

JACK ROSS

THE

**SOCIALIST
PARTY
OF AMERICA**

A COMPLETE HISTORY

THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF AMERICA

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THAT EACH BE BEYOND MAN

The Socialist Party of America

A Complete History

JACK ROSS



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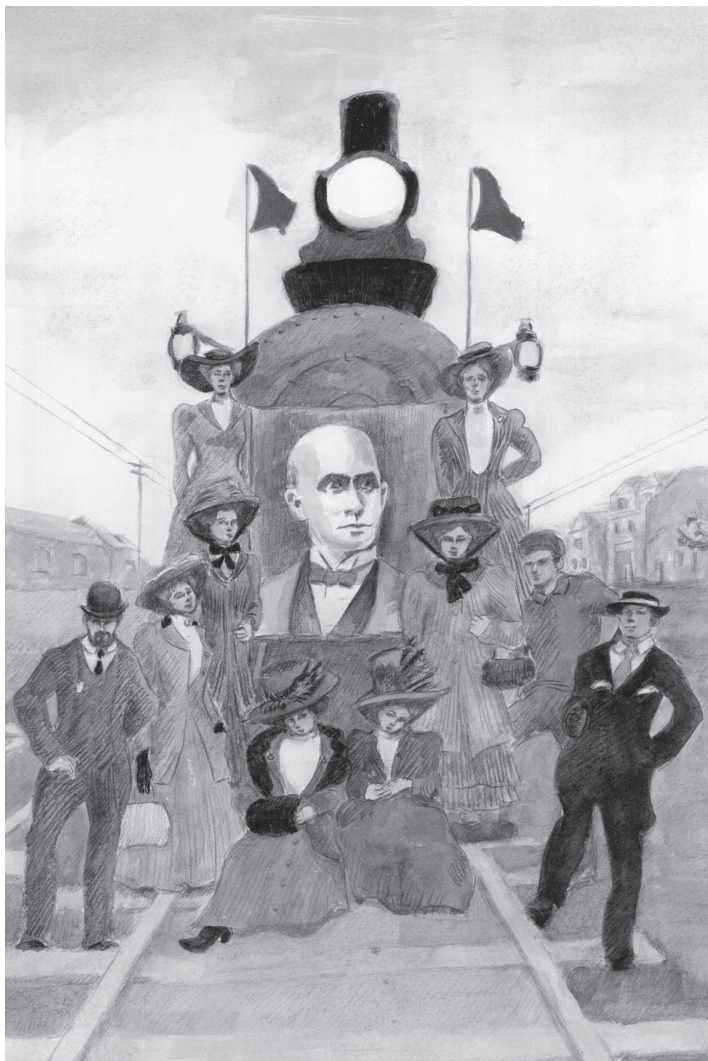
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*In memory of my grandfathers,
Stanley Ruttenberg (1917–2001) and
Milton Ross (1920–2011)*



CONTENTS

Preface xi

Introduction xvii

PART I

1. The Roots of American Socialism (1876–1892) 3

2. Populism and Beyond (1893–1900) 31

3. The Party Is Born (1901–1904) 58

4. The Fate of American Labor (1905–1909) 79

5. The Triumph of Progressivism (1910–1912) 117

6. Calm Before the Storm (1913–1916) 146

7. The Terror (1917–1918) 177

8. Fatal Alienation (1919–1920) 216

PART II

9. A New Hope (1921–1924) 247

10. Changing of the Guard (1925–1929) 281

11. Depression and Renaissance (1930–1933) 306

12. The Two-Front Putsch (1934–1936) 336

13. American Catalonia (1937–1940) 379

14. Not to the Swift (1941–1948) 407

PART III

15. The Twilight of American Socialism (1949–1963) 453

16. Out with the Old, In with the New (1964–1972) 486

17. Social Democrats USA and the Rise of Neoconservatism 520

18. Democratic Socialists of America and the Roots of Post–
Cold War Liberalism 544

19. Socialist Party USA and the Radical Left since 1973 569

20. After Exceptionalism 588

Appendix A: National Officers of the Socialist Party 603

Appendix B: Socialist Elected Officeholders, 1897–1960 609

Appendix C: Presidential Vote Totals 639

Notes 659

Bibliography 717

Index 731

PREFACE

The story of how I came to the study of American Socialism is the story of a personal inheritance.

My great-grandfather, also named Jack Ross, emigrated from the Polish city of Lomza at the age of fourteen, once he was old enough to be jailed by the Okhrana for his involvement with the Jewish Socialist Bund. In New York, he became a skilled diamond cutter and a founder of the International Jewelry Workers Union. After settling down with a family in Brooklyn, he was a “Jimmie Higgins,” as unsung rank and filers of the Socialist Party were known, of Jewish Branch Boro Park.

What he lacked for distinction in the movement, he more than made up for in the depth of his convictions. He remained an unreconstructed Bundist, insisting he was not a Zionist and reliably voting for what he regarded as the sufficiently nonbourgeois Liberal Party of New York until his death in 1975. His son, my father’s father, was never especially interested in politics, but knew well enough from his father to stay away from the Communists at Brooklyn College in the 1930s, and he voted for Norman Thomas in 1948.

My mother’s parents, Gertrude and Stanley Ruttenberg, were never members of the Socialist Party, but they were my role models in serving the cause of social justice. They met on the Steelworkers Organizing Committee in Pittsburgh and were intimately acquainted with the more famous leaders of the CIO up to the time of the merger that formed the AFL-CIO and beyond. They were of a generation of labor partisans caught up in the heyday of Cold War liberalism, with my grandfather

ultimately becoming an assistant secretary of labor under Lyndon Johnson.

Naturally, they had many friends who had been active with the Socialist Party. I was fortunate enough to know Morris and Yetta Weisz as an adult and to learn from them at the early stage of my serious interest in its history. Others included Hyman Bookbinder, Emil Rieve, Jack and Mary Herling, Jack and Kitty Barbash, and Esther and Oliver Peterson. My parents met in the mid-level leadership of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC). My father was first active in the Harvard Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) in the 1960s, and my mother became involved at the behest of labor economist and one-time Young Socialist Nat Weinberg.

By the time I was seriously interested in politics as a teenager, I was acutely aware of the dissonance between my parents' liberalism, defined by loyalty to the labor movement if not a conscious inheritance from American Socialism, and contemporary liberalism. Greater still were two additional dissonances: one between those liberalisms and what called itself "the left" as I came of age a decade after the collapse of Communism, and another between both liberalism and the left and any genuine populism or radicalism—the spirit if not always the substance of which I could clearly tell belonged to what was widely regarded to be the radical right.

An avid reader of American history from a very young age, I was first awakened to the continuity from Populism and the historic American left to so-called right-wing populism before I was even seventeen years old, by a curious volume of radical right provenance titled *Populism vs. Plutocracy: The Universal Struggle*. I became active with the Green Party around that time, and the book's claim to the heritage of leading progressive populists of the first half of the twentieth century, though not of the Socialists, was well received by those Greens I shared it with. As time went on I was exposed to a more substantive and nuanced version of that narrative through such authors as Bill Kauffman and others around the magazine *The American Conservative*, where I found intellectual stimulation I could never have hoped to find on the contemporary left.

This presented me with the central thesis question of this book very early on: how was the Socialist Party of the original Middle American radical Eugene V. Debs and the quintessential progressive isolationist Norman Thomas the same Socialist Party whose legacy was claimed by so many at the rightmost edge of Cold War liberalism? How was it so for many frankly elitist contemporary liberals, to say nothing of the sectarian left? By the time I began the research for this book, I found the chasm separating the actual Socialist Party of America and the historical memory thereof to be all the greater, and many ideas I associated with my misbegotten radical youth to be quite apt and perhaps even understated.

It is said that the historiography of the American left has been dominated by active participants in the political conflicts of their day. Though my own adolescent activism was marginal, two experiences irrevocably shaped my perspective and placed it in sharp contention with the past generation of orthodoxies among scholars of the American left. The first was my experience in the Green Party, which, because it was seriously interested in winning votes and electing people to office, took a far kinder view of right-wing Socialists and populist progressives than the new left and its academic heirs ever had. The second was my initial exposure to the historical memory of the American left and labor movement—particularly how much it was defined by the memory of American Communism and the Popular Front. Having grown up with the memory of the CIO in the family, it was very strange and confusing to encounter this history of the CIO, and of the era generally, and to try to make sense of it.

My mature study of the Socialist Party began as I completed my undergraduate studies at the National Labor College in Silver Spring, Maryland, where my mother was a professor. I was mentored in the history of the American left and labor movement by two outstanding professors and scholars, Bob Reynolds and Pete Hoefer. It had always been my aspiration to be a writing historian, and the goal of writing a complete history of the Socialist Party was with me in some form since I was eighteen years old, if not earlier. Early in the research for my first book, when I

took a somewhat superficial look at the Norman Thomas Papers at the New York Public Library, a primal response was stirred that made clear I had to take the project on.

Acknowledgments must begin with the various living links to the Socialist Party before 1948 whom I had the blessing and privilege to know at different times and places in my radical youth; they are in a category all their own. Many of them have since passed away, but they all left an indelible mark on my perspective and on this book: Bob Auerbach, Walt Brown, Hortense Fiekowsky, Walter Morse, Don Peretz, Irving Phillips, George Stryker, and last but certainly not least, Morris and Yetta Weisz.

For the years through 1920, my main task has been to integrate the existing literature into a single narrative while using archival research only to fill in the gaps. In the second half of the book, which examines the history from 1930 on, I rely much more heavily on primary sources. I regard the archivists of the American left and labor movement as an especially noble band in their vitally important profession, and thus I am most sincerely obliged to the following: Kelly Wooten, Megan O'Connell, and Joshua Larkin Rowley at Duke University; Peter Filardo, Erika Gottfried, and Brendan Dolan at the Tamiment Library of New York University; Harry Miller, Lee Grady, and Paulina Bolland at the Wisconsin Historical Society; Louis Jones, Dan Golodner, and Deborah Rice at the Walter Reuther Library of Wayne State University; Wendy Chmielewski and Mary Beth Sigado at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection; John Haynes and Bruce Kirby at the Library of Congress, Tal Nadan and Laura Karas at the New York Public Library; Rebecca Hatcher at Yale University; Carol Leadenham at the Hoover Institution; Bob Jaeger at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and Sylvia Bugbee at the University of Vermont.

An exceptional group of scholars reviewed my first draft, and I thank them all: Justus Doenecke, Melvyn Dubofsky, Ernest Evans, Bill Kauffman, Bob Reynolds, Markku Ruotsila, Joseph Stromberg, and Frank Warren. Scholars of the American left on both the right and the left have usually lost sight of the fact that the Socialist Party was, after

all, *a political party*, consequently neglecting its place in the history of American elections and particularly of challenges to the two-party system. I have been blessed by the guidance of two experts in the field whom I can also count as personal friends: Richard Winger, for more than forty years the leading expert on election laws relating to minor parties and a tireless advocate for their scandalously abused rights, and Darcy Richardson, author of a multivolume history of American third parties.

Numerous other historians, descendants of old Socialists, and surviving activists from various stages and fragments of the party's twilight responded to a wide variety of queries: Bruce Ballin, Louis Barbash, Andrew Biemiller Jr., Chet Briggs, Paul Buhle, Robert Caulkins, Victor Cohen, Tim Davenport, Bogdan Denitch, Stuart Elliott, David Elsila, Peter Fleischman, James Green, John Gurda, Alec Harrington, Norman Hill, Darlington Hoopes Jr., Rachelle Horowitz, Maurice Isserman, Paul Kahn, Harvey Klehr, Karen Lane, Michael Lerner, Yoel Matveyev, David McReynolds, Bob Millar, Bill Munger, Karen Paget, Robert Parmet, Casey Peters, Maxine Phillips, Randy Roberts, Steve Rossignol, Jason Schulman, Tim Sears, Harry Siitonen, Joe Uehlein, Kenneth Waltzer, Hugh Wilford, and Tim Wohlforth.

Accolades are due to Robin Hoffman for her beautiful frontispiece illustration, based on a 1908 photograph available in the Socialist Party Photo Collection at Duke University. I would be remiss without acknowledging those who gave me hospitality of varying degrees throughout my research travels: Joe Klaitis, Sondra Stein, and Sue Mason in Durham, North Carolina; David Elsila in Detroit; Richard Winger and Jerry Kunz in San Francisco; Dawa Choedon and Tsering Dorjee in Washington, DC; and Kit Healey in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

My gratitude goes out to my first editor at Potomac Books, Elizabeth Demers, for her confidence in me and for championing this project. It was just as I completed the first draft that Potomac was acquired by the University of Nebraska Press, so to the highly capable and conscientious editors of the final manuscript, Alicia Christensen and Marguerite Boyles, I owe many thanks. I especially owe my gratitude to Bronwyn Becker,

who further shaped the manuscript after the acquisition by University of Nebraska Press. As the author, of course, I am solely responsible for the content and conclusions of this book.

Special thanks are once again due to both my parents for the necessary support, both material and emotional, to have written this book. To my father especially I owe so much of my passion and perspective for this subject, as well as a general attitude—and I must further thank him for taking on a taxing review of the full manuscript. Perhaps appropriately, it was my father's mentor in the Socialist movement, Julius Bernstein, who left an incredible collection of rare Socialist pamphlets to the Walter Reuther Library at Wayne State University that proved indispensable in my research.

It has now been a century since the heyday of the Socialist Party, a lifetime since the radical passion play of the 1930s, a half-century since the rise of the new left, and a generation since the fall of Communism. Perhaps I am merely what Daniel Bell foresaw in the 1960s when he wrote that “the materials of a great and tragic story, now shards and detritus, await its archeological historian.” Although I would have been with the Socialists throughout the first half of the twentieth century and my heart is very much with that tradition, I remain skeptical about the relevance of a consciously socialist politics to the contemporary world.

In an authoritative essay on the historiography of the American left, Michael Kazin wrote in 1996 that “no fresh and probing interpretation has yet surfaced that might shake the confidence of either erstwhile new leftists or their cynical intellectual adversaries in the certitude of their respective views.” To provide this interpretation, in short, is the mission of this book.

INTRODUCTION

The Socialist Party of America was the most important minor political party in the history of the United States in the twentieth century. Other minor parties, including one or two in the Socialist Party's own lifetime, performed more impressively at the polls and had a more spectacular short-term impact—but the Socialist Party was unique in the history of American politics as a minor party that enjoyed a consistent level of public support, a wide-ranging impact, and a respected place in the national conversation for a half-century. For more than a decade before the First World War it was widely assumed that the Socialist Party was destined to become a permanent fixture on the national political scene. Even as late as the 1930s, there were similar high expectations for the party in some new form.

The Socialist Party was initially aligned with the Socialist International, also known as the Second International, which was initiated by the German Social Democratic Party in the 1880s. Following the example of the German Social Democrats, they looked to the theories and example of Karl Marx, but often owed more to the founder of the German party, Ferdinand La Salle. The word “socialism” has proven notoriously problematic to define; it is often taken to mean the total public ownership of the means of production, if not the complete abolition of private property, that few in the Second International ever seriously contemplated. By contrast, the term “social democracy” captured more accurately and precisely the goals of the International and the historic American party—commitment to the ballot box as the means of

advancing a political economy in the interest of the working class, as represented by the trade union movement.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a rich though flawed historiography of the American Socialist movement developed, but little has been added to it for at least a generation. This fading from historical memory is particularly striking at a time when the word “socialist” has become a common political epithet, one of many completely divorced from historical context by partisans of all kinds. It is all the more striking considering the legacy of this small political movement—an outsized impact that is still felt in organizations as disparate as the American Enterprise Institute and the War Resisters League.

This book, then, has two objectives: to serve as both a comprehensive history of the Socialist Party of America and a study of the party in American historical memory. One could cover the latter by focusing narrowly on the twilight years of the Socialist Party before its ultimate demise and fracture into three in 1972. But when confronted with the question of when to begin such a study, it becomes evident that a serious study of the party’s twilight cannot be done without a major reexamination of the 1930s. Yet the controversies of that period were, fundamentally, a recurrence of those that defined the party’s history from its founding. The effort to form a Labor Party or Farmer-Labor Party, as vital as it has been neglected by history, reaches even further back, to roots in the Populist Party. In short, a serious understanding of the Socialist Party in historical memory demands a new comprehensive history of the party.

This book can be read in three parts. Part I begins with the founding of the first nationally organized party of Marxian Socialism in the United States in 1876: the Socialist Labor Party. The rise and decline of this party in the last quarter of the nineteenth century occurred against the backdrop of brutal class conflict that culminated in the rise and fall of the Populist movement in the 1890s. The Socialist Party was formed in 1901 by a merger of the Populist remnant led by Eugene V. Debs and the dissenting faction, led by Morris Hillquit, of the increasingly sectarian

Socialist Labor Party. Part I ends with the election of 1920, when the Socialist Party collapsed, after government repression during the First World War was followed by a split in 1919 that formed the American Communist Party.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, while the political realignment was occurring in Great Britain that culminated in the rise of the Labour Party, all the same pieces were in place for a parallel realignment to occur in the United States. This outcome was to a large extent hobbled by the sectarian and revolutionary attitudes of the Socialist Party's small but vocal left wing, which ultimately evolved into the Communist Party, yet in isolation this struggle can still be seen as the normal growing pains of a healthy political movement. The thwarting of the potential of American Socialism required the merciless domestic terror and repression of the Wilson administration during the First World War—the worst in American history and the worst, save perhaps in Tsarist Russia, of all the belligerents in that conflict. Thus did the suppression of the Socialists and its wider ramifications prove a critical condition for America's rise as a world power.

Nearly all historical writing on the heyday of the Socialist Party suffers from the malign influence of *The American Socialist Movement: 1897–1912* by Ira Kipnis (1952): this book is gravely flawed by its adherence to or, more precisely, the reckless reading back into history of the Communist Party line. In many instances, Kipnis simply invents out of thin air his never clearly defined “left wing” of which he is frankly partisan. Though generally held in disrepute by scholars today, Kipnis's narrative has never received the challenge to its fundamentals it deserves. Indeed, the one volume that passes for a comprehensive history of the party, *The Socialist Party of America* by David Shannon (1955)—in addition to being an extremely dated book, with numerous factual errors and generally erring on the side of brevity—defers to Kipnis on the party's first decade even while sharply rejecting his conclusions.

No serious scholars who followed Kipnis accepted every extreme and particular of his work, but the consequence of their deference to his study has been that the left wing has been overrepresented in most

histories of the party, and there has never been an adequate treatment, much less a defense of the record and perspective, of the Socialist Party leadership and its supporters during its heyday. Perhaps most significantly forgotten was the potential, represented by the “millionaire socialists” and the Noroton conference of 1906, to preempt the Progressive insurgency of 1911 led by Robert LaFollette. This insurgency was of major importance to the history of American politics for decades to come, marking the beginning of the split between the “Eastern establishment” and “Midwestern” wings of the Republican Party. With the origins of the latter in the LaFollette insurgency, the major implication of this history has never been acknowledged: that what was considered the major “reactionary” wing of U.S. politics in the first half of the twentieth century was the natural constituency for an American party of social democracy.

Serious scholarship of the American left is widely held to have begun with Daniel Bell’s *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (1952). Bell identifies most of the particulars of this just stated thesis, but views them through the deeply hostile and condescending lens of a self-congratulatory Cold War liberalism. This is particularly evident in his treatment of the Socialist response to the Wilson administration and the First World War, reading back into it controversies over the New Deal and entry into the Second World War. Many of the gaps in these histories published in the 1950s are filled by the two biographies of Eugene Debs—*The Bending Cross* by Ray Ginger (1949) and *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* by Nick Salvatore (1982). Though excellent, both suffer from the overrepresentation of the left wing typified by Kipnis.

Seeking to correct for both Bell and Kipnis is James Weinstein with *The Decline of Socialism in America: 1912–1925* (1967). This remains the most balanced and scholarly study of the Socialist Party, whose theses are almost without exception deferred to in this book; yet ultimately it did little more than establish the basic facts. There have also been numerous, more specialized studies of this period, greatly varying in quality, with two deserving mention as enduring triumphs of American historical literature: *Grassroots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest*,

1895–1943 by James Green (1978) and *The Roots of American Communism* by Theodore Draper (1957).

Part II covers the years 1921 through 1948, which were defined by the specter of American Communism and more earnest efforts by the Socialists toward forming a larger Labor or Farmer-Labor Party. The most hopeful of these efforts came with the candidacy of Robert LaFollette in 1924, but as early as the 1920s, the disciplined and adversarial organizational forms and tactics championed by V. I. Lenin and called “Leninism” already enabled the Communists to nearly wreck that campaign, serving as a prologue to their handiwork of the 1930s. The 1924 election was followed by the Socialist Party’s lowest ebb before the emergence of Norman Thomas as the party’s standard-bearer, coinciding with the beginning of the Great Depression. An era of extreme highs and lows for the Socialist Party, the early 1930s seemed to promise a return to the strength of its heyday, only for the party to collapse in the face of both rising Communist strength and the New Deal. Yet the party would not be extinguished as a serious if small political presence until after 1948, when Norman Thomas waged the last of his six consecutive presidential campaigns.

Historical literature on the 1930s Socialist Party remains sketchy. Many have depended on the problematic firsthand account of Daniel Bell in *Marxian Socialism in the United States* for the basic facts, and only one obscure academic work serves as a straightforward account of the Socialist Party in the 1930s: *An Alternative Vision* by Frank Warren (1974), a mere survey that reads as little more than a factional brief on the controversies of the period. Biographies of Norman Thomas fill in many gaps. *Norman Thomas: A Biography* by Harry Fleischman (1964) is the admiring work of a close friend and collaborator, but retains significant anecdotal value. *Pacifist’s Progress: Norman Thomas and the Decline of American Socialism* by Bernard Johnpoll (1970) gives the most thorough and reliable account of the history of the Socialist Party from 1928 to 1936, but after that date turns into a polemical treatment of Thomas’s pacifist inclinations. *Norman Thomas: The Last Idealist* by W. A. Swanberg

(1976) is a well-rounded and satisfying biography, but his treatment of Socialist Party affairs is wanting.

In the 1970s, the Communist Party began to dominate the historical literature on 1930s radicalism. This emphasis may be merited inasmuch as the Communist Party was far larger and more influential by the second half of the decade, but its displacement of the Socialist Party was a longer and far more complicated process than most historians have treated it—only beginning by early 1934 and not completed until the decisive struggle for control of the United Auto Workers (UAW) in 1938, which effectively served as a proxy struggle for dominant influence in the whole labor movement. More importantly, when the Communists launched the so-called Popular Front in 1935 and ultimately aligned with the New Deal, they had in great measure ceased to be radicals in any meaningful sense. With the Popular Front to such a great extent defining what American history remembers as “radicalism,” it is a core objective of this book to restore the non-Communist left to the history of the 1930s.

James Weinstein defines his objective in his study of the Socialist heyday as treating the collapse of the Socialist Party and the birth of the Communist Party in 1919 as a single process. This book takes the same approach to the entire story of 1930s radicalism, not only with respect to the rise of the Communist Party at the expense of the Socialist Party but also in connection to the broad movement for a Farmer-Labor Party, along with the related idiosyncratic movements of Huey Long and Father Coughlin. A triangular relationship is well sketched in the histories of the 1930s Communist Party by Harvey Klehr¹ and of the Long and Coughlin movements by Alan Brinkley.² But the pivotal importance of the Socialist Party has been lost in previous scholarship: specifically, that the Socialist Party was the dominant influence in the movement for a Farmer-Labor Party as late as the end of 1933, and that largely because of its debilitating factional war lost control of the movement by the time it reached critical mass in 1935, the critical opening that the Communists then seized.

Past histories have tended to portray the Socialist Party of the 1930s as little more than a congregation of confused premature New Deal

liberals. In large part, this portrayal has been based on the fact that, to agitate for U.S. entry into the Second World War, Socialists of this era founded the Union for Democratic Action, which ultimately became the defining activist organization of Cold War liberalism, Americans for Democratic Action. However, that these Socialists had a distinct ideological pedigree as the party's "Militant" faction of the 1930s has been underappreciated. Originally pro-Communist, the Militants challenged and opposed all the historic premises of Social Democracy, perhaps most importantly its historic record of pacifism, out of which their later beliefs ultimately developed. The origins of Cold War liberalism are revealed in these conceits, whereas in important respects many of the much-maligned "Old Guard" remained more radical.

In sharp contrast were Norman Thomas and his proud but diminished band of loyalists, who were in the forefront of opposition to U.S. entry into the Second World War before Pearl Harbor. When American righteousness in the Second World War became the founding myth of the American empire, the legacy of this stand—the logical and anticipated culmination of the entire Socialist Party program of the 1930s—was the key reason so much of the party's history became obscured, and that the romance for the Popular Front was able to triumph among self-identified leftists a generation later. Thus, when Norman Thomas ran his final campaign in 1948, it marked not only the end of American Socialism as a serious political movement but also the demise of an anti-Leninist American left. The major conclusions of this book as to why the Socialist Party failed to ascend to major-party status, therefore, appear at the very end of Part II, immediately after the 1948 campaign.

Part III covers the period after 1949, the twilight of American Socialism. An eventful period, the diminished party was closely linked to the civil rights movement, largely because of the foundation laid over the course of a generation by Socialist Party stalwart A. Philip Randolph. Yet the character of the party was profoundly transformed when it was taken over at the end of the 1950s by the followers of Max Shachtman, a one-time confidante of Leon Trotsky. This takeover ultimately led to the final

demise of the Socialist Party in 1972 and its subsequent fracture into three separate and highly disparate organizations: Social Democrats USA, which identified with the right wing of the Democratic Party; Democratic Socialists of America (originally called the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee), identifying with the left wing of the Democratic Party; and the Socialist Party USA, identifying with the radical left. Each of these groups peaked in the 1970s and steadily, even sharply declined thereafter, with Social Democrats USA passing out of existence entirely.

There is already a respectable historical literature on the Socialist Party's twilight era, with a significant published biography for three of its central figures—Max Shachtman, Michael Harrington, and Bayard Rustin. Of these, the Harrington biography, *The Other American* by Maurice Isserman (2000), is by far the most relevant, comprehensive, and well researched. But many sources for this era have been largely unexamined, and most of the major implications of this history left unaddressed. The followers of Shachtman, called Shachtmanites, were known by the late 1960s as bitter, even violent enemies of the new left—after they were themselves largely responsible for the creation of that new left in the 1950s and early 1960s and for establishing its fundamental premises. The Shachtmanites became a core component in the forging of the neoconservative movement in the 1970s, and Max Shachtman proved to have an astonishingly widespread legacy on the entire American political spectrum of the post-Cold War era. Particularly through the figure of Michael Harrington, the twilight of American Socialism is of deep significance not only to the history of neoconservatism but no less to how so many neoconservative assumptions were adopted by American liberalism after the 1960s.

For most of its history, the American Socialist movement could define itself in comfortably Marxian terms as the opposition to a historic party of state capitalism. From the founding of the Socialist Party to the New Deal, state capitalism was represented by a politics of corporatism, nationalism, and very often militarism, whose archetypical figure was Theodore

Roosevelt. Only with the emergence of Cold War liberalism after the Second World War was a new paradigm firmly established, and only then did an organized, consciously conservative movement emerge in American politics for the first time. Yet the triumph of the neo-conservative movement in the late decades of the twentieth century went far toward reestablishing the older paradigm. Despite the fairly vast literature on neoconservatism, much remains to be examined by future scholars. From its own narrow vantage point, this book proposes many new insights not only on the neoconservatives but also on related issues in the histories of Cold War liberalism, the new left, and post-Cold War liberalism. But the critical prologue to all remains a reexamination of the Socialist Party and its influence on all that followed.

Much of the historical literature on American Socialism has been preoccupied with the question of why a major party of the Second International did not emerge in the United States. But the underlying premises behind this question are flawed. In only a few European countries had the Socialists emerged as a major political force by the time the First World War broke out. In the United States, the suppression of the Socialist movement was an essential precondition to America's rise as a world power, brought about by entering that war. When the parties of the reorganized Socialist International emerged as the major center-left parties in Europe after the Second World War, they became indistinguishable from American liberalism, molded in its image to serve Cold War imperatives. Thus, to the extent that American Socialism can be seen as marginal to the history of the international movement, in fact it is critical to understanding the rise of the American-led world order and, therefore, to understanding the character and fate of other social democracies within that order.

David Shannon is essentially correct in writing that "it was American history that defeated the Socialists." But he wrote these words at the height of the Cold War, so the full meaning and implication of this statement could scarcely be appreciated. Although Pax Americana was an undeniable reality by the 1950s, sixty years later and a generation after the fall of Communism, there is a far more lucid view of where American

history led—to the United States becoming an unapologetic global hegemon on a permanent war footing, with a governing class with all the worst features of both Petrograd and the Gilded Age. The history of the Socialist Party takes on new importance in the post–Cold War era as the story of the principal movement that strove, in vain, for the half-century before the Second World War for the United States to remain a republic and not an empire—not to mention the great and cruel irony of its ultimate role at its twilight in the birth of the revanchist neo-conservative movement.

Whether or not the United States could have ever avoided the path of empire and whether the Socialists, if given the chance, could have kept it off that path are not of concern here. What matters are the lessons the story of American Socialism can impart to those who struggle for peace, justice, and liberty in an entirely different time. The story of American Socialism is, at bottom, the story of the road not taken at the dawn of the American century.

Part I

1 The Roots of American Socialism

(1876–1892)

It was a curious twist of fate that the founding of the first nationally organized party of Marxian Socialism in the United States took place in essentially the same act as the liquidation of the International Workingmen's Association founded by Karl Marx in 1864. After moving from London to New York in 1872, the First International came under the control of Friedrich Sorge, a German exile from the 1848 revolutions who established the International's American branch in 1867. As the fractious American party began to dominate the International, whose European base was rapidly collapsing, a meeting of ten Americans and one German gathered in Philadelphia on July 15, 1876, to proclaim the following:

The International convention at Philadelphia has abolished the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, and the external bond of the organization exists no more. "The International is dead!" the bourgeoisie of all countries will again exclaim, and with ridicule and joy it will point to the proceedings of this convention as documentary proof of the defeat of the labor movement of the world. Let us not be influenced by the cry of our enemies! We have abandoned the organization of the International for reasons arising from the present political situation of Europe, but as a compensation for it we see the principles of the organization recognized and defended by the progressive working men of the entire civilized world.¹

Four days later, Sorge was present at the founding convention of the Workingmen's Party of America in Philadelphia, representing the now-moribund First International in an effort to create a unified party of Socialism in America. This effort was largely instigated by the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party, which split off from the International in 1874 under the influence of Ferdinand LaSalle, the founder of the German Social Democratic Party and critic of Marx. The Social Democratic Workingmen had already absorbed the remnant of the National Labor Union, founded in 1866 to agitate for the eight-hour day, after its disastrous attempt to launch a new political party in 1872. The founders of the Social Democratic Workingmen's Party were the most important leaders of the American labor movement in its turbulent formative years. They included Adolph Strasser, a Hungarian exile who founded the Cigar Makers Union in New York; Peter McGuire, founder of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters; and Albert Parsons of the Typographical Union in Chicago, a Confederate veteran who fled Texas after agitating for the rights of newly freed African Americans.

J. P. McDonnell, a one-time personal secretary of Karl Marx in London who had led most of the English-speaking members out of the American section of the First International even before its split with the Social Democrats, was named editor of the party's newspaper, *Labor Standard*. Meeting in the city where the United States declared its independence and in the very month of the centenary of that occasion, the Workingmen's Party of America seemed destined to become a force of history. Though the party could not field a presidential ticket that year, many supporters backed the marginal Greenback Party campaign of Peter Cooper, the pro-labor philanthropist who founded New York's Cooper Union.² The election of 1876 would be remembered for the bitterly disputed outcome between Republican Rutherford Hayes and Democrat Samuel Tilden. The "Great Compromise" of 1877 is often characterized as the concession of the election by the Democrats in exchange for the removal of federal troops from the Southern states, but there were actually very few troops remaining in the South by 1876. The Republicans appealed to the anxiety of the Southern "Bourbon" Democrats that

Tilden, a New Yorker who campaigned on a reform platform, would not heed their appeals for federal patronage to rebuild their shattered economy.³

More than a generation later, during his tenure at the Socialist Party's Rand School of Social Science, Charles Beard wrote *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, identifying a historic party of state capitalism originating with the Federalists who agitated for the Constitution, associated with Alexander Hamilton and his successors. Thus in the Anti-Federalist camp were the earliest fits and starts of the party of labor. Luther Martin, the most radical and outspoken of the Anti-Federalists at the Constitutional Convention, distinguished himself as America's first labor lawyer when he defended the Baltimore cordwainers against the charge of conspiracy in 1806, in what is widely regarded as the first strike in American history.⁴ The beginnings of the American labor movement are usually associated with the Workingmen's parties that emerged to support Andrew Jackson, the champion of universal white male suffrage who used his populist war against the Bank of the United States to begin the perpetual expansion of the powers of the presidency. They ranged from the Workingmen's Party of New York, led by the utopian socialist Thomas Skidmore, to the eclectically named Locofoco movement, which recalled the Anti-Federalist legacy.⁵

The Civil War, of course, was the harbinger of the rise of the United States as an industrial capitalist power, and the emerging industrial working class put up massive resistance to taking up arms. In July 1863, the Draft Riots that seized New York were led by ironworkers in Manhattan and longshoremen in Brooklyn—a near-revolution in many ways anticipating that which the young Workingmen's Party of America would make a bid to lead in 1877. Similar insurrections also broke out in Albany and St. Louis; in Hartford, Indiana; Port Washington, Wisconsin; and among coal miners across Pennsylvania. In this last case, grievances over working conditions of the miners combined with the protest of conscription.⁶ For if one accepts that conscription is slavery, ever a cardinal principle of the Socialist Party of America, it cannot be

denied that the Draft Riots were a greater insurrection against slavery than any that took place in the South during the war.

Eight years later, American editorialists were quick to compare the Paris Commune to the events of July 1863, as they indeed cast a long shadow in the violence with which labor would be met by its enemies.⁷ One of the earliest indications of possible violence came with the Panic of 1873, when the collapse of the Northern Pacific Railroad led to massive unemployment, with 180,000 out of work in New York State alone. Peter McGuire, who first entered politics and the Marxist orbit as a leader of the unemployed in the immediate wake of the panic, planned to lead a march on City Hall on January 13, 1874. No doubt fearful of a second Irish-led working class uprising in New York, the police charged unprovoked on the crowd as it was just gathering in Tompkins Square Park, critically injuring hundreds.⁸

The growth of the vast system of railroads during and after the war, constructed by private builders with the generous assistance of the federal government, was the main engine of the rise of industrial capitalism. These means perfectly emulated the state capitalist vision of the Federalists and their successors in the new Republican Party. Abraham Lincoln himself spent most of his career as a railroad lawyer and shortly before being nominated for president was offered the position of general counsel to the New York Central Railroad. The inevitable bust of the railroad boom caused the Panic of 1873, leading to what was then the worst depression in American history. The lure of railroad capitalization was at the heart of the Great Compromise, with the major promise attracting the Southern Democrats being the construction of a southern transcontinental railroad. Most railroads, still reeling from the depression, were implementing drastic wage cuts as late as 1877. At the same time, many railroads began to implement company-town-style control over the lives of their employees, to tie them as virtual serfs to their trains. Naturally, then, the inevitable reckoning would take place on the railroads.

The failure of the existing Brotherhoods of Engineers, Firemen, and Conductors to halt these draconian policies by the Pennsylvania

Railroad led to the formation of a secretive Trainmen's Union along the line from Pittsburgh to Chicago.⁹ On July 16, 1877, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad enacted a 10 percent wage cut following the example of the Pennsylvania. That evening, the crew of a cattle train at the yard in Martinsburg, West Virginia, walked off the job. After informing the B&O officials that no trains would leave until the wage cut was rescinded, the townspeople of Martinsburg gathered to assist the strikers in repelling first the local police and then the state National Guard: by midnight the yard was securely in the hands of the strikers.¹⁰ After three hundred federal troops were dispatched to break the strike on July 19, sympathy strikes immediately broke out in the neighboring depots of Keyser and Wheeling in West Virginia; they soon spread to Baltimore where strikers were able to hold up further dispatches of federal troops.¹¹ From Baltimore, the infrastructure provided by the Trainmen's Union allowed the strike to spread rapidly to Pittsburgh and beyond. Mill and factory workers across Pittsburgh were quick to join the railroad men in sympathy strikes, and although a sympathy strike in Philadelphia was easily crushed, the reduced numbers of militia who made it to Pittsburgh were dispirited and in large numbers joined the strikers.

With the support of the local population, even the federal troops were routed from Pittsburgh, a pattern repeated in small towns across Pennsylvania and eventually in Buffalo.¹² The strike continued west to Indianapolis and Louisville, where in the latter city there was a general strike led by integrated unions. An integrated longshoremen's union also led a sympathy strike in Texas at the port of Galveston, targeting the Texas and Pacific Railroad implicated in the Great Compromise just a few short months earlier.¹³ Though relatively late to the action, the Workingmen's Party soon found itself with the unparalleled opportunity to seize the leadership of this great upheaval. When the tiny San Francisco local of the new party called a rally in support of the strike, a crowd of seven thousand answered. The party was able to attract similar mass rallies in New York, Brooklyn, and New Jersey.¹⁴ In Chicago it was only after the party's call for a series of mass rallies that a small group of forty switchmen struck on the Michigan Central Railroad, which

rapidly led to a shutdown of the railroads and then a general strike.¹⁵ As the strike spread to St. Louis and the upheaval reached its climax, the Workingmen's Party of America found itself at the head of a potential revolution.

Many of the cities engulfed by the Great Railroad Strike, perhaps most famously Baltimore, had suffered under harsh occupation by Union troops during the late war, and memories were still fresh for both occupier and occupied in 1877. So it was probably nowhere more appropriate for a workers' revolution to commence than St. Louis, where the full force of the army had been brought down against labor unrest during the war.¹⁶ After organizing a full third of the attendees at a mass meeting of 1,500 held to call a general strike, a local Workingmen's Party leader exhorted the crowd, "All you have to do, gentlemen, for you have the numbers, is to unite on one idea—that the workingmen shall rule the country. What man makes, belongs to him, and the workingmen made this country."¹⁷ Within a day, a Committee of Safety was established in the office of the Workingmen's Party of St. Louis to govern the city and begin authorizing the various unions to return to work and to operate the mills and railroads at their own direction. But before the party could dispatch word to other cities to establish new committees, the army regrouped, having been tied down by the Indian Wars. Still, in Chicago, several days of pitched battle took place in the streets before the strikers were finally subdued.

General Winfield Hancock, the hardened Civil War veteran in charge of suppressing the strike, spoke of it as "the insurrection," clearly regarding it as of a piece with the late War of the Rebellion and the Draft Riots.¹⁸ Southern partisans have often insisted that the Civil War should not be identified as such, because the two sides were not contending over control of the same national government. The Civil War was really just one stage in the larger conflict between two irreconcilable parties that raged most acutely from 1850 to 1877 and that, temporarily from 1861 to 1865, took on a geographical dimension—just as similar conflicts in Spain and China in the twentieth century had a temporary geographical

dimension. Indeed, the Great Compromise of 1877 came about under the threat of an open armed conflict more exactly like a civil war. Thus, when this triumph of the party of state capitalism was met by armed revolt within a few short months, it looked like this threat was materializing in the Great Railroad Strike, but under circumstances few could have imagined.

The country into which the American Socialist movement was born, therefore, was not the city upon a hill being guided toward the millennium by the great and wise Abraham Lincoln. To the contrary: with a Civil War that killed six hundred thousand barely more than a decade behind it, the specter of another hovering over its shoulder with routinely stolen elections, and a military repeatedly facing off against both its indigenous peoples and its urban proletariat, the United States of America for the better part of the nineteenth century was a basket case of a republic that onlookers could justly regard as no more stable than its neighbors to the south.

But the Great Railroad Strike was by no means an unqualified failure. The immediate demands of the strikers—to have their full pay restored and for the operators to abandon their plans for more burdensome working conditions—were largely met. Forty years before Lenin, revolutionary insurrection was not a goal at the forefront of Marxist thinking. The success of the German Social Democrats, who elected twelve members to the Bundestag in the first election they contested that year, was a more compelling example to emulate. It was not at all unreasonable for the Workingmen's Party to surmise that its extraordinary success channeling sympathy for the Great Railroad Strike could be translated into success at the ballot box. At the first national convention, held in Newark the last week of 1877, thirty-eight delegates represented thirty-one locals. In anticipation of growing electoral prospects, the party renamed itself the Socialist Labor Party (SLP).

Over the next two years, the Socialist Labor Party enjoyed remarkable success at the ballot box. In Chicago, an alderman was elected in

the spring of 1878, three representatives and one senator to the Illinois legislature that fall, and three more aldermen in the spring of 1879. Its candidate for mayor that year, Ernest Schmidt, received 20 percent of the vote. In St. Louis, two aldermen and three state assemblymen were also elected, and a whopping 64 percent of the municipal vote went to the SLP in Louisville. Comparable success occurred in Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and New Haven. In 1878, the party earned an impressive 17,000 votes in Baltimore, 6,000 in Buffalo, 3,600 in New York, and 2,400 in Brooklyn.¹⁹ Party founder George Schilling received 12 percent of the vote in a race for the U.S. House from Chicago. Local slates were also run in Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, and New Orleans. In smaller towns, the most notable success was the election of two councilmen in Jeffersonville, Indiana.²⁰

Yet the Socialist Labor Party was by no means the biggest recipient of protest votes in the elections of 1878. The Greenback Party, with its call for the continued circulation of fiat money or “greenbacks” issued to fund the prosecution of the Civil War, received a million votes nationwide on the strength of the farm crisis that came on the tail end of the depression. In addition to earning hundreds of state legislative seats, thirteen Greenbackers were elected to the U.S. House—two each from Iowa, Maine, and Pennsylvania and one each from Alabama, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Texas, and Vermont.²¹ With many labor leaders already backing the Greenback Party, such as Granite Cutters national secretary Thompson Murch, one of the two congressmen from Maine, the Greenbackers and the SLP began to see each other as natural allies despite considerable mutual suspicion.

Anticipating its potential to expand its base into the industrial working class, the party rechristened themselves the Greenback-Labor Party. But the addition of “Labor” owed less to the upstart Socialist movement than its curious competitor, the Knights of Labor, founded in 1869 by Uriah Stephens, a Christian socialist in the tradition of Thomas Skidmore who envisioned a society organized around producer cooperatives. The Knights of Labor extended membership to all classes, black and white, urban and rural, with the exception of bankers, lawyers, stock brokers, and

liquor salesmen.²² Initially based among garment workers in Philadelphia, the influence of the Knights spread rapidly during the depression, attracting many of the old railroad brotherhoods and many farm cooperatives. In 1879, anticipating close ties to the Greenback-Labor Party, the Knights elected as their leader Terrence Powderly, a machinist who had the previous year been elected the Greenback mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania.²³

When the Greenback-Labor Party gathered in Chicago for its national convention in June 1880, Richard Trevellick, a Knights of Labor leader from Michigan, served as chairman, a forty-four-member delegation from the Socialist Labor Party was seated, and the National Woman Suffrage Association was also represented. The result, in the words of one historian of American minor parties, was “a cacophony of discordant voices representing almost every reform movement in the country.”²⁴ The convention ultimately nominated James Weaver, one of the two Greenback congressmen from Iowa, as its candidate for president. An active young abolitionist in Iowa before enlisting in the Union Army and ultimately rising to the rank of brigadier general, Weaver held various state offices in Iowa as a Republican after the war until being radicalized by his party’s military suppression of the Great Railroad Strike.

Pledging “to strike a decisive blow for industrial emancipation,” Weaver accepted the nomination, declaring that “the great moneyed interests are fast swallowing up the profits of labor and reducing the people to a condition of vassalage and dependence.”²⁵ He further declared that it was a grand mission of his party “to banish forever from American politics that deplorable spirit of sectional hatred being fostered by the two old parties.” In that vein, Weaver took on a Confederate officer as his running mate, a pairing that would occur in every campaign through 1892. Barzillai Chambers of Texas gave virtually all his campaign speeches under the auspices of the SLP. At one large Socialist rally in St. Louis he identified himself as “a farmer in full sympathy with all the laboring element of the country. We are a band of brothers, knowing no South, no North, no East and no West.” The former Confederate

general made a point of assuring his Marxist audience that he was “satisfied that the communists and socialists were a body of men battling for human rights.”²⁶ The Greenback-Labor presidential ticket received 306,135 votes, 3.3 percent of the national total and a sharp decline from the million votes cast two years earlier, though the party did hold onto ten of its thirteen seats in Congress.²⁷

The Socialist Labor Party was dispirited by this outcome and abandoned electoral politics for another decade. During this time, the party became overwhelmed by a large new wave of German exiles fleeing the Anti-Socialist Laws of Otto von Bismarck, imposed in an attempt to suppress the rapid rise of the Social Democrats. Most notable was Louis Viereck, a member of the Bundestag who was widely believed to be an illegitimate son of Wilhelm I (in the period just before U.S. entry into the First World War he and his son, George Sylvester Viereck, published the magazine *Fatherland* that openly argued the case of the Central Powers).²⁸ The SLP was already disproportionately German, but now a majority of members were not even interested in learning English. Albert Parsons, who opposed the virtual merger with the Greenback-Labor Party, began to drift toward anarchism and took his large Chicago following with him.²⁹ But the other English-speakers from the old Social Democratic Workingmen’s Party such as Peter McGuire and Adolph Strasser took this dispiriting pass as an opportunity to recommit to trade unionism.

On November 15, 1881, several Marxist trade union leaders, including Knights of Labor and Greenback-Labor representatives, gathered in Pittsburgh to form the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, to be renamed the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886. Strasser’s Cigar Makers and McGuire’s Carpenters were joined by Molders, Iron Workers, Glass Workers, Granite Cutters, Printers, and Bricklayers.³⁰ Within two years, the Federation also won over racially integrated longshoremen in New Orleans.³¹ The Declaration of Principles of the founding convention closely paraphrased *The Communist Manifesto*:

A struggle is going on in the nations of the civilized world between the oppressors and the oppressed of all countries, a struggle between capital and labor, which must grow in intensity from year to year and work disastrous results to the toiling millions of all nations if not combined for mutual protection and benefit. The history of the wage-workers of all countries is but the history of constant struggle and misery engendered by ignorance and disunion; whereas the history of the non-producers of all ages proves that a minority, thoroughly organized, may work wonders for good or evil. It behooves the representatives of the workers of North America, in Congress assembled, to adopt such measures and disseminate such principles among the people of our country as will unite them for all time to come, to secure the recognition of the rights to which they are justly entitled.³²

Samuel Gompers, a loyal and studious lieutenant of Adolph Strasser in the Cigar Makers Union, was elected president of the Federation. Born in London in 1850 into an estranged and impoverished branch of a prominent family of Dutch Sephardic Jews, he emigrated with his family to New York as a teenager. As a young cigar maker on the Lower East Side, then populated largely by exiled revolutionaries from all parts of Europe, Gompers came of age in this radical ferment and became fast friends with Peter McGuire, with whom he attended the free lectures at Cooper Union. In the Cigar Makers Union he was exposed to Marxist doctrines and controversies, as Strasser and his comrades agonized over the takeover of the New York section of the First International by the wealthy spiritualist eccentric Victoria Woodhull.³³ The cigar trade was ideally suited to serve as an incubator of radical politics. The rolling and bunching of cigars being a notably noise-free craft, the shop floors neatly facilitated free-ranging discussion, with one of the men often leading the others in readings on various subjects, very often on the issues of the day.

Gompers's first mentor in the union was Karl Ferdinand Laurell, a Swedish exile in Strasser's inner circle. Laurell was a seafarer by trade, and with his hardscrabble working-class personality combined with a

keen sarcastic wit and a stridently orthodox Marxism, he took his cues directly from Marx from the time of the First International. Laurell disparaged the German Social Democrats and their American imitators, citing their connection to the hated LaSalle, and declared himself not a socialist but a “pure and simple trade unionist.”³⁴ Laurell not only gave Gompers his first copy of *The Communist Manifesto* but also read aloud to him his own translation of the text, which had not yet been translated into English, providing commentary along the way. Laurell’s original slogan of “pure and simple trade unionism,” viewed by radical critics of the AFL as a harsh conservative doctrine, would be carried on by Gompers for decades. Near the end of his life, Gompers explained in his memoirs,

To understand Marx one must read him with an understanding of the struggle from the ‘fifties to the ‘seventies. Marx did not beguile himself into thinking the ballot was all powerful. Perhaps the severest critic of Socialism was Karl Marx, and his denunciations of the Socialists in attacking trade unions has no superior even in our own time. He grasped the principle that the trade union was the immediate and practical agency which could bring wage-earners a better life. Whatever modifications Marx may have taught in his philosophical writings, as a practical policy he urged the formation of trade unions and the use of them to deal with the problems of the labor movement.³⁵

The Marxism of Gompers, Laurell, Strasser, and McGuire was, in short, the Marxism of the older, more cynical Karl Marx—the Marx who was first dubious and then downright hostile to the Paris Commune, the Marx who attacked his radical young followers late in his life and famously lamented “all I know is that I’m not a Marxist.” This Marxism flowered in America and not Europe because virtually the only surviving followers were exiles after 1848 and the lesser revolutions that followed, foreshadowing the exceptional character of American Socialism for generations to come.³⁶

Ironically, the newer German immigrants also brought over the doctrine that for a time won over many alienated English-speaking members of the Socialist Labor Party—anarchism. As early as 1879 some of the more radical German members of the SLP formed paramilitary groups in Chicago and Cincinnati, which the national convention that year resolved to censure but not expel.³⁷ In October 1881, a Revolutionary Socialist Labor Party convention was held in Pittsburgh around the newly arrived Johann Most, a German-born anarchist who had been imprisoned in England for his article praising the assassination of Alexander II in Russia. He soon after renamed his group the International Working People's Association, evidently purporting to have re-founded the First International in the name of its most famous victim of expulsion, the anarchist icon Mikhail Bakunin.³⁸ Perhaps the biggest coup for Most and the International Working People's Association was recruiting Albert Parsons and the large following he had taken out of the SLP.

The coda for the optimism that pervaded up to the election of 1880 came in the last stand of the Greenback-Labor Party in the election of 1884. The party ultimately endorsed the independent candidacy of Benjamin Butler, military governor of New Orleans during the Civil War turned Republican politician, breaking with the Republicans as a supporter of the labor movement. Despite Butler's toxic reputation in the South, he was still able to carry on the Greenback-Labor tradition of pairing Union and Confederate officers on its presidential tickets and accepted its choice for his running mate, Absalom West of Mississippi.³⁹ In the closest election in U.S. history up to that time, the Greenback-Labor vote total was nearly cut in half from 1880, with General Butler receiving a mere 134,294 votes. Virtually all of Butler's votes came from the old Greenback-Labor strongholds in the Midwest.⁴⁰

At its convention in 1884, the AFL, though somewhat alienated from the larger labor movement despite its strong start, passed a resolution declaring that if the eight-hour day was not brought about by May 1, 1886, a general strike would commence. This bold gamble paid off handsomely, as Terrence Powderly, the leader of the competing Knights of

Labor, saw it as enough of a threat to his organization that he ordered his membership not to participate in the strike.⁴¹ By 1886, the AFL boasted the added affiliation of the Brownstone Cutters, Cabinet and Furniture Makers, Piano Makers, Fresco Painters, Furriers, the Typographical Union, Wagon and Carriage Makers, Coopers, Machinists, and Metal Workers.⁴² Yet initially, the Knights of Labor were the biggest gainers from the trade union boom that followed the Great Railroad Strike, winning to their banner the majority of Railroad Brotherhoods. But the Knights as a rule were opposed to the use of the strike, and although this stance at first fit the more conservative sensibility of the Brotherhoods, within a few years this began to change dramatically. Shortly after the AFL threw down its challenge, as much to the Knights of Labor as to the capitalists, the Brotherhoods struck on the southwest lines of Jay Gould, probably the most despised robber baron of the era. Gould was forced to relent to the Brotherhoods' demands early in 1885.

This strike occurred against the wishes of Powderly, who remained an opponent of Marxist-inspired labor radicalism in favor of the conservative utopian idyll upon which the Knights of Labor had been founded. The most recent generation of scholars, who came out of the new left, would see in this their own ideal as opposed to the militancy of the early AFL, counterintuitively conflating the latter with the labor movement of the Cold War liberal era. The assessment of the new left author Jeremy Brecher is typical:

This sense of class unity developed in opposition to the spirit of the trade unions, which at that time generally represented only the most highly skilled craftsmen, the "aristocracy of labor," and fought to maintain their privileged position. According to Powderly, "The sentiment expressed in the words 'the condition of one part of our class can not be improved permanently unless all are improved together' was not acceptable to trade unionists, who were selfishly bound up in the work of ameliorating the condition of those who belonged to their particular callings alone."⁴³

Opposed to both the “producerism” of the Knights of Labor and the violent nihilism of the anarchists, Gompers and the AFL tempered their Marxism with the influence of the indigenous American movement known as individualist anarchism, whose earliest promulgators were the radical abolitionist Lysander Spooner and the Jackson-era currency reformer Josiah Warren. In the early years of the AFL, Spooner’s protégé Benjamin Tucker edited the popular magazine *Liberty*, which issued the first English translation of *The Communist Manifesto* in the United States. Combining Marx’s labor theory of value with the ideas of Warren, himself influenced by the French anarchist Pierre Proudhon, Tucker formulated the slogan, “the natural wage of labor is its product.” The Typographical Union leader August McCraith was a devoted follower of Tucker, and it was with them in mind that Gompers insisted, “Some of the gentlest, most spiritual men I have known were men who called themselves philosophical anarchists.”⁴⁴

Gompers loved to tell the story of Joseph Labadie, who denounced violent revolution when he spoke at Cooper Union, saying it would yield only a like reaction and that anarchism was possible only through popular education. When an audience member responded in disbelief, “You are a hell of an anarchist,” Labadie cheerfully replied, “Yes, that’s the kind of an anarchist I am.”⁴⁵ In his eventual programmatic critique of the Socialist Party, Gompers continued in the tradition of the individualist anarchists. His eventual hostility to the Socialist Party must be seen separately from his later support for U.S. entry into the First World War, and he was far from alone among comrades of this era to embrace the Allied cause; Benjamin Tucker became a fierce French patriot after expatriating there before the war.

Like many of his English contemporaries, Gompers synthesized Marxism with the philosophy of Herbert Spencer. He fondly recalled meeting Spencer on an American speaking tour in which the fiercely pro-labor radical liberal declared, “I have observed the nervous tension which business men, public men, and labor men are under. In my opinion what Americans most require is relaxation.”⁴⁶ Whereas the individualist

anarchists are best remembered today by the modern libertarian movement that claims them as forebears, in an 1889 letter Gompers relied heavily on Spencer's concept of "the remnant" to explain his doctrine:

Herbert Spencer says it is the "remnant" which saves society from demoralization and preserves liberties for the people. By the nature of things tyranny is always exerted upon the non-possessing class. The working people form that class today and all attempts to abridge rights and privileges fall inevitably upon them. It necessarily follows that their action is directed to prevent encroachments upon, and to extend, their rights and privileges, and since their rights and privileges cannot be extended without according the same to all others, the benefits of their action is felt by all inasmuch as organized effort accomplishes more than individual effort in any given direction. The working people are the "remnant" and the labor organizations the machinery to maintain past achievements and further our advancement of our civilization.⁴⁷

Demonstrations for the AFL eight-hour campaign began as early as the summer of 1885 in New York.⁴⁸ By the time May 1 arrived, a quarter-million workers were active in the movement and almost as many went out on strike.⁴⁹ Gompers himself reported the mass meeting held in New York to be a complete success and looked with enthusiasm on the general strike conditions in Chicago, reminiscent of those in 1877.⁵⁰ Massive actions were also seen in Cincinnati, Baltimore, Milwaukee, Boston, Pittsburgh, Detroit, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. As many as two hundred thousand workers were estimated to have successfully secured the eight-hour day from their employers as a result of the strike.⁵¹ May 1 was thus destined to become the international workers' holiday, yet although May Day put down weaker roots in the United States than in Europe, the irony is that the American Labor Day, on the first Monday of September, commemorates an earlier and more radical protest, led by Peter McGuire and the Carpenters Union in New York's Union Square on September 5, 1882.

However, the potential for the eight-hour day strikes to reach the scale of the Great Railroad Strike was thwarted, possibly by deliberate sabotage, within a few days. On May 3, the police charged unprovoked on the strikers at the International Harvester plant in Chicago. At a protest the next day in Haymarket Square, 180 policemen entered and ordered the crowd to disperse. As the crowd was mostly complying, a bomb went off in the police columns, killing one and wounding dozens more.⁵² In the ensuing hysteria, seven leading anarchists in Chicago were charged with conspiracy, including Albert Parsons. Their case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, argued by none other than Benjamin Butler, but Parsons and three others were executed on November 11, 1887, while the rest were given life imprisonment. These men were pardoned by Illinois governor John Altgeld in 1893 with a statement condemning the entire trial.⁵³

Despite the Haymarket Tragedy, the year 1886 remained auspicious for the growing Socialist movement in America. With the success of the eight-hour strikes, many felt the time was right to once again enter the electoral arena. Thus was much excitement generated by Henry George when he announced his candidacy for mayor of New York. In 1879, George had published a political and economic manifesto *Progress and Poverty* that was an overnight sensation. Its basic message was that land monopolies were the source of economic inequality and that property should therefore be the sole basis of taxation, a theory known as the “single tax.” The New York Central Labor Union, affiliated with the AFL, instigated the campaign to draft Henry George for mayor. On Labor Day George accepted the nomination of the new United Labor Party before a raucous mass meeting at Cooper Union.⁵⁴

Already a popular figure among Irish voters for his outspoken support for Irish independence, George’s support from this constituency grew massively when the Democrats, who typically commanded fierce loyalty from the Irish, nominated the nativist congressman Abram Hewitt. Samuel Gompers served as organizing secretary for the George campaign, and other labor leaders figured prominently, including John

Swinton, a leading New York newspaperman who devoted his later years to impassioned labor agitation. It proved to be a tight three-way race between George, Hewitt, and ultimately running third, a young Republican rising star named Theodore Roosevelt. It was widely believed that the notoriously corrupt Tammany Hall had fabricated Hewitt's 22,000-vote margin of victory, as was routine.⁵⁵

But the United Labor Party had organized nationally and enjoyed many other successes. It elected two members of the U.S. House, where they joined James Weaver, whose return to Congress in 1884 was a bright spot for the otherwise collapsing Greenback-Labor Party. In the Virginia district surrounding Lynchburg, the Labor ticket elected Samuel Isaac Hopkins, a Confederate veteran badly wounded at Gettysburg.⁵⁶ Most notable was the election of Henry Smith from Milwaukee. A former Greenback member of the Wisconsin legislature, Smith was elected city comptroller in 1882 and in 1886 led his People's Party slate to smashing success in Milwaukee, electing in addition to himself six state assemblymen, a state senator, and numerous city office-holders.⁵⁷ Smith's success in maintaining the local Milwaukee organization of the Greenback-Labor Party after its collapse and leading it to unprecedented success won over many former SLP members in that stronghold of the party's heyday. The most consequential would be Victor Berger, an Austrian-born schoolteacher who soon became the powerful editor of Milwaukee's *Social Democratic Herald*.

But back in New York, many of the recent German arrivals in the SLP had great misgivings about supporting Henry George and after the election began publishing strident polemics against George's doctrines. Led by Hugo Vogt, they nearly took over the New York state convention of the United Labor Party in 1886 until the chairman moved to bar membership to any members of the SLP, the doctrinaire single-taxers being deeply alarmed by the SLP platform of militant class struggle. The SLP briefly built up a rival Progressive Labor Party out of the locals they controlled; the two parties both ran full slates in the state-wide elections that year and both fared abysmally.⁵⁸ The SLP was now increasingly led by Daniel De Leon, the scion of a wealthy family of

Sephardic Jews in Curacao and a professor of international law at Columbia. He had entered politics in the election of 1884 when he joined a club of “mugwumps,” the mostly upper-class reform-minded Republicans who supported Grover Cleveland, and was subsequently one of many mugwumps who backed Henry George. After being fired by the Columbia administration for campaigning for George, De Leon was so bitter that he joined the camp of George’s Marxist critics in the Socialist Labor Party, rapidly rising in the much diminished organization by force of his dizzying intellect.

Above all, the eventful year of 1886 marked the arrival of the most devoted leader the American Socialist movement would ever know. Morris Hillquit was born Moshe Hillkowitz in 1869 in Riga, a German cultural outpost on the western frontier of the Russian empire. An assimilated German Jew in his upbringing and manners, it was only by chance that he attended the Russian gymnasium in Riga before coming to the United States at the age of seventeen; by that time he could speak German, Russian, and English fluently. Hillquit received his political education on a Lower East Side that was then in transition from the asylum for survivors of the 1848 revolutions that forged the convictions of Samuel Gompers to the Yiddish-speaking, most densely populated place on Earth it more famously became. The “roofs of Cherry Street” served as the impromptu salons of the exiled Russian radicals, fresh from the aftermath of the assassination of Alexander II. Most in this period were anarchists, but there was a healthy minority of Social Democrats. As Hillquit recalled near the end of his life,

I allied myself with the Social Democrats almost immediately. . . . The romanticism of the anarchists held no attraction for me. I always had a certain sense of realism, which rendered me immune from the intoxicating effects of the hollow revolutionary phrase. I could not take the violent anarchist thunder seriously. I was on the other hand deeply impressed with the practical idealism of Social Democracy. Socialism has never become a religious dogma to me. I accepted its

philosophy as convincing on the whole, without insisting on every article of the Marxian creed for myself or my comrades.⁵⁹

The cosmopolitan Russians of Cherry Street, however, proved more representative of the Lower East Side's past than its future. It was not only the radicals who were compelled to flee the repression that followed the assassination of Alexander II, which fell upon the Jews indiscriminately and began sending them to the new world in massive numbers. The end of serfdom in Russia had also brought about massive downward mobility among the Jews, historically of the merchant class; an almost precapitalist existence had set in before the émigrés experienced the massive shock of urban proletarian life on the Lower East Side. In short, one could scarcely ever hope to find a group whose actual lived experience more perfectly reflected Marx's narrative of a rapidly expanding proletariat against a shrinking and ever-wealthier bourgeoisie.

Many challenges confronted Hillquit and his comrades in propagating socialism among the ripe audience of the new immigrants; first and foremost was their ignorance of Yiddish. They were tutored in the workers' tongue by Abraham Cahan, who joined the SLP as a disillusioned anarchist after the Haymarket tragedy.⁶⁰ By 1888, there were two "Jewish" sections of the SLP in New York, Yiddish-speaking and Russian-speaking. In October of that year, the United Hebrew Trades was unceremoniously founded by a committee made up of two members of each section. The organizers hoped to emulate the United German Trades, a powerful SLP-aligned union of German-speaking immigrants established in several industries. The United Hebrew Trades' first major victory was a successful strike of mostly illiterate Knee Pants Makers in 1890, and on the heels of that victory it organized the Bakery Workers.⁶¹ Other unions organized by the United Hebrew Trades included the Musicians, Retail Clerks, Bookbinders, Soda Water Workers, and the garment industry—the bedrock of the Socialist movement in American Jewry—whose earliest unions were the Cloak Makers, Tailors, Furriers, and Cap Makers.⁶²

After working a few years as a cuff maker in a men's shirt factory, Hillquit began as a paid clerk in the SLP headquarters before becoming one of the three editors of the new *Arbeiter Zeitung*, the first socialist Yiddish newspaper in America.⁶³ As Hillquit excitedly recalled,

The paper was an instantaneous success. It was our aim to conduct the paper along broad educational lines rather than to confine it to dry economic theories and Socialist propaganda. The Jewish masses were totally uncultured. They stood in need of elementary information about the important things in life outside of the direct concerns of the Socialist and labor movement. Without a certain minimum of general culture they could not be expected to develop an intelligent understanding of their own problems and interest in their own struggles. Abraham Cahan largely supplied the "human interest" features. I contributed editorials, historical sketches, and articles on Socialist theory and a variety of other subjects.⁶⁴

By the late 1880s, the Jewish sections of New York were the only part of the SLP enjoying growth. As late as 1888 there were more anarchists than socialists among the Yiddish-speaking radicals, but most anarchists soon came to support the United Hebrew Trades. The socialists easily matched the anarchists' most pervasive feature in this era, the rejection of religion; the New York SLP always held its annual banquet on the Jewish fast day of Yom Kippur. But more characteristic of the state of the SLP was when, in 1889, the Cincinnati local followed Milwaukee in unceremoniously bolting from the party, confirming that the party base was defecting to more promising Socialist terrain.⁶⁵

Across the continent and worlds away from the Lower East Side, a rebellion was brewing that posed the most profound challenge the historic party of state capitalism ever faced. Beginning in the latter half of the 1880s, several farm cooperatives in Texas in the orbit of the Knights of Labor began to organize as the Farmers Alliance. A massive influx of farmers from across the former Confederacy arrived in Texas, lured by

the promise of cheap land and escape from the oppressive lien system, which historian Lawrence Goodwyn describes thus:

The farmer, his eyes downcast, and his hat sometimes literally in his hand, approached the merchant with a list of his needs. The man behind the counter consulted a ledger, and after a mumbled exchange, moved his shelves to select the goods that would satisfy at least a part of his customer's wants. Rarely did the farmer receive the range of items or even the quantity of one item he had requested. No money changed hands, the merchant merely made brief notations in his ledger. Two weeks or a month later, the farmer would return, the consultation would recur, the mumbled exchange and the careful selection of goods would ensue, and new additions would be noted in the ledger. From early spring to late fall the ritual would be enacted until, at "settlin'-up" time, the farmer and the merchant would meet at the local cotton gin, where the fruits of a year's toil would be ginned, bagged, tied, weighed and sold. At that moment, the farmer would learn what his cotton had brought. The merchant, who had possessed title to the crop even before the farmer had planted it, then consulted his ledger for a final time. The accumulated debt for the year, he informed the farmer, exceeded the income received from the cotton crop. The farmer failed in his effort to "pay out"—he still owed the merchant a remaining balance for the supplies "furnished" on credit during the year. The "furnishing merchant" would then announce his intention to carry the farmer through the winter on a new account, the latter merely having to sign a note mortgaging to the merchant the next year's crop. The lien signed, the farmer, empty-handed, climbed his wagon and drove home, knowing that for the second or fifth or fifteenth year he had not paid out.⁶⁶

C. Vann Woodward, the great historian of the South, went as far as to say that the lien system "more universally characterized the post-bellum economy than ever slavery described the antebellum system."⁶⁷ The most common escape from such indentured servitude was

abandonment of one's farm, with the epigram GTT ("Gone To Texas") a universally recognized symbol when painted on the door of an abandoned shanty. Like countless other revolutionary movements, political consciousness first blossomed in exile, where the Farmers Alliance emerged. Goodwyn explains the macroeconomic and cultural context of the system they escaped and were now protesting as follows:

Emancipation had erased the slave system's massive investment in human capital, and surrender had not only invalidated all Confederacy currency, it had also engendered a wave of Southern bank failures. Massachusetts alone had five times as much national bank circulation as the entire South, while Bridgeport, Connecticut, had more than the states of Texas, Alabama, and North and South Carolina combined. The per capita figure for Rhode Island was \$77.16; it was 13 cents for Arkansas. . . . The man with the ledger became the farmer's sole significant contact with the outside world. Across the South he was known as "the furnishing man" or "the advancing man." To black farmers he became "the man."⁶⁸

Indeed, the plight of these formerly independent farmers after the collapse of the slave system was not very different from that of the formerly merchant class Jews after the liberation of the serfs. For the Jews, the aftermath of the partition of Poland in which their drama played out had been nearly as great a political trauma as the defeat of the Confederacy and ensuing occupation.

The rise of the Farmers Alliance coincided with the beginning of the end of the Knights of Labor. The Knights were thrust into an untenable situation when their victory over Jay Gould increased membership from roughly 100,000 to 700,000. But when Gould decided after the Haymarket tragedy that the time was right to retaliate against the Railroad Brotherhoods, after another strike, an agonizing defeat completely erased their membership gains and threw the organization into turmoil.⁶⁹ Probably a majority in the Farmers Alliance had family members who worked on Gould's southwest system. The more radical members of the Alliance

saw an opportunity to build a broad-based farmer-labor coalition with which to enter the political arena and began to strategize over the objections of more conservative leaders of the Alliance. Thus was born the Populist movement.

In the presidential election of 1888, the remnants of the Greenback-Labor Party built their bridge to Populism when they formed the Union Labor Party. Overwhelmingly a party of farmers, the new party's choice of name was not as idiosyncratic as it might first appear. There were high hopes that Congressman Henry Smith, the forgotten father of Milwaukee Socialism, would stand for the presidency, and still others hoped to see a national campaign by Henry George.⁷⁰ In the end, the Union Labor nomination went to Alson Streeter, a one-time Greenback member of the Illinois legislature and one of the earliest organizers for a Farmers Alliance north of the Mason-Dixon Line. His running mate was Charles Cunningham of Arkansas, a prominent leader of the Agricultural Wheel, a group that prospered in the border states before merging with the Farmers Alliance in Texas to form the Southern Alliance in 1889.⁷¹ In a razor-thin national popular vote, Grover Cleveland led despite losing massively in the Electoral College to Republican Benjamin Harrison. Streeter and Cunningham earned 11 percent of the vote in Kansas and 9 percent in Texas, but only 149,115 votes nationally, running well behind Prohibition Party candidate Clinton Fisk.⁷² Incredibly, in 1891 the largely forgotten Streeter came just two votes short in the Illinois legislature of being elected to the U.S. Senate.⁷³

As late as the eve of the 1892 election season, what history came to remember as Populism was often referred to as "Pefferism," in reference to William Peffer, a Pennsylvania-born veteran of Bloody Kansas who became an influential newspaper editor and sometime Republican officeholder in the post-bellum era. Though reluctant to break with the Republicans, Peffer was finally compelled to do so shortly after the 1888 election, and in 1890 he organized the new People's (or Populist) Party from the foundation laid by the Union Labor Party. In Kansas that year, the party won a large majority in the legislature and elected five

of the state's seven members of Congress. Peffer himself was sent by the legislature to the U.S. Senate, and four other Populists were elected to the U.S. House—two from Nebraska and one each from Georgia and Minnesota.⁷⁴

The Populist Party's most promising leader was the brilliant and charismatic young congressman from Georgia, Thomas Edward Watson. Watson's family was driven near poverty after the war, but by the age of sixteen he had received an impressive self-education, not only devouring such classics as *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* but also becoming an especially keen student of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.⁷⁵ Elected to the Georgia legislature shortly after reading for the law in 1882, Watson was appalled by the crass capitalism of Georgia's post-Reconstruction political class, desperate and pathetic in scrambling for capital investment from the North. He was also greatly frustrated by the thwarting of bills he introduced on behalf of his black constituents—legislation to provide them with free schools and end the convict-labor system that effectively resurrected slavery by other means.⁷⁶

No adolescent admirer of Lenin and Trotsky ever enjoyed such an exhilarating fulfillment of their aspirations as Tom Watson, the young French Revolution buff, as he organized a biracial Farmers Alliance in the Bourbon Democrat heartland. After announcing his campaign for Congress, he exhorted the crowd,

To you who grounded your muskets twenty-five years ago I make my appeal. The fight is upon you—not bloody as then—but as bitter, not with men who come to free your slaves, but who come to make slaves of you. And to your sons also I call: and I would that the common spirit might thrill every breast throughout this sunny land, till from every cotton field, every hamlet, every village, every city, might come the shout of defiance to these Rob Roys of commerce and to the robber tariff, from whose foul womb they sprang.⁷⁷

By the time Watson emerged as the movement's boy wonder, the Farmers Alliance was firmly committed to radical political action. It was

now nationally organized, and in the South a Colored Farmers Alliance also emerged, though it was forced to remain largely underground for fear of reprisal from both white Bourbons and black Republicans.⁷⁸

The early front-runner for the Populist presidential nomination in 1892 was Leonidas Polk. A young Unionist member of the North Carolina legislature in 1860 before reluctantly enlisting with the Confederate Army, Polk served as North Carolina's first commissioner of agriculture when the post was created in 1877 and thereafter devoted himself to Farmers Alliance activism. Viewed both at the time and by future historians as the one man who could have broken the solid Democratic South, the highly popular Polk died suddenly, less than a month before the nominating convention. Another highly sought-after candidate was Walter Q. Gresham of Indiana, a federal judge rare in those days for friendliness to the labor movement, who was a dark-horse candidate for the Republican nomination. Though he received a Populist delegation led by Alson Streeter, Gresham refused to allow his name to be entered into nomination, instead endorsing Grover Cleveland. The Democrat returned the favor by appointing Gresham secretary of state, the most committed and outspoken anti-imperialist ever to grace that office.⁷⁹

Convening in Omaha over the Fourth of July, the Populists ultimately turned to James Weaver, the standard-bearer from 1880, though there was a hard-fought contest with James Kyle, a young senator from South Dakota.⁸⁰ In a final ticket uniting Blue and Gray, Weaver's running mate was James Field of Virginia, who once served as his state's attorney general. Weaver thundered to the convention, "This is no longer a country governed by the people, and it is the great duty today devolving upon the party which you represent to rescue the government from the grasp of the federal monopolies and restore it to the great common people to whom it belongs."⁸¹ Although the platform, written by Ignatius Donnelly of Minnesota, was famously radical by reputation, the Populist program was striking for its reformism when compared to such contemporary documents as the founding preamble of the AFL. Focusing primarily on financial and monetary questions, most of its labor and reform planks went back to Greenback days. Along with the

re-monetization of silver in addition to gold, the Populists proposed a “Sub-Treasury” system in which farmers could warehouse crops to be sold when prices demanded, exchangeable in certificates of deposit. The Populists no longer called for greenbacks—only the Sub-Treasury proposal went beyond bimetallism.

Leaders of the AFL such as Samuel Gompers and Peter McGuire were in full support of Weaver, but the Socialist Labor Party was heading in a strange new direction.⁸² Daniel De Leon, in the interlude between the Henry George campaign and assuming command of the SLP, spent time among the followers of Edward Bellamy, whose novel *Looking Backward* anticipated a utopian resolution to the problems of industrial capitalism by the year 2000.⁸³ Despite a vision that appears dystopian and totalitarian to the modern sensibility, Bellamy attracted a large following, overwhelmingly from the upper classes, to his short-lived “Nationalist” movement, whose most lasting legacy is the Pledge of Allegiance composed by his cousin Francis. De Leon’s control of the SLP began when he was made editor of the party’s English weekly, *The People*, in 1891. Taking full advantage of the desire of the SLP to “Americanize,” De Leon brought in many Nationalist recruits to help consolidate his control of the party. The first presidential nominee ever fielded by the SLP in 1892—Simon Wing of Boston, the inventor of tintype photography—was of this group. His running mate was the more established SLP member Charles Matchett of New York, an electrician and Civil War veteran.⁸⁴

In the 1892 election, Grover Cleveland avenged his defeat four years earlier against Benjamin Harrison by more than 350,000 votes. Though a committed champion of the gold standard, Cleveland was able to blunt some Populist appeal by taking on as his running mate Adlai Stevenson of Illinois (grandfather of the Democratic standard-bearer of the 1950s), who favored the monetization of silver and had served earlier in the U.S. House where he sometimes caucused with the Greenback-Labor members. The Populist ticket received just over a million votes at 8.5 percent of the national total. In addition to carrying the electoral votes

of Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, and North Dakota, the Populists elected thirteen members of the U.S. House—joining senators from Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota—and elected governors in Kansas and Colorado.⁸⁵ The SLP ticket earned 21,173 votes in the five states where it was on the ballot, three-fourths coming from New York, where it actually outpolled the Populists.⁸⁶

The triumphant spirit that naturally prevailed among the Populists, however, was also prevailing in the party of state capitalism. The year 1893 would be marked by the famous Columbian Exposition in Chicago, commemorating the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage to America as the occasion to exhibit the glorious future of American industry and civilization. At the exposition, historian Frederick Jackson Turner gave the lecture that revealed his "frontier theory," which held that the existence of an open and expansive frontier had kept America "democratic" and free of the class upheavals that rocked Europe throughout the century. Though one wonders how Turner accounted for the many upheavals of the preceding generation of American history, he warned that, with the frontier now closed, the United States was facing a crisis with no clear solution. Republicans such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge were already advocating their answer: that America should pursue an overseas empire in the Pacific and Caribbean.

At the same time, the English Marxist John Hobson was developing his theories about imperialism as an extension of capitalism, which would be clumsily borrowed by Lenin but more effectively used by Socialist ally Charles Beard in turning Turner on his head with *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*. The Populists had thus emerged to join the battle at the moment of greatest decision—whether the United States, having finally consolidated the continental frontier, would henceforth be a republic or an empire.

2 Populism and Beyond

(1893–1900)

At the height of the Columbian Exposition, on June 20, 1893, fifty disgruntled veterans of the Railroad Brotherhoods met in Chicago to discuss plans for a new and more effective means of labor organization and representation. The result of this meeting was the formation of the American Railway Union (ARU), in which membership would be open to all wage workers in the railroads on an industry-wide basis, including long shore, warehouse, and building trades workers employed by the railroads. The undisputed leader of this new movement was an officer of twenty years in the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen destined to become the beloved icon, indeed the man who was American socialism.

Eugene Victor Debs was born on November 5, 1855, in Terre Haute, Indiana. His father, Jean Daniel Debs, was the scion of a leading family of Colmar, Alsace-Lorraine, which was represented by his grandfather in the National Assembly of Revolutionary France. An overseer in one of his family's factories, Jean Daniel was disowned by his family for taking up with a German Catholic working girl on his shop floor, and together they were forced to flee to America in 1849. Bringing the spirit of 1848 France with him to the new world, Jean Daniel named his eldest son after the novelists Eugene Sue and Victor Hugo and, after obtaining a level of bourgeois comfort as a grocer in Terre Haute, gave his son a substantial supplementary classical education.¹

Hiring on to a railroad painting crew at the age of fifteen, Debs was later put to work as a fireman and at the age of twenty-one was in the leadership of his local Vigo Lodge of the Brotherhood of Locomotive

Firemen. Rising in the ranks in the year of the Great Railroad Strike, Debs was generally critical of the strike, in keeping with the peculiar conservatism of his early career; evangelizing the self-help philosophy that characterized the Railroad Brotherhoods in this era, whose aims he described as “to plant benevolence in the heart of stone, instill the love of sobriety into the putrid mind of debauchery, and create industry out of idleness.”² A force in the Vigo County Democratic Party by the 1880s, Debs was elected to a single term in the Indiana legislature in 1885, but was embittered by the experience and returned to the cause of trade unionism. That year he married Katherine Metzger, the daughter of a successful pharmacist in Terre Haute, whose moderate wealth supported her husband’s political activism in an often bitter marriage of convenience.

The turning point in Debs’s trade union career came in 1889 when, as editor of the national newspaper of his brotherhood, he played a secondary leadership role in a strike on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad. The disastrous results of this strike led Debs to join the movement of labor leaders away from the failing Knights of Labor toward the AFL.³ He began a friendly correspondence with Samuel Gompers, who in principle supported an entirely new organization to displace the Railroad Brotherhoods, but was wary of antagonizing them and creating a “dual union.”⁴ Still behind the curve in the political radicalization of his time and place, Debs remained a loyal son of the Democracy in 1892 and supported Grover Cleveland over the Populist James Weaver, probably the most ironic decision of his entire life.

The Panic of 1893, often regarded by historians as the first great depression, began in the first two months of the second Cleveland administration. Farm prices were already plummeting when, in May, the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad declared bankruptcy with \$125 million in debts, causing a stock market crash. Believing deflation to be in order, the administration pushed through Congress the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, thereby making the dollar completely reliant on gold. This led to more than six hundred bank failures and unemployment in

the hundreds of thousands, sealing the political fate of Grover Cleveland. A majority of Democrats voted against repeal of the Silver Purchase Act, their numbers now including several in the West who owed their election to fusion with either the Populists or “Silver Republicans.”

Naturally, massive labor unrest accompanied this depression, with more than a thousand strikes believed to have taken place in 1893 and 1894. As early as 1892, the AFL Iron and Steel Workers struck the Carnegie plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, where they were devastated in pitched battle against the hired private army from the Pinkerton Detective Agency. The most spectacular struggles of 1893 took place in the mining communities of Coeur d’Alene, Idaho; Cripple Creek, Colorado; and in the coal regions of Tennessee. Against this backdrop, the new American Railway Union stood out as a beacon of strength and success. By the end of 1893, the Union Pacific and several smaller railroads were solidly organized, and both the Northern Pacific and Southern Pacific were well on their way.⁵

On the Northern Pacific, nine thousand employees went on strike at the beginning of 1894 after successive wage cuts. When Debs arrived in Minnesota in April to take command of the strike, the railroad’s owner, James J. Hill, hoped he could put Debs in a corner by inviting him to address the St. Paul Chamber of Commerce. In his speech Debs shrewdly appealed to the business interest of his audience in a settlement of the strike, which led to the creation of an arbitration panel that decided overwhelmingly in favor of the ARU.⁶ The jubilant ARU held its founding convention in Chicago in June. With 465 locals represented, the convention endorsed the Populist platform and only narrowly rejected a move to eliminate the color barrier to membership, instead calling for the creation of a separate Negro organization.⁷

At the time of the convention, the ARU had 150,000 members, compared to 100,000 in all the Railroad Brotherhoods combined and 175,000 in the entire AFL. Yet Debs aligned himself closely with the AFL leadership, supporting Gompers in his campaign for AFL president against Mineworkers leader John McBride in Gompers’s only election loss as AFL president until his death. Debs also endorsed Gompers’s position

on political action, which prevailed when Thomas J. Morgan, a leader of the Machinists in Chicago aligned with the SLP, introduced a resolution calling on the AFL to emulate the British example and adopt the principle of “independent labor politics.”⁸ Presented with a modest and reformist list of immediate demands such as “compulsory education,” “direct legislation,” and “liability of employers for injury to health, body, or life,” the convention overwhelmingly adopted the resolution with the deletion of just one demand: “the collective ownership by the people of all means of production and distribution.”⁹ In its place was inserted a plank calling for “abolition of the monopoly system of landholding” by the individualist-anarchist August McCraith.¹⁰

Meanwhile, the SLP under the leadership of Daniel De Leon was viewed increasingly warily, at best, by most other trade unionists. In 1893, the SLP demanded to be seated as an affiliated body of the New York Central Labor Union. Alarmed, Gompers wrote to Friedrich Engels for an authoritative declaration that only trade unions could be seated at a trade union convention.¹¹ But hostility to the SLP did not yet amount to a wholesale rejection of socialism. As early as 1890, Engels blasted the SLP, declaring “the decay of the specifically German party in America, with its absurd theoretical confusion, would be a real piece of good fortune.”¹² The AFL convention at which the political action resolution was adopted was addressed by the Populist governor of Colorado, Davis Waite, who quoted the French Socialist Paul Lafargue and denounced “the capitalism which controls our legislation, which dominates our national conventions, and dictates political platforms and policies.”¹³

It was at the exhilarating first convention of the ARU that it set out on the noble crusade that would be its tragic undoing. Living only a stone’s throw from Chicago, the desperate workers of the company town of Pullman, Illinois, had appealed to the ARU to organize and represent them. George Pullman became a captain of industry with the invention of the sleeping car, which brought unprecedented comfort to railway travel. He personally controlled the town of Pullman—built to accommodate the workforce necessary to build the sleeping cars—imposing

his utopian ideal on the town by banishing both alcohol and the eight-hour day, leaving his workers in a state of peonage. Said one of his unfortunate wards, "We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shop, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman church, and when we die we shall be buried in the Pullman cemetery and go to the Pullman hell."¹⁴

The strike began in the town of Pullman on May 11, 1894. After three thousand workers peaceably walked off the job, Debs proceeded to Pullman to investigate. When the call was heard at the ARU convention to immediately issue a boycott, refusing to move all Pullman cars until George Pullman came to the negotiating table, Debs shot down the motion from the convention chair and instead urged the appointment of an arbitration committee.¹⁵ Debs was acutely aware of how numerous would be the forces arrayed against such a strike—not only the rail industry's General Managers Association but also thousands of unemployed who would clamor for the strikers' jobs, the Railroad Brotherhoods whose hostility to the ARU meant they might furnish strikebreakers, and possible military intervention. But Pullman refused all appeals for negotiation.¹⁶ On June 26, the boycott commenced.

Within two days, fifteen railroads were tied up and 125,000 men had joined the boycott. The Central Labor Council of Chicago offered to call a general strike to enforce the boycott, but Debs, still proceeding cautiously to ensure that no violence would break out, refused to sanction such a move.¹⁷ For their part, the General Managers Association easily recruited strikebreakers, many of them veterans of the 1886 strike against Jay Gould seeking revenge against the men who had taken their jobs then.¹⁸ A typical lead in the hysterical press coverage of the strike read, "Through the lawless acts of Dictator Debs' strikers the lives of thousands of Chicago citizens were endangered yesterday."¹⁹ Yet victory seemed within the grasp of the ARU. By the end of June, the entire American rail system west of Chicago was virtually paralyzed, with only the Northern Pacific able to carry on even a semblance of regular service.

The most indispensable ally of the General Managers Association was Attorney General Richard Olney, a railroad lawyer for more than thirty

years. Olney applied for an injunction against the ARU on the grounds that it was interfering with the mails, and on July 3 it was granted. On the morning of July 4, Debs awoke in his hotel room to see federal troops outside his window and turned to his brother Theodore (at the start of his long career as Gene's loyal right hand) to exclaim, "Those fellers aren't militiamen—they're regulars, Theodore, they're regulars! Do you get that? Cleveland has sent the troops in!"²⁰ Prepared to cut its losses, the ARU made one final call for arbitration, calling for a general strike to commence if the Managers did not agree to negotiate by July 11. On July 10, Debs and other ARU officers were arrested for conspiracy to obstruct interstate commerce and the mails, and the next day 25,000 workers walked off the job in Chicago in a fruitless protest.²¹

Not all was lost. The dystopian regime in Pullman, Illinois was brought under outside scrutiny and was effectively no more by 1898. Among those who vigorously protested the actions of the Cleveland administration was John Altgeld, the governor of Illinois who insisted that state police and militia were perfectly capable of keeping order throughout the strike. But perhaps most consequential was the intervention of Samuel Gompers. Generally keeping a safe distance before finally calling a conference in Chicago for July 12—a date that may have been deliberately chosen to intervene against the possible outbreak of a general strike—the AFL lodged a vigorous protest after a plea to President Cleveland for conciliatory measures was pointedly ignored.²²

These corporations have given the greatest impetus to anarchy and lawlessness. Still, they did not hesitate when confronted by outraged labor, to invoke the powers of the state. The Federal Government, backed by United States marshals, injunctions of courts, proclamations by the President, and sustained by the bayonets of soldiers and all the civil and military machinery of law, have rallied on the summons of the corporations.²³

Though the AFL appropriated \$500 to the legal defense of the ARU, Gompers used the Chicago conference to reach out to the Railroad

Brotherhoods and bring them into the AFL with the apparent collapse of the ARU.²⁴ This was not an unreasonable, if coldly calculating move, but Debs took great affront at this personal betrayal by Gompers and never forgave him.²⁵ Incapable of discussing Gompers and the AFL rationally in years to come, Debs would be led by his passions into some of the most regrettable actions in his career as leader of the Socialist Party. Yet this impasse reflected no difference in ends and only a relatively narrow difference in means. Debs had no intention of starting a revolution in 1894 and indeed lashed out at the railroads and their federal allies for their own revolutionary intentions.²⁶ The ideal that motivated Debs throughout his career was the “beloved little community of Terre Haute, where all were neighbors and friends,” as he wistfully described at the end of his days.²⁷ This often contrived picture of the Old Northwest frontier was nonetheless a brilliant illustration of the young republic that had inspired Alexis de Tocqueville. This conservative, even counterrevolutionary impulse would be the enduring hallmark of the American movement often called “Debsian Socialism.”

It is in this context that the full meaning of the Pullman Strike must be understood. Debs would always believe that it was only the intervention of the courts and the military that defeated the Pullman Strike. With federal troops occupying the entire expanse of rail lines from Chicago to the Pacific, a larger portion of the territory of the United States was then under military occupation than at any time between 1861 and 1877. Many troops from the last leftover skirmishes of the Indian Wars were deployed to suppress the restive proletariat; a more perfect illustration of Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis could not have been provided. As for the role of the courts, “judicial review,” a creation of Federalism a century earlier, was perfectly suited to be the arbitrary enforcer of the state and its vested interests whenever threatened by popular will. Judicial review began with the Supreme Court unilaterally endowing itself with legislative authority in the 1803 *Marbury v. Madison* ruling and was vastly expanded by the Fourteenth Amendment (itself only ratified by many state legislatures at the point of a bayonet); the abolition of what one leading American Marxist would call

“government by judiciary” would be among the Socialist Party’s immediate demands for forty years.

Military intervention in the Pullman Strike proved the political doom of Grover Cleveland. In the midterm elections of 1894, called by one surviving Missouri Democrat “the greatest slaughter of innocents since Herod,” his party lost an astonishing 125 seats in the U.S. House. This created a wide opening for John Altgeld to plot the takeover of the Democratic Party by more progressive forces, generally identified with the cause of restoring the free coinage of silver and potentially aligned with the Populist Party. But the Populists also suffered setbacks in 1894. The two Populist governors, Davis Waite of Colorado and Lorenzo Lewelling of Kansas, both lost reelection.²⁸ However, the most crushing loss was that of Tom Watson. Branded a dangerous prophet of anarchism and communism by the Bourbon Democrats, his northeast Georgia district saw the most dramatic and pivotal conflict of the post-bellum South. Scores of black men rallied to Watson for sanctuary from lynch mobs, and Watson’s white supporters took up arms against said mobs. Watson’s biographer C. Vann Woodward declared that “never before or since have the two races in the South come so close together as they did during the Populist struggles.”²⁹ Watson had overcome vote fraud marred by violence to take his seat in Congress in 1892, but the second battle in 1894 proved too great a challenge.

Yet still a force in its historic agrarian strongholds, the Populist Party was now determined to look beyond them. Eugene V. Debs became an instant hero to the Populists, who were eager to join forces with the urban labor movement. Debs declared for the Populists even before the Pullman Strike, but declined nominations for Congress and for governor of Indiana in its aftermath.³⁰ In an early sign of the extraordinary reverence with which Debs would be held for the balance of his career, after an appearance at Cooper Union in 1894, the great labor journalist John Swinton invoked his distinction as the *New York Times* reporter who covered Lincoln’s 1860 Cooper Union speech to draw a comparison:

Lincoln's name was less familiar to New York masses at the opening of 1860 than Debs' was in 1894. Lincoln had campaigned in the west, but the west was much farther away than it is now, and western men were less known in the east than they are now. Lincoln drew a crowd to Cooper Union, but not as large a crowd as Debs drew. When, in Cooper Union, a year ago, I heard the speech of Eugene V. Debs, which, in so many ways reminded me of that of Abraham Lincoln long ago, I felt sure that nobody could deny that here again, in this new Western leader in the struggle for labor's emancipation, there might be the stuff for a Presidential candidate. And this suggestion would have been made by me at the New York meeting but for the jam of perversity on the platform.³¹

In June 1895, Debs began to serve a six-month jail sentence at Woodstock, Illinois, for contempt of court in the Pullman Strike conspiracy trial. It was during this period of enforced leisure that, by most accounts, Eugene Debs was converted to Marxian Socialism. As he later recalled in a widely published account,

Books and pamphlets came by every mail and I began to read and think and dissect the anatomy of the system in which workingmen, however organized, could be shattered and battered and splintered at a single stroke. The writings of Bellamy and Blatchford early appealed to me. . . . It was at this time, when the first glimmerings of Socialism were beginning to penetrate, that Victor L. Berger—and I have loved him ever since—came to Woodstock, as if a providential instrument, and delivered the first impassioned message of Socialism I had ever heard—the very first to set the “wires humming in my system.” As a souvenir of that visit there is in my library a volume of “Capital” by Karl Marx, inscribed with the compliments of Victor L. Berger, which I cherish as a token of priceless value.³²

The biographer Nick Salvatore, in his admirable effort to humanize the Debs of legend, challenges this version of events by pointing to other instances during his time at Woodstock in which Debs resisted the

Socialist label. In particular, Salvatore points to the visit of Keir Hardie, the father of the British Labour Party whose early career as a mineworkers' leader in Scotland in many ways mirrored Debs, joined by Thomas J. Morgan of the Socialist Labor Party. Debs initially signed on to, but quickly distanced himself from, an effort by Hardie and Morgan to form a society for "The Industrial Commonwealth."³³ In any event, there is no question that Debs and his movement remained more influenced by the particularly American movements that culminated in Populism than by Marxism. But Debs, for all the peculiarities of his early conservatism, was not a changed man.

Debs came into the Populist Party, with its leadership his for the asking, at a time when the party itself was undergoing considerable change. No one more shrewdly recognized this than Victor Berger or did more to foster its transformation into American Socialism. The gifted SLP refugee in the Populist Party of Milwaukee gained national influence for his *Social Democratic Herald* with the help of rich angel Henry Demarest Lloyd. As financial editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, Lloyd was radicalized by his experiences as a muckraker in the 1880s and declared himself an independent socialist. In 1894 Lloyd published the widely read Populist tome, *Wealth vs. Commonwealth*. This book and other socialist writings were widely circulated in the highly diffuse Populist press, but the door burst wide open to their efforts as it became evident that the leadership of the party was now dominated by elected officials in the West who largely relied on fusion with the Democrats. Berger's successful efforts to win Debs to socialism must therefore be understood in the context of the larger campaign he led with Lloyd to convert the Populist Party to socialism.

The Populist Party leadership inclined toward fusion with the Democrats in 1896, especially when it became clear that Cleveland would be deposed in favor of a candidate favoring a return to the coinage of silver. This development was widely opposed, but nowhere more fiercely than in the South, where they were typically met by the Democrats with violence. The opponents of fusion became known as the "middle of the road" faction. They included such Populist veterans as Tom Watson,

Mary Lease, and Ignatius Donnelly, but had little support among Populist officeholders. The two exceptions were Senator William Peffer in Kansas and Congressman Milford Howard in Alabama. They were further weakened by the loss of the party's two governors in 1894, both mid-roaders who, like Peffer, began their political careers in the Union Labor Party of 1888.³⁴ The mid-roaders eagerly flocked to the program on offer from Berger and Lloyd, especially given the prestige that came through their association with Debs. At least one newspaper account of internal Populist politics declared that "most of the middle-of-the-roaders of the Populist Party are socialists."³⁵ It would not, therefore, be an exaggeration to say that the nucleus of the future Socialist Party existed in the Populist Party as early as 1895.

But Debs had not lost all hope for the redemption of the Democratic Party, and he felt a personal loyalty to John Altgeld, the acknowledged leader of the Silver Democrats, for standing with him during the Pullman Strike. Altgeld's preferred candidate was Missouri senator Richard Bland, the leader going into the 1896 Democratic convention. There was also the prospect that Colorado "Silver Republican" senator Henry Teller might bring about a grand alliance with both the Democrats and Populists. Key fusionists in the Populist leadership included James Weaver, Senator William Allen of Nebraska, Congressman Jerry Simpson of Kansas, and Marion Butler of North Carolina.³⁶

Among the victims of the 1894 "slaughter of innocents" was a two-term Democratic-Populist fusion congressman named William Jennings Bryan, who after leaving Congress became the most prominent newspaper editor of the silver crusade at the *Omaha World Herald*. Bryan came to Chicago in 1896 with large followings in the delegations of several Southern states and his native Nebraska.³⁷ When he concluded a dramatic twenty-minute speech in favor of the party's adoption of a silver coinage plank with the chiliastic declaration, "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold," a jubilant hour-long demonstration broke out for Bryan's nomination, which was secured on the fifth ballot.³⁸ Though

Bryan had already run on a fusion ticket, the Populist rank and file remained strongly opposed to fusion. Even John Altgeld issued a skeptical note, remarking to his friend Clarence Darrow, "Applause lasts but a little while. I have been thinking over Bryan's speech. What did he say, anyhow?"³⁹ Moreover, Bryan's running mate, Arthur Sewall of Maine, was a wealthy shipbuilder with a history of strikebreaking.

The Populist convention opened in St. Louis on July 20. The influence of the future Socialist leaders was now so extensive that one of the party's leading newspapers, the Texas-based *Southern Mercury*, called for the state parties to send delegates "pledged to support the Omaha Platform in its entirety, and instructed to vote for the most broadminded statesman and patriot of the century, Eugene V. Debs, for President."⁴⁰ With this coup, Berger and Lloyd opened a makeshift headquarters at the convention, securing pledges from more than four hundred delegates, just under one third of the total. They shrewdly arranged for Congressman Milford Howard of Alabama to give the nominating speech for Debs. There were even rumors in the press that Bryan was prepared to take on Debs as his running mate to secure fusion with the Populists, although this offer was flatly rejected by the Debs managers in St. Louis after they led on the first ballot.⁴¹

But at 8:00 that evening, there was a sudden blackout in the auditorium. When an officer of the convention announced in darkness from the podium that business would have to be adjourned until the next morning, a spontaneous demonstration for Debs began as some shouted that the Bryan forces caused the blackout. Although deliberate sabotage may have been the cause, it was more likely the result of electrical storms plaguing St. Louis that summer.⁴² The Populist Party's fate was sealed when, by a margin of 194 votes, Senator William Allen, Bryan's indispensable home-state ally, was elected permanent chairman of the convention. That afternoon, Debs sent a telegram removing himself from consideration, stating that his duties remained with the labor movement.⁴³ Desperate to find a candidate, the mid-roaders rallied to Seymour Norton, publisher of the Populist-aligned *Chicago Express* with roots

in the Greenback-Labor Party, with running mate Frank Burkitt of Mississippi, a leader of the Farmers Alliance whose newspaper office had been set ablaze by vindictive Democrats.⁴⁴ James Weaver gave the nominating speech for Bryan, and as they realized Bryan's nomination was inevitable, such stalwart mid-roaders as Ignatius Donnelly and Mary Lease rose to give seconding speeches. The final vote was 1,042 for Bryan to 321 for Norton.⁴⁵

However, the convention insisted on nominating its own candidate for vice president. Milford Howard nominated the absent Tom Watson, seconded by a black delegate from Georgia who gave what many felt was the best speech of the convention in praise of Watson's courage.⁴⁶ Watson had stayed away from St. Louis because of his extreme reluctance to be drafted, much like Debs after their respective traumatic defeats of 1894. But Watson accepted the vice presidential nomination, understanding it was necessary to heal the divisions in the Populist Party. The Populists, in turn, believed that Bryan could be compelled to replace his widely disliked running mate, Arthur Sewall, with Watson. Though much of the press took well to the idea, Bryan treated the Populists with cold indifference.⁴⁷ Even more frosty was the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who made his hostility to the Southern Populists abundantly clear with the assurance that "they will go with the Negroes, where they belong."⁴⁸ Despite resenting the position he had been pushed into, Watson rallied the Populist faithful in his native Georgia before touring Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado.⁴⁹

Debs, who was never eager to run that year, was as fervent for Bryan as anyone, writing in a personal letter to the Democratic nominee:

In the great uprising of the masses against the classes, you are at this hour the hope of the Republic, the central figure of the civilized world. The people love and trust you, they believe in you as you believe in them, and under your administration the rule of the money power will be broken and the gold barons of Europe will no longer run the American government.⁵⁰

In fact, as president of the much-diminished American Railway Union, Debs was the only labor leader of national prominence to publicly campaign for Bryan, doing much of his stumping in Chicago for John Altgeld in the fight of his political life, and with Clarence Darrow, who had given up his career as a railroad lawyer to defend Debs during the Pullman Strike and was then running for Congress on a Democrat-Silver fusion ticket.⁵¹ Samuel Gompers personally supported Bryan and was even in the hall during the “cross of gold” speech, but stopped short of having the AFL formally endorse his candidacy and instead campaigned narrowly for silver, a stand that upset both major parties.⁵² Typical of mid-roaders in the fall campaign was Mary Lease, who in the course of stumping for Bryan at Cooper Union announced that she had become a socialist. In a characteristic stemwinder, Lease thundered in the hallowed Great Hall,

We have become blind to evils that menace us. We are confronted with glutted markets and idle labor. It is a condition that makes it possible for a few men to become landlords of a proud city like this while God’s poor are packed in the slums. Such a condition is not only a menace to republican institutions, but a travesty upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. A condition by which the wealth accumulated by the common people is poured into lard tubs and oil wells, to enable Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Whitney to buy a diamond tiara for his daughter is a disgrace to the country.⁵³

Henry Demarest Lloyd, however, was so dispirited by the events in St. Louis that he resolved to cast his ballot for the Socialist Labor Party, whose narrow, doctrinaire instincts were now brought out with a vengeance by Daniel De Leon. Roughly one hundred delegates gathered in New York on July 4 to nominate Charles Matchett for president, who had been the vice presidential standard-bearer four years earlier and who also had made respectable showings running for governor of New York and mayor of Brooklyn. His running mate was Matthew Maguire, an alderman in Paterson, New Jersey, and collaborator of Carpenters’ Union founder Peter McGuire in the September 1882 protest that became

commemorated as Labor Day.⁵⁴ Although Lloyd only intended a symbolic vote for the SLP, other disillusioned Populists were less shy about actively campaigning for the Matchett-Maguire ticket. They included Julius Wayland, a disillusioned newspaperman ally of Davis Waite in Colorado who now published *The Coming Nation* from a utopian colony in Tennessee, and Charles H. Kerr, a former Unitarian minister who founded an eponymous spiritualist publishing house where he was joined by Algie M. Simons, a rare college-educated WASP in the SLP, in launching the journal *International Socialist Review*.⁵⁵

Yet few Americans of radical sympathies did not to some degree or other share the sentiment expressed by Debs that William Jennings Bryan was, indeed, the hope of the republic. Of Bryan's followers, biographer Michael Kazin wrote, "In their eyes, Bryan was spiritual kin to the patriarchs and prophets who, according to Hebrews 11, 'subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, and stopped the mouths of lions.'" ⁵⁶ But this Protestant revivalist tone of Bryan's campaign, with overt religious themes, was also its undoing. The Republican nominee, William McKinley, ran a perfectly orchestrated campaign in the nineteenth-century "front porch" style from his home in Canton, Ohio, and his very shrewd campaign manager Mark Hanna, in addition to raising massive amounts of campaign cash from nervous capitalists, brilliantly seized the opportunity to capture the votes of Catholics and others in the urban middle class who were historically Democrats but were alienated by prairie evangelism.

The election proved to be close, with McKinley only leading Bryan by four percentage points in the popular vote. Even the lopsided Electoral College margin of 271–176 was misleading, because margins of less than ten thousand votes decided the election in six critical states: California, Delaware, Indiana, Kentucky, Oregon, and West Virginia.⁵⁷ A pathetic 245,728 votes of more than six million for Bryan were cast on a Populist ballot line with Tom Watson listed as his running mate.⁵⁸ With arrangements made in twenty-eight states for Watson electors to be on the Democratic slate, twenty-seven electoral votes were cast for Watson for vice president from the states of Arkansas, Louisiana,

Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.⁵⁹ In the U.S. House, twenty-two Populists and three Silver Republicans were elected, but only Milford Howard remained among the old mid-roaders. The Socialist Labor Party polled 36,359 votes in the twenty states where they were on the ballot, coming in fifth place behind National or Gold Democrat John Palmer, with roughly 1 percent of the vote, and the Prohibition Party's Joshua Levering.⁶⁰ The extent of the Republican triumph was best symbolized by the defeat not only of John Altgeld in Illinois but also of Clarence Darrow in an overwhelmingly Democratic Chicago district.

There are many misconceptions about the meaning of the Bryan campaign and the failure of the Populists to resist fusion. Lawrence Goodwyn, in his otherwise excellent history of the Populist movement, completely misses the evidence of the early transition taking place toward Socialism and falsely reduces the divide between fusionists and mid-roaders to silver versus fiat money, when, as has been noted, the Omaha Platform eschewed a revival of the greenback. In contrast, Debs biographer Nick Salvatore goes so far as to suggest that his reluctance to assume the leadership of Populism in 1896 indicates that Debs was, in fact, not yet a socialist:

Debs was neither a Socialist nor a confident leader of a popular movement in 1896. Politically naïve, he lacked both a consistent analysis and a coherent program. But his commitment to Populism reveals another trait. Even in 1896 he saw in that movement a potent appeal to Americans that emphasized their culture's democratic promise. Within a year this appeal would form the core of his new commitment to Socialism. But in 1896 Populism had not fully run its course, and Debs was willing to temper his own ideas to support that movement in what proved to be its last serious campaign.⁶¹

This assessment may be largely accurate, but it makes the serious error of viewing Debs in isolation, rather than as part of a larger movement that was going through the same transition. Ignoring the importance

of Socialists such as Victor Berger and Henry Demarest Lloyd to what was happening in the Populist Party leading up to 1896 compounds the error of ignoring the fact that a clash between the fusionists and mid-roaders was inevitable and almost certainly could not have been resolved without splitting the party. Events certainly could have provided a more enduring foundation for the future Socialist Party. Yet the statement of Debs's early biographer Ray Ginger that "if Bryan had been elected President in 1896, Eugene Debs might never have become a socialist" is highly misleading; certainly Victor Berger also knew that the Populist drama had to run its course.⁶²

In any case, on January 1, 1897, Eugene V. Debs made the following bold announcement in an open letter to the remaining membership of the American Railway Union:

The issue is Socialism versus Capitalism. I am for Socialism because I am for humanity. We have been cursed with the reign of gold long enough. Money constitutes no proper basis of civilization. The time has come to regenerate society—we are on the eve of universal change.⁶³

A few weeks later, Henry Demarest Lloyd and Julius Wayland came together to announce the formation of the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth, taking that phrase and much of their perspective from Lawrence Gronlund, a Danish immigrant whose 1884 pamphlet *The Cooperative Commonwealth* converted many to a nonparty socialism free from the vagaries of the SLP. By this time, Wayland was in Kansas City, where he established a new national newspaper, *Appeal to Reason*, destined to become the most widely circulated Socialist newspaper in American history. Ever the savvy newspaperman, Wayland defined his socialism in what he called his "one-hoss philosophy," an idiosyncratic blend of Marxism learned in the orbit of the SLP with the utopian thought of Edward Bellamy and of the British agrarian socialist John Ruskin—all bearing the stamp of his abolitionist heritage and articulated in the most perfectly contrived rustic twang.⁶⁴

On June 15, 1897, the remnant of the American Railway Union and the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth assembled in Chicago to merge, forming the new Social Democracy of America. Victor Berger's Milwaukee organization, now rechristened the Social Democratic Party of Wisconsin, was among the Populist Party remnants present. Also present was a twenty-eight-year-old Lower East Side anarchist named Emma Goldman, who after charming Gene Debs over lunch and exclaiming, "Why Mr. Debs, you're an anarchist," was taken by the hand with the reply, "Not mister, but comrade, won't you call me that?"⁶⁵ But the convention was divided over the way forward. In the wake of the collapse of the Populist Party there was some resistance to resume political action, with many favoring a colonization scheme in which one of the new, sparsely populated Western states would be colonized by the Social Democracy so that a model commonwealth could be voted into existence.

Henry Demarest Lloyd was among those who strongly objected to this scheme. Debs, though inclined toward the views of Lloyd and Berger, was not able to reject colonization out of hand as a practical palliative for the unemployed, particularly the many blacklisted former ARU members. He tried desperately to maintain peace in the new organization, stressing that colonization was but "an incidental plan to relieve the present distress all about us as much as possible."⁶⁶ The governor of Washington even announced that he would welcome the establishment of Social Democracy colonies in his state.⁶⁷ At the 1898 convention, a resolution to go forward with colonization passed by a vote of 52 to 37. The minority, led by Victor Berger, walked out, ultimately to be joined by Debs, who was presiding over the convention. Two small and short-lived colonies were formed in Washington State, and the minority, which reconstituted as the Social Democratic Party of America, looked to the future.⁶⁸

Occurring in parallel with the birth pangs of the Social Democratic Party was the revolt in the Socialist Labor Party against the dictatorial whims of Daniel De Leon. At the 1896 convention of the SLP, following a disastrous attempt to take over the all but moribund Knights of Labor, De Leon moved that the party establish its own labor federation to rival the AFL, the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance (STLA). This motion

was met with determined opposition from much of the party membership, who belonged to the AFL and remained determined to work within it—including presidential nominee Charles Matchett, Max Hayes of the Typographical Union in Cleveland, and J. Mahlon Barnes of the Cigar Makers in Philadelphia. Job Harriman, a Los Angeles attorney who came into the SLP out of Edward Bellamy's Nationalist movement, became the titular leader of the opposition, backed by the United German Trades and the United Hebrew Trades, both comfortably aligned with the AFL.⁶⁹

At the convention, the formation of the STLA was only approved with the understanding that it would not oppose or seek to replace the AFL but instead would only organize the unorganized. But De Leon quickly reneged on this understanding, beginning a no-holds-barred polemical war against all those he regarded as “labor fakirs” and “traitors”—in short, all radicals and trade unionists other than his unquestioning followers. De Leon manned the barricades as editor of the party's English paper, *The People*, with Hugo Vogt, who first launched the ultra-orthodox Marxist attack on Henry George that brought De Leon into the SLP, as his faithful lieutenant at the German paper *Vorwaerts*.⁷⁰ The United German Trades had a powerful organ in the *New York Volkszeitung*, but the United Hebrew Trades lacked a newspaper to rally its members to the opposition. Into this void stepped Abraham Cahan, who on April 22, 1897, published the first issue of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, which in a few short years became the most widely circulated Yiddish newspaper in the world.

The opponents of De Leon and dual unionism were aware of developments outside the SLP. Indeed, after Isaac Hourwich attended the Social Democracy convention in 1897 as an observer for the United Hebrew Trades, Cahan led much of the Jewish membership out of the SLP to join them, and the United Hebrew Trades was unceremoniously expelled from the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance.⁷¹ Morris Hillquit, who had only just returned to SLP activity after an absence of several years to establish his law practice, remained in the party, close to the Germans around the *Volkszeitung* despite being the counsel of record for the United Hebrew Trades.⁷² Meanwhile, following the lead of Julius Wayland and Henry Demarest Lloyd, disillusioned Populists who had

nominally joined the SLP began to flock to Debs and his Social Democrats, particularly in Texas. The mid-road Populist stronghold had been so radicalized that there even existed a faction that looked to the secession of Texas as an independent socialist republic. Among the radical Texans who declared for Socialism in this period was Martin Irons, a leader of the 1886 strike against the Gould southwest system whom Debs had openly emulated in the Pullman Strike.⁷³

Then, in December 1897, James F. Carey, leader of a successful local strike of Boot and Shoe Workers, was elected as a Socialist Labor candidate to the Common Council of Haverhill, Massachusetts. This heightened the debate in the SLP about whether party officeholders, of which there were consistently a few, should support reform legislation. This debate moved beyond the academic when Carey was elected by his colleagues to serve as president of the Common Council. De Leon denounced Carey for “having the class consciousness of an oyster” and drifting “Debsward,” speculating that his political success was entirely due to Carey’s diminished faculties in the last stages of consumption. In March, a personal visit from Debs won the perfectly healthy Carey over to the Social Democrats, and by the end of 1898 both he and comrade Louis Scates were elected to the Massachusetts legislature, and John Chase elected the Socialist mayor of Haverhill.⁷⁴ As Morris Hillquit described Daniel De Leon in his memoirs,

Daniel De Leon was a fanatic. . . . For his opponents he had neither courtesy nor mercy. His peculiar traits and methods were not due entirely to his personal temperament and character. In part at least they were the logical expression of his social philosophy. . . . He placed organization ahead of education, politics above economic struggles, and leadership above the rank and file of the movement. He was the perfect American prototype of Russian Bolshevism.⁷⁵

As the various Socialists set out on the path toward eventual union, many consequential changes were taking place after the election of

William McKinley. The question of bimetallism, on which everything else seemed to hinge in 1896, was rendered moot the following year when the discovery of gold in Alaska expanded the money supply. Although many historians portray Mark Hanna, the man who engineered McKinley's election, as the reactionary arch-nemesis of the great progressive Theodore Roosevelt, it was the latter who said of the unrest of the 1890s that "the sentiment now animating a large proportion of our people can only be suppressed, as the Commune in Paris was suppressed, by taking ten or a dozen of their leaders out, standing them against a wall, and shooting them dead."⁷⁶ By contrast, Hanna wanted to offer an outstretched hand to labor, convinced of the folly of suppressing labor with the bayonet after witnessing federal troops intervene in one of his coal mines in 1876. When Samuel Gompers returned to the leadership of the AFL, Hanna reached out to him, beginning for Gompers a long and controversial collaboration with the business community. Coinciding with a major increase in membership and organizing success for the AFL as the economy improved, this path to peaceable labor relations and greater respectability would have been difficult in any event to resist.⁷⁷

Yet this was only one of many factors in the evolution of Gompers into a fierce critic of the Socialists. As the dawn of the twentieth century approached, Gompers remained in the radical camp in important respects, at times being even more far-sighted than the Socialists. In 1898, a boiler explosion on the *USS Maine* as it was docked in the port of Havana became the *casus belli* for a splendid little war that resulted in the conquest by the United States of the last overseas remnants of the Spanish Empire. The Republicans heralded the Spanish-American War with a frank embrace of imperialism and its benefits. But as a member of the Anti-Imperialist League, Samuel Gompers spoke bluntly and forthrightly:

I propose stating as succinctly as possible the grounds of our opposition to the so-called policy of imperialism and expansion. We cannot annex the Philippines without a large increase in our standing army.

A large standing army is repugnant to our republican institutions and a menace to the liberty of our own people. If we annex the Philippines, we shall have to conquer the Filipinos by force of arms, and thereby deny to them what we claim for ourselves—the right of self-government.⁷⁸

More outspoken still was Tom Watson, who likely saw in the American embrace of the imperial purple the fulfillment of his declaration at the close of the 1896 campaign that “no soldier of the Southern Confederacy carried away from Appomattox a heavier heart than I took with me into my enforced retirement.”⁷⁹ Watson poignantly asked, “What are we going to get out of this war as a nation? Endless trouble, complications, expense. Republics cannot go into the conquering business and remain republics. Militarism leads to military domination, military despotism. Imperialism smooths the way for the emperor.”⁸⁰ By contrast, the young Socialist movement remained unmoved by the imperialism controversy. The orthodox Marxists considered it a diversion from the class struggle, whereas others retained a belief in manifest destiny. Nevertheless, Debs spoke out against the war, noting that “in 1894 the press denounced us for the alleged reason that we were murderous and bloodthirsty, and now the same press opposes us because we are not.”⁸¹

By 1899, the Socialist Labor Party was at the breaking point, with Morris Hillquit the undisputed leader of the opposition to De Leon. The “kangaroos,” as De Leon called them for reasons lost in the mists of history, began publishing a special monthly edition of the *New York Volkszeitung* to agitate against De Leon’s leadership and were able to mail it to all subscribers of both the papers backing De Leon.⁸² On May 31, De Leon ordered a membership referendum to approve severing all connection between the party and the *Volkszeitung*. By a strange quirk, the election of the National Executive Committee and national secretary of the SLP was vested solely in the General Committee of the New York section, so before the close of voting on August 1, the July meeting of the New York committee would have decided everything. This meeting descended into an open brawl for physical possession of the hall. When

the Hillquit faction prevailed, the national secretary elected by their rump convention, Henry Slobodin, immediately went to secure the party headquarters, only for another street battle to ensue with De Leon supporters barricaded inside. After a few days, the Executive Committee loyal to De Leon was regrouped and expelled the entire opposition.⁸³

Half the membership went with Hillquit, including some, such as Thomas J. Morgan of Chicago, who supported the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance and its hard line against the AFL but were disgusted by De Leon and his tactics.⁸⁴ Having been urged to reconstitute as a new party by the Chicago and San Francisco sections months earlier, a convention was held in Rochester, New York, on January 29, 1900.⁸⁵ Still calling itself the national convention of the SLP, fifty-nine delegates unanimously repudiated the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance and nominated Job Harriman and Max Hayes as candidates for president and vice president, respectively.⁸⁶ But these nominations were only intended to serve the foremost objective of the convention, which resolved, "That the interests of socialism will be best subserved by a speedy union of the Socialist Labor Party and the Social Democratic Party into one strong, harmonious, and united socialist party."⁸⁷

The Social Democrats had long been the refuge of those cast out of the SLP, from Victor Berger in the 1880s to the United Hebrew Trades and Haverhill Socialists in just the past two years. When the Social Democratic Party had its convention in Indianapolis on March 6, Hillquit, Harriman, and Hayes all addressed it and their calls for unity were met with thunderous applause.⁸⁸ The enthusiasm was so great that the convention was prepared to nominate the Harriman-Hayes ticket by acclamation until the chairman made the point of order that neither man was a member of the Social Democratic Party and therefore they were not eligible for nomination. When an ad hoc unity committee met at the hotel adjacent to the convention, it was suggested as a compromise that Harriman and Hayes be nominated in exchange for accepting the name Social Democratic Party for the new united party. But Victor Berger,

wary of unity and largely responsible for delaying it another year, told the meeting that he was still trying to persuade Debs to accept the party's nomination. The next day, after a rousing nominating speech by Frederic MacCartney, a minister who had just been elected to the Massachusetts legislature, the Social Democrats nominated Eugene Debs for president and Job Harriman for vice president by acclamation.⁸⁹

On March 25, a conference intended to work out the final details of unification was held in New York. The substance of unity was easily agreed to: the platform adopted by the Rochester convention would be the new party's declaration of principles, with the "immediate demands" of the Social Democrats included as an addendum. But mayhem ensued on the question of the new party's name. The Social Democrats insisted on keeping their name, while Hillquit and his comrades proposed "United Socialist Party."⁹⁰ A week later, a manifesto was issued by the National Executive Board of the Social Democratic Party charging that this difference, going back on the informal unity agreement at the Indianapolis convention, amounted to such treachery that honorable unity was impossible.⁹¹ The Social Democrats submitted a referendum on the question to their membership as Berger blasted all the advocates of unity on both sides. James Carey was attacked as a "ward politician," whereas Hillquit, seen as a hopeless assimilationist by many of his United Hebrew Trades comrades, retained enough Jewish identity for Berger to attack him as a "Polish apple Jew" and "rabbinical candidate."⁹² Though making no secret of his own Jewish heritage, Berger insisted on identifying as a German American and took a Protestant wife, the former Meta Schlichtling.

In spite of this propaganda, the vote on the referendum was close, at 1,213 against and 939 for union. This only led to more chaos. The March meeting in New York had resolved to set up a national headquarters in Springfield, Massachusetts, and this headquarters was soon occupied by the dissenting Social Democrats for unity. They then merged with the Rochester SLP, adopted the name Social Democratic Party, and issued formal letters of notification to Debs and Harriman.⁹³ This "Springfield party" appointed William Butscher, a leader of the Brooklyn Social

Democrats who organized one of the first local unity conventions, as national secretary.⁹⁴ Still, the two rival parties were left with little choice in how they would proceed: cooperate behind their shared presidential ticket and then resume negotiations after the campaign.

Meanwhile, the Democrats once again nominated William Jennings Bryan. America's new overseas empire was the central issue of the 1900 campaign, with opposition, particularly to the raging war against Philippine rebels, a point of reunification for the party still bearing the scars of the bimetallism split.⁹⁵ The Anti-Imperialist League included among its founders many who had been "Gold Democrats" in 1896; some of these founders, such as future Socialist Oswald Garrison Villard, long-time editor of *The Nation*, boasted considerable radical credentials.⁹⁶ But although the Democratic platform of 1900 was shockingly forthright in declaring "no nation can long remain half-republic and half-empire," Bryan, who conspicuously volunteered when the war broke out, was a reluctant standard-bearer for the anti-imperialist cause.⁹⁷

What remained of the Populist Party had gone through turmoil that made the unification agonies of the Socialists pale in comparison. The much-diminished party was finally ruptured between fusionists and mid-roaders in 1898, with the former, led by Marion Butler, determined to maintain a ghost of autonomy as junior partner to Bryan's Democrats. Some remaining bitter-enders were led by Milton Park, editor of the *Southern Mercury*. They nominated Wharton Barker, the scion of a Philadelphia banking family who came late to Populism after losing much of his fortune in the Panic of 1893. The campaign proved a disaster when it became clear that Barker, who had a history of falling in with con men, could not personally finance the campaign.⁹⁸ Most old mid-roaders, whether in the Socialist movement or not, saw no reason to support Bryan after he had given them such a cold shoulder in 1896.

Yet Bryan cultivated a large enough personal following that so long as he remained the Democratic standard-bearer no radical alternative would make more than modest headway. Among those outspoken for Bryan in 1900 was the somewhat eccentric reform mayor of Toledo, Ohio, Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones, a benevolent industrialist and avowed

Christian socialist. Debs even hoped to recruit him as the presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party and felt personally betrayed when Jones came out for Bryan.⁹⁹ Also solidly behind Bryan again was Samuel Gompers, whose arrival firmly in the Bryan camp by this time is best understood in the same context as that of the fusionist Populists. In a major irony given later history, his support for the Democrats may well have been measurably helped along by Socialist ambivalence on the imperialism question, with Bryan largely embraced by Gompers's colleagues in the Anti-Imperialist League.

For his part, Debs did not begin actively campaigning until late September, but once he got going, it was clear he was in the role for which he was destined—as evangelist of unmatched charisma for the cooperative commonwealth. His opening address took place at Chicago's Music Hall, where he declared, "The one vital issue in the present campaign springs from the private ownership of the means of production and it involves the whole question of political equality, economic freedom and social progress."¹⁰⁰ The Chicago appearance also revealed the strain created by the awkward situation of Debs serving as candidate of two parties that were at each other's throats. Two rival organizations were campaigning for Debs in the city: the "Springfield party," led by Thomas J. Morgan, and the older Social Democracy, to which Debs still technically adhered, led by a former follower of Edward Bellamy named Seymour Stedman. The Social Democrats were thus especially furious when Debs publicly embraced the Morgan group, though Debs would convince Morgan to close his campaign office in the interest of unity.¹⁰¹

From Chicago, Debs began a six-week nationwide tour, giving speeches that could last more than two hours and proving himself the equal in oratory of his Democratic rival. He retained enough celebrity from the Pullman Strike that he easily received the most press coverage of any minor-party candidate; even though the Prohibition Party remained larger, and certainly received more coverage than the hapless Wharton Barker, who all but disappeared in the final month of the campaign.¹⁰² Repeated misleading newspaper stories announced that Debs would

withdraw from the race in support of Bryan, with Debs's denials typically buried far to the bottom of the article. The Democrats clearly saw Debs as a serious threat, with the leading Democratic paper *Chicago American* running allegations that his campaign was financed by the Republicans.¹⁰³

But it hardly mattered in the end, as William McKinley received a substantial increase in both the popular and electoral vote in his reelection. Debs and Harriman received a generally disappointing 88,011 votes, in fourth place behind the Prohibition Party. Wharton Barker received a pathetic 50,989 votes, and the SLP, at the start of its century-long twilight as a small sect, earned 40,943 votes. The Social Democrats had a few notable showings in congressional elections. Albert Gillen, a Socialist on the Haverhill Common Council, received nearly 10 percent of the vote. Gaylord Wilshire, namesake of Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles who would be one of several "millionaire socialists" who helped define the Socialist Party's first decade, made a respectable showing in a Los Angeles district. Other notable U.S. House candidates in 1900 included James L. Bishop, the African American president of the Clinton, Indiana, Central Labor Union.¹⁰⁴

After having to work together to run a national campaign, it was clear to both rival parties that the pettiness of the past year needed to be put behind them. Both sides looked forward to finally bringing about unity in the coming year. Berger and many of his loyalists continued to have misgivings, but the original Social Democrats came out of the campaign in such disarray they had little choice.¹⁰⁵ On the other side, William Butscher wrote confidently to Hillquit, "If we declare that we are in favor of union and suggest that a convention be held early next spring for unifying all Socialists it can but strengthen our position and weaken theirs."¹⁰⁶ Most of all, after the 1900 campaign the field was now open to the Socialists to succeed the once mighty and much-mourned Populists. At the dawn of what would prove the bloody American century, if any yet remained, the Socialists were now the hope of the republic.

3 The Party Is Born

(1901–1904)

The “Unity Convention” that formed the Socialist Party of America was held at Masonic Hall in Indianapolis on July 29, 1901. It was initially intended that they keep the name “Social Democratic Party,” but after a few delegates raised concerns about potential confusion with the Democratic Party, with election law bills even proposed in a few states to prevent this, it was agreed that the new united party would be known as the Socialist Party.¹ Of the 125 delegates, 70 came out of the “Springfield party” led by Morris Hillquit and William Butscher, 47 represented the Chicago-based Social Democratic Party of Debs and Berger, and 8 represented independent remnants of the Populist Party in Iowa, Kentucky, and Texas.² The party headquarters was to be in St. Louis, and Leon Greenbaum, a new recruit in that city who took no part in the late unpleasantness, was chosen to serve as executive secretary.

In keeping with the original unity discussions, the platform consisted of a declaration of principles laying out the ultimate aim of the cooperative commonwealth, followed by a short and succinct list of “immediate demands.” The Wisconsin delegation, the last and most reluctant to approve unity, prevailed in proposing a highly decentralized party structure assuring that “the state or territorial organization shall have sole jurisdiction of the members residing within their respective territories, and the sole control of all matters pertaining to the propaganda, organization, and financial affairs within such state or territory.”³ Only a quarter of the delegates were foreign born, three were African Americans, and more than half were under the age of forty.⁴ Even though a majority

of the delegates at one time or another had passed through the Socialist Labor Party, most were products of either Populism or Edward Bellamy's Nationalist movement. As historian David Shannon describes the delegates to the founding convention of the Socialist Party, "only a few had more than the haziest acquaintance with theoretical Marxism."⁵

The notable exceptions included Algie Simons, editor of *International Socialist Review*; James Oneal (the Irish Catholic apostate had the apostrophe legally removed as a personal statement), an organizer for the Iron and Steel Workers in Eugene Debs's hometown of Terre Haute; and Algernon Lee, the college-educated son of an Iowa carpenter whose reputation as a learned Marxist exegete earned him the moniker "the Yankee Talmudist" from his New York colleagues. Also arriving in the United States around the time of the party's founding was John Spargo, who, as a rising star in the constituency that first sent Keir Hardie to Parliament in 1900, had participated in the analogous birth agonies of the unified movement that ultimately became the British Labour Party.⁶ Spargo came out of the most radical faction in this drama, the Social Democratic Federation of H. M. Hyndman, known for its Christian Socialism shaped by the precapitalist philosophy of John Ruskin.⁷ Spargo became aware of the controversies plaguing the American movement after James Connolly, future leader of the Irish Republican Army, became an evangelist for Daniel De Leon in the Federation.⁸

This Christian Socialism was vital to the American party, because if any substantial group in its first decade was recruited from outside either Populism or the early Marxist movement, it was the large cohort of ministers. Most consequential among this group was George Herron, an Iowa Congregationalist who joined many of his fellow Midwesterners at the party's founding in relocating to New York. Also hailing from the Congregationalist Church was Carl Thompson, recruited by Victor Berger in Milwaukee. Other notable ministers included Walter Thomas Mills of Kansas and George Washington Woodbey of California, probably the leading African American Socialist before the First World War. They were a generally conservative influence on the party; in the words of David Shannon, "Most of them confined their leftist activities to

reading such newspapers as the *Christian Socialist*, which had as its motto ‘The Golden Rule Against the Rule of Gold,’ and attending the annual conferences of the Christian Socialist Fellowship.”⁹

Much about the earliest years of the Socialist Party remains obscure, largely because of how the makeup of the party in its earliest years has been interpreted. The recruitment of socially conscious ministers caused no friction in the party, which was overwhelmingly rooted in the Populist remnants of the West and a few pockets of the South. If anything, the ministers were a source of middle-class respectability that, fairly or not, the Populists always lacked. The only more distinct section of the party base was the trade union base in the craft unions of the AFL. With this group’s connection to Marxism and the sympathies of the party’s decidedly Marxist leadership, a reasonable view of the internal politics of the Socialist Party before 1905 would place these trade unionists, led by Berger and Hillquit, on the left of the party, rather than the right with which they have typically been identified. Before 1905, there was no “revolutionary” left in the Socialist Party that renounced immediate demands and the ballot box.

However, the leading history of the Socialist Party’s first decade has this exactly backward. *The American Socialist Movement: 1897–1912* was written in 1952 by Ira Kipnis, a young professor at the University of Chicago who the following year lost his job after pleading the Fifth Amendment in a state legislative hearing on Communist activities at the university.¹⁰ Although Kipnis’s membership status in the American Communist Party is uncertain, his work bears all the marks of the party’s historiographical influence. In particular, he creates arbitrary categories of “left, right, and center” based on abstract principles, largely projected from the politics of the 1930s, with little discussion of the individuals involved in the controversies of the Socialist Party.

To the extent that “left” and “right” are valid labels in describing the factional politics of the Socialist Party before the First World War, the substantive meaning of “left” was rejection of the ballot box and legislative

reform as a means toward socialism, as well as propaganda along these lines, if not also advocacy of revolutionary violence. But so soon after breaking with the Socialist Labor Party of Daniel De Leon, no one in the Socialist Party favored taking such a path, not least because prospects at the ballot box seemed so promising. It was only the establishment of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905 that would create that substantive meaning of “left,” and only the IWW would create the circumstances in which the trade unionist and avowedly Marxist elements of the party were categorized as the “right.”¹¹

Kipnis obscures this substantive meaning of “left” and “right” by invoking an imagined working-class purism. Some radical elements in the Western states did indulge absurd expressions of proletarian purity, such as the refusal to dine in any establishment with tablecloths or provide any alternative to spitting chewing tobacco on the floor of party offices.¹² But in reality all persuasions in the party could boast their share of lawyers, dentists, professionals, and intellectuals, and at times a majority of the “millionaire socialists” later in the decade leaned left. Among the more erroneous issues brought into this matrix by Kipnis is women’s suffrage, a mainstay going back to Populism. Women’s suffrage first took root in rural states, where the nature of farm labor made men more inclined to see their wives as equals, in contrast to the cult of domesticity the McKinley-Hanna majority fostered in the more comfortable parts of urban America. Two other issues, however, merit closer scrutiny: Socialist attitudes toward African Americans and the trade unions.

The record of the Socialist Party on race before the First World War, although certainly falling short of twenty-first-century standards, was nevertheless an honorable one. The resolution on “the Negro race” passed at the 1901 Unity Convention should leave no doubt of earnest intentions, however flawed in execution:

We declare to the Negro worker the identity of his interests and struggles with the interests and struggles of the workers of all lands, without

regard to race or color or sectional lines, that the causes which have made him the victim of social and political inequality are the effects of the long exploitation of his labor power. . . . We, the American Socialist Party invite the Negro to membership and fellowship with us in the world movement for economic emancipation by which equal liberty and opportunity shall be secured to every man and fraternity become the order of the world.¹³

It is true that this policy was not always faithfully adhered to in practice, particularly in the South. Of the four Southern states that had more than a handful of black members in the party's early years—Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Mississippi—Kentucky and Louisiana had integrated party locals. Florida, a Socialist stronghold in the party's first decade, had persistently segregated locals, but this may have partly reflected the separatist pride that prevailed in much of the black community of Florida in this era. Mississippi had the most interesting arrangement, in which Negroes were admitted as at-large members to the state organization, a means sanctioned by the national office where there were not enough members in a given area to form a local.¹⁴ Even Louisiana, a party stronghold at the end of the decade, had to be forced by the national party in 1903 to cease chartering segregated locals. Yet later, a member of the Louisiana party defended the practice in *International Socialist Review* by comparing it to the chartering of foreign language sections.¹⁵

This comparison elucidates the generally prevailing attitude of the Socialist Party in its heyday toward “the Negro question” and how it was blessed by the international movement. Another article around the same time in *International Socialist Review* asserted that “Jews also live apart from gentiles, and no one will claim that there is, in any civilized community deserving the name, any vestige of ill-will between the two peoples.”¹⁶ For the ideal through which most European Socialists undoubtedly viewed segregation was that of the Jewish Socialist Bund, founded in Russia in 1897 and advocating Jewish cultural autonomy

(chiefly preservation of the Yiddish language) in a future Socialist Russia. Although assimilated Jews such as Hillquit and Berger often had trouble concealing their disdain for Yiddish culture, the growing party stronghold in New York was increasingly populated by recent arrivals from the Bund.

The underlying principle of the party's approach was typically articulated as "political but not social equality."¹⁷ In other words, African Americans would be given full rights of political participation and ideally take their place in the labor movement, but the taboos of the era against everyday social interaction between the races and miscegenation would be respected and upheld. However unfortunate this may be to modern sensibilities, it was carried over from the Populist movement, which despite its reputation for racial egalitarianism remained respectful of social segregation outside direct political struggle. The case of Tom Watson, often mistakenly viewed as having evolved from radical egalitarianism to extreme racism, is instructive. Though he became a purveyor of infamous demagoguery against Catholics and Jews, his view of segregation remained largely consistent with benevolent paternalism.¹⁸

As a young Indiana Democrat in the 1880s, Eugene Debs offered a frank defense of Jim Crow, but he abandoned this position earlier than later.¹⁹ As early as 1893, Debs favored opening full and equal membership in the American Railway Union to eligible black workers and, to his dying day, felt that the failure to do so was the short-lived union's greatest mistake.²⁰ Victor Berger and other Midwesterners were known for expressing frankly racist views, but even they never spoke against the principle of political but not social equality.²¹ It should be emphasized that attitudes toward race could not be determined by factional affiliation in the party—in Texas, usually the most radical state of the Socialists as it had been of the Populists, was to be found the greatest resistance to any kind of racial egalitarianism.²² On the related question of Asian immigration, the most militant exclusionists were the notorious ultra-leftists of the Pacific Northwest. The fate of Jim Crow under a Populist or Socialist government would have likely been analogous to that

of the caste system under Nehru: completely opposed and abolished in law, but with virtually nothing done to correct for its legacy.

But far more consequential was the trade union program of the Socialist Party. The statement adopted by the Unity Convention in 1901 would be a subject of enormous internal party controversy in the years ahead, yet the policy it put forward remained essentially unchanged throughout the party's history:

The Socialist Party, in convention assembled, declares that the trade union movement and independent political action are the emancipating factors of the wage-working class. The trade union movement is the natural product of capitalist production and represents the economic side of the working class movement. We consider it the duty of the Socialists to join the unions of their respective trades and assist in building up and unifying the trades and labor organizations. We recognize that trade unions are by historical necessity organized on neutral grounds as far as political affiliation is concerned. We call the attention of trade unionists to the fact that the class struggle so nobly waged by the trade union forces today, while it may result in lessening the exploitation of labor, can never abolish that exploitation. The exploitation of labor will come to an end only when society takes possession of all the means of production for the benefit of all the people. It is the duty of every trade unionist to realize the necessity of independent political action on class-conscious lines, to join the Socialist Party, and to assist in building up a strong political movement of the wage-working class, whose ultimate aim and object must be the abolition of wage slavery and the establishment of a cooperative state of society based on the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution.²³

In short, the Socialist Party would not seek to wrest control of the American Federation of Labor, instead viewing the labor movement represented by the AFL as having a separate, ideally complementary role in their shared objective. Each was to remain autonomous, but trade

union members were expected to individually support the Socialist Party and be actively propagandized to that end. While it may have already been clear by the time the party was founded that it had an adversary in Samuel Gompers, optimism remained about bringing the AFL over to the Socialist program. At the 1902 national convention of the AFL, the Socialist trade union policy was first put into practice, with a resolution introduced by Max Hayes that called on workers “to organize their economic and political power to secure for labor the full equivalent of its toil and the overthrow of the wage system and establishing an industrial cooperative democracy.” With the backing of the Mine Workers, Carpenters, and Brewery Workers, the resolution was only narrowly defeated.²⁴

More importantly, the political action policy of the AFL remained unsettled until the end of the decade, and sentiment within the AFL to organize a labor party was high after the two successive defeats of William Jennings Bryan. But the Socialists were hostile to such a move, believing themselves perfectly worthy of AFL support and given to seeing any new labor party as a capitalist plot directed against them. As early as 1901, an attempt by the labor movement of Chicago to form a political party was thwarted by Socialists who packed a convention called for that purpose, voting the effort down.²⁵ Most historians see this action of a piece with the sectarian attitude that plagued many other periods in the party’s history, but in the party’s earliest years the trauma of the collapse of the Populist Party cannot be discounted. The disaster of fusion with Bryan was still the formative political experience of most Socialists before 1905, and they saw the Socialist Party as an evolutionary step forward.

This notion merged well with the Marxist certitude of comrades who had not personally experienced the collapse of Populism. But the organizational ties of scores of individual Socialists to the AFL made the labor party question unavoidable. The most promising labor party experiment was in San Francisco, where in 1901 the Union Labor Party (ULP) elected a mayor, Eugene Schmitz, and two supervisors.²⁶ In 1902, at the urging of Executive Secretary Leon Greenbaum, himself a salaried AFL organizer, the California Socialists decided not to run their own candidates. While not endorsing the ULP, they issued a statement that they

“simply stood aside and let them prove their claims if they could.”²⁷ Nonetheless, the slate was frequently referred to in the press as the Socialist-ULP fusion ticket and fared badly even as the Socialists nearly tripled their 1900 nationwide vote total to more than 220,000.

To the extent that factional lines were beginning to emerge, they still could not predict a position on the labor party question. Victor Berger, always a loose cannon, was as adamant as his frequent adversaries about the folly of supporting the ULP, yet its model of organization was exactly the one he would soon employ with great success in Milwaukee.²⁸ Job Harriman was the most outspoken advocate for the ULP among the Socialists, giving among other assurances that the party was vigilant against fusing with the Democrats.²⁹ Henry Demarest Lloyd openly supported Harriman just before his death in 1903, but the visceral reaction against anything that smacked of the memory of 1896 was simply too great for most Socialists. The major casualty was Leon Greenbaum, removed as executive secretary in January 1903 by the National Committee and replaced by William Maily, a Tennessee coal miner who relocated to Springfield, Massachusetts, when the Social Democratic Party was briefly centered there.³⁰

Two major changes resulted from this episode: the national headquarters was moved from St. Louis to Omaha, Nebraska, and the managerial duties of the National Committee were vested in a five-member National Executive Committee that remained the source of centralized power in the party.³¹ The appearance, if not necessarily the reality, of official Socialist hostility to the labor movement's efforts at independent political action appears to have led to the final break between Gompers and his supporters in the AFL with organized socialism. At the AFL convention in November 1903, the Socialist resolutions that had been only narrowly defeated the previous year were overwhelmingly rejected. The mood of the convention allowed Gompers to issue his definitive denunciation:

I want to tell you, Socialists, that I have studied your philosophy, read your works upon economics. . . . I have heard your orators and watched

the work of your movement the world over. I have kept close watch upon your doctrines for thirty years, have been closely associated with many of you and know how you think and what you propose. I know, too, what you have up your sleeve. And I want to say that I am entirely at variance with your philosophy. . . . Economically you are unsound, socially you are wrong, industrially you are an impossibility.³²

Because most of the historical record of Gompers's life and times comes from his own writings and reminiscences, with noticeable inattention to the evolution of his thought, the complexity of his philosophy and program has been lost on many historians. Both those favorable and unfavorable to him have generally been content to simply write off his political evolution as accommodation with the powers that be. In 1902, when a massive and violent coal miners' strike broke out in the anthracite region of Pennsylvania, Theodore Roosevelt, who had just become president after the assassination of William McKinley, personally intervened to arbitrate the strike, setting an entirely new precedent of government mediation of labor disputes. Socialist criticism of both the precedent and the settlement itself served to alienate much of the earlier Socialist support among the Mine Workers, redounding to the AFL leadership.³³ It was also in the aftermath of the settlement that Roosevelt's adversary Mark Hanna convened the National Civic Federation, providing a forum for Gompers and his colleagues to engage in dialogue with the captains of industry.

Gompers thus completed his journey to political respectability that began with his continued support for Bryan after 1896. His course of action was analogous to the civil rights leaders of the 1960s who took the path open to them to work with and within the highest echelons of national power; in a time and place where labor agitation and organization were still met by judicial dictatorship through the injunction power, if not by state violence, the AFL took the path of negotiation out of eagerness to avoid bloodshed. Nor did this path signify a decline in militancy. Gompers continued to reject socialism on much the same individualist-anarchist grounds as in the past, perceiving the syndicalist labor movement of

France, which explicitly rejected the German Social Democratic model, as virtually identical in its aims and tactics with the AFL.³⁴

Gompers likely saw the National Civic Federation as a needed anti-statist antidote to the precedent of benevolent government intervention set by Roosevelt. Yet his policy was already beset with contradictions. In no small irony, the Socialist Party's approach to the anthracite strike came closer to Gompers's stated ideals: respect for the autonomy and prerogatives of the unions engaged in struggle; rejection of any movement toward a general strike, as Leon Greenbaum personally helped secure at the 1902 United Mine Workers convention; and opposition to government intervention and arbitration.³⁵ When the aftermath of the anthracite strike dissatisfied radical miners, their movement toward splitting with the AFL would gravely exacerbate the split between the AFL and the Socialists, as well as divisions within the Socialist Party itself.

The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) was a separate union from the largely eastern AFL-affiliated United Mine Workers of America; founded in 1893, it reflected a very different culture of precious metal mining in what was still very much the Wild West. The 1902 convention of the WFM was addressed by Eugene Debs, who found in its leader Ed Boyce a kindred spirit, the sort of labor leader whom Debs felt the Socialists needed to help create more of. This impression was likely confirmed when his speech was followed by an undiplomatic address by Gompers's lieutenant Frank Morrison pleading for the WFM to join the AFL.³⁶ After Gompers made clear his displeasure with the Socialists the following year and joined the National Civic Federation, all Socialists were outraged, but Debs had little support in calling for a completely new trade union policy. This was a relatively sudden change for Debs; as late as 1902 he was quoted as saying, "I am the friend, not the enemy of the American Federation of Labor."³⁷

It is clear that Debs continued to take personally Gompers's move against salvaging the American Railway Union after the failure of the Pullman Strike, and the events of 1902 and 1903 seem to have set off a ticking time bomb that finally led to his highly emotional advocacy of "dual unionism" against the AFL. When Boyce and his lieutenant in

the WFM, Bill Haywood, moved to transform their union into a class-wide movement called the Western Labor Union (quickly renamed the American Labor Union), Debs exhorted them, "I want the trade unions to organize thoroughly and to assert their rights upon the economic field and to do all they can to keep them there. I also want the trade unionists as such to stand together upon a political platform!"³⁸ One important ally of Debs was Algie Simons at *International Socialist Review*, who denounced Leon Greenbaum and his allies for organizing "not a Socialist Party, but an annex to the American Federation of Labor."³⁹ For their part, the new National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party expressed regret that the WFM had not joined the AFL and only awkwardly welcomed its convention's unsolicited endorsement of socialism.⁴⁰

Debs has typically been seen by historians as being on the "left" in party factionalism, but his only policy difference with the alleged "right" was on trade union policy. Deeply affected by the experiences of the Pullman Strike, Debs would always look to recreate the industrially organized alternative to the AFL he briefly led. Until the American Labor Union became the IWW in 1905, he had only a difference of tactics, if a reckless and hysterically argued one, with the leadership of the Socialist Party. But once it became a difference of principle, Debs was out of the IWW within a year, never to offer an alternative policy again. Emotional as the issue was for Debs, he never reappraised his actions nor even personally owned up to them. But if Debs was led by his emotions to work against the AFL, Gompers's thinking also certainly had no lack of an irrational streak. He refused to distinguish between the Socialists and the SLP of the 1890s, held fast to the erroneous conviction that Daniel De Leon was in reality a mulatto named Daniel Loeb, and late in life exhibited considerable projection in his condescending view of Debs.⁴¹

The differences between Debs and his comrades on trade union policy had serious consequences in the second half of the decade, but they were largely swept under the rug as the Socialist Party prepared for its first national campaign. Because Daniel De Leon had used an official party press to become the dictator of the SLP, no official party paper existed,

but there were two unofficial rivals for the honor: Berger's *Social Democratic Herald* and the *Appeal to Reason* published by Julius Wayland in Girard, Kansas. The *Appeal* was shaken by a strike by its staff in 1903 and only then began to take a serious interest in trade unionism.⁴² The *Appeal* and the *Herald* alike also had an important competitor in the Seattle-based *The Socialist* published by physician Herman Titus. Like the *Herald*, *The Socialist* was avowedly Marxist, though of a more militant bent that directly anticipated the left wing of the 1910s.⁴³

The founding of the Socialist Party coincided with the publication of Eduard Bernstein's *Evolutionary Socialism*. A leading German Social Democrat who had been a direct disciple of Marx, Bernstein drew from the experiences of his party to argue that there would not be, as Marx initially predicted, a violent cataclysm that would end capitalism, but rather that socialism would emerge from a peaceful process of political and social evolution. Karl Kautsky, though initially a critic of Bernstein, wrote toward the end of his life,

None learned so readily from experience as did Marx, even when the experience ran counter to his innermost wishes. It was precisely his materialist method that facilitated this learning from experience, for it stressed the study of the surrounding world and not that of personal wishes and emotions.⁴⁴

In other words, in strong opposition to how the concept would be invoked by Lenin, "scientific socialism" simply meant to Marx and his contemporaries that, per the scientific method, theory was subject to changing facts and circumstances and was not intended to serve as dogma, much less as "laws of history." It bears mention that Kautsky began this essay by noting that, with Bernstein having just recently passed away, he was now the last remaining of the original Marxists, who had learned directly from Marx himself. Indeed, speaking directly to the American case, Friederich Engels had been outspoken in his final years about the imperative in both the British and American cases of the goal of unification around a Labor Party.⁴⁵

Victor Berger used the *Social Democratic Herald* to publicize Bernstein's writings, giving a factional edge to his positions for the first time that few were yet prepared to challenge. Berger found much in his experience in Milwaukee to relate to Bernstein's doctrine and took great pride in being increasingly referred to as "the American Bernstein."⁴⁶ The support of his German immigrant constituency emboldened Berger to go on the attack against his rivals, particularly Wayland, for the intellectual leadership of American Socialism. Berger felt that the reliance of the *Appeal to Reason* on dubious promotional schemes revealed Wayland to be little more than a mountebank, denouncing him as a menace to the movement and seizing on his dubious record on trade unionism.⁴⁷ If Berger was motivated by the fear that the *Appeal* stood to displace the *Herald* as the unofficial voice of the party, there was widespread fear throughout the party that Wayland was working to sabotage all other Socialist papers.⁴⁸

The serious intellectual adversary to the American Bernstein was to be found in *International Socialist Review*. Through the magazine, Charles Kerr and his publishing house underscored a curious condition of the Socialist Party's first decade—the party members most tied into the international movement in its early years were the most impeccably "American" in their background and manners, such as Algie Simons, George Herron, and Algernon Lee. They were tied to the continental movement by the Kerr Company, which was publishing most of the Marxist classics for wide American circulation for the first time. This press was also instrumental in establishing the first workers' education facility in the United States. The short-lived Ruskin College, established in 1903 in Trenton, Missouri, was modeled after an experiment in England and led by Walter Vrooman and Charles Beard. The two assisted in establishing course offerings, with several thousand registering for a correspondence program taught by George Herron, Walter Thomas Mills, Algie Simons, and his wife May Wood Simons.⁴⁹

What was officially designated the First National Convention of the Socialist Party was held in Chicago from May 1–6, 1904. Reflecting the party's

nascent condition, only thirty-three states were represented by a total of 175 delegates. It was decided at this convention to move the national headquarters once again to Chicago, where it remained for the next thirty-five years. The platform issued by this convention consisted mostly of a declaration of principles and only in a final paragraph offered a condensed list of immediate demands. Very much the offspring of Populism, it is striking how much the tone of the platform reflected this heritage, as opposed to any collectivist dogma:

The Socialist Party, in convention assembled, makes its appeal to the American people as the defender and preserver of the ideal of liberty and self-government, in which the nation was born, as the only political movement standing for the program and principles by which the liberty of the individual may become a fact, as the only political organization that is democratic, and that has for its purpose the democratizing of the whole of society. . . . Our political institutions are also being used as the destroyers of that individual property upon which all liberty and opportunity depend. The promise of economic independence to each man was one of the faiths upon which our institutions were founded. But, under the guise of defending private property, capitalism is using our political institutions to make it impossible for the vast majority of human beings ever to become possessors of private property in the means of life. Capitalism is the enemy and destroyer of essential private property. Its development is through the legalized confiscation of all that the labor of the working class produces, above its subsistence wage. The private ownership of the means of employment grounds society in an economic slavery which renders intellectual and political tyranny inevitable. Socialism comes to organize industry and society that every individual shall be secure in that private property in the means of life upon which his liberty of being, thought, and action depends. It comes to rescue the people from the fast increasing and successful assault of capitalism upon the liberty of the individual. . . . Into the midst of the strain and crisis

of civilization, the Socialist movement comes as the only conservative force. If the world is to be saved from chaos, from universal disorder and misery, it must be by the union of the workers of all nations in the Socialist movement.⁵⁰

The immediate demands of the 1904 platform were limited to the eight-hour day, comprehensive social insurance, an income and inheritance tax, the abolition of child labor, women's suffrage, and the initiative, referendum, and recall at all levels of government.⁵¹ The emerging differences over trade union policy were aired, and the not yet fully formed left wing denounced the immediate demands as "municipal opportunism." But in the best measure of party sentiments, a resolution condemning dual unionism clearly directed against the American Labor Union passed by a lopsided margin of 107 to 52.⁵² Max Hayes, the unofficial leader of the Socialist bloc in the AFL for the next two decades, argued that the party's popularity vindicated the Socialist approach to the AFL in demonstrating that Gompers's impact on his membership was marginal.⁵³ It was probably in the platform debates of 1904 that the label most often applied to the ostensible left wing emerged—"impossibilist"—originally describing the belief that socialism was impossible through legislative reform, but having the additional salience of being the literal and more damning translation of "utopian."

Eugene V. Debs, present as a member of the Indiana delegation as he would seldom be in the years ahead, was nominated by acclamation to continue as the presidential standard-bearer for the united party. As Debs insisted in his acceptance speech, "I could have wished to remain in the ranks, to make my record, humble though it might be, fighting unnamed." Claiming the mantle of history for his party, he continued, "Thomas Jefferson would scorn to enter a modern Democratic convention. He would have as little business there as Abraham Lincoln would have in a modern Republican convention. If they were living today, they would be delegates to this convention."⁵⁴ The vice presidential nomination went to Ben Hanford, a leader of the Typographical Union in Brooklyn

who had been the SLP candidate for governor of New York in 1898. Probably the most prolific and beloved pamphleteer of the Socialist Party's first decade, Hanford was best remembered for creating the fictional "Jimmie Higgins," symbol of the hardworking, unsung rank-and-file party activists, still invoked as late as the 1980s in the splinter groups that came out of the Socialist Party's ultimate demise.

With Theodore Roosevelt's election to a full term in his own right all but foreordained, the Democrats were eager to nominate anyone but Bryan. They ultimately chose perhaps the most forgettable major party nominee in U.S. history, Alton Parker, Chief Justice of the New York Court of Appeals. His chief rival for the nomination was one of the more colorful and ultimately despised characters in American history, whose rise and fall in American politics in many ways had a greater impact on the fortunes of the Socialist Party than Bryan before him. William Randolph Hearst, heir to the Comstock Lode mining fortune and one of the richest men in America, was already known for his eccentric ways when he poured most of his money into newspapers as a young man, becoming in 1896 the only major newspaper publisher to support William Jennings Bryan. He first made his political ambitions known in 1904, advocating most if not all of the Socialist Party's immediate demands. Throughout its first decade and especially in New York, Hearst was stiff competition for the Socialist Party as a successor to Populism who had middle-class respectability.

Among those aroused to enthusiasm for Hearst in 1904 was Tom Watson. Watson insisted ever since 1896 that he had left politics forever, but suddenly reemerged to declare, "Were I in politics, I should heartily approve and support the candidacy of William Randolph Hearst."⁵⁵ By all appearances, Watson suffered from severe manic depression, evident throughout C. Vann Woodward's truly outstanding biography written many years before the rise of modern psychiatry.⁵⁶ Had Watson not been overwhelmed with gloom after the debacle of 1896 and remained in politics, he might very well have joined the Socialist Party. Thus was the divide between the Socialists and the Populist remnant especially tragic

and of great historical consequence. Based on their ultimate combined vote that year, the likely mid-road Populist ticket in 1896 of Debs and Watson could have done nearly as well in 1904; though far less clear is whether it would have been enough to restore the 1890s status quo ante of Southern opposition to Bourbon white supremacy.

As it happened, the Populists, with hopes of revival after the nomination of Alton Parker, opened their convention in Springfield, Illinois, on July 4. Former Nebraska senator William Allen, indicating some regret for steamrolling the 1896 convention for Bryan, made a strong push for the nomination, but sentiment was overwhelmingly for the old firebrand Tom Watson, who was nominated on the second ballot. The platform adopted in Springfield was virtually identical to the Socialist Party's immediate demands. Even on the "trust question," in which Socialists often ridiculed agrarians and other reformers for wanting to abolish the trusts rather than seeing them as a necessary step in the evolution of capitalism into socialism, the Populist platform of 1904 expressed a view practically identical with the Socialists.⁵⁷

Watson accepted the Populist nomination in New York on August 18 with an address at Cooper Union. He was backed by many former Hearst supporters, including Clarence Darrow, New York labor leader Alfred Boulton, and such future Socialists still in the Hearst camp as J. G. Phelps Stokes and Robert Hunter.⁵⁸ Watson's running mate was one of the most extraordinary and sadly forgotten men ever to seek national office, Thomas Henry Tibbles, a very outspoken advocate for the civil rights of Native Americans as a correspondent for the *Omaha World Herald*.⁵⁹ Though Watson denounced Theodore Roosevelt as the prophet of "imperialism, extravagance, class legislation, militarism, Hamiltonism, of the rankest sort,"⁶⁰ he directed most of his ire toward Alton Parker's "campaign against the corporations, financed and led by the Standard Oil Company, the Sugar Trust, August Belmont and Arthur Gorman."⁶¹ Curiously, Watson had nothing but praise for Gene Debs and his "splendid fight."⁶²

The impression may be created that the continued nominal existence of the Populist Party, under Watson's leadership after the founding of

the Socialist Party, represented the origin of so-called right-wing populism. But this would be erroneous and ahistorical. As noted, there was no substantive difference between the Populist and Socialist platforms of 1904, and Watson continued in that campaign to denounce the racism of the Bourbon Democrats as unequivocally as in the past.⁶³ More importantly, it was not Watson who took it upon himself to perpetuate the ghost of Populism. That dubious distinction fell to Milton Park and his *Southern Mercury*, which issued the call for the convention that nominated Watson. Far from representing a reactionary response to Populism's failure, Park acknowledged the British Fabian Socialists for inspiring his draft platform.⁶⁴

For the first of three consecutive campaigns, Debs made a grueling speaking tour that took him to every state in the union, and for the next fifteen years, the Socialist Party would be a significant political presence in every part of the country except for the Southeastern seaboard from Maryland to Georgia. Debs officially began his campaign on September 1 in Indianapolis, thundering in typical flourish,

The most barbarous fact in all Christendom is the labor market. The mere term sufficiently expresses the animalism of commercial civilization. The labor market is the foundation of so-called civilized society. Without these shambles, without this commerce in human life, this sacrifice of manhood and womanhood, this barter of babes, this sales of souls, the capitalist civilizations of all lands and all climes would crumble to ruin and perish from the earth. This is the paramount issue in the present national campaign. Let me say at the very threshold of this discussion that the workers have but the one issue in this campaign, the overthrow of the capitalist system and emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery. The capitalists may have the tariff, finance, imperialism and other dust-covered and moth-eaten issues entirely to themselves. The rattle of these relics no longer deceives workingmen whose heads are on their own shoulders. The very moment a workingman begins to do his own thinking he

understands the paramount issue, parts company with the capitalist politician and fall in line with own class on the political battlefield. The political solidarity of the working class means the death of despotism, the birth of freedom, the sunrise of civilization.⁶⁵

The election of 1904 was mainly a referendum on the policies of Theodore Roosevelt that inaugurated the Progressive Era. Though Roosevelt's trust-busting agenda and speechifying about malefactors of great wealth won him the most lopsided election victory and decisive mandate since Andrew Jackson rode similar themes to reelection in 1832, Tom Watson's characterization of the Colonel's conservative and dictatorial tendencies expressed the attitude of most radicals. Roosevelt was even distrusted by the growing middle-class municipal ownership movement, which William Randolph Hearst hoped to unify into a national force before disillusionment with his outsized ego sent many supporters fleeing to the Socialists. Debs remained above it all as the forthright prophet of the cooperative commonwealth: "Every hint at public ownership is now called Socialism, without reference to the fact that there can be no Socialism, and that public ownership means practically nothing, so long as the capitalist class is in control of the national government. Government ownership of public utilities means nothing for labor under capitalist ownership of government."⁶⁶

In its premiere as a unified party, the Socialist ticket received 402,810 votes, just a hair under 3 percent of the national total. This highly satisfying showing was complemented by Tom Watson's extremely disappointing result of 114,062 votes, less than half the number received by the Prohibition Party's Silas C. Swallow. Debs's best states were in the West and Northwest, with California the best performing state at nearly 9 percent. Watson received more votes than Debs in every state of the former Confederacy (including 17 percent in his native Georgia) except South Carolina and Florida (the latter the Socialists' best state east of the Mississippi after Wisconsin) as well as in Nebraska, demonstrating the effect of his sapping the national potential of the Socialist Party as well as that of a unified radical movement in the Jim Crow South.

The few bright spots for the Socialists in down-ballot races were indicative of the party's future sources of strength. In Milwaukee, Victor Berger made his first of many runs for Congress from the fifth district of Wisconsin and narrowly outpolled the Democrat.⁶⁷ Milwaukee sent five Socialists to the Wisconsin state house and one to the state senate. In a victory presaging extraordinary strength in the mining regions of the West, cigar maker John Frinke was elected mayor of the company town of Anaconda, Montana, along with Socialists winning the posts of city treasurer and police judge; the Anaconda Company responded by firing hundreds of miners for voting Socialist.⁶⁸ And on the Lower East Side of New York, Joseph Barondess of the United Hebrew Trades, a leader of both the Cloakmakers Union and the Hebrew Actors Union, polled 21 percent as the Socialist candidate in the ninth congressional district. Trailing far behind with barely 1 percent was the Socialist Labor Party candidate, future Amalgamated Clothing Workers leader Joseph Schlossberg.⁶⁹

If the Socialist vote remained relatively modest, it nevertheless aroused great alarm. In part, this was a consequence of Tom Watson having been the subject of greater press coverage, encouraging Populist illusions that they were poised to match or exceed James Weaver's vote in 1892.⁷⁰ Until the returns came in on election night, Populism was still the devil that American capitalism knew, so the growth of the Socialist Party, led by the seemingly discredited agitator of the long-ago Pullman Strike in a time of national prosperity, came as a rude awakening. The *Chicago Chronicle* intoned, "Debs is opposed to government, to society, to all political parties and to all labor organizations. What he and other revolutionists desire is a state of affairs that will be intolerable and, therefore, a direct incentive to revolt."⁷¹ Even Theodore Roosevelt weighed in, declaring that the Socialist Party posed "a threat far more ominous than any Populist or similar movement in time past."⁷² With such literal praise from Caesar, there was no question that the Socialists now led the opposition to the historic party of state capitalism. That is, so long as they would not sabotage themselves.

4 The Fate of American Labor

(1905–1909)

On January 2, 1905, the American Labor Union met in Chicago “to discuss ways and means of uniting the working people of America on correct revolutionary principles.”¹ Eugene Debs was still in the long recuperation period that followed each of his three national campaign tours, but was involved in the discussions that led to the meeting, held soon after the 1904 campaign. Among those present from outside the ALU was William Trautmann, editor of the journal of the Socialist-aligned Brewery Workers. Trautmann had recently returned to the Socialist Labor Party after loudly opposing the SP trade union policy at the 1904 convention, publicly tearing up his membership card after it passed. Trautmann dominated the proceedings at the ALU conference, along with Thomas Hagerty, a lapsed Catholic priest in the orbit of the Western Federation of Miners. Also present were Bill Haywood and Vincent St. John as official representatives of the WFM, the elderly itinerant mineworkers organizer Mary “Mother” Jones, and Charles Sherman, leader of the United Metal Workers, a recent splinter group from the Machinists Union.

The ALU conference resolved to form a new “revolutionary industrial union” and called a founding convention for June 27, 1905, in Chicago. These events greatly alarmed the Socialist Party leadership. As Victor Berger frantically wrote to Hillquit:

There can be no question that it is the intention of Trautmann and his coterie to split the Trades Union movement and lead as big a part of it as they can into the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance and

then split the Socialist movement and lead as many as they can into the Socialist Labor Party. I will go and see Debs personally next week and explain the situation to him. He must come out immediately and come out in a decided and unequivocal manner or else there will be war. If Debs stays with that crowd, it will land them some prestige for a little while, but I am also sure that would be the end of Eugene V. Debs. But for God's sake, since we have now a party that seems to be the coming Socialist Party of America, let us not destroy it. Let us do everything in our power to hold it together and to finally evolve out of the stage of childhood and sectarianism.²

Though Berger, Hillquit, and other Socialist leaders were invited to attend this convention, only Debs obliged. Bill Haywood presided as chairman, proclaiming it "the continental congress of the working class" and insisting "it has been said that this convention was to form an organization rival to the AFL. This is a mistake. We are here for the purpose of forming a labor organization."³ Yet initial expectations that several AFL locals were ready to bolt to the new organization failed to materialize. As Berger predicted, the program adopted by the convention was that of Daniel De Leon, a fully credentialed delegate, rather than that of Debs and his fellow critics of the SP majority trade union policy at *International Socialist Review*.⁴ Anointing themselves the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), their principles were stated with unmistakable directness and militancy in the preamble to their constitution:

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of the working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life. Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the Earth. . . . The army of production must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have

been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.⁵

With De Leon's Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance folding itself into the new IWW, the Socialist press went on a no-holds-barred attack. Especially galvanized was the new executive secretary of the SP, J. Mahlon Barnes, who had played a leading role in the fight against the SLP adoption of dual unionism. His comrade in that earlier struggle, Max Hayes, now had a prominent paper in the *Cleveland Citizen*. They were joined by the *Forward* in New York and, most outspoken, the *Social Democratic Herald* in Milwaukee, where the Socialists were already winning elections with the support of the AFL. Curiously, Victor Berger refrained from direct involvement in the controversy and left Milwaukee's response to his lieutenant Frederic Heath. In contrast, Debs insisted that the IWW convention "was in many respects the most representative proletarian gathering I have ever seen," adding "Berger and Heath probably never worked for wages a day in their lives, and yet they appear in leading trade union roles." Heath, a skilled woodcarver of Mayflower descent, reminded Debs that he had been on the railroads only five years before taking trade union office, a far shorter wage-earning career than either Berger's or his own.⁶

The romance of the IWW would prove remarkably resilient with the American left. When this romance first took hold with the new left in the 1960s, the critic Christopher Lasch denounced the "militancy, advocacy of violence and sabotage, and view of radicalism as a movement based on marginal people" that both these movements held in common.⁷ Odder still has been the tendency to view the IWW as predecessor of the Communist Party-backed corporatism of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), though in part this can be attributed to the CIO mainstreaming the songs of the IWW for the postwar labor movement. But in fact, the IWW shared with the AFL the tendency to view the state as the principal enemy of labor. Indeed, the two industries in the remote West where the IWW established itself with any consistency, mining and timber, were perhaps most directly implicated in federal-corporate collusion.⁸

The doctrine of the IWW has been generally identified as “anarcho-syndicalist,” though it is problematic to compare it to the relatively more systematic anarcho-syndicalism of French labor radicalism, typified by Georges Sorel. In the American version was added a cult of the proletariat distinctly provincial to the American West. This ideology probably took its most coherent form in the IWW preamble, but often was little more than the glorification of marginality and violence.⁹ The man who for all practical purposes was the IWW—Bill Haywood, the Wild West outlaw who ended his days a political exile in the Soviet Union—was surely no less a man of major contradictions than Tom Watson. But most consequential has been the myth that the IWW was a prodigious “organizer of the unorganized.” As one of the earliest histories of American labor radicalism describes the actual *modus operandi* of the IWW,

The most spectacular successes centered in areas where the local leaders and workers, particularly immigrants, had, on the basis of casual experience during a disastrous strike, lost confidence in the existing unions and their officials. The IWW also had fair success in industrial centers where unions had not operated during the advent of the immigrant workers. The general course of affairs is aptly illustrated by events in the territories where the organization was most active. Previous to IWW participation in the famous textile strikes the United Textile Workers, an AFL organization, was active in the very centers with which the IWW name is connected, as Lawrence, Paterson, Passaic. But the union neither succeeded in firmly establishing itself nor in retaining the confidence of the immigrant workers, although they at first were loyal to it. Thereafter the workers in these textile towns remained practically unorganized until the great strikes led by the IWW.¹⁰

In other words, outside of its timber and mining strongholds, the IWW merely provided freelance leadership to chaotic strike situations where AFL unions had already begun the major agitation, leaving it to the established unions to pick up where it left off after the strike was

either won or lost. And even this level of involvement was largely limited to the textile and garment industry.

At the same time that the specter of the IWW first began to haunt American Socialism, an equally important institution was emerging at its polar opposite in temperament. On September 12, 1905, the first gathering of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS) was held in New York. The ISS was the brainchild of Upton Sinclair, who the following year published his expose of the Chicago meatpacking industry in the *Appeal to Reason* that would later take book form as *The Jungle*. Personally greeted by Theodore Roosevelt at the White House North Portico to help pass his Pure Food and Drug Act, Sinclair lamented of his intended polemic against industrial capitalism, "I aimed for America's heart, and instead I hit it in the stomach." Hoping to reach intellectuals, college students, and the affluent, Sinclair was a founding vice president of the ISS, joined by many others with only one foot in the Socialist movement such as J. G. Phelps Stokes, Robert Hunter, Clarence Darrow, and Charles Beard. The first president of the ISS was America's leading popular novelist and a veteran of the Socialist Labor Party, Jack London.¹¹

In a time and a movement defined by characters of many contradictions, there was no greater walking contradiction than Jack London. A hardscrabble working-class seafarer and proletarian purist who yielded to none in his posture of revolutionary militancy, as described by David Shannon: "London, who signed his letters 'Yours for the Revolution,' took with him on tour a Korean valet, who dressed him in as unproletarian costume as it was possible to devise. London addressed his audiences dressed in a white flannel shirt with a rolling collar that suggested a little boy's sailor outfit, a white silk tie, a black cheviot suit, and patent-leather pumps."¹² The adventurous cosmopolitan who ever sympathized with the underdog, London believed devoutly in the doctrine of the Nietzschean Superman in its most frankly white supremacist iteration. Revered across the western world for his prophecy of totalitarianism in *The Iron Heel*, he ended his life on the eve of U.S. entry into the First World War in the camp of the most aggressive American militarists.

At the height of his fame and popularity, Jack London was also one to scandalize. Only a year after he married, he began a widely publicized affair with a Russian Jewish immigrant girl named Anna Strunsky, a leading light of the Socialist Party in his native San Francisco. Strunsky collaborated with London on a novel based on their love letters, *The Kempton-Wace Letters*.¹³ After the inevitable scandal, Strunsky married an equally unlikely wild man of the Socialist movement, if one of a distinctly different type. William English Walling was the scion of a prominent Midwestern banking family—his maternal grandfather, William Hayden English, was the Democratic vice presidential nominee in 1880. Walling was a fixture at the University Settlement of Lower Manhattan, where well-to-do recent college graduates provided social, medical, and educational services to the immigrant poor.

At University Settlement, the so-called millionaire socialists, a major influence on the Socialist Party's formative years, were brought together largely by Walling's networking.¹⁴ The most important of these was James Graham Phelps Stokes, son of Yale University rector Anson Phelps Stokes and heir to a branch of the Phelps Dodge fortune; he was moved to dedicate his life to social uplift after his experiences as an ambulance assistant in the Hell's Kitchen section of Manhattan while at Columbia University Medical School.¹⁵ The leader of the University Settlement staff was Stokes's brother-in-law, Robert Hunter, the son of a prosperous carriage manufacturer from the beloved Terre Haute of Eugene Debs. In 1904, Hunter's book *Poverty* rivaled in impact the more famous *How the Other Half Lives* by Jacob Riis.¹⁶

After serving on the New York slate of electors for Tom Watson in 1904, Stokes and Hunter entered the orbit of William Randolph Hearst, the dominant figure in the Municipal Ownership League and its candidate for mayor of New York in 1905. Hearst was now the undisputed leader of the movement for a new national party among non-Socialist progressives. Though they echoed the immediate demands of the Socialists and enjoyed the support of most AFL unions, Hearst and his colleagues campaigned as crude demagogues. Hearst's candidate for Manhattan district attorney, Clarence Shearn, based his entire campaign on his

promise to imprison Tammany Hall boss Charles Murphy—later the basis of one of the most famous scenes in the history of American cinema when Orson Welles campaigned for governor of New York in *Citizen Kane*.¹⁷

J. G. Phelps Stokes accepted the nomination of the Municipal Ownership League for President of the Board of Aldermen. Running against the popular Tammany mayor George McClellan (son of the Civil War general), Hearst fell just under four thousand votes short of election, with Stokes running only a few thousand votes behind. Hearst challenged the result on the highly plausible grounds of theft by Tammany Hall, with the recount only ending with a final decision by the New York Supreme Court on June 30, 1908.¹⁸ Receiving 11,711 votes, or just under 2 percent, was Socialist Algernon Lee. Hearst was a deeply flawed candidate, but the Socialists polling three times the margin of victory nevertheless illustrated the dilemma of dealing with potential allies outside the party.

Still, it appeared that the opportunity belonged principally to the Socialists. For years, most of the leading Hearst backers belonged to an exclusive dinner and discussion club known as the “X Club,” in which Morris Hillquit had long been a frequent participant. By 1905, the mood of the X Club had moved so swiftly in the direction of socialism that even some of the more conservative members of the club were disheartened to see Stokes still identifying with Hearst.¹⁹ Stokes increasingly took on a leadership role in this clique of socially conscious members of his class. Early in 1905 he held a large gathering at his father’s estate in Noroton, Connecticut, billed as a forum for free-wheeling debate and discussion of social problems. Morris Hillquit and Tom Watson were both present, along with Edward F. Dunne, the victorious Municipal Ownership League candidate for mayor of Chicago.²⁰

By the time a second conference at Noroton was called for the weekend of March 2–4, 1906, both Stokes and Robert Hunter were on the verge of joining the Socialist Party. Stokes had received much press attention the previous year for his unlikely marriage to Rose Pastor, a young reporter for the Jewish immigrant press. As at the previous gathering, those who attended were assured that the discussions would remain private, but this time the conference was clearly if tacitly an exercise in building

the Socialist Party, with the hope of persuading others of wealth and influence to follow Stokes and Hunter's lead. This was evident in the invitations sent to leading progressive officeholders such as Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, Joseph Folk of Missouri, and the reform mayors of Cleveland and Toledo, Tom Johnson and Brand Whitlock, respectively, who all, along with Tom Watson, sent their regrets.²¹ Hillquit, Victor Berger, John Spargo, and Gaylord Wilshire officially represented the Socialist Party. Other attendees included the Socialist-sympathizing Hearst lieutenant Arthur Brisbane, editors Hamilton Holt and Leonard Abbott, Brooklyn labor leader Alfred Boulton, and the humorist Finley Peter Dunne, who even wrote a sketch of his beloved "Mr. Dooley" character commenting on the meeting.²²

The second Noroton conference was destined to attract considerable press comment. Though abroad at the time, William English Walling made his mark on the conference through his brother Willoughby in Chicago, who dispatched to Noroton a most promising convert—Joseph Medill Patterson, of the family that owned the *Chicago Tribune*. Patterson had created a sensation when he resigned in disillusionment from the initially promising city administration of Edward F. Dunne in 1905 and announced that he was now a Socialist. The publicity followed him to New York, where he disclosed the happenings at the Stokes estate to curious reporters, leading to sensational headlines about "millionaire socialists" and "national life savers."²³ Somewhat more thoughtful was a *New York Times* editorial commending such young men of social standing for "flying the flag of the public weal," but cynically wrote off their idealism as inevitably doomed.²⁴ Morris Hillquit, continuing in his memoirs to regard Noroton as "of almost historic importance for the Socialist movement," recalled the moment in history it epitomized thus:

"Muckraking," as Theodore Roosevelt contemptuously baptized the literature of expose, was the fashion. But the vogue of the purely critical and negative movement could not endure forever. Thoroughly convinced of the evils, many thoughtful persons began to look for the remedy, and there was Socialism offering a ready and constructive

program of radical change. It was inevitable that the critics and doubters should turn with interest to the new creed. Socialism became a favorite topic of discussion among New York's intelligentsia, and the intelligentsia were always strong on discussion.²⁵

Yet the conference fell short of its aim of converting a critical mass of wealthy reformers and newspapermen to the Socialist Party. The performance of Victor Berger was no doubt partly responsible. When actually in the presence of affluent supporters of Hearst and the Municipal Ownership League, the alleged Milwaukee opportunist tore into them with all the militant fury of his enemies to the left. Informally over drinks late in the evening, Berger loudly upbraided his hosts: "They are your laws. We abhor them. We obey them because you have the power to force them on us. But wait until we have the power. Then we shall make our own laws and, by God, we will make you obey them!" As Hillquit recalled what followed:

An embarrassed silence fell on the gathering. The discussion came to an abrupt end. The next morning one of the conferees cornered me. "What do you think of Berger's violent speech?" he asked anxiously, "Surely you do not share his views." "Well," I replied in my mellowest tones and suavest manner, "we Socialists believe in democracy. Under any democratic system the majority of the people, of course, have the right to make laws and the power to enforce them. The minority must submit, but may continue to advocate a complete change of the law. When it has succeeded in persuading a sufficient number of people, the minority becomes the majority, empowered to make new laws, to which the new minority must bow with equal grace. Is not that your conception of democracy?" "Oh, yes" said my relieved interlocutor. "Nobody can quarrel with that theory, but Berger spoke like an anarchist rather than a Socialist."²⁶

Berger's outburst at Noroton can be seen as a metaphor for the larger drama that was about to play out in the national spotlight. In late

December 1905, Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg was killed by a bomb blast outside his home. Elected as a Democratic-Populist fusion candidate, in 1899 Steunenberg had called in federal troops to suppress a strike in Coeur d'Alene and was thereafter regarded as a sworn enemy and traitor by the Western Federation of Miners. When an Idaho miner named Harry Orchard, later revealed to have been a plant of the Pinkerton Agency, was apprehended, he told the police in exchange for leniency that he was hired to murder Steunenberg by the WFM leadership. In February 1906, Bill Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone, were arrested in Denver and spirited to Idaho without proper extradition proceedings.

Both the AFL and the Socialist Party put aside their differences with the IWW and rallied to the defense of the three men, with Debs rushing into an unparalleled emotional frenzy. In what may be the most famous statement of his first decade as leader of the American Socialist movement, Debs took to the *Appeal to Reason* on March 10, 1906, comparing the trial of Haywood to that of his long-standing hero, John Brown, as the inevitable beginning of a great cataclysm. With the headline "Arouse, Ye Slaves," Debs thundered,

Nearly twenty years ago the capitalist tyrants put some innocent men to death for standing up for labor. They are now going to try it again. Let them dare! There have been twenty years of revolutionary education, agitation, and organization since the Haymarket tragedy, and if an attempt is made to repeat it, there will be a revolution and I will do all in my power to precipitate it. . . . From the farms, the factories and stores will pour the workers to meet the red-handed destroyers of freedom, the murderers of innocent men and the arch-enemies of the people. . . . If they attempt to murder Moyer, Haywood and their brothers, a million revolutionists, at least, will meet them with guns.²⁷

The trial was as big a media sensation as any criminal trial of that generation, with outsized personalities to match—not only the

defendants but also Clarence Darrow as their attorney and future U.S. senator William Borah as prosecutor. The Socialist Labor Party, then at the peak of its influence in the IWW, would long claim to have taken the lead in rallying popular support for the defendants, though the SP press had a capable correspondent on the ground in Ida Crouch Hazlett, a dominant personality in the rapidly growing Montana party who wrote regular dispatches for the *Social Democratic Herald*.²⁸ So radicalized was the Socialist Party by the trial that not only did it make Haywood its nominee for governor of Colorado in 1906 but his candidacy even enjoyed the support of the SLP.²⁹ The trial also radicalized the new millionaire converts to the party, many of whom were deeply involved in hosting Maxim Gorky in New York following the 1905 revolution. When Gaylord Wilshire issued a telegram in Gorky's name supporting Haywood, much of the press began publishing the Russian Embassy propaganda against the heretofore sympathetic advocate for democracy.³⁰

Clearly referring to Debs, President Roosevelt gave a speech denouncing "the so-called labor leader who clamorously strives to excite a foul class feeling on behalf of some other labor leader who is implicated in murder."³¹ Roosevelt was forced to qualify many of his other public remarks about the trial when he was called out for presuming the guilt of the defendants, but he refused to back down against Debs, referring to the *Appeal to Reason* as "a vituperative organ of pornography, anarchy, and bloodshed."³² But Debs did not benefit from any sympathy in return. When Haywood and his co-defendants were acquitted in August 1907, the fanatical excess of "Arouse, Ye Slaves" was made to look ridiculous by Haywood's profuse expressions of gratitude, which were even extended to the prosecutor, sheriff, and deputies. Thus was the face of the Socialist Party discredited to many ordinary Americans at the very time the Socialists were getting a hearing as an alternative to the major parties—a point never considered by historians, including biographers of Debs.³³

Though Debs never openly acknowledged the consequences of his emotional recklessness, it is nevertheless clear that the events of 1905

and 1906 humbled him and put an abrupt, if ambiguous, end to his drift into what was by now the full-fledged revolutionary “left wing” of American Socialism. By the time the IWW had its second convention in 1906, neither Debs nor his closest SP ally on trade union policy, Algie Simons, was in attendance. Daniel De Leon dominated the convention, so that not only was any notion of electoral support for the SP brushed aside but so was any effort to build stable industrial unions, no less important a principle for Debs than the ballot box.³⁴ Though Bill Haywood and Vincent St. John remained with the IWW, the Western Federation of Miners bolted from the erstwhile “one big union” in 1906 and by 1909 affiliated with the AFL as the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. But Debs continued to harbor a personal grudge against much of the SP leadership, particularly Victor Berger, for having been proven right about the IWW’s aims.

Morris Hillquit waged his first of several congressional campaigns from Manhattan in 1906. Though there were high hopes in New York, they were in large measure dashed by William Randolph Hearst, who buried the hatchet with Tammany Hall and marshaled his forces behind their man on the Lower East Side, Henry Goldfogle.³⁵ Hearst himself ran as a fusion candidate for governor with the Democratic endorsement in 1906, losing narrowly to Charles Evans Hughes, future Republican presidential nominee and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Curiously, there is evidence that Hearst initially offered his party’s gubernatorial nomination to J. G. Phelps Stokes.³⁶

The *New York Times* suggested less than three weeks before the election that Hillquit had a chance of winning, noting buoyant enthusiasm for the Socialists on the Lower East Side, partly fostered by stump speeches given by Maxim Gorky. With Daniel De Leon himself running as the SLP candidate against his old nemesis, and a candidate of Hearst’s Independence League on the ballot despite the newspaper mogul’s strong backing of Goldfogle, Hillquit polled 26 percent of the vote.³⁷ In part, his campaign suffered from making a middle-class municipal reform

appeal in the most proletarian urban district in the country. Typical campaign literature came under such headings as “The Tenement Evil,” “The Sanitary System,” “Vice,” “Municipal Government,” and “Public Franchises,” and the National Executive Committee went as far as to censure Hillquit for stressing his business and financial success as qualifications for office.³⁸

As the SP became an increasingly respectable force in New York politics, the city also saw the establishment of one of American Socialism’s great institutional pillars, the Rand School of Social Science. George Herron, leader of the Christian Socialist Fellowship, had earlier left his first wife to marry the youngest daughter and namesake of Carrie Rand, who had endowed his former chair in Applied Christianity at Iowa College. When the elder Mrs. Rand died in 1905, a trust was willed to establish the Rand School to serve the Socialist Party. With incorporation papers filed under the name American Socialist Society, the board comprised George and Carrie Herron, Morris Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Job Harriman, Ben Hanford, William Mailly, Leonard Abbott, and Henry Slobodin.³⁹ Herron’s generosity also led to the launch of the New York party’s English daily, the *New York Call*, with Algernon Lee as its first editor.⁴⁰

William J. Ghent, a founder of the prestigious X Club, was the first president of the Rand School, to be succeeded by the increasingly ubiquitous Lee.⁴¹ Bertha Mailly, wife of the former executive secretary, was the school’s administrative secretary through the 1950s.⁴² In his memoirs, Hillquit recalled the Rand School’s early vision:

From the outset, the founders of the school agreed on a broad curriculum to include not only the theory of Socialism but a liberal range of general cultural subjects. We expected to recruit the body of students from the ranks of the workers, many of whom had been deprived of the advantages of even an elementary education, and we realized that they could not be trained for effective work in the Socialist and labor movement by a mere study of dry economics. The program of

the first year of instruction included, besides the history, philosophy, economics, and methods of Socialism and trade unionism, such subjects as Social Evolution, the Arts, Composition and Rhetoric. Later the curriculum was extended to all conceivable subjects of general information beginning with elementary classes in English for foreigners and running through the whole gamut of history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, popular science, literature, music, the drama and foreign languages besides the more practical and direct subjects of instruction for which the school was primarily organized.⁴³

The Rand School was very much a legacy of wealthy parlor socialists and their approach to social problems, which, however conscientious, remained in great measure one of noblesse oblige. Illustrative of their impact on the Socialist Party outlook was John Spargo, who largely designed the Rand School's course of study, which would remain long after his ignominious departure from the SP. When Graham Stokes and his friends first began to drift into the party, Spargo joined those who bitterly mocked them as "young ladies with weak eyes and young gentlemen with weak chins flittering confused among heterogeneous foreigners, offering cocoa and sponge cake as a sort of dessert to the factory system."⁴⁴ But within a few years, Spargo joined Stokes, Robert Hunter, and William English Walling at the new Prospect House settlement in the Bronx.

In the early months of 1907, Eugene Debs arrived in Girard, Kansas, to take an active part in editing the *Appeal to Reason*, where his articles had long been a fixture, and would spend a significant part of each year there for the next five years. For Debs, Girard was essentially an escape—both from the humiliation of his disastrous affair with the IWW and from his troubled marriage.⁴⁵ As the biographer of Julius Wayland put it, "The *Appeal* and Debs were made for each other. They shared a utopian outlook and a sentimental vision of the coming of socialism."⁴⁶ Debs's retreat into the *Appeal* took place at the very time Wayland's influence was starting to wane in the party, particularly in his own region,

the old Populist heartland. Wayland remained aloof from the labor movement, not least from the coal miners of his own part of Kansas. Still, this did not prevent the surrounding Crawford County from becoming as towering a Socialist stronghold as any that ever was.⁴⁷

For a newer and more dynamic Socialist movement was emerging in the “Old Southwest,” as the states of Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri were known. This Socialist prairie fire was ignited by the desire of the mostly Midwestern national leadership to somehow transplant the “Milwaukee model” to the promising region—Victor Berger had, after all, come out of the Populist Party and saw no reason he should not be able to repeat his past success in winning over so many of the region’s radicals to the Socialist banner. Eager to marginalize Wayland, Berger first dispatched Walter Thomas Mills, a scion of prominent Ohio Quakers who was especially despised by the ostensible left wing.⁴⁸ At Fort Scott, Kansas, Mills established a “People’s College” to deliver correspondence courses in the Rand School style across the rural West, serving as an epicenter for the regional movement.

Even the *Appeal to Reason* itself was increasingly overshadowed by a new publication. The *National Rip-Saw* was started in 1904 by the somewhat eccentric “Colonel” Dick Maple, a Populist convert to Socialism and unreconstructed Southern partisan in St. Louis, and under new management this paper took its place in the top tier of Socialist press.⁴⁹ Its dominant personalities were Populist veteran Kate Richards O’Hare and her husband Frank. A native of the Kansas plains who moved to Kansas City as a girl with her father, Kate Richards became a working machinist and trade unionist and converted to Socialism after a personal encounter with Mother Jones. She met her husband in 1905 through Walter Thomas Mills, and they resided for a few years in Oklahoma Territory before returning to Kansas City in 1909 to help run the *National Rip-Saw*.⁵⁰ The O’Hares virtually remade the entire Socialist speaker’s bureau, particularly when they revived the “encampments” from Populist days.

But the most important figure to arrive in the Old Southwest was Oscar Ameringer. Born in 1870 in the Bavarian village of Achstetten,

he came to the United States as a teenager and aspiring artist. After enjoying some success as a humorist with appearances in *Puck* magazine, Ameringer returned for the better part of the 1890s to Munich. He attributed much of his radicalism to the provincial virtues of Bavaria, close in spirit to neighboring Switzerland, which responded to the 1848 revolutions by establishing the most successful model of direct democracy in the history of mankind.⁵¹ With Munich having thus emerged as a stronghold of the German Social Democratic Party, Ameringer was ripe for political radicalization when, on returning to the United States, he was employed as a member of the brass band that played at William McKinley's Canton, Ohio, front porch in the campaign of 1896. This experience taught him the rule of "never voting for a presidential candidate who had the slightest chance of election."⁵²

An organizer for the Brewery Workers when he joined the Socialist Party, in 1905 Ameringer was dispatched to New Orleans to lead a strike of the city's interracial dockworkers, who were represented by the Socialist Brewery Workers while the AFL increasingly acquiesced to prevailing racism.⁵³ From there he traveled to Oklahoma, where another young marvel of the Milwaukee organization, Otto Branstetter, was serving as organizing secretary for the newly admitted state that held such promise for the Socialists. In addition to its place at the very center of the old Populist heartland, Oklahoma was home to hundreds of former members of the American Railway Union who, black-listed after the defeat of the Pullman Strike, sought a new beginning in the last part of the frontier opened to settlement.

As Daniel Bell writes in one of the earliest histories of American Socialism, "Oklahoma may not have had a working class, but it did have, in the most literal sense of the word, a proletariat—a dispossessed propertyless group with little visible means of support."⁵⁴ Or as Ameringer put it far more vividly:

These people were not wops and bohunks. They were not Jewish needle slaves, escaped from the ghettos and pogroms of Czarist Russia and Poland. Their forefathers had been starved, driven, shipped and sold

over here long before and shortly after the Revolution. They were more American than the population of any present-day New England town. They were Washington's ragged, starving, shivering army at Valley Forge, pushed ever westward by beneficiaries of the Revolution. They had followed on the heels of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks and Seminoles, like the stragglers of routed armies. Always hoping that somewhere in their America there would be a piece of dirt for them. Now they had settled in the hills of the Indian Territory, tenants of white land hogs, Indians, squaw men and Afro-American freedmen. A quarter of a century later, burned out and tracted out, they pulled up stakes for the last time until they landed in ramshackle trucks and tin lizzies in California, as ragged, hungry, and shivering as their ancestors at Valley Forge.⁵⁵

In 1906, a group of Socialist Party supporters had met in Shawnee, Oklahoma, to draw up a list of radical demands for inclusion in the new state's constitution, effectively calling for the implementation of the national platform's immediate demands. The Shawnee demands soon found an able advocate in William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray, elected Speaker of the Constitutional Convention after no fewer than seventy-three of the Democratic delegate candidates pledged themselves to the Shawnee demands. But Murray was responsible for scuttling the most radical demands—for the initiative and referendum and for women's suffrage. For the next several years Murray would be the frustrated leader of the progressive faction in the dominant Democratic Party of Oklahoma, presenting for the first time the dilemma of a potential Socialist ally who, unlike Watson and Hearst earlier, remained in one of the major parties.⁵⁶

The movement in the Old Southwest was a legacy of Populism to be sure, but by this time most activists had gotten their political training in the trade union movement rather than from agrarian campaigns, and even a rapidly growing share of the rank and file was too young to have been meaningfully involved in the Populist Party. The demise of the *Southern Mercury* in 1907 marked the final passing of any serious

rival for radical agrarian support.⁵⁷ Its resistance to backing the Socialists reflected a sharp divide dating back to the 1901 Unity Convention, with doctrinaire Marxists insisting that farmers were not wage workers and therefore no appeal should be made to them. In response, Morris Hillquit devised the position that while the interests of farmers and wage workers were not identical, farmers were still an exploited class though “the agencies and mode of exploitation are different.”⁵⁸ But in practice such finer points of doctrine were becoming superfluous. Oscar Ameringer arrived in Oklahoma convinced that as good Marxists the SP must not become a party of farmers. But after his first organizing campaign during which he stayed in dilapidated shanties and subsisted on “sow belly, corn pone, and molasses until my stomach had gone on the warpath,” he declared upon returning to Oklahoma City that “of my notion that all American farmers were capitalists and exploiters I had long since been permanently cured.”⁵⁹

Ameringer’s best known and loved work was his *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam*, an irreverent history of the United States that would be translated into sixteen languages and earn him the moniker of “the Mark Twain of American Socialism.” Showing his impressive knowledge of history, it begins with a spellbinding discussion of the various waves of indentured servants who washed up on to the colonies and the various European wars that prompted their arrivals. Indeed, in brevity and humor as well as radical substance, this short work puts to shame the “people’s history” franchise of a later generation:

Kings used to claim that they received their power from God himself. The framers of the Constitution couldn’t very readily claim the same thing for this document, especially while the writings of Paine and Jefferson still lingered in the minds of the masses. But in the course of time their successors succeeded in canonizing the Constitution. What was originally a scheme to deprive the people of self-government was praised to the sky until the dense masses accepted the constitutional straight-jacket as the ermine of popular sovereignty. . . . Now,

it is a well proven historical fact, that the people who own the wealth of a nation soon will own its government too. The southern slave owners had run the government in their own interests. They had opposed railroad building, so essential to capitalist expansion. They had discouraged manufacture, fearing that a great factory population would furnish a market for the product of the northern farmers, thus raising the cost of feeding their own slaves. But over and above all, the south had bitterly opposed the protective tariff demanded by the northern capitalists. The tariff, more than any other factor, was responsible for the war between north and south. Of course Mary's little history says it was the desire of the good northern people to free the slaves from the oppression of the bad southern people that brought on this Civil War. But Mary's school history doesn't explain why abolitionists were persecuted in the north as much as in the south. . . . On the contrary, the war came in spite of the most earnest pledges of the government of Lincoln that slavery would not be disturbed.⁶⁰

The most distinguishing feature of the Socialist movement in the Old Southwest was the "encampment" method of organizing, educating, and rallying the faithful. An inheritance from Populism, the first Socialist encampment meeting was held in 1904 in Grand Saline, Texas, where one would be held annually until 1917. The *National Rip-Saw* fostered a far-flung network of encampments tied together by the annual speaking tour it sponsored—typically consisting of Debs, Mother Jones, Ameringer, and Kate Richards O'Hare—that visited all of them. Other lecturers included Walter Thomas Mills, Caroline Lowe, and "Red Tom" Hickey, who published his own popular newspaper, *Rebel*, out of Hallettsville, Texas. Combining evangelistic oratory with instruction in history and economics of the type on offer at the Rand School and People's College, the carnival atmosphere of the encampments was complemented by an inspirational repertoire of old Populist and newer Socialist songs, usually followed by a classical concert performed by the brass quartet of Oscar Ameringer and his sons.⁶¹

Gene Debs, naturally, was the highly sought-after star attraction of the encampments, the “fountain of enthusiasm.” In her final years Kate Richards O’Hare described the response to Debs’s appearances:

Gene was at his best in these camp meetings. We often traveled together to cover them and as I watched him and the response of the crowds, Oklahoma faded and we were Jesus of Nazareth and Martha, burdened with many cares, speaking to the harried Jews in Palestine. I don’t think anyone could have known Gene well, lived and worked with him, watched his power over the masses and not known the Carpenter of Nazareth intimately.⁶²

Such worship of Debs was by no means limited to the Old Southwest, but it poignantly reflected that time and place. The dirt farmers of the old Populist heartland had been left behind by an increasingly institutionalized Protestant denominationalism as well as by industrial capitalism. The agrarian ideal of Jefferson was central to their political and social identity, and so too was the radically nonconformist Christianity of Jefferson, of which Debs was in many ways the last major representative. They remained devoutly Christian in their beliefs to be sure, many coming out of such marginal, largely rural sects as the Campbellites and Pentecostals. Typical of the marriage of their politics and religion were the overtly Christian themes in the *Rebel*, which proclaimed, “Capitalism has been weighted in the balance and found wanting. As sure as God reigns, Babylon is falling to rise no more. The international socialist commonwealth—God’s Kingdom—shall rise on the wreck and ruin of the world’s present ruling powers.”⁶³

By 1910, Socialist encampments were a larger attraction in much of the Southwest than religious revival meetings.⁶⁴ In Europe, the success of the Socialists in the Old Southwest so impressed the leaders of the Second International that the French Socialist leader Jean Jaures even asked Kate Richards O’Hare to come to France to advise his party on how to make an agrarian appeal, oblivious to why tent revival meetings were

ill suited to the Vendee.⁶⁵ O'Hare would serve briefly in the following decade as a delegate to the International. The peculiar condition that generated O'Hare's popularity with the continental Socialist leaders was the prominence in international involvement of those who came to the Socialist Party out of motivations squarely in the American scene and not because of previous attachments to the international movement. George Herron, after helping found the Rand School, spent most of his time in Europe working for the Socialist International and was soon living as a full-fledged expatriate in Italy.⁶⁶ Morris Hillquit, in keeping with his status as unofficial figurehead of the American party, had long been regarded as its leader in the International, but he was now encouraging Robert Hunter to take on that role.

The official delegation to the 1907 Stuttgart Conference of the International consisted of Hillquit, Hunter, and Algie Simons.⁶⁷ Ahead of Stuttgart and in keeping with the aspirations of the Noroton conference, Hunter excitedly wrote to Hillquit hoping that a delegate from the AFL might be seated to help bring about a reconciliation with the SP.⁶⁸ Hunter was increasingly convinced of the urgent need for such a rapprochement if the party was to have a future, but the leaders of the International had other ideas. At an ocean's distance, most European Socialists believed that reconciliation with the Socialist Labor Party was the real imperative, encouraged in this delusion by the two parties largely joining hands in the defense of Bill Haywood. The SLP continued to be represented in the International, and the Stuttgart conference passed a resolution urging the formation of a unity committee between the two parties. The recommendation was overwhelmingly rejected at the SP national convention the following year.⁶⁹

By the time of the Stuttgart Conference, whatever prospects the SLP still had were coming undone in the implosion of the IWW that followed the departure of the Western Federation of Miners. In anticipation of his attendance at Stuttgart, Hillquit received a letter from the disillusioned first president of the IWW, Charles Sherman, describing how the SLP captured the executive board through violence, intimidation, and recourse to the capitalist courts—the same methods that the “so-called

‘revolutionists’” employed against the founders of the Socialist Party a decade earlier.⁷⁰ The following year, Daniel De Leon and William Trautmann set up a rival “Detroit IWW” that would be renamed the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance several years later before finally giving up the ghost in the 1920s. The final remnant of SLP trade union support, mostly Irish Boot and Shoe Workers and Italian Granite Workers in New England, remained in the IWW after the departure of the SLP.

Yet the implosion of the IWW was occurring just as the first manifestations of an actual revolutionary left wing were emerging in the Socialist Party, which would hound it at the margins for the next decade before ultimately providing the foundation of the American Communist movement. The watershed event took place in Chicago at the offices of the *International Socialist Review (ISR)*. Algie Simons was disenchanted with the IWW along with Debs and resigned from *ISR* at the beginning of 1908. The differences between Simons and Charles Kerr were as much tactical as political, with Kerr determined to give the magazine a less academic and more popular tone. Kerr was also moving sharply to the left, but had his own misgivings about the IWW and urged the supporters of revolutionary industrial unionism to attempt to win converts within the AFL.⁷¹

The IWW remained a potent force out west, but even in its natural strongholds there was significant pushback from non-revolutionary Socialists. In Montana, the powerful Butte local, based among the radicalized mine workers, clashed with the major power in the state party, the editors of the *Montana News*, Ida Crouch Hazlett and James Graham. The Butte organization attempted to bring them down by accusing them of embezzlement based on a \$550 deficit at the paper, but Hazlett and Graham were supported by the locals in Missoula and Laurel. Even in notoriously crimson Washington State, where Herman Titus was one of the few genuine revolutionary ideologues in the earliest years of the SP, Walter Thomas Mills, after bringing Kansas to heel, started a successful paper to squelch his influence, the *Saturday Evening Tribune*.⁷²

The movement in the Old Southwest never fit neatly into the factional categories of the national party. The Oklahoma party, for all its fire-eating populism, was at all times under the steady guidance of the orthodox German-born Social Democrats Otto Branstetter and Oscar Ameringer. The Texas party, by contrast, had deep roots in the most radical wing of the Populist movement and continued to yield to none as radicals within the Socialist movement, typified by the frankly apocalyptic Christian Socialist millennialism of Tom Hickey's *Rebel*.⁷³ Even the IWW gained a foothold in the Southwest through Covington Hall, a poet of Mississippi plantation-owning pedigree who was forced to resign as an adjutant general of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans for his Socialist affiliations. Hall organized the timber workers of northern Louisiana for the IWW during a period of prolonged strikes that peaked in 1908, leaving behind the leading Socialist stronghold in Dixie and indeed one in the top tier nationwide.⁷⁴

But the most notable first stirrings of the Socialist Party's historic left wing took place in New York, home to the brilliant lawyer and Marxist exegete Louis Boudin, whose 1907 book *The Theoretical System of Karl Marx* was recognized internationally as the most important defense of orthodox Marxism against social democratic reformism. Born in Russia and arriving in New York as a teenager in 1891, Boudin entered the fray of internal SP politics in great measure out of his intense personal dislike for Morris Hillquit, the exemplar of the German Social Democratic model.⁷⁵ The other leader of the New York left wing at this time was Henry Slobodin. Chronically an odd man out in the Socialist movement, Slobodin was a rare veteran of the 1890s struggle against De Leon to identify with the SP left and later, even rarer, a New York Jew in the pro-war Social Democratic League during the First World War. As early as 1908, a group of discontented radicals in the Cloakmakers Union announced the formation of a "Proletarian Society," an alternative to the Rand School "to create internal propaganda for the preservation of the true principles of socialism . . . and to encourage facility of expression on the part of the comrades of the rank and file."⁷⁶ Though the

Society never appears to have come into existence, there would soon be a following for its platform in the garment unions.

The approaching 1908 election was to a great extent defined by the repercussions of the emergence of the IWW. Although sympathy for the IWW had all but collapsed in the party, views on the AFL and any moves it made toward independent political action were still confused and contradictory. The AFL itself was in crisis as it attempted to chart its future political course. As it increasingly became settled law (ultimately affirmed by the Supreme Court) that strikes and boycotts were criminal under antitrust laws, the AFL hoped it could flex its political muscle by working for the defeat of a select group of anti-labor congressmen, a campaign that failed miserably. But while the Socialist delegates urged independent political action when the debate over this campaign was held at the 1906 AFL convention, they did not support a similar resolution the following year when it stood a better chance of passing at a moment of desperation.⁷⁷ Even more fickle was the titular leader of the Socialist bloc, Max Hayes, who spoke contemptuously of the Union Labor Party in San Francisco during the 1906 debate, but the following year made an unusually bold call for a Labor Party:

Let us sink our differences of the past, as we did in fact at the Norfolk convention and get together in a national conference, as is the desire of the rank and file everywhere, and proceed along the lines of the British socialists and trade unionists, and include the farmers, if they will come, and organize a political combination.⁷⁸

When the 1908 Socialist Party convention opened in Chicago on May 10, it appeared there might be a real contest for the presidential nomination. Eugene Debs had not declared his intentions, and there remained considerable ill will following his misadventure with the IWW. Morris Hillquit hoped to present a consensus candidate in James F. Carey, one of the party's brightest stars at the time of its founding. The Milwaukee machine put forward Carl Thompson, the leading Socialist clergyman

of that city, as a favorite son candidate. Algie Simons also threw his hat into the ring, and a group of die-hard left-wingers hoped to draft Bill Haywood into the race.⁷⁹ But when Ben Hanford read a message from Debs to the convention, declaring that he was “willing to do anything the party commanded of him,” the possibility that anyone else would be nominated vanished.⁸⁰ Carey even withdrew his name from consideration, and the first ballot was anything but close: Debs with 159 votes, Carey with 16, Thompson with 14, and Simons with 9.⁸¹ Ben Hanford was once again nominated for vice president.

The immediate demands of the 1908 platform, more comprehensive than the 1904 platform but still concise, established the general program that would remain largely unchanged through the end of the 1930s. These demands included the collective ownership of “all social means of transportation and communication” and “all industries organized on a national scale and in which competition has virtually ceased to exist”; the abolition of “official charity and substituting in its place compulsory insurance against unemployment, illness, accidents, invalidism, old age, and death”; and “unrestricted and equal suffrage for men and women,” with the solemn pledge “to engage in an active campaign in that direction.” But perhaps most noteworthy was the radical constitutional program of the Socialist Party, concretely argued for the first time. In addition to the initiative, referendum, and recall at all levels of government, the Socialists called for the abolition of the U.S. Senate and of “the power usurped by the Supreme Court of the United States to pass upon the constitutionality of legislation enacted by Congress,” the ability to amend the Constitution by majority vote, the election of all judges, and the abolition of their injunction power.⁸²

Debs accepted the Socialist presidential nomination for the third time on May 23 with an extemporaneous two-hour speech in the town square of Girard, Kansas, inviting his listeners to join him “on a march to the grandest civilization the human race has ever known.” The *Appeal to Reason* published the entire speech and was able to circulate it to an audience of four million, a quarter of the entire voting population.⁸³ The impeccably Middle American and righteously reactionary strain of Debs’s indictment of industrial capitalism was on full display:

I have seen children ten years of age in New York City who had never seen a live chicken. The babes there don't know what it is to put their tiny feet on a blade of grass. It is the most densely populated spot on earth. You have seen your beehive—just fancy a human beehive of which yours is the miniature and you have the industrial hive under capitalism. If you have not seen this condition you are excusable for not being a Socialist. Come to New York, Chicago, San Francisco with me, remain with me just 24 hours, and then look into my face as I shall look into yours when I ask "What about Socialism now?" These children by hundreds of thousands are born in sub-cellars, where a whole grown family is crowded together in one room, where modesty between the sexes is absolutely impossible. They are surrounded by filth and vermin. From their birth they see nothing but immorality and vice and crime. They are tainted in the cradle. They are inoculated by their surroundings and they are doomed from the beginning. This system takes their lives just as certainly as if a dagger were thrust into their quivering little hearts, and let me say to you that it were better for many thousands of them if they had never seen the light.⁸⁴

The most emblematic token of the 1908 campaign was the volume published by the Charles Kerr Company of Debs's writings and speeches going back to the days of the American Railway Union, which included several testimonials by leading Socialists. John Spargo's contribution was typical of the sentimental and worshipful tone:

Our love for Eugene V. Debs, the greatest lover of us all, entered into our choice of him as the bearer of our standard, the scarlet banner of the sacred cause, the symbol of a world-brotherhood to be. But it was not our love alone. Into our choice there entered another element than our love for Debs, namely, our consciousness that he was splendidly equipped for the task. Nature and Destiny seemed to have joined to dower Debs with the qualities of mind and soul needed for the task we gave him.⁸⁵

Robert Hunter's reminiscence of old Terre Haute was nothing short of maudlin:

I remember as a little lad of eight or nine years, walking with my father in one of the streets of Terre Haute. A tall, slender, handsome young man stopped to talk with my father. At first I was fascinated by the way they grasped hands and looked into each other's eyes. I was then impressed by their animated conversation. But they talked on and on until it seemed to me hours at length, and finally I began to tug at my father's coat-tails, urging him to come on. After a while they parted, and my father said to me very seriously, "You should not interrupt me, Robert, when I am talking. That young man is one of the greatest souls of this earth, and you should have listened to what he said." . . . These and countless other stories are told by his fellow citizens. Many of them do not understand Gene. His views and his work they cannot comprehend, but every man, woman and child in that town loves him with a devotion quite extraordinary. They say that a prophet is without honor in his own country, but in Terre Haute you will find that however much they misunderstand the work that Gene is doing there is not one who does not honor and love him.⁸⁶

But the most memorable outburst of adulation in the 1908 campaign came during Debs's weeklong campaign visit to New York in early June. At Carnegie Hall, a woman in the audience suddenly got up and shouted, "There he is! There he is! Gene Debs, not the missing link but the living link between God and man, the God consciousness come down to earth!"⁸⁷ This fervor was not atypical of how Debs was received in New York, where thousands of Jewish immigrants, many of whom became Socialists only after arriving in the United States, were drawn to the man from Terre Haute as representing everything they aspired to become as Americans. David Shannon writes that "the demonstrations of affection he received in New York were more than usually sentimental and even pathetically maudlin," and even this description probably fails to

do justice to the collective emotional experience that is no doubt largely responsible for the odd phenomenon of the Socialist movement's enduring legacy in American Jewry.⁸⁸ Even the Jewish Socialist leadership was not immune to this hero worship, with the United Hebrew Trades leader Morris Winchevsky proclaiming that Debs spoke to them in "love's interracial pan-human language."⁸⁹

The 1908 campaign thus provided the most poignant illustration for Daniel Bell's argument that "Debs wore his romanticism like a cloak, and this was his strength as well as his weakness."⁹⁰ For while the Socialists were ultimately able to retain their place as the leading successor of Populism, there was an opening for an alternative to reemerge in the wake of the Haywood trial. Tom Watson eagerly seized on the intermittent possibilities for a Labor Party before accepting, in a fit of depression, the nomination of the dying Populist Party.⁹¹ Yet when the nominating convention of William Randolph Hearst's Independence League opened in July, Hearst's moment had already passed. Once again, the Hearst platform echoed the Socialists' immediate demands, but included strong support for Chinese exclusion and, in a callback to Hearst's infamous role in precipitating the Spanish-American War, a greatly expanded navy.⁹² In a final echo of what might have been, the contenders for the Independence League nomination included Milford Howard, the man who entered Debs into nomination at the Populist convention in 1896. Ultimately, Hearst's clear favorite carried the day—Frank Hisgen, who had run an impressive Hearst-aligned campaign for governor of Massachusetts two years earlier.⁹³

By the time of the Hearst convention, the Democrats had nominated William Jennings Bryan for the third time. Bryan traveled extensively abroad in the years following the 1904 campaign and in Germany even sang the praises of that country's Social Democrats.⁹⁴ With relative ease he was able to claim vindication for his platform following the Democratic disaster in 1904, and thus he had no serious competition for the nomination in 1908. Theodore Roosevelt ultimately anointed as successor his secretary of war, William Howard Taft. Few substantive differences

separated Taft and Bryan in 1908—both favored an income tax, the direct election of Senators, and the continuation of Roosevelt’s policies generally. The one major difference was with respect to labor. Whereas Taft in his long career on the bench solemnly affirmed the judicial consensus against labor, the AFL had been unofficially aligned with Bryan since 1896.

For the first time in a presidential election, perhaps largely to spite Taft’s record, the AFL officially endorsed Bryan in 1908. Gompers even personally reviewed the labor planks of the Bryan platform and wrote most of the campaign materials directed to urban and working-class districts. Both Gompers and Bryan were compelled into the alliance by desperation. While the Democrats were more harmoniously behind Bryan than in the past, the party organization was still reeling from a decade of lethargy, and the infrastructure that the AFL could provide was critical to any chance of victory.⁹⁵ The failure to prevent this marriage of the AFL and the Democrats was not the only gravely missed opportunity for the Socialists in 1908. The other conspicuous failure was to attract the critical mass of press and elite support that was the goal of the 1906 Noroton conference. It was widely believed that the intended marriage would be announced to the world late in 1906 with an article in William Randolph Hearst’s recently acquired *Cosmopolitan* magazine. But when the article failed to appear as publicly anticipated in the October issue, it became widely believed in Socialist circles that it was suppressed at the urging of Tammany boss Charles Murphy in the home stretch of Hearst’s run for governor of New York.⁹⁶ Still, the “millionaire socialists” remained highly regarded within the Socialist Party. Around this time Willoughby Walling won over William Bross Lloyd, son of Henry Demarest Lloyd and also connected by family to the ownership of the *Chicago Tribune*. Joseph Medill Patterson, author of the popular manifesto *Confessions of a Drone*, was even appointed the national campaign manager for Debs in 1908.

Shortly after the campaign got underway, Executive Secretary J. Mahlon Barnes proposed that the party lease a train to carry Debs and reams of campaign literature on a national speaking tour, convincing the

initially incredulous National Executive Committee to issue a fundraising appeal for the “Red Special,” which embarked just in time for the fall campaign on August 31.⁹⁷ When Samuel Gompers accused the Republicans of financing the Red Special, Barnes promptly published the complete list of fifteen thousand individual Socialists who contributed to the cost of the train, which made nearly three hundred stops in thirty-three states over the next two months.⁹⁸

Prominent campaigners for Debs in 1908 included the Populist veteran Mary Lease and Brand Whitlock, mayor of Toledo, Ohio, and a confidante of the “millionaire socialists.” But perhaps the most auspicious endorsement Debs received in 1908 came from Lincoln Steffens, the increasingly acknowledged dean of the “muckrakers.” Steffens published an extensive interview of Debs for *Everybody’s* magazine, and in confiding his own support for Debs assured him, “As you well know, I am not addressing Socialists—they know it all, but the people who do not understand. If I did fairly by you, it was because I was fair, if you are presented attractively (as I find all readers say) then that is creditable to you. For I did not write this to please you or even because I liked you, but because I found you to be as I have shown you to be.”⁹⁹

On Election Day, Taft beat Bryan by more than a million votes, with Colorado, Nebraska, and Nevada the only states outside the South to go to Bryan. Debs and Hanford received a generally disappointing 420,852 votes nationwide, a marginal improvement in actual votes but a small decline in the percentage of the vote from 1904. The Independence League ticket proved to be a flop, receiving only 83,739 votes. (Hearst would run again for mayor of New York in 1909 with a more than respectable third-place showing, but by that time was widely mocked as “William Also-Randolph Hearst”). The last noncampaign of Tom Watson garnered a dismal 29,147 votes, more than half coming from Georgia.¹⁰⁰ The final gathering of the once mighty Populist Party took place in St. Louis in 1912, where all of eight delegates were bitterly divided between the candidacies of Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁰¹

The Socialists could take ample consolation that all their rivals of the last decade—Bryan, Hearst, and Watson—were now effectively out of the picture. Nevada and Oklahoma took their places as the top two states for the Socialist ticket, with the West and Northwest following closely and with pockets of strength in Louisiana and Florida. Socialist strength in down-ballot races remained limited to New York and Milwaukee, with the candidates for the latter city's two congressional districts, Albert J. Welch and Edmund T. Melms, winning 27.8 percent and 24.7 percent of the vote, respectively. Morris Hillquit again ran for the ninth district of New York, but fell off from his 1906 showing with only 22 percent of the vote. The 1908 election saw one of the earliest instances of an occurrence that would repeatedly haunt the Socialists. In the ninth district of Minnesota, "Independent Populist" Ole Sageng was narrowly defeated by entrenched Republican Halvor Steenerson, blocked by a Socialist candidate polling the margin of victory.¹⁰² Worst still was the evidence of a significant depression of the Socialist vote by fraud that cursed the party well into the future. No votes for Debs were recorded in his own precinct in Terre Haute, even though he voted there and was assured of the votes of many of his neighbors.¹⁰³

In many ways, the 1908 election was even more fateful than the election of 1896. The AFL endorsement of Bryan began the long marriage of organized labor to the Democratic Party, which, in a political system characterized by frequent switching of allegiances between the two major parties, has proven a rare constant for the last century. The consequences of the failure this represented for the Socialists would be profound. As the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset convincingly argues in his impressive survey of historic American Socialism, the structural and institutional obstacles to the Socialist Party's success—the nonparliamentary constitutional order of the United States, the ambiguous and heterogeneous nature of the American working class, and the entrenchment of the two-party system and legal obstacles for minor parties—though by no means insignificant, could all have been overcome had the party secured the support of the trade union movement, as occurred in the Socialist Party's greatest successes.¹⁰⁴ But most consequential of all was

the significance of its embrace of the Democrats for the labor movement itself. Leaving aside any questions of capitalism, socialism, militancy, or pure and simple unionism, the American labor movement became a part of the system of political control represented by the two-party system, and thus beholden to the agenda of America's power elite, both at home and abroad. Nothing else so important ever happened to it again.

But the election was no final verdict on the Socialist Party, and 1909 proved an especially eventful year for the movement. It became clear that the IWW would not quietly pass from the scene, particularly after a steelworkers strike in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. The tactics that defined the IWW in its most active years were now well developed, including the so-called free speech fight. The most memorable of these actions took place late in 1909 in Spokane, Washington. As early as 1907 a full-fledged class war had broken out in the radical stronghold of Spokane, with the city issuing an ordinance banning public meetings. The ordinance was defied by the Socialists, the IWW, and even the AFL, and mass arrests began on November 12. The increasingly acknowledged leader of the protests, a rising IWW firebrand and future Communist named Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, was arrested on December 1, causing a mass of outraged radicals from across the country to descend on Spokane to fill the city jails. The ordinance was repealed in March 1910.¹⁰⁵

On the other end of the continent, the garment workers toiling under miserable conditions and as yet only nominally organized by the United Hebrew Trades were also at a desperate pass. In 1903, most were reorganized into the jurisdiction of the newly chartered International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). Morris Hillquit served as its general counsel until his death, but as more and more of his attention was given to leading the Socialist Party, many of his trade union duties were delegated to Meyer London. Born in 1871 in Kalvaria, Poland, and arriving in New York in 1891, London had been among the first activists on the Lower East Side to leave the SLP for Eugene Debs's Social Democracy and, being more culturally attuned to the Yiddish-speaking Lower East Side movement than Hillquit, was increasingly replacing him in his local

role in New York. His biographer would laud his devotion to the movement:

London spent his nights and days in the service of the unions, the Socialist Party, the revolutionary movement in Russia and the relief campaign for the victims of oppression and poverty. He was the lawyer of the poor man, the advocate of the poor union, the poor man's champion. . . . London put his professional career in jeopardy when he was still a young man and gave himself to the service of the union as agitator, organizer, negotiator with the employers. His devotion to the working man was not mere mouthing, it was deep-seated in the very heart of his being. In those days many of the radical attorneys grew wealthy. Some of them made fortunes in real estate speculation. Practical men thought London insane for neglecting his practice for months at a time in order to travel over the country to collect funds for the Bund or to carry on socialist propaganda.¹⁰⁶

On November 22, 1909, the ILGWU held a mass meeting at Cooper Union to consider calling an industry-wide general strike. The major issue was the prevalent system of subcontracting, in which large employers subcontracted manufacturing to often unscrupulous men who ran small shops, often in their own homes amid the appalling conditions of Lower East Side tenements. After two hours of cautious debate, a twenty-one-year-old shirtwaist worker named Clara Lemlich rose to move for a general strike. As her Yiddish speech was translated into Italian and English, the crowd broke into massive cheers and it was so.¹⁰⁷ Meyer London initially urged moderation, but yielded to none in militancy once the strike was underway, declaring on behalf of the strike committee:

We offer no apology for the general strike. If at all we should apologize to the tens of thousands of the exploited men and women for not having aroused them before. . . . The employer who neglects all sanitary requirements, who does business with money taken from the workmen under the guise of security and who levies a tax upon the employees for the use of electricity, is a danger not only to the employees

but to every reputable employer in their trade. This general strike is greater than any union. It is an irresistible movement of the people. It is a protest against conditions that can no longer be tolerated.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, the strike won sympathy throughout New York, including from the upper classes. Most notable for rallying support from the general public and its most affluent members was Lillian Wald, a social worker on the Lower East Side and a leading Socialist sympathizer from the older, predominantly German-descended Jewish elite known as “Our Crowd.” It was the leaders of this elite, including future Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, who ultimately stepped forward to mediate a resolution to the strike, leading to a widely hailed “Protocol of Peace” after a second strike in the spring of 1910. Meyer London was the chief negotiator for the ILGWU as it won most of its demands and established a permanent collective bargaining infrastructure, but agreed to surrender the right to strike in the future.¹⁰⁹ This created the opening for militant dissent among the garment workers that provided an important base for the IWW and other revolutionist elements in the years ahead. Not least of these radicals would be Clara Lemlich herself, who went on to be a devoted Communist Party member from its founding until her death in 1982.

The other event of 1909 that was extraordinarily consequential in defining the legacy of American Socialism was barely noticed at the time. Early that year, William English and Anna Strunsky Walling visited Springfield, Illinois, to survey the damage caused by a particularly devastating race riot. Shocked by what he saw, Walling issued a call for a new organization to advocate for Negro equality. What resulted was the founding that summer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Walling, unlike his wife, did not join the Socialist Party for another year, but Socialist Party members who helped found the NAACP included Mary White Ovington, daughter of an abolitionist minister and a leading Christian Socialist in Brooklyn, and Charles Edward Russell, a journalist in the Hearst orbit who had recently joined the party.¹¹⁰ Another founder of the organization was

Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of the abolitionist icon William Lloyd Garrison and increasingly drawn to the Socialist movement.

W. E. B. DuBois, the first African American to receive a Harvard PhD and the leading sociologist of the America Negro, agreed to become editor of the NAACP journal *Crisis*, and soon thereafter would even briefly join the Socialist Party. But there would be many ironies to this vital part of the American Socialist legacy. The NAACP became defined by seeking to secure the rights of African Americans through the courts, an approach radically at odds with the Socialist platform. Moreover, in his frank elitism and abiding belief in the supremacy of “the race question” above all others, DuBois bore an uncomfortable resemblance to Moses Hess, the theorist of nationalism and early prophet of Jewish nationalism who was an early antagonist of Karl Marx. These tendencies ultimately led DuBois, in common with many of his early Socialist supporters, to support American involvement in the First World War, believing that Wilson’s professed support of “self-determination of nations” would lead to African liberation.

In the final months of 1909, the leaders of the Socialist Party were gripped by a contentious and dramatic debate over the party’s future. The disappointing election returns of 1908 prompted a mood of reappraisal, and two events in particular focused this reappraisal on the ubiquitous labor party question. The first was a visit to the United States by Keir Hardie in June, in which he upbraided his American comrades for their narrow, sectarian attitudes and urged them to follow the example of his increasingly successful Independent Labour Party in Britain.¹¹¹ The second was the 1909 sweep of the Union Labor Party in San Francisco, with Carpenters Union leader Patrick McCarthy elected mayor along with an overwhelming ULP majority on the Board of Aldermen. The ULP had an ambiguously cooperative relationship with the California Socialists. The official San Francisco party was decidedly impossibilist and in the orbit of the IWW, but the state party was controlled by Job Harriman and his powerful AFL-backed Los Angeles local, who treated the Union Labor Party as the de facto San Francisco local.¹¹²

It was clear that the Socialist Party was moving against its increasingly restive left wing. The tempestuous William English Walling only saw this as an opportunity to seize the reins of leadership of the left wing and wrote a polemic against the Labor Party model for *International Socialist Review*. Walling's former University Settlement colleague Robert Hunter became his leading antagonist, writing a series of articles in the wake of Keir Hardie's visit for the *New York Call*.¹¹³ Then, Algie Simons, now editor of the *Chicago Daily Socialist*, wrote to Walling in an apparent attempt to find common ground: "I do not like the English policy, but I say frankly it is better than the present Socialist Party," adding that the AFL "comes much nearer representing the working class than the SP, and unless we are able to so shape our policy and our organization as to meet the demands and incarnate the position of the workers we will have failed of our mission."¹¹⁴

Walling took this letter and charged headlong to the ramparts, claiming that it revealed a conspiracy by the National Executive Committee to dictatorially transform the Socialist Party into an "Independent Labor or Social Democratic Party."¹¹⁵ He forwarded the letter to the left-wing editors of the *New York Volkszeitung*, Ludwig Lore and Gustavus Myers, who read and denounced it to a mass meeting that nearly broke out into a riot.¹¹⁶ Walling demanded that the five members of the NEC he implicated in this conspiracy—Hillquit, Simons, Victor Berger, Carl Thompson, and Graham Stokes—be removed from office. Past historians of the Socialist Party, largely influenced by the partisan work of Ira Kipnis, have tended to believe that Walling was correct to charge the existence of a conspiracy.¹¹⁷ But Walling's "conspiracy" amounted to little more than the stated position of the SP majority. As Morris Hillquit wrote in attempting to contain the potential crisis,

I have at all times maintained that the prime object of the Socialist Party is to organize the working class of this country politically, that it would be very desirable to have the Socialist Party as such to perform that task, that it has so far not succeeded in doing so, and that

if a bona fide workingmen's party should be organized in this country for political purposes on a true workingmen's platform, and upon the principle of independent and uncompromising working class politics, our party could not consistently oppose such an organization, but that it would have to support it and cooperate with it. . . . None of us ever made a secret of these views, on the contrary, we have been discussing them in private and public very freely, whenever an occasion presented itself.¹¹⁸

The other principals implicated by Walling were enraged by his antics. Victor Berger wrote to Hillquit, "I can explain this only by the jealousy that egotistic and impotent fellows have toward men who try their best to do something. And since the impossibilists are organizing all over the country, it is only right that we should do the same."¹¹⁹ Even more outraged was the response of John Spargo: "I know of nothing in Mr. Walling's character or history which would justify my giving the slightest weight to any statement he might make about me. Mentally unbalanced, erratic in his movements, Mr. Walling is one of the most pathetic figures I have ever encountered."¹²⁰ But most aggrieved was J. G. Phelps Stokes, already caught between his friend and his brother-in-law Robert Hunter in the initial debate. Hillquit, Spargo, and the others took out most of their anger over the incident on Stokes; Walling claimed to have his support, and Stokes did little to disabuse the notion.¹²¹

Historians have also puzzled over why Simons sent his letter to Walling in the first place, but this confusion stems from a failure to appreciate the nuances of Socialist factionalism in this era. Simons had only recently left *International Socialist Review*, and his position was increasingly the position of the SP left—skepticism toward the IWW but nonetheless in favor of a militant trade union program and its priority over electoral action. Walling, who fancied himself a theorist of syndicalism, also identified with this view, and therefore Simons would have anticipated a friendly exchange on tactics rather than Walling's erratic behavior. Naturally, Walling received an emphatic note of sympathy from Eugene Debs:

I've been watching the situation closely and especially the tendencies toward reactionism, to which we are so unalterably opposed. The Socialist Party has already catered far too much to the AFL and there is no doubt that a halt will soon have to be called. The revolutionary character of our party and our movement must be preserved in all its integrity, at all costs, for if that be compromised it had better cease to exist.¹²²

But Debs, as ever, was only reacting emotionally, and it was soon clear that he would yield to the SP majority trade union policy as a practical matter. But the Walling episode marked the arrival of the revolutionary left wing that ultimately decided the party's fate. More than in any tangible organizational progress, this was reflected in the rising prevalence of an attitude, articulated clearly by Walling at the outset:

In placing so-called "practical" questions in the foreground and slighting questions of principle, "Labor" Parties adopt the ethics and philosophy of Capitalism, forget all the lessons of history and corrupt the morality and intelligence of the rising generation. In denying the class struggle and the probability of a revolutionary conflict "Labor" Parties do a service to Capitalism so great as to obtain its lasting gratitude and the assurance to all "leaders" of that Party that should they ever wish to stoop, they are certain of obtaining their reward—at least by public office and the advantage of close association with the rich. This is social not financial corruption, a subtle form that not many can resist.¹²³

That within a decade, the author of these words was a confidante of Samuel Gompers in rallying support for Woodrow Wilson's war policies, calling for "right-wingers" like Victor Berger to be jailed for sedition, tells all that one needs to know about the constantly recurring agonies of the American left.

5 The Triumph of Progressivism

(1910–1912)

The new National Executive Committee (NEC) elected in 1910 unanimously supported the historic majority policies of the Socialist Party, particularly the trade union policy. An unknowledgeable observer would have been unable to register the turmoil caused by William English Walling or realize that the election of the new NEC and its nonresponse to him were the most stinging rebukes he could be given. Berger and Hillquit were the only two members of the previous NEC to keep their posts; they were joined by Robert Hunter, John Spargo, James Carey, George Goebel of New Jersey, and Lena Morrow Lewis of California. The most notable departure was of J. G. Phelps Stokes, whose friendship with Walling apparently was stronger than family loyalty to Hunter.¹

The facts driving the debate between what were now unambiguously the right and left wings of the Socialist movement were about to change drastically. In the early months of 1910, the Milwaukee Socialists conducted a model campaign in which they finally swept the major city offices, with their celebrated “bundle brigade” distributing literature in seven languages. Milwaukee was always promising terrain for the Socialists, with its large German and working-class population, and in the past decade, multiple city officials in both major parties had been indicted on various corruption charges. On April 6, 1910, one of the largest pluralities ever recorded in a Milwaukee city election went to

the Socialist ticket, electing the mayor, seven aldermen-at-large, two civil judges, and the city attorney.

The new mayor of Milwaukee was Emil Seidel, a son of German immigrants who campaigned in both English and German. A skilled woodcarver, Seidel had been, with Victor Berger, one of the original defectors from the SLP to the Populist Party of Milwaukee in the late 1880s. Victor Berger himself was one of the seven aldermen, as was his virtual shadow, Frederic Heath, who also went back to the Milwaukee movement's earliest roots. Berger's wife Meta was even elected to the Milwaukee school board, serving for more than thirty years. For the most part, the SP was overjoyed at this breakthrough, with the *New York Call* proclaiming "that which has been cherished as a dream was beginning to look like a reality."² But while the Milwaukee campaign was ongoing, *International Socialist Review* took a frank impossibilist stand against Socialist participation in politics "for any reason other than the encouragement of class consciousness," blaming the left wing's complete absence from the National Executive Committee on the hypnotic spell that Berger cast with his model of machine politics.³

On the one hand, the labor party question that ostensibly exorcised *ISR* was now superfluous, with the clear illustration in Milwaukee of the Socialist Party's success when it functioned as a labor party itself. As David Shannon notes,

The secret of the success of the Milwaukee Socialists was their close alliance with the trade unions. Milwaukee AFL men were Socialists. Berger's newspaper, the *Social Democratic Herald*, carried on its masthead the legend "Official paper of the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee and of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor." Popularity of the Socialist Party in the Milwaukee labor movement did not come of any "boring from within," of parliamentary trickery whereby the unions were put on record as supporters of Socialism, but by Socialists working hard in the trade union movement, getting the confidence and respect of the unionists, and converting them to their way of thought.⁴

It was this very success that angered the left-wingers. They had never come close to controlling the SP, only emerging as a distinct tendency several years after the party was founded. They were isolated almost as soon as they came into existence, but paradoxically, the more the Socialist leadership was able to enforce and extend their isolation, the louder and more potentially dangerous the left wing became.

It was true, of course, that the city administration of Milwaukee could not by itself establish the cooperative commonwealth, and no one took greater pains to emphasize that fact than the Socialists themselves. Historian Darcy Richardson notes that in the fifty years from 1910 to 1960, thirty-eight of which were under Socialist administration, the City of Milwaukee did not purchase a single public utility or even attempt to build a mass transit system: "They wanted to try new things, new approaches to old problems plaguing the city, but only if such innovations weren't too costly. The party's legacy in Milwaukee was that of having provided good government, free from the remotest hint of scandal. And for that, the people of Milwaukee were grateful."⁵ The Seidel administration's first order of business was to appoint John Commons, the economist and labor historian who pioneered the "Wisconsin model" of Robert LaFollette's reform state administration, to plan a reorganization of the city's finances. Securing an improved credit rating and an end to deficit financing, Seidel then became a champion of factory and building inspection. With a vigorous pro-labor agenda, he also acted to prevent police intervention in strikes and gave city employees the prevailing wage and eight-hour day.⁶

Flush with the success of Milwaukee, the Socialist Party held a "national congress" in Chicago from May 15–21, 1910, conducting all the business of a national convention save for the nomination of a presidential ticket. The most notable debate at this gathering was over the party's stand on immigration, which illustrated well how the party was governed in practice. After the majority report called for complete Asiatic exclusion, at least one impassioned speech against it came from Meyer London.⁷ Morris Hillquit offered a typical lawyerly compromise for which he was so often relied on by the party:

The Socialist Party favors all legislative measures tending to prevent the immigration of strike-breakers and contract laborers, and the mass importation of workers from foreign countries, brought about by the employing classes for the purpose of weakening the organization of American labor, and of lowering the standard of life of American workers. The party is opposed to the exclusion of any immigrants on account of their race or nationality, and demands that the United States be at all times maintained as a free asylum for all men and women persecuted by the governments of their countries on account of their politics, religion or race.⁸

Another development at the 1910 conference, also relating to immigration, would prove of great consequence in the party's history. Since its founding, several immigrant nationalities within the SP had organized as fraternal societies, most prominently the Finnish Federation, which commanded a large following in the Lake Superior region of Minnesota, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and towns from Fitchburg, Massachusetts, to Astoria, Oregon. In 1907, the national office agreed to pay for a Finnish translator of official party business, and in 1910 it made a similar arrangement with the Lettish (Latvian) Federation. The 1910 congress amended the party constitution to allow these federations to affiliate directly with the party, with the authority to establish party infrastructure and collect dues independent of the state parties. Fourteen "language federations" were affiliated with the party by 1915. Some grew to be quite wealthy, namely the Finnish Federation and the Yiddish "Workmen's Circle," founded in 1900 before formally affiliating with the SP under this arrangement.⁹

After the city elections, the Milwaukee Socialists set their sights on Congress, nominating Victor Berger for the north side fifth district of Wisconsin, and Winfield Gaylord, a Congregationalist minister known for riding around Milwaukee on a motorcycle with his sons in the sidecar, for the south side fourth district. Berger always had better prospects, running on the overwhelmingly German north side. The south side was predominantly Irish and Polish, with an often vehemently anti-Socialist

Catholic hierarchy to contend with, though the Socialists slowly did make inroads in the Polish wards. Victor Berger would be the first Socialist congressman, winning a 40 percent plurality in the fifth district. In addition, after the five Socialists elected to the Wisconsin legislature in 1904 were reduced to three by 1908, they became thirteen after the election of 1910.

Elsewhere, one Socialist each was elected to the legislatures of California, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania. Of these, the most notable by far was James Maurer in Reading, Pennsylvania, who was elected after carefully building up a machine with the support of the local AFL along the same lines as in Milwaukee. Less remembered but no less distinguished a leader of the American Socialist movement than Debs, Hillquit, or Berger, James Hudson Maurer was born in Reading in 1864 of old Pennsylvania Dutch stock. A machinists' apprentice, he joined the Knights of Labor at the age of sixteen in its eastern Pennsylvania stronghold, taking the familiar path into the Populist Party, briefly into the Socialist Labor Party after the debacle of 1896, and finally into the Socialist Party just after its founding.¹⁰

Socialist momentum increased exponentially with the spring municipal elections of 1911. Over the course of the year, no fewer than seventy-four Socialists were elected as mayors in twenty-three of the forty-eight states—including eighteen in Ohio; six each in Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania; and five each in Michigan and Utah. Many of these mayors were trade unionists, including cigar maker John Menton in Flint, Michigan; railroad brakeman Walter Tyler in New Castle, Pennsylvania; bricklayer William Matthews in Rockaway, New Jersey; carpenter Andrew Mitchell in Eureka, Utah; and plumber Thomas Pape in Lorain, Ohio. A rare businessman among the Socialist mayors was Christmas ornament manufacturer Henry Stolze Jr. in Manitowoc, Wisconsin.¹¹

Curiously, the three most memorable of the Socialist mayors elected in 1911 were all ministers. In Berkeley, California, J. Stitt Wilson, a Methodist, was a founding member of the party and of the Christian Socialist Fellowship and was elected with a 40 percent plurality. In Schenectady,

New York, George Lunn was a graduate of New York's Union Theological Seminary who led the city's large nondenominational United People's Church. Like Wilson in Berkeley, Lunn ran a campaign virtually indistinguishable from municipal reform campaigns in other parts of the country. Of the many Socialists elected to the Schenectady Common Council over the course of the decade, the most memorable was Charles Steinmetz, chief research engineer of General Electric. Lunn hired as his chief of staff a fresh-faced recruit from the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, highly recommended by Morris Hillquit, named Walter Lippmann. After Lunn failed in his efforts to establish municipal coal and ice plants, Lippmann resigned in disillusionment, declaring that "reform under fire of radicalism is an educative thing, reform pretending to be radicalism is deadening."¹²

Butte, Montana, the self-described mining capital of the world, was as natural a Socialist stronghold as any. In 1911 Lewis Duncan, a Unitarian minister, led the Socialist ticket in winning every city office, leading the Socialists to proclaim that "every councilman in Butte is a bona fide workingman."¹³ Duncan had long been seen as a spokesman of the left wing, reflecting his copper mining constituency, but there was little love for the IWW in this Western Federation of Miners stronghold. From the outset Duncan saw Milwaukee as his model, writing to the Milwaukee city clerk that "we are doing the best we can to educate the bourgeoisie into an understanding that their genuine interests are with us and not with the capitalists."¹⁴ Future U.S. senator Burton Wheeler, at the start of his public career as Silver Bow County district attorney, still regarded Duncan as the best mayor in the history of Butte fifty years later in his memoirs. Perhaps the most memorable reform of the Duncan administration was his rigorous regulatory regime over the legal red light district in Butte.¹⁵

Mayoral races only nearly missed by the Socialists could be as indicative of their strength as those they won. Notable also-rans included Elwood Leffler in Reading, Pennsylvania, where the Socialists nonetheless elected five councilmen; Alvah C. Eby in Columbus, Ohio, aided by a prolonged streetcar strike; and Al Blase in Wichita, Kansas, a

shoemaker who could quote Karl Marx verbatim.¹⁶ Perhaps most memorable was Oscar Ameringer's campaign for mayor of Oklahoma City. Ameringer was determined to bring the Milwaukee model of an effective, trade-union-based party to his adopted city, but as one history of the campaign put it, "Tactics and programs suitable to a long-established, industrialized, and polyglot city like Milwaukee proved to be of marginal political utility in a recently settled southwestern boomtown."¹⁷ The Oklahoma AFL leadership was mostly loyal to the reigning Democrats, but state secretary-treasurer Luther Langston campaigned for Ameringer and announced that he had joined the Socialist Party. In the end, Ameringer received 23 percent of the Oklahoma City vote.¹⁸

Even considering that the field was wide open after 1908 for the Socialists to take up the mantle of progressive reform, the extent of their momentum in 1910 and 1911 is still extraordinary. That the two major parties were essentially united on a moderate reform agenda in 1908 only served to radicalize much of the public when the limits of that agenda became clear. One tragic demonstration of how unchanged the miserable condition of the working class remained came on March 25, 1911, in the worst industrial accident in the history of New York City. Late in the afternoon, a fire in the tenth-floor factory of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company killed 147 Jewish and Italian working girls, who could not escape because the owners had locked the doors to keep out union organizers. Louis Waldman, a nineteen-year-old recent arrival from Ukraine who just a few years later would be a Socialist member of the New York legislature, vividly recalled the response to this tragedy:

The Waistmakers' Union arranged for a mass funeral of the dead, since most of the victims had been burned or mangled beyond recognition. City officials prohibited any demonstration, but the plans for the funeral were carried out nevertheless. More than one hundred thousand workers marched in a silent cortege behind the flower-laden hearses. East Side places of business were closed for the day. . . . Shortly after the mass funeral, a crowded meeting was held at Cooper Union to consider the tragedy and its meaning for the working people of

New York. The finest orators of the New York labor movement were there, among them, of course, Meyer London. But more memorably, indeed unforgettable, was another speaker whose oratorical powers and great personal charm impressed me as perhaps no other man has impressed me since . . . and since I had not caught his name when he was introduced I turned to my neighbor and asked who the orator might be. Incredulously, the man replied: "Do you mean to tell me you've never heard Morris Hillquit before?"¹⁹

In Cleveland, the Socialist standard was carried by Charles E. Ruthenberg, a son of German immigrants who rapidly rose within the Ohio SP and to lead the left wing nationally. Ohio would emerge as a stronghold of the left wing, with signs well in evidence as early as 1911. In Canton that year, Socialist mayoral candidate Harry Schilling was defeated by the narrowest of margins, but after insisting on a recount was declared victorious—and for this, the local party expelled him.²⁰ Yet despite local pockets of strength, the left wing, to the extent it existed as a unified force under the nominal leadership of *International Socialist Review*, was reeling from the smashing success at electing Socialists to office. Especially aggravating to the left-wingers was how electoral success enhanced the prestige of their arch-nemesis Victor Berger, as he and the Milwaukee party were praised as exemplars of civic virtue in such bourgeois publications as *The Independent* and the *Saturday Evening Post*.²¹

The first left wing attempt at a party coup was by Thomas J. Morgan, the Chicago left-winger who only reluctantly left the SLP in the period leading up to the founding of the Socialist Party. The mine workers organizer Mother Jones had asked Morgan to help her resolve a financial dispute she had with SP executive secretary J. Mahlon Barnes. After making the dispute public in a Chicago Socialist weekly he controlled, Morgan made a series of lurid and sensationalist charges that Barnes: dishonesty in business dealings, alcoholism, and carrying on sexual liaisons with national office employees. Such charges prompted many of the party's ministers to demand Barnes's resignation. As a founder

of the Socialist Party, Barnes enjoyed the personal loyalty of most of the leadership, who were reluctant to give any attention to the controversy. But when the National Executive Committee was compelled to hold hearings, it was revealed that Barnes not only employed the mother of his illegitimate child in the national office but had also garnished her wages to pay off a private debt. The putsch backfired for the left wing, however, when Barnes was replaced as executive secretary in September 1911 by John M. Work, a product of the Milwaukee machine who had most recently served as a party organizer in Iowa.²²

The rapid growth of the Socialist movement at this time also gave rise to an organized anti-Socialist movement, almost uniformly Catholic in its affiliations. When Samuel Gompers realized the potential to rally the massive Irish Catholic membership of the AFL against the Socialists on religious grounds, the Militia of Christ was organized with the support of several AFL leaders. The most colorful figure in this movement was David Goldstein, a founding member of the Socialist Party in Boston who loudly left the party in 1903 after attempting to get them on record forbidding their speakers from advocating either atheism or free love. Frederic MacCartney, prominent clergyman of the Massachusetts party, insisted that such a resolution would dignify the false accusation that this had ever occurred, but within the year Goldstein and fellow Boston renegade Martha Moore Avery announced their conversion to Catholicism and became professional anti-Socialists.²³ Goldstein's prominence was such that as late as 1915 the SP was still publishing literature to refute his writings.²⁴

One extraordinary election result in 1911, almost entirely forgotten by history, was in a statewide election in Mississippi. John T. Lester, a grandson of the state's second governor, ran for lieutenant governor with Sumner Rose, a Socialist alderman in Biloxi, at the top of the ticket. Running against Theodore Bilbo at the start of his career as one of the most notorious racist demagogues of the Jim Crow era, Lester ran large majorities in the cities of Biloxi, Greenville, Natchez, and Vicksburg. Some newspapers even reported that he had been elected before he ultimately tallied just under a third of the vote, with Rose getting a mere

5 percent.²⁵ Daniel Bell, the only historian of the SP to acknowledge this election, takes a characteristically cynical view of the Mississippi vote:

The genteel wing of the Democratic Party, in order to defeat Theodore Bilbo, sought to elect a Socialist Lieutenant Governor and did in fact swing to the Socialist Party candidate a third of the vote. In the South particularly, remnants of the old Populist groups sought to use the Socialist Party as a club against the Democrats or as a means of pressuring the Democrats for an acceptable candidate.²⁶

Whatever the case, Bell's assessment shows a damning indifference to the final demise of the Populist legacy in the politics of the deep South. Later scholarship shows that the failure of that region's Socialist movement to cross the Mississippi was by no means foreordained and far more complicated than the simple surrender of the Populist movement to Southern racism. In any event, it was certainly appropriate for this final denouement to take place at the hands of perhaps the most infamous of the Southern demagogues.

But in the exceptionally eventful year for the Socialist Party of 1911, almost everything else was overshadowed by the events in Los Angeles. In May 1910, an Ironworkers strike had begun that by the fall became a brutal citywide class war, targeting the employers' association leader Harrison Gray Otis, who all but ruled the city. Otis owned the *Los Angeles Times*, and on October 1 the *Times* building was destroyed in an explosion. John McNamara, the union's secretary-treasurer, and his brother James were indicted for setting the explosion in the spring of 1911. Meanwhile, Job Harriman, now the city's leading labor lawyer while leading the local SP with AFL support, was nominated for mayor in the fall elections. Harriman himself was the attorney for the McNamara brothers, and the case became a major cause for the Socialist and labor movements nationally. There were numerous parallels, including

extralegal extradition, to the Haywood case five years earlier, and both Haywood and Debs took to the stump in the brothers' defense.²⁷

If any major American city had the potential to repeat the Socialist success in Milwaukee, it was Los Angeles: two years earlier, Socialist city councilman Fred Wheeler had come just 1,700 votes shy of being elected mayor. In the 1911 election Harriman won a plurality in the first round on October 31, four thousand votes ahead of incumbent mayor George Alexander. With the backing of the AFL, it looked for most of November as though Harriman was likely to be elected, leading Alexander to insist that the election was "not a question of the merits or demerits of Socialism, but of the merits or demerits of myself and Mr. Harriman."²⁸ Ubiquitous throughout the November campaign were buttons reading "McNamaras Not Guilty! Vote for Harriman!" But with Harriman's attention focused on his campaign, he handed representation of the McNamaras to Clarence Darrow, whose disastrous attempt to reach a negotiated settlement of the case ultimately led to a guilty plea on December 1, five days before the runoff.

The evidence against James McNamara at least was overwhelming, and the Socialists were quick to argue that the McNamaras were not Socialists but AFL men; it is important to remember that in this era the AFL remained no stranger to violence.²⁹ But the public face of the Socialists was of Bill Haywood and his collaborator Frank Bohn, who remained unrepentant.³⁰ In the end, Harriman received just under 37 percent of the vote in the runoff against Alexander. An additional blow came in San Francisco, where Patrick McCarthy, whose Union Labor Party Harriman had passionately championed, lost his own mayoral reelection bid to Republican Jim Rolph, a future governor of California. The case can be overstated that the McNamaras' guilty plea lost Harriman the election, because even with the lopsided margin of defeat, Harriman doubled his number of votes from the first round. But the association of the Socialist Party with political violence by the labor movement was clearly a dangerous liability that had to be quickly remedied. Harriman wrote to Morris Hillquit shortly after the campaign:

We have conducted the greatest campaign ever conducted in any city in this country. I wish you could have been here. Organized labor was in action politically and made a tremendous fight when they moved solidly together. This campaign has confirmed my theories for the last seven years, and I want you to consider that more strongly than ever before.³¹

In this letter Harriman was referring to his arguments for efforts to create a Labor Party. As the Los Angeles campaign of 1911 progressed, the consequences of failing to heed his advice were playing out in dramatic fashion. The taint of violence and sabotage was afflicting the Socialist Party at the very moment that what amounted to the new party hoped for by the Noroton conference of 1906 was striving to come into existence.

By 1911, a caucus of “Insurgents” among Senate Republicans emerged that was seeking a progressive alternative to President Taft in the coming election. Led by the indefatigable Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin, the caucus included senators from Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, and Minnesota. It became evident that this development represented lost potential for the Socialists when the *Chicago Tribune* emerged as the leading newspaper in support of the Insurgents. The failing *Tribune* had been left to Joseph Medill Patterson and his two cousins, Joseph Medill McCormick and Robert McCormick, when Patterson’s father died in 1910.³² Aligning with the Insurgents was a logical extension of Patterson’s activism; although his cousins no doubt strongly influenced him against remaining in the Socialist Party, no less significant was the increasing association of the party with the likes of Bill Haywood and the McNamaras.

The presidential election of 1912 has entered the realm of legend, but much of its mystique relies on the disturbingly enduring myth of Theodore Roosevelt, against whom William Howard Taft can provide as instructive a contrast as Mark Hanna. Taft had never aspired to be president and only later achieved his true aspiration to serve on the Supreme Court. As such, he favored institutionalizing the de facto

regulatory regime of the courts that characterized the Gilded Age, if in a more enlightened and progressive version. In contrast, Roosevelt had long been closely aligned with J. P. Morgan, whose shared ideal of legalized, regulated trusts was always the underlying vision dressed up in the colonel's speeches about the malefactors of great wealth. In August 1910, Roosevelt spoke to a gathering of Civil War veterans from both North and South at which he unveiled the program he called the "New Nationalism." Prepared to go to great lengths to return to the White House, he made such statements as "labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration."³³

The extraordinary events of the 1912 election were set in motion by a candidate who would not even run in the general election, Robert LaFollette, and those who drafted him into the race. The first to call for LaFollette to challenge both Taft and Roosevelt for the Republican nomination was newspaper magnate E. W. Scripps, who argued that Roosevelt would become a dictator for life if elected in 1912: "Some day you will see him riding up Pennsylvania Avenue on a white mule and abolishing Congress."³⁴ The first campaign conference for LaFollette was held in October 1911 in Chicago, attended by Medill McCormick; George L. Record, leader of the progressive Republicans in New Jersey who had attended the Noroton conference five years earlier; Louis Brandeis, then serving as counsel to the House committee investigating U.S. Steel; plumbing supply manufacturer Charles Crane, probably the most generous financial backer of the campaign; and Gifford Pinchot, widely regarded as the father of the U.S. Forestry Service under Roosevelt. Pinchot was joined by his brother Amos, historically regarded as the most radical of the 1912 Progressives.³⁵

George L. Record and the Patterson-McCormick cousins were not the only connections of the LaFollette campaign to the Noroton conference, and thus symbolic of the Socialists' missed opportunity. Amos Pinchot had been a trustee of University Settlement and would be closely aligned with the Socialist Party later in the decade as it struggled to form a Labor Party. And then there was Louis Brandeis, the intellectual guru of the Insurgents in Congress after playing a key role in forging

the “Protocol of Peace” in the New York garment industry, with his compromise position of the “preferential shop” as opposed to the closed shop.³⁶ In the closing weeks of 1911 and early weeks of 1912, it appeared that LaFollette had a clear path to the presidency, with the strong prospect of support from Samuel Gompers and the AFL.

The year 1912 began with the major turning point in the heroic era of the American left and labor movement, and indeed of the entire Progressive Era. What began as a spontaneous walkout of mostly Polish working girls in response to an unannounced wage cut at the massive American Woolen Company mill of Lawrence, Massachusetts, had by the evening of January 12 become a 10,000-strong strike of the diverse, though largely Italian, workforce at American Woolen. These were exceptionally well-organized workers, with the AFL Textile Workers representing the more skilled crafts and the IWW already somewhat established on the ground among the immigrant groups, of whom few spoke English. The Lawrence Strike was also blessed in having a local IWW leadership that rejected violence and was committed to cooperation with the AFL. The Socialist Party national office would ultimately donate a total of \$18,000 to the Lawrence Strike fund.³⁷

As the days turned to weeks in Lawrence, the Italian Socialist Federation, one of the new foreign language federations of the SP, played a memorable role when its locals offered to take in the children of the strikers until the strike was resolved. The children were sent primarily to sympathetic families in New York and in Barre, Vermont, self-described granite capital of the world where the Italian Granite Workers had only recently broken with the Socialist Labor Party. When the state militia attacked a group of parents and their children as they were preparing to be sent off at the train station on February 24, the public outrage was sufficient to finally force the city and American Woolen to the negotiating table, with the strike concluded and its four major demands won after eight weeks.³⁸ Victor Berger, in the high point of his first term in Congress, succeeded in having hearings held by the House Rules Committee on the causes of the strike. As it was described how the employees of

the world's largest woolen mill typically could not afford winter clothes for their families, First Lady Helen Taft was seen weeping among the spectators.

Berger's first term was marked by a flurry of activity, with Rand School founding president William J. Ghent serving as his chief of staff. The first resolution he sponsored called for the withdrawal of American troops poised at the Mexican border to intervene in that country's revolution. Perhaps most memorably, he called for the abolition of the Senate and of the presidential veto, as well as of the Supreme Court power of judicial review. On the more practical side, he introduced bills for old age pensions and for nationalizing the railroads and telephone lines.³⁹ The inspiration and example of a Socialist congressman had a noticeable effect on Eugene Debs, impressed by the man who brought him into the Socialist movement for having "demonstrated effectively the value of even a single Socialist in Congress."⁴⁰ The Socialist breakthrough at the ballot box led Debs to openly break with the party's left wing, indicating that the party could now decisively move against this faction once and for all.

The Lawrence Strike proved to be the high-water mark for the IWW, but an ambiguous one at that. Not only was the leadership role of the IWW itself ambiguous, but the strike was won by the very opposite tactics of those that defined its reputation. The SP leadership recognized this, but the IWW did not. Bill Haywood responded to the victory at Lawrence by denouncing the right-wing Socialists as lawyers "who for all the ages ago have been the mouthpieces of the capitalist class."⁴¹ The situation was especially perilous as Haywood had just become a member of the National Executive Committee. During the Lawrence Strike, Haywood and Hillquit even held a public debate at Cooper Union.⁴²

The first few months of 1912 gave a mixed picture of the fortunes of the Socialist Party. On the one hand, the LaFollette campaign essentially collapsed after a speech in which a hostile press caricatured and exaggerated LaFollette's visible physical strain to report that he had suffered a nervous breakdown.⁴³ But on the other hand, and of greater significance was the defeat of Emil Seidel for reelection in Milwaukee.

Oscar Ameringer, on the ground in Milwaukee after his own unsuccessful run for office, described in his memoirs how the capitalist press of Milwaukee turned an innocent proposal for a new public park into a public scandal:

Public service corporations and big business in general lined up, bringing their mercenaries of the press along with them. The propaganda that this united gangland conducted against "Berger's million dollar park" resulted in the defeat of the Socialists in the next election . . . working people almost to a man had given their time and meager earnings for the redemption of Milwaukee. . . . If Milwaukee has today the merited reputation of being the best-governed city in the United States, it was the common people who made it so, not their "betters."⁴⁴

With a fusion ticket of the two major parties running to defeat Seidel, his percentage of the vote was reduced from 47 percent in 1910 to 40.6 percent in 1912. But because this amounted to an increase in actual votes of about three thousand, the Socialists took consolation that they increased their vote with the issue of capitalism versus socialism being placed squarely before the public.⁴⁵ Milwaukee Socialism still had a long life ahead of it. Shortly after the 1910 victories, the *Social Democratic Herald* was revamped as the *Milwaukee Leader*, including on staff a young reporter and future giant of American letters named Carl Sandburg.

When the 1912 National Convention of the Socialist Party opened in Indianapolis on May 12, supporters of the left wing felt they were on the verge of a breakthrough. Haywood was on the National Executive Committee, and they believed the success of the Lawrence Strike was perceived as their vindication. But the highlight of the convention's first day was an address by Carl Legien, chairman of the General Commission of German Trade Unions, then on an American speaking tour arranged by Samuel Gompers. Upholding the model of the German Social Democrats who that year commanded a third of the vote, Legien

attributed his party's success to a trade union policy identical with the American Socialist majority and directly rebuked the sympathizers of the IWW: "In our German movement we have no room for sabotage and similar syndicalist and destructive tendencies."⁴⁶ For their part, most left-wing delegates were satisfied with a trade union resolution giving new emphasis to the need to organize unskilled and immigrant workers and abolish parochial union membership restrictions, without fundamentally changing historic party policy.

Nearly all the delegates believed that this resolution settled the emerging left-right struggle for good. In an especially poignant scene, the leader of the Texas radicals, Tom Hickey, entered a mutual embrace with Job Harriman, the stubborn Labor Party advocate who bore the brunt of intraparty animus in Hickey's widely read *Rebel*.⁴⁷ Yet resentments still lingered. In an incident that may resonate with the widely perceived "two Americas" of the early twenty-first century, the super-assimilated Jewish urbanite Victor Berger gave a speech upbraiding his opponents, "Don't be like the ancient Hebrews who, when going on a journey, carried a bundle of hay to sleep on so as not to come in contact with a place on which a Gentile had previously slept." That afternoon, Tad Cumbie of Oklahoma defiantly appeared with a small thatch of hay pinned to his bright-red shirt. Determined to get the better of him, Berger remarked, "I see you brought your lunch with you."⁴⁸

Lewis Duncan was elected permanent chairman of the convention, and the SP leadership was emboldened by the passage of the trade union resolution. A caucus led by Berger, Hillquit, Harriman, and John Spargo drafted an amendment to the party constitution that was introduced by Winfield Gaylord: "Any member of the party who opposes political action or advocates crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation, shall be expelled from membership in the party."⁴⁹ In the surest sign of how much the tone of the party had changed, perhaps no one was now more outspoken against the tactics of violence and sabotage than Eugene Debs, who wrote to the convention of his hope that the party would "place itself squarely

on record against sabotage and every other form of violence and destructiveness suggested by what is known as 'direct action.'"⁵⁰ The amendment was approved by a vote of 191 to 90.

Debs, hobbled by frequent illness and exhaustion that biographer Nick Salvatore argues was more emotional than physical in nature, was reluctant to stand again as the Socialist standard-bearer.⁵¹ For some time he had been urging the nomination of Fred Warren, who took over as editor of the *Appeal to Reason*. But the *Appeal* had long been in decline as an influence in the Socialist movement, and Warren, despite bearing the brunt of a series of frivolous obscenity prosecutions against the paper, was not a popular figure in the party.⁵² Once Debs was entered into nomination, the opposition was divided between two favorite-son candidates, Emil Seidel of Wisconsin and Charles Edward Russell of New York, one of the most prized recruits from the heyday of the millionaire socialists. Debs easily won on the first ballot with 156 votes to 56 for Seidel and 54 for Russell. Perennial favorite Ben Hanford had died in 1910, so Seidel handily won the vice presidential nomination, receiving several left-wing votes in the spirit of unity, over Dan Hogan of Arkansas and John Slayton of Pennsylvania.⁵³

Debs formally accepted the Socialist presidential nomination for the fourth time on June 16, declaring at a rally in Chicago at Riverside Park,

The Socialist Party is organized and financed by the workers themselves as a means of wresting control of government and of industry from the capitalists and making the working class the ruling class of the nation and the world. Since the Socialist revolution cannot be achieved in a day, never for a moment mistake reform for revolution and never lose sight of the ultimate goal.⁵⁴

The speech was deliberately timed to coincide with the Republican convention at the Chicago Coliseum. Theodore Roosevelt declared for the Republican nomination against Taft after the successful effort by much of the press to discredit LaFollette, and when the convention opened

it promised to be a hard-fought contest between Taft and Roosevelt, with a not insignificant bloc of diehard LaFollette delegates. Many of the key LaFollette backers had gone over to Roosevelt, including the Pinchot brothers, the McCormick brothers, and George L. Record. Though the rules of the convention were stacked in favor of Taft and the Republican old guard, Roosevelt might well have prevailed had he not walked out of the convention. California governor Hiram Johnson, an early LaFollette supporter who was only too eager to lead his state out of the Grand Old Party, called an impromptu gathering at the Congress Hotel to begin organizing a third party to back Roosevelt in the general election. Roosevelt personally appeared to assure them that he would in fact run.⁵⁵

For all the overt religious fervor that frequently characterized the followers of Eugene Victor Debs, there can simply be no comparison to the following of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912. Returning to the Chicago Coliseum on August 5, the new Progressive Party nominated Roosevelt for president and Hiram Johnson for vice president; it responded to Roosevelt's cry, "We stand at Armageddon and we battle for The Lord," with religious hymns, including the Civil War-era "Battle Hymn of the Republic" that envisaged the U.S. military as a literal proxy for God Himself (the tune of which, a few short years later, would be adopted for the long-standing anthem of the American left and labor movement, "Solidarity Forever"). Several veterans of the Hearst movement were present, and several former Populists gave the Progressives hope of cracking the solid South, including Tom Watson, Milford Howard, and their old fusionist adversary Marion Butler.⁵⁶ But the Progressive platform was dictated by George Perkins, the agent of the House of Morgan dispatched to be Roosevelt's national campaign manager. Perkins most notably intervened against the strong antitrust plank of the draft platform, a pivotal moment of disillusionment for such radical Progressives as Amos Pinchot.⁵⁷

Thus did the much-celebrated "Progressive Era" amount to the final consolidation of the state capitalist order. In his influential revisionist history of the era by the same name, Gabriel Kolko calls it "the triumph of conservatism," but it could just as easily be labeled the triumph of

progressivism—though it was only called “Progressive” by the historical accident that the immediate threat it subverted and co-opted was the Progressive movement of LaFollette. Progressive or conservative, the Roosevelt-Morgan program was the ultimate fulfillment of the system of Alexander Hamilton: the state as the implementer and guarantor of the economic system originally called mercantilism but most often called capitalism. Within a decade, the regime implementing this system in Italy adopted the name “fascism” to reflect its romance for the Roman Empire. Yet the development of this term has fatally obscured the true roots of modern political authoritarianism in the presidential system first introduced by the authors of the Constitution of the United States.

Against the Roosevelt-Morgan program, LaFollette and the original Progressive Republican League favored an aggressive trust-busting regime that would ensure the primacy of small business, making LaFollette arguably the most *laissez-faire* actor in the great political drama of 1912. The unsettled Socialist position was somewhere between that of LaFollette and Roosevelt. The Socialists shared much of the sentiment underlying the LaFollette position, but many still held to the Marxist view that the trusts were a natural part of the evolution of capitalism into socialism. The nominally official position, as given in the legislation proposed by Victor Berger, was for the government to purchase any trust that controlled more than 40 percent of its industry. Berger argued for this position against those Socialists who insisted on confiscation by drawing an analogy to the Civil War:

Violence like that would lose us much. Before that carnage some tried to avert it by proposing to pay for the slaves, but the fanatics on both sides refused. The result was four years of war at a cost of ten billion dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives. We ought to learn from history. We will offer compensation because it seems just to present day thought and will prove the easiest, cheapest way in the end.⁵⁸

There was little love lost between Berger and LaFollette at this stage of their respective careers, with LaFollette still influenced by a native

Republican prejudice against the Socialists and Berger combining an ostensible orthodox Marxism with what Hillquit called his “sublime egotism” in looking down on LaFollette’s provincialism. Before they were forced together by their opposition to the First World War, LaFollette and the Socialists saw each other as rivals in Wisconsin, though neither ever threatened the geographic base of the other. Although there was easily a meeting place between the two on the trust question, the LaFollette campaign, with its links to the Noroton conference of 1906, emerged at the very moment its constituency was most alienated from the Socialists, and it represented progress for the SP just to do what was necessary that year to reopen the door to future possibilities of cooperation.

But the nomination of Woodrow Wilson by the Democrats sealed the outcome of the great drama of 1912. The president of Princeton University before becoming governor of New Jersey, Wilson openly speculated about the possibility of becoming Roosevelt’s running mate before prevailing at the Democratic convention.⁵⁹ LaFollette let it be an open secret that he supported Wilson, and several of his most loyal backers campaigned for the Democratic nominee. Some were rewarded handsomely—Louis Brandeis with an appointment to the Supreme Court, and Charles Crane as a leading diplomat in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. It was Brandeis who formulated the position in the trust debate that Wilson announced shortly after Roosevelt accepted the Progressive nomination:

I am not one of those who think that competition can be established by law against the drift of a worldwide economic tendency, neither am I one of those who believe that business done upon a great scale by a single organization—call it a corporation, or what you will—is necessarily dangerous to the liberties, even the economic liberties, of a great people like our own. I am not afraid of anything that is normal. I dare say we shall never return to the old order of individual competition, and that the organization of business upon a great scale of cooperation is, up to a certain point, itself normal and inevitable.⁶⁰

Proclaimed as the “New Freedom” in pointed opposition to Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism,” in practice this position meant that, in contrast to the corporatist system envisioned by Roosevelt and his industrialist backers, there would be no legalized trusts or monopolies, but that large corporations would still be protected under a system of regulation by executive-appointed commissions. A generation before the New Deal or any of its successor programs, the implementation of the “New Freedom” in the first Wilson administration established, with almost no fundamental change over time, the prevailing system of political economy in the twentieth-century United States.

The Socialist campaign began on a contentious note, when at the close of the national convention Morris Hillquit succeeded in having J. Mahlon Barnes named as the national campaign manager for 1912. Hillquit, and most of the SP leadership with him, felt the need to vindicate Barnes now that they had driven back the forces that pushed him out of the national office. But old wounds were immediately reopened. Many left-wingers threatened to work against the Socialist ticket if Barnes remained, and his defenders welcomed them to do so.⁶¹ Debs, whose brother Theodore many left-wingers had hoped would be Barnes’s replacement as executive secretary, initially gave his blessing to those who protested, prompting Frederic Heath to write him, “Capitalism would pay well for such a job as you are doing for nothing and undoubtedly with good intentions.”⁶² Yet Debs, disenchanted with the left wing despite its lingering emotional claim on him, made his peace with Barnes by July.⁶³ When *International Socialist Review* attempted to regain its footing after the convention by seizing on the appointment of Barnes, its recall effort was quickly shot down in an open letter organized by Algernon Lee and Meyer London:

No question is raised about Barnes’ qualifications for the position or his ability to manage a vigorous and aggressive campaign. Still, in the language of the circular, “the *Review* is going to demand his recall” and “Remember, the issue is not Barnes’ personality or

character or conduct. The issue is HILLQUITISM, which has already gone far enough.” Thus the *International Socialist Review* and its adherents are deliberately engineering a move to cripple the campaign by inaugurating an ugly and spiteful warfare upon the campaign manager, which is fully in line with its general anti-political attitude.⁶⁴

Indeed, the 1912 campaign held out such promise for the Socialist Party in great measure because it allowed them to sharply contrast its own identity to both the Roosevelt Progressives, who were calling for far greater government control of the economy than the Socialists, and the “impossibilists” represented by the IWW and *International Socialist Review*. Some Socialists even suggested that Bill Haywood had helped draft the Progressive Party platform, which Haywood took seriously and denounced as a malicious rumor.⁶⁵ But this missed the point of the observation, which merely articulated the long-standing right-wing Socialist critique of the IWW that its vision of “industrial government” bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the Roosevelt platform of legalized trusts.⁶⁶ For his part, Debs relished the opportunity to once again campaign against the Colonel, declaring to a massive rally at Pabst Park in Milwaukee, “As President, Roosevelt did none of the things, nor attempted to do any of the things he is now talking about so wildly. On the contrary, a more servile functionary to the trusts than Theodore Roosevelt never sat in the presidential chair.”⁶⁷

A significant exception to the Socialist attitudes toward Roosevelt was John Spargo, now residing in Bennington, Vermont. As early as 1908 Spargo had called Roosevelt a “near-Socialist” and was now attracted to the evangelical fervor of the Progressives. He embraced the Roosevelt trust position on orthodox Marxist grounds, going so far as to argue that “exploitation is incidental and pales in comparison with the benefits of concentration, therefore, it would be foolish to check the economic development because of the pain which it involves.”⁶⁸ Spargo continued to serve on the National Executive Committee; though always an ally of Hillquit in matters of party policy, his sympathy for the Progressives was a continued reflection of his roots in the British left wing and in

many ways anticipated the peculiar trajectory of the American left wing after its rout in 1912.

The high point of the 1912 campaign, which itself was a high point in the history of the American Socialist movement, came when Eugene Debs appeared late in September at Madison Square Garden before twenty-two thousand New Yorkers. Debs was lovingly embraced on stage by Charles Edward Russell, his former rival for the presidential nomination and now the Socialist candidate for governor of New York.⁶⁹ Both then embraced the aging Lucien Sanial, a leader of the Socialist Labor Party in its heyday. Debs proceeded to denounce Taft as “a specialist when it came to issuing injunctions to keep working men in subjugation,” Wilson as “a kid glove on the paw of the Tammany tiger,” and Roosevelt as “a hypocrite for running as a champion of the oppressed and the downtrodden, on a platform that only four years ago he denounced as anarchist.”⁷⁰ The Socialist journalist Art Young, who a decade earlier had mocked Debs as a “schoolboy elocutionist” for the capitalist press, now reported on his appearance at Madison Square Garden:

An inspiring man, because he was himself inspired. He was emotional, and used the logic of understanding born of long experience with the workers. When one heard him voice a natural sympathy for the enslaved, one felt that here was a champion who would go to the stake rather than sacrifice his own beliefs.⁷¹

The Prohibition Party candidate, Eugene Chafin, predicted the outcome of the election almost perfectly: “Wilson will carry forty states, Roosevelt, five, Taft three and Debs and I will divide the others.”⁷² Wilson indeed carried forty states, beating Roosevelt by fifteen percentage points in the popular vote, but with fewer votes than had ever been won by William Jennings Bryan. Roosevelt, in fact, carried six states, whereas Taft won only Utah and Vermont. Debs ran ahead of Taft in seven states—California and South Dakota, where Taft was kept off the ballot, and in Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Nevada; ahead of both Roosevelt and Taft in Florida; and in Texas coming only 1,012 votes short of the

incumbent president. Debs received 901,551 votes nationwide, just a shaving under 6 percent of the national total, with over 16 percent in Nevada and Oklahoma, over 13 percent in Montana and Arizona, over 12 percent in Washington, and over 11 percent in California and Idaho. For the first and only time in the party's history, the presidential ticket won a plurality in a county—Lake County, Minnesota, with 37.44 percent—which was one of a dozen counties that gave the Socialist Party more than 30 percent of the vote.

In a bitter blow, Victor Berger was defeated for reelection to Congress with only 36 percent of the vote, though in his neighboring district to the south Winfield Gaylord ran almost even with him. The breadth of Socialist voting strength in 1912 was nonetheless impressive, with Socialist candidates earning more than 10 percent of the vote in no fewer than eighty U.S. House districts. In state legislatures, the Socialists lost their members in New York, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, and six of thirteen in Wisconsin, but gained three each in Illinois (including party founder Seymour Stedman) and Kansas, two in Nevada, and one each in Massachusetts, Montana, and Washington—amounting to a net gain of one nationwide.⁷³ In California, Berkeley mayor J. Stitt Wilson got 40 percent of the vote in the sixth district and Los Angeles councilman Fred Wheeler 21 percent in the tenth. In Schenectady, Mayor George Lunn polled 22 percent for Congress and blamed his loss on the presence of the Progressive Party's Edward Everett Hale, grandnephew of Revolutionary War martyr Nathan Hale.

In his second run for Congress on the Lower East Side, Meyer London narrowly lost to incumbent Henry Goldfogle with 31 percent of the vote; his loss perhaps also attributable to the presence of the Progressive candidate, Henry Moskowitz, whose wife Belle was later a famous aide to New York governor Al Smith. Another race for which the SP had high hopes was in Kansas, where George Brewer, an editor at the *Appeal to Reason*, received 23.6 percent of the vote in the third district. Labor leaders Fred Holt and Luther Langston were among the congressional candidates in Oklahoma, joined by Oscar Ameringer and Tad Cumbie for the two at-large districts. In Washington, future Communist Party leader

Alfred Wagenknecht polled over 13 percent for an at-large U.S. House seat, and in Minnesota, Thomas Latimer, future Farmer-Labor Party mayor of Minneapolis, polled 17.7 percent.⁷⁴ New Socialist mayors were elected in 1912 in Daly City, California; Gulfport, Florida; Winnfield, Louisiana; Haledon, New Jersey; and Adamston, West Virginia.⁷⁵ Notable gubernatorial races in 1912 included Butte Mayor Lewis Duncan with 16 percent in Montana; future NEC member Anna Maley with 12 percent in Washington; and Baptist minister, former Populist, and Confederate officer Reddin Andrews with 9 percent in Texas.⁷⁶

To focus narrowly on 1912 as the high-water mark of American Socialism can be highly misleading. It is true, of course, that the party would never again win as much as 6 percent of the national popular vote; indeed, several observers at the time, such as Wilson confidante George Harvey, believed the Socialists would have won an additional half-million votes had it not been for Roosevelt.⁷⁷ But two other milestones adding to such an impression of 1912 are more ambiguous. The first is the peak in dues-paying membership reached that year. From an average of 20,763 in 1904, to 41,751 in 1908, membership spiked to 84,716 in 1911 and peaked at 118,045 in 1912. But only in 1915 did the average fall below 90,000.⁷⁸

The second ambiguous milestone was the official high point of Socialist opposition to the administration of Samuel Gompers in the AFL. Max Hayes received 36 percent of the vote as the opposition candidate to Gompers at the 1912 AFL convention, with the support of the Machinists, Brewery Workers, Bakers, Mine Workers, Painters, Quarry Workers, and Tailors. Although Ira Kipnis argues that the failure to repeat this vote tally, timed with the decisive break with the IWW, illustrated the Socialist Party's abandonment of the labor movement, this was simply not the case. The position of Gompers only strengthened with the growth of the AFL's influence in the first Wilson administration, so the Socialists moved to other means of expanding their influence in the labor movement. Two important breakthroughs took place in 1912: the election of James Maurer as president of the State Federation in Pennsylvania and of Socialist William Johnston as president of the Machinists. Two years

later, Socialist Mine Workers leader John Walker was elected president of the Illinois State Federation.⁷⁹

In truth, the period from 1912 to U.S. entry into the First World War was one of growing Socialist influence in and solidarity with the AFL. By 1916, the Socialists enjoyed varying degrees of control among the Brewery Workers, Cigar Makers, Mine Workers, Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, Machinists, Painters, Potters, Quarry Workers, Railway Car-men, the Typographical Union, and the various garment unions; in the State Federations of Arkansas, Michigan, Montana, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming; and in the Central Labor Councils of Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Jersey City, Butte, Montana; Chattanooga, Tennessee; Jacksonville, Florida; Kalamazoo, Michigan; and Springfield, Missouri.⁸⁰ If there was any deep significance to the vote for Max Hayes in 1912, it was in confirming the status of the Socialists in the labor movement for the next twenty-five years—as “His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition” to Samuel Gompers and his successors.

Ira Kipnis makes the boldest attempt of any historian to mark the point of inexorable decline of American Socialism in 1912, largely by making it synonymous with the rout of the left wing at the 1912 convention and the recall of Bill Haywood from the National Executive Committee the following year. One can detect deliberateness in his decision to end his narrative in 1912: he thus never had to address why so much of his “left wing” supported U.S. entry into the First World War, why the villains of his narrative were the most reliable war opponents, and of course, the events that led to the founding of the Communist Party. Daniel Bell condemns Kipnis’s theses as “simply wishful thinking about history,”⁸¹ whereas James Weinstein writes that “none of Kipnis’ reasons for the rapid decline of the Socialist Party after 1912 stand up. This, however, should not be too surprising since the thesis of rapid decline is itself invalid.”⁸²

Few take Kipnis seriously today, yet so much of the historical literature on the Socialist Party remains scarred by his influence. The left wing is overrepresented in most histories of the Socialist heyday, with

less rigorous scholars taking all of Kipnis's basic assumptions for granted. Even Nick Salvatore, whose biography of Eugene Debs is a work of first-rate scholarship and far from romantic toward Bill Haywood and the IWW, argues that,

Had Debs publicly pressed a discussion of the relationship of democratic socialism and industrial unionism, the effect upon the party and the movement might have been immense. Taking control of the national party apparatus from those exclusively committed to a narrow, AFL-oriented policy, while striving to preserve a place for them within the party, could have greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the Socialist movement. Most important, such a course would have made possible friendlier relations with the IWW. This, in turn, might have checked the excesses of the IWW, especially concerning direct action, and have prevented a final split between the IWW and the Socialist Party.⁸³

This claim repeats the most fundamental error of Kipnis: reading back into the Socialist Party a romance for the “industrial unionism” of the 1930s and uncritically equating it with the IWW. To do so is to fundamentally misunderstand Debsian Socialism, which hoped for a progressive alternative to the industrial capitalism with which 1930s labor radicalism was fundamentally reconciled. It is especially ironic to make such an argument about Debs, whose American Railway Union far more nearly anticipated industrial unionism than did the IWW. As James Weinstein demonstrates in his authoritative study, the Socialist base in the AFL was always found among its more industrially organized unions, whose increasing acceptance by the AFL was a significant measure of Socialist strength.⁸⁴ Finally, Salvatore, like Kipnis, fails to explain how more closely identifying with the widely unpopular IWW was supposed to lead to greater Socialist success at the ballot box.

More complex is the case of Daniel Bell, who also identifies 1912 as the beginning of Socialist decline in *Marxian Socialism in the United States*. Whereas Kipnis attributes the decline in dues-paying

membership after 1912 entirely to the campaign against the left wing, Bell acknowledges other factors, such as the inevitable decline following the stupendous rise of municipal socialism in 1911 and the popular reform agenda of Woodrow Wilson.⁸⁵ But Bell overstates his case, much as the membership decline is itself overstated:

Wilson's appeal was more than to the intellectuals and the echoes which their voices could magnify. The light of "The New Freedom" had an incandescence which seemed to many to shine with a clearer light than that of the Socialists. In his speeches, Wilson denounced the growing centralized control of finance, the choking of opportunity by monopoly, the control over the government exercised by big business, and the blight of municipal corruption. Wilson himself pointed out that where many Socialists had been elected it was not a socialist but a protest vote that put them in office. It was Wilson's achievement to draw off the protest vote before it jelled into a solid bloc of dissent. The solid body of social legislation which he enacted in his first term drew that reform vote tightly to himself.⁸⁶

Yet as James Weinstein expertly documents, the story of the Socialist Party during Wilson's first term is precisely of how this *did not* happen—in other words, of how the space opened up for a party to oppose the triumph of progressivism. Bell reads back into the Wilson presidency the experience of the New Deal and the Second World War, ultimately attributing the Socialist Party's downfall to its opposition to U.S. entry into the First World War. It is especially telling that he chooses to focus on the war rather than on a more compelling example for his thesis, such as the pitfalls of support for the IWW in the period of "Arouse, Ye Slaves." To be sure, if any one year can be called the high-water mark of American Socialism, it is 1912. But Socialist strength would not erode for several years yet, and only under the impact of cataclysmic change in both the nation and the world.

6 Calm Before the Storm

(1913–1916)

Two events immediately following the 1912 election confirmed it as a major turning point for the Socialist Party. Just days after the election, Julius Wayland committed suicide, leaving behind a suicide note that read, “The struggle under the competitive system is not worth the effort. Let it pass.”¹ Known to have descended into depression in recent years, Wayland was increasingly alienated from the Socialist Party despite the continued popularity of the *Appeal to Reason*. Then, Italian IWW leaders Joseph Ettor and Arturo Giovannitti were acquitted in their murder trial, which was widely seen as a revenge prosecution following the Lawrence Strike. On December 1, Bill Haywood was the featured speaker at a rally celebrating their acquittal in East Harlem, where he made the following fateful remarks:

I believe in sabotage, that much misunderstood word. There is no revolutionary action that can be too strong if we can only throw the capitalistic class back. The jails all over the country are filled with many of the working class this very day. But they are not filled by political Socialists, but are filled by the men and women Socialists of the Industrial Workers of the World.²

The calls immediately began for Haywood to be formally expelled by the party, led by the party press in New York, particularly the German *New York Volkszeitung*.³ The *Volkszeitung* had been a major ally of William English Walling in his attempt to rally the left wing a few years

earlier, thus indicating that an especially large majority in the SP was turning against the IWW. Any doubt of how decisively the party had moved was put to rest by Eugene Debs, who denounced the IWW in early 1913 as “an anarchist organization in all except in name. This base and treacherous gang projects itself into a local disturbance with professions of loyalty to labor upon its lying lips and treason to labor in its venal heart.”⁴ By the end of February, Bill Haywood was recalled from the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party by a membership referendum vote of two to one.⁵

At the time of his ouster from the NEC, Haywood was deeply immersed in the ultimately unsuccessful attempt by the IWW to repeat the success of Lawrence among the silk workers of Paterson, New Jersey. Not long after the silk workers strike began, Haywood accepted an invitation to address the salon of Mabel Dodge, an heiress at the center of the social life of the newly bohemian Greenwich Village, whose guests often included anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman. When she suggested to Haywood that he arrange for the conditions in Paterson to be recreated in Madison Square Garden, her young lover, a Harvard-educated journalist named John Reed, immediately volunteered to direct the project. After three weeks on the frontlines leading the strikers in song, Reed repeated this performance as the highlight of his “Pageant of the Paterson Strike.”⁶

Reed was nominally associated with *The Masses*, the most prominent radical publication coming out of Greenwich Village edited by Floyd Dell and Max Eastman, convinced Marxists who remained aloof from the Socialist Party. With Haywood and the IWW, their circle formed a new left wing that was more marginal than ever. Yet Reed, with his Paterson pageant, first linked labor radicalism and bohemianism in ways that, for better or worse, would ultimately redefine the American left. The nexus of both political and cultural radicalism with wealth had migrated to bohemia from such quarters as the decidedly bourgeois X Club that produced the millionaire socialists. Indeed, the remaining millionaire socialists largely relocated to the salon of Mabel Dodge.

J. G. Phelps Stokes finalized his drift into the left wing when he signed an open letter opposing the recall of Bill Haywood, joining Louis Boudin, Frank Bohn, Walter Lippmann, and Max Eastman.⁷ Stokes was pulled in this direction not only by William English Walling, following the 1909 labor party controversy, but also by his wife, Rose Pastor Stokes, who increasingly identified with the Jewish trade unionists who supported the left wing in New York. Walling made his presence known in the new scene with *The New Review*, “a literary periodical devoted to explaining the theories, principles, history and methods of the International Socialist Movement.”⁸ It was Walling who most frankly expressed the attitude of the new left wing: he considered the Socialist Party to be hopeless, but was enthusiastic about a more generic “socialist” cause.⁹ This disposition laid the foundation for the American Communist movement, of which Walling would ironically be among the most vociferous early opponents.

The vastness of the divide between the main body of the Socialist Party and its ostensible left wing was vividly illustrated by the labor upheaval that deeply involved the SP leadership at the same time Haywood was finding new allies in Greenwich Village. A protracted mining war had gone on for nearly a year in Kanawha County, West Virginia, where the United Mine Workers had long been a presence, but sentiment for the IWW was growing under martial law. By the time Debs led a delegation to investigate the strike with Victor Berger in May 1913, martial law had been rescinded and there was hope for a just peace. Yet Debs was shocked to find the Socialists in West Virginia savaging him for urging arbitration and defending the United Mine Workers as one of the largest industrial unions in the AFL.¹⁰

Joining Debs and Berger on this fact-finding mission was Adolph Germer, a young Mine Workers organizer in the southern Illinois coal country and rising party star. An active campaigner against Haywood after becoming disillusioned with the IWW, Germer corresponded with his fellow mine workers organizer across the Atlantic, Keir Hardie, who took a special interest in the case of Haywood, insisting, “If he had any

sense of honor he would have cleared out long ago.”¹¹ In response, Germer assured Hardie,

His doom is sealed in the Socialist movement of this country and the sooner we get rid of him the better will we be off. Our movement is undergoing a change. The party is being cleansed of that turbulent element that has marred its growth in the past. It might result in a split, and if so, you will find that the constructive wing of our movement will build up an organization that will challenge the admiration of the world.¹²

Germer’s optimism seemed validated when the SP National Committee held its annual meeting in Chicago on May 11. A proposal to repeal the “anti-sabotage amendment” that led to the expulsion of Haywood was defeated by a vote of 46 to 16. The new NEC came entirely from the historic leadership faction: Victor Berger, Adolph Germer, James Maurer, George Goebel, and J. Stitt Wilson. Also elected was a new executive secretary, Walter Lanfersiek of Kentucky, while his predecessor John M. Work remained a steadfastly loyal and active Milwaukee Socialist right up to his death in 1961. The Young People’s Department, which soon evolved into the Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL), was created at this meeting, as was the ceremonial position of national chairman, with Oscar Ameringer easily elected to the honor over left-wing candidate Tom Clifford of Ohio. Though the left wing was clearly defeated, it was determined to carry on. As Clifford wrote for the *Cleveland Socialist* edited by Charles Ruthenberg, “The lines were clearly drawn between the revolutionists and the conservatives. While the former were in the minority, what they lacked in numbers was made up in aggressiveness.”¹³

In the Midwest, a particularly brutal pushback against municipal socialism led much of the party into a regrouped left wing. The most prominent and illustrative case occurred in Flint, Michigan. After the business community adopted a policy of maximal obstructionism toward the Socialist administration, Mayor John Menton was roundly defeated

for reelection in 1913 by an “Independent Citizens” ticket with the support of both major parties, led by industrialist Charles Mott, a founder of General Motors.¹⁴ A similar pattern played out in many Ohio communities. The perils of so emboldening the left wing were again demonstrated in Michigan, where several locals dominated by Finns loyal to the IWW, which was active among local copper miners, were in the process of being expelled.¹⁵ The leader of the Finnish Federation in Michigan, Frank Aaltonen, supported the SP mainstream and appealed to the NEC to authorize the foreign language federations to discipline their own branches, taking this power away from the state parties. Ironically, this increased power of the language federations ultimately proved a critical enabler of the split that would form the Communist Party. As David Shannon wryly notes, “Such are the fortunes of politics.”¹⁶

By the end of the first year of the Wilson administration, both the extent of his co-optation of the Socialist appeal with his reform agenda and the opening it left for an opposition to emerge were apparent. The AFL, cool to Wilson as a candidate, became enthusiastic about his legislative agenda, culminating in Samuel Gompers hailing the Clayton Act of 1915, which exempted trade unions from antitrust laws, as “labor’s magna carta.” Though there were no Socialists in the 63rd Congress, the Progressive Party boasted a caucus of twenty, nearly half of whom were elected as Republicans before switching allegiance.¹⁷ With both the future of the Progressive Party and Theodore Roosevelt’s relationship to it uncertain, there was hope that it might come under the influence of more radical Progressives of the LaFollette stripe. No one better exemplified this hope than Charles Lindbergh Sr. of Minnesota, who eventually became an important Socialist ally in the struggle to form a Farmer-Labor Party. Of the Federal Reserve Act, probably the most consequential legislation of the first Wilson administration, Lindbergh famously thundered,

This Act establishes the most gigantic trust on earth. When the President signs this bill, the invisible government by the monetary power

will be legalized. The people may not know it immediately, but the day of reckoning is only a few years removed. . . . Wall Streeters could not cheat us if you Senators and Representatives did not make a humbug of Congress. The caucus and the party bosses have again operated and prevented the people from getting the benefit of their own government.¹⁸

The Socialist Party heartily concurred, publishing a specially commissioned report on monetary policy shortly after the passage of the Federal Reserve Act concluding,

That the present monetary system of the United States has been created by a number of laws passed by its congress. That every one of these laws, from the very birth of the nation, have, almost without exception, been framed for the benefit of a few privileged individuals and against the interest of the nation. That these laws have put into the hands of a few individuals, who probably do not number one in one hundred thousand, a power that gradually has grown to such proportions that it now controls the entire nation.¹⁹

New intellectual heft was brought to this argument with the publication that year of Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States*. Beard was not a dues-paying member of the Socialist Party, but remained active with the Intercollegiate Socialist Society and was a fellow at the Rand School of Social Science, which in these years could boast as distinguished a faculty as ever graced an American institution of higher learning: Charles Beard in American history and government, W. E. B. DuBois in race problems, Morris Hillquit in labor law, and James T. Shotwell in sociology. Of the regular instructors at the Rand School in these years, the most notable by far was August Claessens, born in Switzerland and educated in the Catholic schools of New York before being enthralled by the Jewish Socialists as a student at Cooper Union. Like Oscar Ameringer, his fellow German Catholic, Claessens became one of the Socialist Party's most beloved wits. As early as 1915 he was sent on a national organizing tour with his new wife, which

they combined with their honeymoon to the Pan-American Exposition in San Francisco.²⁰

Major labor unrest continued unabated into the Wilson years, most infamously with the massacre of striking miners at Ludlow, Colorado, in April 1914. The militancy this engendered played out tragically for the Socialist Party in Montana. Though the Butte Miners Union had long been loyal to the Western Federation of Miners, the erroneous notion promoted by the capitalist press that Montana was a haven of the IWW attracted many of its itinerant followers to the state. When these migrants discovered otherwise, the IWW in Butte resorted to a campaign of terrorism, dynamiting the Miners Union Hall in July 1914. Frank Aaltonen, the Finnish Federation leader who faced down the regrouped left wing in Michigan, was on the scene in Butte, provoking an IWW loyalist named Erik Lantala to storm into Mayor Lewis Duncan's office demanding that Aaltonen be deported from town. Lantala threatened the mayor with a knife, and although Duncan had a gun, he was stabbed three times before two friendly city officials could rush into the room to save his life. Yet the governor of Montana blamed the Socialists for the violence, declaring martial law in Butte and convening a grand jury to remove Duncan from office. In a final insult, in June 1915 the Socialist printing plant in Butte was also dynamited.²¹

A far less violent but equally precarious situation prevailed between the Socialist mainstream and an increasingly militant "left" in New York. The much-heralded Protocol of Peace in the garment industry was increasingly untenable by 1914, owing to its no-strike pledge. Small outbreaks of strike activity had occurred periodically since its signing, with the radicals increasingly identifying with the IWW. These actions, which only exacerbated radicalization, would have occurred far less frequently if the employers could have been pressured by the threat of more serious strikes. By 1914 the left wing in the ILGWU was largely unified under the leadership of Isaac Hourwich, who had been primarily responsible for bringing the United Hebrew Trades into the Social Democracy of the 1890s. Hourwich, an officer of the Cloakmakers Joint Board, led a campaign for the union to become the administrator of the Protocol

of Peace, which was opposed by Meyer London on behalf of the ILGWU leadership.²²

Chaos within the ILGWU continued as late as 1916, with Cloakmakers Local One in particular often referred to as “Mexico” because its leadership was constantly subject to “wild revolutions.”²³ Yet it was the employers who overreached after initiating a series of lockouts in 1915. Morris Hillquit brilliantly exploited the employers’ misstep by framing the issue so that public opinion in New York swung overwhelmingly behind the union and its leadership.²⁴ With Louis Boudin and Henry Slobodin, Hourwich now served to link the increasingly restive rank-and-file Jewish radicals of the Lower East Side and the rising left-wing intelligentsia in Greenwich Village. In New York, there was thus continuity from the Socialist Party’s historic left wing to the founding of the Communist Party, but only in the Pacific Northwest was the regrouped left wing similarly consolidated. The IWW was influential among longshoremen in Seattle, where virtually all local party propaganda was dictated by the line of *International Socialist Review*.²⁵

The Socialists in the Old Southwest continued to defy the factional categories that prevailed in most other regions. In Oklahoma, the “foreign” leadership of Oscar Ameringer and Otto Branstetter gave way by 1913 to such “genuine Oklahomans” as Fred Holt of the United Mine Workers, who led a successful coal strike in 1913 with the vital support of local Socialist farmers and helped consolidate the party’s influence in the neighboring coal mining regions of Kansas and Arkansas.²⁶ Yet there remained a certain voice of the left wing in Oklahoma in Tad Cumbie, a Confederate veteran and defender of segregation who continued to identify with the IWW. Left-wing sentiment in the Old Southwest took its clearest organizational form with the founding of the Working Class Union in Van Buren, Arkansas, where IWW founder Thomas Hagerty had once been a parish priest.²⁷ A consistently high Socialist presidential vote and impressive organization made Oklahoma stand out historically, but by other measures of performance the Oklahoma SP was more modest. Six state legislators were elected in 1914, but only

one was reelected in 1916, making the collapse of the Oklahoma party in the face of repression during the First World War somewhat less spectacular than often perceived.

Oklahoma also boasted a more formidable organized anti-Socialist presence than many other party strongholds, led by such publishers as A. A. Veatch and C. E. Guthrie, whose son, named after Woodrow Wilson, would go on to fame as the folk singer Woody Guthrie.²⁸ State politics at this time was largely dominated by Senator Thomas Gore, a former Populist (and grandfather of the writer Gore Vidal) who made a more sincere appeal to Oklahoma radicalism than did former SP ally “Alfalfa Bill” Murray. A farm depression hit in the immediate aftermath of the passage of the Federal Reserve Act, which Murray championed as an ultimate solution to the plight of farmers stretching back to Populist days. This confluence of events allowed the Socialists to increase their vote totals in both Oklahoma and Texas in 1914, when the latter state also elected a progressive Democrat, Jim Ferguson, to the governor’s mansion.²⁹

The encampment circuit also continued to flourish in these years under the sponsorship of the *National Rip-Saw*, where Kate Richards O’Hare was joined at the helm by Oscar Ameringer after his departure from Oklahoma. After insisting he was in semi-retirement following the 1912 campaign, Eugene Debs made his new base of operations at the *Rip-Saw* and on the encampment circuit. Beginning a long physical decline, he was content to play the role of elder statesman and collect a salary as a national tour promoter.³⁰ In many ways representing the “center” against an increasingly polarized left and right in the Socialist Party, Debs, O’Hare, and Ameringer were nonetheless squarely with the party leadership in all practical matters—if anything, decidedly more so in philosophy than in policy. When left wing sympathizer Arthur Le Sueur began dominating People’s College in Fort Scott, Kansas, Caroline Lowe, second only to O’Hare among outstanding women leaders in the Old Southwest, urgently pleaded with Debs to help drive out the “syndicalists” who were taking it over.³¹

Old questions about the role of small farmers in the Socialist movement were now a distant memory as tenancy and absentee landlordism

were increasingly widespread, a state of affairs especially well suited to the vintage Populist appeal that remained in near-mint condition in the Socialist Party of Texas. The Socialists there could seamlessly wrap themselves in the mantle of the Lost Cause and also be the state that voted most overwhelmingly against the recall of Bill Haywood from the NEC, both attitudes largely dictated by Tom Hickey's ever-popular paper *Rebel*.³² In 1914, Hickey formed his own militant outfit along the same lines as the Working Class Union—the Land League—which took its name from a militant tenant organization in the ongoing Irish independence struggle and was also inspired by the revolution unfolding south of the border.³³ By 1915, the plight of tenants across Texas was so severe, with many landlords and bankers blatantly open in their usurious practices and vigilante actions, that a newly formed federal commission, the Commission on Industrial Relations, was compelled to intervene.³⁴

The Commission on Industrial Relations had been created by an act of Congress in 1912. It began its work in 1914 against a backdrop of particularly violent labor strife—not only in Ludlow and among the tenant farmers of the Southwest but also among the Mine Workers in Oklahoma and Arkansas, who took to heart the counsel of Victor Berger that a good Socialist “should besides doing much reading and still more thinking also have a good rifle and the necessary rounds of ammunition in his home”³⁵ and that “an armed people is always a free people.”³⁶ On May 21, 1914, the Commission met in New York to take testimony from leaders of the AFL, IWW, and Socialist Party on the general aims and program of each. After Morris Hillquit made his address for the SP, Samuel Gompers cornered him and boasted that he could conduct a more effective cross-examination of Hillquit than the commissioners. Hillquit eagerly accepted Gompers's challenge, and they won the Commission over to the proposition of being entertained by a debate.³⁷ Hillquit recalled:

Mr. Gompers assumed that I would criticize the methods or question the effectiveness of the AFL. Nothing, however, was farther from my purpose than to belittle the achievements of trade unionism or to

claim any superiority over it in behalf of the Socialist movement. What I endeavored to demonstrate was the direct opposite of the proposition, namely, that trade unionism and Socialism sprang from the same economic conditions and necessities, that their ultimate goals were consciously or unconsciously identical, that one complemented the other and that both would gain by mutual understanding and practical cooperation. My plan of procedure was to take up the main planks of the Socialist program, without labeling them as such and to establish Mr. Gompers' approval of them.³⁸

In the heart of their exchange, when Gompers believed he had cornered Hillquit by getting him to admit that the "cooperative commonwealth" was "a transitory goal" and that "there will be a movement towards a higher goal tomorrow," Hillquit immediately replied by eliciting from Gompers essential agreement that, in Hillquit's words, "the object of the organized workmen is to obtain complete social justice for themselves and for their wives and for their children."³⁹ Most Socialists felt confident that they won the debate and published the entire transcript as a pamphlet. As Hillquit put it, "Theoretically the close kinship of aims and interests between the Socialist and trade union movements was thus once more strikingly established."⁴⁰ Of Gompers, Hillquit recalled, "Our relations were a peculiar mixture of personal cordiality and political opposition. To the end of his days we remained 'friendly enemies.'⁴¹ But this spirit that typically prevailed between Gompers and his loyal opposition was about to founder upon the consequences of an assassination five thousand miles away.

As the initially localized fallout of the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand was rapidly giving way to a general European war in August 1914, the large American delegation to the International Socialist Congress was meeting at its rendezvous point in New York before setting sail for Vienna. Consisting of Oscar Ameringer, Victor Berger, Emil Seidel, Charles Edward Russell, George Lunn, Morris Hillquit, and Meyer London, the erstwhile delegates were at first determined to proceed to

Vienna, but over the course of two days were informed that the meeting had been relocated to Brussels and then called off entirely.⁴² The NEC met shortly thereafter to issue its statement: “The Socialist Party is opposed to this and all other wars, because war is a crude, savage, and unsatisfactory method of settling real or imaginary differences between nations, and destructive of the ideals of brotherhood and humanity to which the international Socialist movement is dedicated.” The statement went on to blame the war on the European ruling classes and pledged its support to the Socialist parties of Europe “in any measures they might think it necessary to undertake to advance the cause of peace and good will among men.”⁴³

Yet the European Socialist parties were supporting their governments in the war. The German Social Democrats voted almost unanimously for war credits. The French Socialists were largely brought in line after their vehemently antiwar leader Jean Jaures was assassinated just after the war began. The British party was divided, with the aging Keir Hardie and his heir apparent Ramsay MacDonald opposing the war, while John Spargo’s mentor H. M. Hyndman believed that Pax Britannia was the embryo of the future world socialist state. Even the revered Russian Marxist George Plekhanov was swept up in the crusade for Holy Russia that was the principal cause of the war. In the American party, a small coterie of propagandists for intervention on the side of the Allies emerged almost immediately. Perhaps the first to go public was William English Walling, as described by David Shannon:

Walling, taking a position upon some kind of Marxian Olympus from which he could view in proper perspective the actions of mortal men, saw the conflict of England and France with the Central Powers as one between capitalism on the one hand and a semifeudal, militaristic precapitalism on the other. Only a highly developed capitalism, he argued, could prepare the way for socialism. Therefore, it was in the interest of Socialists that German militaristic semifeudalism be crushed. He did not bother to explain how this precapitalistic Germany had developed the strongest socialist movement in the world. Later Walling

came down from his Olympus and saw the European conflict as a rather simple battle between freedom and democracy in the English-French camp and black reaction on the other side.⁴⁴

Walling appealed to many left-wingers who had long resented the German party for serving as the model of the SP leadership, and indeed, sympathy for the German party's majority colored much of the leadership response to the outbreak of the war, with what historian Theodore Draper calls a "benevolently understanding attitude" toward their German comrades.⁴⁵ Hillquit was more forceful than anyone in blocking any encroachments of war fever into the party:

The ghastly carnage in Europe has no redeeming features. It is not a war for democracy, culture, or progress. It is not a fight for sentiments or ideals. It is cold blooded butchery for advantages and power, and let us not forget it—advantages and power for the ruling classes of the warring nations.⁴⁶

As late as January 1915, the Socialist Party hoped that it could rally the sister parties of the neutral nations to be a force to help bring an end to the war, with Executive Secretary Walter Lanfersiek at one point even unilaterally appealing to the Socialist parties of the belligerents as well.⁴⁷ Well into the war's second year, the pro-war agitation within the SP was almost exclusively the preserve of the left wing. At the very start of the war, *International Socialist Review* had gone so far as to publish, with no editorial comment whatsoever, the article by future French premier Georges Clemenceau crowing over the abandonment of the British and French Socialists by the German Social Democrats.⁴⁸ Algie Simons began attacking Victor Berger and the entire Milwaukee machine as agents of the Kaiser, charging that they led the schoolchildren of Milwaukee in song to celebrate the sinking of the *Lusitania*.⁴⁹ But perhaps no one was quite as agitated as George Herron, the founder of the Rand School, insisting to Hillquit from his self-imposed exile in Florence,

No disinterested reader could possibly take from your articles in the *Metropolitan* anything else other than an apology for German Social Democracy. That is the motive that runs through them from the opening to the closing paragraph. If I did not know you at all, I should say that you were not only an apologist for German socialism, but a sympathizer with Germany in this struggle. Your neutrality or impartiality is a delusion, and, for that matter, so is the neutrality of everyone else. There are no neutrals in this war.⁵⁰

Despite the gathering war clouds, or perhaps to some extent because of them, the election of 1914 was a joyful one for the Socialist Party. By at least one major measurement, it was a high-water mark for the party, electing a grand total of 33 state legislators in 14 states. These included the election of six legislators in Oklahoma, the return of James Maurer to the Pennsylvania legislature, and the elections of George Brewer of the *Appeal to Reason* to the Kansas legislature and of the first legislator from New York City, Abraham Shiplacoff, from the Williamsburg and Brownsville sections of Brooklyn. More than two dozen new mayors had been elected in 1913 in towns as varied as Buena Vista, Colorado; Naugatuck, Connecticut; Minot, North Dakota; and Hamilton, Ohio, and in 1914 they were joined by mayors in Missoula, Montana and Lake Worth, Florida.⁵¹ In the first election after the passage of the Seventeenth Amendment providing for the direct election of senators, Baptist minister-turned-lawyer A. Grant Miller received 25.3 percent of the vote in Nevada, coming just 2,628 votes shy of being elected to the U.S. Senate, while Farmers Union leader Patrick Nagle, who courageously spoke out for the rights of his African American constituents, earned 21 percent of the vote in Oklahoma.⁵² The Sooner State also nearly elected a congressman, H. H. Stallard, editor of the *Farmers Union Advocate*, with 33 percent of the vote in the seventh district in the southwestern corner of the state.⁵³

Yet the Socialist Party would have a voice in the 64th Congress, when Meyer London was elected in the twelfth district of New York, with

49.5 percent of the vote against incumbent Democrat Henry Goldfogle and Republican-Progressive fusion candidate Benjamin Borowsky.⁵⁴ Outside the offices of the *Jewish Daily Forward* where the results were announced, cheering, dancing, singing, and speech making lasted until dawn, yet most of the New York press reported Goldfogle victorious the next morning for lack of reliable coverage in the immigrant wards.⁵⁵ London was buoyed by the endorsement of Samuel Gompers, who wrote in an open letter, “His devotion to the cause of Labor has rarely been equaled by any man, and never exceeded, in my opinion, by any attorney engaged to look after the interests of the workers.”⁵⁶ Another endorsement came from William Randolph Hearst in what proved to be his last dalliance with radicalism. In a sign of things to come, many left-wingers attacked the London campaign for distributing a flyer reprinting the relevant Hearst editorial.⁵⁷ At a victory celebration in Madison Square Garden the Sunday after the election, London declared, “I don’t expect to work wonders in Congress. I shall, however, say a new word and I shall accomplish one thing that is not in the platform of the Socialist Party. I hope that my person will represent an entirely different type of Jew from the kind that Congress has been accustomed to see.”⁵⁸

Among the radical ideas Meyer London advocated in Congress were anti-lynching laws, higher immigration quotas, and paid maternity leave. His most ambitious proposal, and the one most relevant to debates over social welfare policy in the early twenty-first century, was for a comprehensive system of social insurance. Primarily intended as a means of unemployment insurance but also potentially including health insurance and old age pensions, this plan did not propose a government-run system: “The administration is to be vested in mutual associations of employers and employees organized according to localities and trades, and managed jointly by employers and workers under the general supervision of a state social insurance commission.”⁵⁹ Remarkably resembling the Affordable Care Act of 2010, which has been criticized by some for not being publicly administered, London’s plan intended all

social insurance to be administered in this fashion, in keeping with the Socialist Party's immediate demand of abolishing "official charity" in favor of "compulsory insurance."

There were new municipal gains in 1915, with the election of six new mayors in Illinois and other victories as far flung as Eureka, California; Birmingham, Alabama; Clinton, Indiana; Brookneal, Virginia; and Williamsport, Pennsylvania.⁶⁰ Yet 1915 marked the beginning of the end of the golden age of Socialist mayors, best illustrated after the reelection of George Lunn. Lunn's relationship with the local party in Schenectady had long been tense due to his refusal to only appoint party members to his administration. SP state secretary Usher Solomon made a concerted attempt at mediation, and when the state executive committee recommended a compromise in January 1916 of removing only the one most objectionable appointment, Lunn refused and soon after resigned from the Socialist Party.⁶¹ He was reelected as a Democrat in 1919 and went on to briefly serve as lieutenant governor of New York. By this time, the noted radical dissenter from the Lunn administration, Walter Lippmann, had launched a new magazine with the Progressive Party's Herbert Croly, *The New Republic*. William English Walling now echoed their sentiments, preaching that Wilson "should be seen as in no way impeding the further advance towards Socialism, but as absolutely indispensable preparation for it."⁶²

The renewed hope represented by the election of Meyer London and scores of other victories across the nation coincided with the general collapse of the Progressive Party. The formidable Progressive bloc in Congress lost fourteen of twenty seats in 1914. But even at this stage what remained of the Progressives represented tragically missed opportunities of the Socialist Party in its formative years. In California, Governor Hiram Johnson was reelected with nearly 50 percent of the vote against candidates from both major parties and with a majority in the legislature, in what historian Darcy Richardson calls "one of the most stunning electoral feats in the annals of third-party politics."⁶³ Johnson's triumph represented what had once been a major opportunity for the Socialists

in California that they appeared well on their way to seizing before the disaster of the McNamara case in 1911.

A similar case with yet greater implications for the party's future was unfolding in North Dakota. In 1915, the state organizer for the Socialist Party, Arthur Townley, convinced a group of his comrades to form a new organization, the Non-Partisan League (NPL), which would run on a platform of the party's immediate demands with the goal being to take over one of the major parties. "I can take the name Non-Partisan and use it to sugarcoat the principles of socialism and every farmer in the state will swallow them and call for more," Townley boasted, and indeed, the following year the new organization succeeded in securing the Republican nomination for and then electing its candidate for governor, Lynn Frazier.⁶⁴ The NPL soon spread all over the Northwest and to Minnesota and Wisconsin to the east, winning over disillusioned radical Progressives such as Charles Lindbergh Sr. as well as disaffected Socialists, many of whom had been expelled from the increasingly left wing-dominated state parties of the Pacific Northwest. Walter Thomas Mills joined the NPL outright, and the attorney for the League was the Socialist mayor of Minot, North Dakota, Arthur Le Sueur.⁶⁵ On a good day, therefore, the relationship between the Socialists and the NPL could be analogous to that which the party had with the Union Labor Party of San Francisco a decade earlier.

If there was a single turning point that brought returned strength to the left wing, enabling it to wreak the havoc that ultimately led to the founding of the Communist Party, it was the National Committee meeting in Chicago in May 1915. The power of the National Executive Committee, never imposing to begin with, was significantly weakened, with terms reduced to one year instead of two. Victor Berger took a rare absence from the NEC, but all four of the other incumbents were reelected. The fifth slot went to a left-wing candidate, Arthur Le Sueur, who nevertheless remained an idiosyncratic left-winger and edged out by a large margin the candidacy of the left wing's increasingly titular leader, Charles Ruthenberg. Ludwig Katterfeld, a rising star of the left wing in

Washington State, was nonetheless optimistic in his report for *International Socialist Review*:

There can only be one meaning to this. The pendulum has begun to swing back. Although thousands of the radicals have been forced out of the party during the last three years, the party contains more clear-cut revolutionists than ever before. The names of the “mighty” are losing their power. . . . Back to the firing line, everyone, and take up with renewed courage the struggle to make this party of ours in fact and truth as well as in name the political expression of a class-conscious working class.⁶⁶

The mandate of the 1912 convention against the IWW was in no danger, but the regrouped left wing was now a force to be reckoned with. Two other events made 1915 a watershed in the formation of the nucleus of the future Communist Party USA. Louis Fraina, a son of dirt-poor Italian immigrants in New York, resigned from the Socialist Labor Party and joined the editorial board of *The New Review*, rapidly becoming its dominant influence with his theory of a vanguard “revolutionary union,” an essential stepping-stone from anarcho-syndicalism to Lenin’s theory of the vanguard party.⁶⁷ In Massachusetts, the left wing stalwarts of the Lettish Federation nearly took over the state party at its July convention. James Oneal, a founding member of the SP from Debs’s beloved Terre Haute, was dispatched to Boston to prevent this takeover, and following his success began to ascend in the party leadership. Subsequently, the first explicit left-wing organization, the Socialist Propaganda League, was formed by the Lettish Federation, but was led by their Irish allies with more American-sounding names.⁶⁸

In September 1915, left-wing socialists from ten European nations gathered in the village of Zimmerwald outside Berne, Switzerland, to begin contemplating the formation of a Third International after the collapse of the Second. The most consequential participants, of course, were V. I. Lenin and Grigori Zinoviev, representing the small Bolshevik Party that split from the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party in 1903.

Though all the participants were united on a general antiwar program, few were prepared to heed Lenin's call for a Third International. No Americans were present at Zimmerwald, but *International Socialist Review* was closely linked to its convener, the small left-splinter Dutch Social Democratic Party, whose leader Anton Pannekoek was the first to call for a Third International in response to the war. Like Louis Fraina, Pannekoek was a key transitional figure from anarcho-syndicalism to Leninism, before becoming disillusioned very shortly after the Russian Revolution and maintaining a small but devoted following for his doctrine of "Council Communism."

A Dutch émigré close to Pannekoek, S. J. Rutgers, came to America in 1915 to take charge of *ISR* on behalf of the growing international movement.⁶⁹ But it was Ludwig Lore, editor of the *New York Volkszeitung* and an inconsistent supporter of the left wing, who took the boldest steps to unite the American left wing with the Zimmerwald movement. At Lore's invitation, Lenin dispatched to the United States a comrade of aristocratic background, Alexandra Kollontai, who, in her extensive lecture tour agitating for a Third International, brought the Bolshevik program to the American left wing for the first time. It was also on Lore's initiative that a new Russian-language newspaper was established in New York under Bolshevik guidance. This new paper of the Russian language federation, *Novy Mir*, was edited by a twenty-seven-year-old émigré who arrived shortly after Kollontai named Nikolai Bukharin.⁷⁰

The Socialist Party leadership, however, did not conform to the image of collusion with the war party held by the incipient Third International. In Congress, Meyer London proposed a program he hoped President Wilson would adopt in convening neutral nations to promote peace negotiations:

- 1) Evacuation of invaded territory
- 2) Liberation of oppressed nationalities
- 3) Future allegiance or independence of Alsace-Lorraine, Poland, and Finland determined by plebiscite
- 4) Removal of political

disabilities of the Jews 5) Freedom of the seas 6) Gradual concerted disarmament 7) Establishment of a court of international arbitration.⁷¹

In December 1915 Wilson indicated his willingness to receive a Socialist Party delegation to discuss the proposal, with Morris Hillquit and James Maurer appointed by the NEC to accompany Meyer London. Eugene Debs was also invited to join the delegation, but wrote Executive Secretary Walter Lanfersiek that,

I am in perfect agreement with the Meyer London peace resolution and also with the action of the National Executive Committee in proposing nationwide agitation in favor of said resolution, but I can see no possible good in us, as Socialists, calling on a capitalist President and asking him to do a thing he is committed not to do and refrain from doing another thing which he has solemnly pledged himself and his administration to do.⁷²

London, Hillquit, and Maurer were received at the White House on January 25, 1916. Hillquit, who more than a decade later made plain in his memoirs how the First World War and its legacy haunted him the rest of his days, recalled the meeting thus:

The President received us in the White House at the appointed hour . . . after some general discussion of the international situation and the terms of our peace program, informed us that he had had a similar plan under consideration . . . he hinted at the possibility of a direct offer of mediation by the government of the United States and assured us that he would continue to study the question with deep and serious interest . . . as we got up, ready to take our leave, James Maurer, looking at the President with steady and appraising eyes, delivered himself with slow and pondering tones of the following sentiment: “Your promises sound good, Mr. President, but the trouble with you is that you are surrounded by capitalist and militarist interests who want the war to continue, and I fear you will succumb to their influence.”

The Pennsylvania Dutch bluntness of my diplomatic colleague evoked an amused smile on the pale and intellectual face of Woodrow Wilson. “If truth be known” he said, “I am more often accused of being influenced by radical and pacifist elements than by the capitalist or militarist interests.” This ended our interview. I have often thought of it, wondering whether subsequent events did not bear out the apprehension of James Maurer rather than the reassurance of Woodrow Wilson.⁷³

Maurer returned to call on the president alone and of his own accord the following month, with a secretary allowing him five minutes and hoping to rush him out of the room as soon as he entered. But Wilson, quite likely believing that this would be his Socialist opponent in the fall campaign, excused the secretary and assured Maurer that he wanted “to hear more of what you think about preparedness and what the folks at home around the fireside say about it.” Maurer responded bluntly, telling him “that the idea of preparing for peace by creating a huge military establishment could fool no one capable of distinguishing fact from fiction,” to which Wilson merely responded with the same rehearsed platitudes.⁷⁴

The “preparedness” program began as a response to the deaths of several Americans aboard the British ocean liner *Lusitania*, which was heavily stocked with munitions, when it was sunk in May 1915. The unprecedented level of militarization of American life that preparedness engendered indicated that the coming U.S. intervention in the European war, desperately sought by most of the nation’s financial powers, was intended as a revolution from above that would once and for all bring the restive American working class to heel; James Weinstein would call it “war as fulfillment” in the title of the concluding chapter of his study of the Progressive Era. William Feigenbaum, the outspoken youthful editor at the *New York Call*, anticipated the tone being set for the American century to come when he wrote, “‘Security,’ ‘preparedness,’ ‘national defense’—these are the sinister words that are on the lips of everyone. It is no longer called militarism. It is no longer called war. It is ‘national defense.’”⁷⁵

Most ominous for the Socialist movement, however, was the consummation taking place between the labor movement and American militarism. In his autobiography, Samuel Gompers insisted that he resigned from numerous peace societies and began to work toward intervention on the side of the Allies immediately after the war broke out in 1914. But this is directly contradicted by the record. The AFL convention strongly condemned the war at its 1914 convention and as late as the spring of 1916 called for peace terms virtually identical to the Meyer London resolution, repeating Gompers's warning during the Spanish-American War of "large standing armies as a threat to the existence of civil liberty."⁷⁶ But Gompers and the AFL leadership quickly changed their tunes in August 1916 when promised labor representation in the economic planning regime being prepared for the war, under pressure from the National Civic Federation, which had been closely aligned with Wilson since 1912.⁷⁷ As a co-founder of *The New Republic*, among the loudest voices calling for entering the war, Walter Lippmann spoke for many intellectuals who had been in the orbit of the SP when he declared that Wilson had placed the country "at the threshold of a collectivism which is greater than any as yet planned by the Socialist Party."⁷⁸

By the end of 1915, the Socialist Party was devoting its energies almost exclusively to keeping America out of war. Even left-wingers who leaned toward intervention could not bring themselves to endorse preparedness. The exception was a right-winger, Charles Edward Russell, who enthusiastically endorsed both preparedness and the prevailing anti-German sentiment. Russell was scorned and ostracized throughout the SP for his position, including somewhat dramatically by Meyer London. Of the promising Socialist career now dashed, Eugene Debs mused, "There is no instance in American politics where a man in order to be true to his conscience deliberately forfeited the nomination for the Presidency of the United States. Such men, however mistaken, are all too rare in the world."⁷⁹ Several Socialists, including Morris Hillquit and Rose Pastor Stokes, were invited by Henry Ford to accompany him on his "peace ship" to Stockholm.⁸⁰ The party was represented on the quixotic mission

by Lola Maverick Lloyd, wife of Chicago “millionaire socialist” William Bross Lloyd and a founder of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.⁸¹

Another Socialist whose star rose on the strength of the antiwar imperative was Scott Nearing, a product of the Pennsylvania coal aristocracy who had been fired as an economics professor at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School for his affiliation with the Socialist Party. In a 1916 pamphlet for the *National Rip-Saw*, Nearing wrote,

The conflict between militarism and democracy is a conflict to the death. Neither can abide the presence of the other. If militarism is to stay, democracy must go. The man who urges the United States to prepare for war is false to all that is highest and finest in American life. Only he who desires to prepare for peace is a true American.⁸²

The most consequential figure to get out in front of the overwhelming antiwar feeling in the Socialist Party was Allan Louis Benson. Born in 1871 in Plainfield, Michigan, he joined the party as an editor at the *Detroit Times* when the SP was a magnet for the muckrakers.⁸³ An increasingly prominent intellectual in the Socialist press, in 1912 he published *The Usurped Power of The Courts*, then, following the great impact of Charles Beard’s *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, wrote a more polemical work, *Our Dishonest Constitution*, in 1914, that tied Beard’s critique directly to the constitutional platform of the Socialist Party. Updating the narrative on the Constitution to include an indictment of contemporary capitalism, the book included many of Benson’s popular pamphlets such as “War and the Rothschilds,” “Henry Ford’s Bombshell,” and “Repudiate All War Debts.”⁸⁴ Benson achieved his greatest popularity campaigning for a national referendum to decide the question of U.S. entry into the war, adding that in the event of war, those who voted in favor would be the first drafted to fight.

Morris Hillquit denounced Benson’s proposal as “perfectly wild”—all the more reason, perhaps, that Benson quickly became the most sought-after antiwar editorialist in the Socialist press with a home base at the

Appeal to Reason, which even published a book to promote the war referendum campaign.⁸⁵ Even Eugene Debs was compelled to upbraid Benson for his apparent eagerness to provoke controversy within the party.⁸⁶ Yet, without explicitly endorsing Benson's proposal, the platform statement ultimately adopted by the Socialist Party in 1916 on the power to declare war undeniably reflected its spirit:

No one man, however exalted in official station, should have the power to decide the question of peace or war for a nation of a hundred millions. To give one man such power is neither democratic nor safe. Yet the President exercises such power when he determines what shall be the nation's foreign policies and what shall be the nature and tone of its diplomatic intercourse with other nations. We, therefore, demand that the power to fix foreign policies and conduct diplomatic negotiations shall be lodged in Congress and shall be exercised publicly, the people reserving the right to order Congress, at any time, to change its foreign policy.⁸⁷

Meeting in January 1916, the NEC initiated a party referendum to dispense with the national convention, largely to spare the expense, and to instead proceed with the nomination of a presidential ticket by referendum. Debs was determined to keep his hat out of the ring, despite an impassioned plea from Ludwig Lore "that in this great emergency, it is your duty to the movement you served so well for so many years, to bear once more the brunt of the burden, and let your name go before the country as the rallying cry for all international revolutionists of this country."⁸⁸ J. Mahlon Barnes floated a trial balloon for Thomas Van Lear, a Machinists Union leader who instead chose to bring the Milwaukee model to his native Minneapolis in 1916.⁸⁹ The ballot that was ultimately submitted to the membership listed James Maurer, Allan Benson, and Arthur Le Sueur as candidates for president, with Kate Richards O'Hare and George Kirkpatrick, an economist affiliated with both the Rand School and Ripon College in Wisconsin, as choices for the vice presidential nomination.

Maurer was the unmistakable choice of the leadership and would have likely prevailed in a convention.⁹⁰ But the popularity of Benson's antiwar writings in the Socialist heartland put him over the top, with 16,639 votes to Maurer's 12,264, and 3,495 for Le Sueur, who ran openly as the candidate of the left wing.⁹¹ George Kirkpatrick beat the more widely known and loved O'Hare for the second spot by a lopsided margin of 20,607 to 11,388; indicating that the usually progressively inclined Socialists were not ready to nominate a woman, even one of their most widely admired figures, for national office.⁹² The indication that the left wing could only command roughly 10 percent of the party membership was confirmed in the parallel balloting for a new executive secretary, with the candidate of the left, Ludwig Katterfeld, receiving a nearly identical tally to Le Sueur. Walter Lanfersiek came in ahead of Katterfeld, but was edged out by the top two vote-getters, Carl Thompson and Adolph Germer. Though Thompson bested Germer in the first round, Germer was elected decisively in a second ballot.⁹³

A resident of Yonkers, New York, Benson formally accepted the Socialist nomination on March 19 at the Bronx Lyceum in what was billed as "the first shot in the war on war":

If ever there was a need of devotion to a just cause, it is now. If ever there was a time when our philosophy should be convincing it is now. Yesterday we were dismissed as unpleasant theorists, today Europe is writing in letters of fire and blood athwart her midnight skies "This war was caused by the greed and hatreds engendered by the capitalist system." . . . The United States is in no danger of being attacked. If the Socialists could utter only one word during the campaign, it should be "peace."⁹⁴

Benson's plan to make the war question the paramount issue of his campaign was complicated, however, when Woodrow Wilson began to campaign for reelection on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Socialists who went so far as to support Wilson on antiwar grounds included Gustavus Myers, co-editor with Ludwig Lore of the *New York Volkszeitung*,

and Algie Simons, who still framed his attacks on the Socialist Party's "pro-German" slant in the language of left-wing attacks on the leadership.⁹⁵ Also joining them was John Reed, the increasingly vocal editor at *The Masses* but still not a member of the party, nonetheless taking it upon himself to write to the SP national office:

People like, Hillquit, Berger, Spargo, et al, to me are unbelievable smug fakers, and London's conduct in Congress was a joke. . . . So I am going to vote for Wilson, because the only real principles he has (few enough) are on our side. . . . I'm not a believer in anything lasting coming out of purely political action, but I don't want this country to become a hell for the next four years.⁹⁶

Even Oscar Ameringer had some sympathy for those who felt a need to vote for the perceived lesser evil, writing almost twenty-five years later in his memoirs, "I didn't blame them for voting for Wilson. Neither they nor the American people at large wanted this country mixed up in the slaughterfest 3,000 miles across the pond. After all, the cooperative commonwealth was still a few years off, while war was already pounding at the gates."⁹⁷ But the most forthright attack on the duplicity of Wilson's campaign posture came from the aging Tom Watson, bitterly disillusioned by his alignment with the Progressives in the past decade and despite an initial hysterical bent toward the Allies: "He kept us out war? What war? Where did we have a chance to get into one? What did he do to keep us 'out?' We had no cause to go in." Watson further denounced, "The insane notion that belligerence of mind, belligerence of preparation, and belligerence of attitude and conduct lead to peace."⁹⁸

The impression that the Republican Party was the war party in 1916 had less to do with the actual nominee, Charles Evans Hughes, than with the odd behavior of Theodore Roosevelt, that heralded the demise of his Progressive Party. The leading agitator for U.S. entry into the war by 1915 and incensed by Wilson's perceived reluctance to enter the war, Roosevelt hoped to have either himself or General Leonard Wood, the architect of preparedness, nominated by both the Republicans and

Progressives on a militarist platform. He maneuvered the Progressives to hold their convention in Chicago the same week as the Republican convention; however, once it was clear that Hughes would be nominated, Roosevelt, with what may have in part been a twisted sense of humor, sent a stream of messages to the Progressive convention urging it to nominate a pro-war arch-conservative such as Massachusetts senator Henry Cabot Lodge. The confused and outraged delegates watched their party literally implode before their eyes.⁹⁹

A large section of the Progressive base was opposed to entering the war, making their continuing idolization of Roosevelt all the more peculiar. (Roosevelt even denounced the woman who seconded his nomination in 1912, Jane Addams, for leading a peace mission to Europe early in the war.¹⁰⁰) Nor did these Progressives lack for alternative candidates, from California's indomitable Hiram Johnson to Indiana senator Albert Beveridge who, like William Randolph Hearst, was an arch-imperialist during the Spanish-American War but was now deeply opposed to an American war against Germany. But the convention was carefully managed by Roosevelt loyalists who shared his pro-war fervor; namely William Allen White, who two decades earlier had been the most outspoken newspaper editor opposing William Jennings Bryan, and Harold Ickes, who went on to be a legacy of the New Nationalism in the cabinet of Franklin Roosevelt. Roosevelt campaigned vigorously across the country for the Republican ticket and for the United States to enter the war, but could barely conceal his contempt for the less than hawkish nominee, angrily referring to the conspicuously bearded Hughes as "a whiskered Wilson."¹⁰¹ Other disillusioned Progressives such as Amos Pinchot, George L. Record, and J. A. H. Hopkins would soon reach out to the Socialists in their efforts to build anew.

For his part, Allan Benson, who boasted membership in the New York City Liberal Club and the Corinthian Yacht Club, did most of his campaigning through writing rather than on the stump. The cash-strapped SP spent less than \$12,000 on the 1916 presidential campaign, compared to \$72,000 in 1912, and received only five individual contributions over

\$100.¹⁰² Still, Benson attracted a respectable crowd to Madison Square Garden in September and appeared in most major cities.¹⁰³ He was especially outspoken about the scarcely discussed conscription clause in the military reorganization legislation passed that fall, specifically the apparent “gentlemen’s agreement” between Wilson and Hughes not to discuss it. But the more consequential races for the Socialists in 1916 would be waged locally, with the National Executive Committee predicting that the Socialists could potentially elect as many as ten congressmen.¹⁰⁴

The most exciting local campaign occurred in Minneapolis, where Machinists Union leader Thomas Van Lear was running his third mayoral campaign in six years. Minneapolis had been the site of aggressive class war since a young Van Lear swaggered into town demanding an industry-wide recognition of the Machinists in 1901 and prompting aggressive counteraction by the business community. A fragile *détente* between capital and labor had prevailed for most of the past fifteen years, with periodic unsuccessful strikes by the Machinists, until two events in 1916: the renewal of charters of the widely resented public utilities, some of them claiming perpetual charters, and the brutal suppression of a Teamsters strike that rallied the entire labor movement of Minneapolis around the Socialists. Van Lear had patiently built up a trade-union-based machine on the Milwaukee model that now swept him and four councilmen to victory.¹⁰⁵ The continuing salience of municipal ownership questions also propelled a Socialist comeback in Milwaukee. Daniel Hoan, the city attorney first elected in 1910 and reelected in 1914, finally led the Milwaukee Socialists to capture 51 percent of the citywide vote, running for mayor more as the opponent of the powerful railway and light company than as a Socialist.¹⁰⁶

Of congressional races, most memorable by far was the one waged by Eugene Debs, who had been somewhat reluctantly drafted to stand in his home district. Touring Indiana’s fifth district in a Model-T, he was accompanied by his former colleague at the *Appeal to Reason*, George Brewer, and by such visitors from abroad as Alexandra Kollontai and Irish Republican leader James Larkin.¹⁰⁷ In one of his campaign speeches, Debs bluntly declared,

The issue is socialism against capitalism, imperialism, and militarism. The hordes of hell are all against us, but the hosts of justice are on our side. We can win and must. Comrades, I am counting on you, each of you, as if our very lives were at stake—and they are.¹⁰⁸

Both major parties poured considerable resources into the district, fearing the impact of having the Socialist Party's best-known spokesman in the House of Representatives. But perhaps no visitor to Debs's district caused a greater headache for the Socialists than Arthur Reimer, the presidential candidate of the Socialist Labor Party. Early in 1916, the NEC voted to open unity negotiations with the SLP, two years after the death of Daniel De Leon. But any possibility of unity was destroyed when Reimer gave a speech in Terre Haute attacking Debs. Adolph Germer blasted this speech in a letter to SLP leader Arnold Petersen: "It matters not whether it was his intention to injure the candidacy of Comrade Debs. The fact remains that the capitalists use the slanders of a so-called Socialist because they suit their purpose."¹⁰⁹ After Petersen responded by throwing the accusations of slander and collusion with the capitalists back at the SP, Germer replied, "It is strange indeed that your party should seek unity with an alleged enemy."¹¹⁰

The 1916 election proved to be the closest since the 1880s, with Woodrow Wilson narrowly defeating Charles Hughes. Though Allan Benson and George Kirkpatrick received a generally disappointing 590,524 votes, about 3.2 percent of the national total, it was the only time in the history of the Socialist Party that it polled the margin of victory in a presidential election. Oklahoma was the only state with a vote to compare to 1912, at over 15 percent, with Nevada a distant second at just over 9 percent. The nomination of Benson was largely forgotten by history mostly because it proved a shameful episode for the Socialist Party: the man who was swept from obscurity to the presidential nomination on the force of his antiwar agitation a few short months later resigned from the party as a supporter of the war. After the war, Benson achieved some distinction as a popular biographer before he died in 1940. The more qualified James Maurer, with his distinction in the labor movement and joined by the

evangelistic Kate Richards O'Hare, could have likely matched if not exceeded the Socialist vote of 1912.

Meyer London won a hard fought battle for reelection with 47 percent of the vote, once again the lone Socialist in Congress. Eugene Debs received 17 percent as a distant second to incumbent Democrat Ralph W. Moss while narrowly edging out the Republican. Back in New York, Morris Hillquit won nearly 33 percent in the East Harlem-based twentieth district, *New York Call* editor William Feigenbaum over 18 percent in the tenth district in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, and Hilda Claessens, wife of August Claessens, over 15 percent in the thirteenth district bordering that of Meyer London to the west. In Oklahoma, Allen Adams got over 20 percent in the fourth district and H. H. Stallard over 24 percent in the seventh. In Minnesota, J. J. Anderson won over 26 percent in the eighth district, encompassing Duluth and the Iron Range and largely populated by radical Finns, and perennial candidate Thomas Latimer received nearly 17 percent in Minneapolis.

In Nevada, A. Grant Miller once again came devastatingly close to being elected to the U.S. Senate with just under 29 percent of the vote. Other leading SP personalities who ran for the Senate in 1916 included Kate Richards O'Hare in Missouri, Tom Hickey in Texas, Charles Ruthenberg in Ohio, future state legislator Richard Elsner in Wisconsin, and Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers leader Joseph Cannon in New York. Notable gubernatorial candidates included Algernon Lee in New York and Seymour Stedman in Illinois.¹¹¹ The party suffered a steep net loss of twelve state legislators, including wipeouts in California, Illinois, Montana, and Nevada.¹¹² But there were several sweet municipal victories in addition to those in Milwaukee and Minneapolis. William Brueckmann returned as mayor of Haledon, New Jersey, after a fusion ticket turned him out for assisting the ill-fated Paterson Strike.¹¹³ Scottish-born granite cutter Robert Gordon was elected mayor of Barre, Vermont, along with a legislator in the Green Mountain State.

In *The Nation*, Oswald Garrison Villard recognized the particular circumstances of the disappointing Socialist vote in 1916 and cautioned that "the future of the Socialist Party should not be predicated from its

showing at the last election.”¹¹⁴ In the coming revolutionary experience through which the United States became a world power, anchoring this status in a domestic politics dictated by militarism, the Socialist Party faced enormous promise and peril in meeting its destiny as the leading opposition movement. In a speech at the close of the 1916 campaign, Morris Hillquit issued a call to arms, anticipating the imminent fundamental transformation of America:

In this campaign the country is infested with a swarm of professional patriots, including men who are aspiring to the highest office in the land, men who have occupied the most exalted positions in the gift of the nation and other great national luminaries. They travel throughout the country prating about “true Americanism,” they wave the American flag with rivaling frenzy, they flatter our national vanity, they appeal to our national prejudices and pride. They stir up our basest instincts, they foment racial antagonism at home and war with foreign nations. Their agitation is harmful to the people, it is grossly unpatriotic. The Socialists alone stand for true and enlightened patriotism. . . . I refer to the sublimest instrument ever produced by American genius, the Declaration of Independence. Life, Liberty, and Happiness for all human beings, that is the great goal of organized labor and of the Socialist movement. For the ruling classes of our country, the Tories of the 20th century, the Declaration of Independence has become an antiquated, meaningless scrap of paper. To them government exists not to ensure Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness, but to protect Property, Authority, and the Pursuit of Profits. The government and system maintained by American capitalism have become destructive of the lives, liberties, and happiness of the workers and the great masses of the people, and with the founders of this republic we hold that it is the right and duty of the people to alter or abolish this system, and to institute a new government.¹¹⁵

7 The Terror

(1917–1918)

In July 1914, shortly after he issued the ultimatum that called the Guns of August to their places, the foreign minister of the Habsburg Empire, Leopold Berchtold, had lunch at Vienna's Café Central with Victor Adler, the leader of the Austrian Social Democrats. Adler, who supported king and country throughout the war despite misgivings, pleaded for Berchtold to understand the gravity of what he had done. A general European war would result from any action by the empire against Serbia, Adler warned, and would only end with the fall of every royal house in Europe and a wave of bloody revolutions. "And who will lead these revolutions?" Berchtold asked incredulously as he peered across the café in search of a perfect foil. "I suppose it will be Bronstein over there, arguing with his friends as usual."

On January 13, 1917, Lev Davidovich Bronstein arrived in the port of New York. A large crowd came to greet the acknowledged author of the Zimmerwald manifesto, known to them by the name he stole from the warden of a Siberian prison—Leon Trotsky. The timing of Trotsky's arrival was fortuitous for his erstwhile comrades in the new world; the following evening, several leaders of the left wing of the Socialist Party were meeting at the home of Ludwig Lore on the Brooklyn waterfront and could not ask for a more distinguished guest to update them on events in Europe. Four members of what would be Russia's first ruling Bolshevik Central Committee were present: Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, Alexandra Kollontai, and V. Volodarsky. The leaders of the American left wing at this meeting were Ludwig Lore, Louis Boudin, Louis Fraina;

John D. Williams, representing the Boston-based Socialist Propaganda League; and S. J. Rutgers, the Dutch émigré who first connected *International Socialist Review* to the Zimmerwaldians in Europe.¹

Lore had invited them “to discuss a program of action for Socialists of the Left, for the purpose of organizing the radical forces in the American Socialist movement.” Despite having largely regrouped since their debacle at the 1912 SP convention, the American left-wingers knew how marginal they remained in the party and were pessimistic about the future. But the Russians quickly dominated the discussion with their intense theoretical discourses and in a matter of hours had the credulous Americans ready to follow them into the Promised Land. Bukharin, with youthful bravado encouraged by his mentor Lenin, urged that the left wing immediately bolt from the SP. But Trotsky urged them to remain in the party for the time being and launch a publication around which to organize. As Theodore Draper, author of the magisterial *The Roots of American Communism* acidly comments, “24 hours after Trotsky’s arrival, he and Bukharin were able to carry on their European feud in terms of an American movement almost wholly foreign to both of them”—and that they expected, only sixty days before the abdication of the Tsar, would be their base of operations for a long time to come.²

Trotsky’s position won out. As it happened, John Williams came from Boston with the intention of soliciting money for the paper just launched by the Socialist Propaganda League, *The Internationalist*. Louis Fraina, after the demise of *The New Review* the previous summer, eagerly took the reins of this paper, moving it to New York and renaming it *The New Internationalist*. By the spring, the bimonthly originally envisioned by Trotsky, *Class Struggle*, was being published under the editorship of Fraina, Lore, and Boudin.³ In short, the meeting in Lore’s apartment on January 14 set in motion the plot to split the Socialist Party and form what would become the Communist Party USA. Yet only Fraina had truly been won over to the Bolshevik program, though he still articulated it in syndicalist phraseology.⁴

Lore and Boudin remained orthodox Marxists of the vintage pre-1912 *ISR* type, and ironically, it was Trotsky’s independence from the

Bolsheviks that made him such an attractive leader for them. If their resentment of the SP leadership and its imitation of German Social Democracy, typified by Hillquit, could not be entirely explained in rational terms, Trotsky was truly pathological. As he contemptuously wrote in his memoirs,

During those months America was getting ready for war. As ever, the greatest help came from the pacifists. Their vulgar speeches about the advantages of peace as opposed to war invariably ended in a promise to support war if it became “necessary.” This was the spirit of the Bryan campaign. The Socialists sang in tune with the pacifists. . . . Men like Hillquit welcomed the chance to play the socialist American “uncle” who would appear in Europe at the crucial moment and make peace between the warring factions of the Second International. . . . In the United States there is a large class of successful and semi-successful doctors, lawyers, dentists, engineers, and the like who divide their precious hours of rest between concerts by European celebrities and the American Socialist Party. . . . Properly speaking, they are simply variants of “Babbitt,” who supplements his commercial activities with dull Sunday meditations on the future of humanity. These people live in small national clans, in which the solidarity of ideas usually serves as a screen for business connections. . . . They tolerate all ideas, provided they do not undermine their traditional authority, and do not threaten—God forbid I—their personal comforts. A Babbitt of Babbitts is Hillquit, the ideal Socialist leader for successful dentists. My first contact with these men was enough to call forth their candid hatred of me. My feelings toward them, though probably less intense, were likewise not especially sympathetic. We belonged to different worlds. To me they seemed the rottenest part of that world with which I was and still am at war.⁵

Trotsky’s assignment of proportions of “candid hatred” was a case of bald projection: what he so detested about the American Socialists was their very American-ness. Moreover, many have observed in this

connection the paradox of Trotsky's Jewish identity, which he detested while presenting himself as a fanatical opponent of anti-Semitism. But the core of Trotsky's pathology was his militant internationalism, with its violent aversion to anything that smacked of the "social patriotism" of the parties of the Second International. For his comrades at Zimmerwald, their hatred of right-wing, especially German, Social Democracy was political and not personal. But Trotsky fancied himself no less a cultural revolutionary and avant-gardist, taking personal offense at the provincial fashions and manners of right-wing Socialists to a degree other left-wingers did not. Nothing could have pushed his buttons more than the happy cohabitation of German and American social democratic provincialism in the new world. And nothing could have propelled him into more of a blind rage than to be confronted with the fact that these social democrats were more principled opponents of participation in the war than any cosmopolitan left in what he wistfully called "that old *canaille* Europe."

Louis Waldman, one of the most promising young talents in the "small national clan" of the Lower East Side, recalled Trotsky's time in New York a generation later:

Back in 1917 the Café Monopole, at the corner of Second Avenue and Ninth Street in downtown New York, was the hub of the social life of the East Side intelligentsia. Flowing ties, odd costumes, variegated beards and silver-topped walking sticks, set the habitués of this hangout apart from their more conservatively attired fellows. . . . Into this veritable League of Nations one evening in January, 1917 came one whom we later knew to be Leon Trotsky. . . . I remember him as simply another café seer and pundit. However, as time went on, he collected a small coterie of disciples, all of them Russian, a handful of revolutionary asteroids revolving around a star of the first magnitude. Occasionally I would stand a few minutes listening to the Russian political émigré. His favorite theme at that time was denunciation of "the abhorrent, the almost depraved social-patriots," as he invariably referred to the Social Democrats. Of all the species of political

fauna, none was lower, none more contemptible, none more dangerous to the interests of Trotsky's working class. . . . Shaking his finger at me one evening, he declaimed: "Yes, the victorious proletariat will know how to deal with you social-patriots."⁶

The depths of Trotsky's rage became clear with the program he led the left wing in arguing for at the Manhattan membership meeting of the Socialist Party on March 4, one month after the United States severed diplomatic relations with Germany and one month before formally declaring war. Against Morris Hillquit's majority report declaring "relentless opposition to war is and must always remain a cardinal feature of Socialist propaganda," Trotsky and Fraina jointly submitted a minority report calling for a general strike and hinting at armed insurrection.⁷ They may have been encouraged by Eugene Debs, who suggested the possibility of a general strike against the war in a recent appearance at Cooper Union.⁸ But Debs, at the very least, knew far better than they how little appeal this would have to American workers.

Reflecting the deep hostility on the Lower East Side to the United States entering Russia's war, the Trotsky-Fraina report was defeated by a narrow vote of 101 to 79.⁹ Waldman wrote, "This was the stormiest meeting I ever witnessed in a long career of stormy meetings. Two chairmen had to surrender their posts because they found it impossible to maintain order. Fist fights kept breaking out in the hall as partisans of opposing factions split into little sub-meetings, without benefit of parliamentary procedure to abate their passions."¹⁰ Eleven days later, Nicholas II was forced to abdicate the throne after a general strike broke out in Petrograd as he was en route to return from the front. Before the month was out, Trotsky, Bukharin, Kollontai, and virtually the entire Russian Federation leadership left New York to return home. It was left to the Americans they enthralled to continue building the American affiliate of the projected Third International.

The countless biographers of Leon Trotsky have rarely done justice to his American sojourn, much less captured its significance. Trotsky succeeded in converting the most marginal segment of the American

Socialist movement to his prejudices, based entirely on experiences completely foreign to the American scene, solidifying an implacable hostility to the actually existing American movement. It is no exaggeration to say that the Socialist Party of America forever after lived in the shadow of the meeting on January 14, 1917. This is not only because it set in motion the founding of the Communist Party, against which the Socialist Party for most of its remaining history would almost existentially define itself. Trotsky would later take a special interest in the American movement during the 1930s, exerting an influence far beyond his immediate band of followers, undoubtedly wistful in exile for that brief moment in which the leadership of the American left wing was in his grasp. The legacy of that moment would even be felt more than a half-century later, in the ultimate demise of the Socialist Party and subsequent birth of neoconservatism.

Shortly after the riotous membership meeting in New York, the National Executive Committee called an Emergency Convention, to open in St. Louis on April 7, to deliberate the Socialist response to the imminent U.S. entry into the war. But events were proceeding faster than the party could keep pace. On April 6, one day before the convention opened, the United States formally entered the war. Only six senators and fifty members of the House voted against the declaration of war. Among them of course was the lone Socialist in Congress, Meyer London, the only member of the massive New York delegation to vote no. London was then the sole congressman to vote against the subsequent declaration of war against Austria, and he voted present on every war appropriation bill that followed. Perhaps the most outspoken voice in the House opposing the rush to war for more than a year, London also continued to vehemently oppose conscription.¹¹

The convention in St. Louis immediately appointed a Committee on War and Militarism to present recommendations to the whole convention. Kate Richards O'Hare, the chair of this committee, set the tone for this momentous gathering in her address: "I am a Socialist, a labor unionist and a believer in the Prince of Peace first, and an American second.

If need be, I will give my life and the life of my mate to serve my class, but never with my consent will they be given to add to the profits and protect the stolen wealth of the bankers, food speculators and ammunition makers.”¹² A subcommittee assigned to draft the majority report expressing unbowed opposition to U.S. participation in the war consisted of Morris Hillquit, Algernon Lee, and Charles Ruthenberg. Though some historians have viewed Ruthenberg’s presence as an indication of the degree to which the war fortified party unity, more likely Hillquit made sure to bring him on to preclude a recurrence of the scene in New York a month earlier.¹³

With no proposal analogous to the Trotsky-Fraina resolutions on offer, Louis Boudin submitted a minority report that amounted to little more than the majority report rewritten in the language of *International Socialist Review*. Tellingly, in contrast to the majority report, Boudin’s resolution did not commit the party to any particular course of action in its antiwar stand, thus if anything offering a centrist position.¹⁴ A second, pro-war minority report was submitted by John Spargo, echoing such former left-wing adversaries as Walter Lippmann and William English Walling in seeing the war as a harbinger of “industrial democracy.” The majority report, thereafter known as the St. Louis Platform, was adopted with 140 votes against 31 for the Boudin minority report and 5 for the pro-war resolution.¹⁵

The St. Louis Platform declared unequivocally and forthrightly:

We brand the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world. In all modern history there has been no war more unjustifiable than the war in which we are about to engage. No greater dishonor has ever been forced upon a people than that which the capitalist class is forcing upon this nation against its will. In harmony with these principles, the Socialist Party emphatically rejects the proposal that in time of war the workers should suspend their struggle for better conditions. On the contrary, the acute situation created by war calls for an even more vigorous prosecution of the class struggle, and we

recommend to the workers and pledge ourselves to the following course of action: 1) Continuous, active, and public opposition to the war, through demonstrations, petitions, and all other means within our power. 2) Unyielding opposition to all proposed legislation for military or industrial conscription. Should such conscription be forced upon the people, we pledge ourselves to continuous efforts for the repeal of such laws and to the support of all mass movements in opposition to conscription. We pledge ourselves to oppose with all our strength any attempt to raise money for payment of war expense by taxing the necessities of life or issuing bonds which will put the burden on future generations. We demand that the capitalist class, which is responsible for the war, pay its cost. Let those who kindled the fire, furnish the fuel. 3) Vigorous resistance to all reactionary measures, such as the censorship of the press and mails, restriction of the rights of free speech, assemblage, and organization, or compulsory arbitration and the limitation of the right to strike. 4) Consistent propaganda against military training and teaching in the public schools. 5) Extension of the campaign of education among the workers to organize them into strong, class-conscious, and closely unified political and industrial organizations, to enable them by concerted and harmonious mass action to shorten this war and to establish lasting peace. 6) Widespread educational propaganda to enlighten the masses as to the true relation between capitalism and war, and to rouse and organize them for action, not only against present war evils, but for the prevention of future wars and for the destruction of the causes of war.¹⁶

On June 15, the same day that the Espionage Act—the principal means by which the Socialists' free speech rights would be suppressed—went into effect, the St. Louis Platform was ratified by a membership vote of 21,639 to 2,752.¹⁷ The extent of the coming repression was suggested very early on, when Secretary of State Robert Lansing invoked, for the first time ever, the 1799 Logan Act (adopted during the early republic's stand-off with Revolutionary France to prohibit unauthorized diplomatic negotiations by private citizens) to deny passports to Morris Hillquit,

Victor Berger, and Algernon Lee to attend a conference in Stockholm called by the newly empowered Russian Socialists to promote their peace offensive.¹⁸ But the earliest fallout from St. Louis was the departure of the pro-war Socialists, a small but vocal minority that included many of the party's leading intellectuals and organizers. Spargo was isolated at St. Louis, but even before the convention, a pro-war manifesto had appeared on March 24 in the *New York Call*; its other signers included Charles Edward Russell, Upton Sinclair, William English Walling, J. G. Phelps Stokes, and William J. Ghent.¹⁹

On April 26, Stokes had held a gathering of the disaffected pro-war Socialists at his home to form a new organization, the Social Democratic League (SDL), composed almost exclusively of the "millionaire socialists." Stokes set a characteristically idealistic tone, asserting it to be "a poor citizen who refrains from public service while awaiting the millennium."²⁰ Their number quickly grew to also include Allan Benson, Gustavus Myers, Algie Simons, Winfield Gaylord, Carl Thompson, Henry Slobodin, and Frank Bohn. (Party members who resigned as war supporters but took no part in the SDL included Robert Hunter, Gaylord Wilshire, and J. Stitt Wilson). Estranged Socialists from every persuasion in the prewar party, from the Milwaukee machine to the circle around *ISR*, could be found in the Social Democratic League. Yet it was very much a legacy of historic left-wing resentment of the German Social Democratic influence on the SP, as even Louis Boudin made an early attempt to find common ground with the SDL.²¹

Despite an initial call for the preservation of civil liberties, the pro-war socialists joined the national hysteria against all things German, in an apparent means of settling scores with those whom they had long despised vicariously through Hillquit, Berger, and their allies. Algie Simons became the literature director of the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion, charging that the Socialist Party "today stands in opposition to democracy," whereas Winfield Gaylord provided the Justice Department with party documents he felt proved the party "treasonable." John Spargo wrote a pamphlet for the SDL that accused Hillquit of "upholding the impudent

claims of the guilty Hohenzollern dynasty,” and William English Walling, true to form, outdid them all, claiming in one broadside, “The view I represent, that the Socialist Party, under its present control is directed from Berlin, is also held by A. M. Simons, Winfield Gaylord, John Spargo, and others of the most popular of the Socialist leaders. None of these are working men, but they have a far better right to speak for the American working people than Berger, who was born in Austria, and Hillquit, who was born in the German town of Riga.”²²

The *Appeal to Reason* was also firmly in the pro-war camp. The leading personality at the *Appeal* was now Upton Sinclair, widely regarded as a “Socialist celebrity” even though he played no substantial role in party affairs after the founding of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society.²³ Gustavus Myers took it upon himself to write to President Wilson offering the services of the SDL to the Wilson administration. The result of this letter was the referral of the League to George Creel, who led the new federal Committee on Public Information.²⁴ In addition to finding Myers a post in wartime Washington, Creel secured the appointment of Charles Edward Russell to the commission led by former secretary of state Elihu Root to the Provisional Government in Russia—a “socialist” emissary to persuade the Russian Socialists to stay in the war.²⁵

The initial Socialist vehicle for organizing antiwar sentiment emerged spontaneously, in what was loosely organized by late spring as the People’s Council for Democracy and Peace. The Council appears to have been first set in motion by Louis Lochner, a prominent participant in the Henry Ford Peace Ship of 1915.²⁶ Morris Hillquit recalled its formation thus:

The movement was sponsored by men and women of different social and political faiths, Socialists, trade unionists, liberals, and conscientious objectors on religious grounds. . . . Among the most active promoters of the movement at that time was Judah L. Magnes, a rabbi of an unusually fine type. Young, enthusiastic, eloquent, and of rare personal charm, he was rapidly becoming the idol of the wealthy Jews of New York and had before him a most promising career. But this

Jewish rabbi was one of the very few divines who took the spirit and teachings of Christ seriously. . . . He was sincere and courageous, and he threw himself into the fight headlong and in utter disregard of the admonitions of his shocked parishioners and patrons.²⁷

The founding conference of the People's Council for Democracy and Peace was held at Madison Square Garden on May 31. With Louis Lochner as executive secretary, the extensive organizing committee included Fola LaFollette (daughter of the unbowed antiwar senator from Wisconsin), Max Eastman of *The Masses*, Judah Magnes, Scott Nearing, and Eugene Debs. Labor leaders included ILGWU president Benjamin Schlesinger; Joseph Schlossberg of their new rival, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; Joseph Cannon; and Duncan McDonald, an Illinois Mine Workers leader. The Socialist Party was also represented by James Maurer, Arthur Le Sueur, Patrick Nagle, and Jacob Panken.²⁸ Hillquit was appointed to a committee on permanent organization that also included Magnes, disillusioned former Progressive Party stalwart Amos Pinchot, and Non-Partisan League founder Arthur Townley.²⁹

The tone was set for the People's Council at Madison Square Garden by Rebecca Shelly of the Emergency Peace Federation. Declaring that Congress had defied the will of the people, Shelly urged the People's Council to model itself on the Russian Council of Workers and Soldiers, otherwise known as the Soviets:

The functions of the council would be to work for the repeal of the Conscription Law, to combat all violations of the constitutional rights of citizens, to urge an early and democratic peace on the terms announced by the Russian government, and to let the American people know that there is in existence a definitely constituted body through which the democratic forces of the country can express themselves.³⁰

The audience roared with approval, but Victor Berger cautioned the Council to “not expect to equal the Russians’ achievement because there

the soviets control the unions and the soldiers.”³¹ The only major mass antiwar demonstration after the United States entered the war took place under the auspices of the People’s Council in July on Boston Common. After more than thirty thousand marched in the face of attacks by armed mobs, James Maurer and James Oneal addressed the crowd. The police charged the platform, not to make any arrests but only to intimidate. Maurer later toured the Northwest as a speaker for the People’s Council, at great risk to his personal safety in the face of mob violence.³²

The potential for domestic unrest such as the country had not seen since the close of the preceding century was on full display in Butte, Montana, where class tensions had never subsided. A full-fledged draft riot, led by the local Irish nationalist Pearse-Connolly Club and the Finnish Socialists, broke out in Butte as soon as the Conscription Act went into effect. Tensions abated a few days later, when a mine explosion occurred that killed 175, leading the miners to go on strike, with the mine owners claiming the explosion was an act of German sabotage.³³ Martial law was soon declared—before any U.S. troops arrived in Europe, they were dispatched to occupy their own country. But it was clear that pro-war vigilantes had a free hand when on August 2 they lynched Frank Little, the IWW organizer on the scene, who denounced the occupying troops as “scabs in uniform.”³⁴ Burton Wheeler, the progressive young district attorney, denounced the mob through his office while the press echoed the views of Vice President Thomas Marshall, who urged them not to stop until every last IWW member was hanged.³⁵

The best-remembered attempt to spark an all-out popular revolt against the creeping Wilson terror broke out in the Old Southwest. In the spring of 1917, an IWW fugitive from Chicago named Rube Munson took charge of the local Working Class Union and built it into a strong presence in the sections of Texas and Oklahoma that were the site of unabated tenant struggles. Almost as soon as the Conscription Act went into effect, federal agents arrested Munson along with thirty men who had signed a pledge to resist the draft by force.³⁶ Postmaster General Albert Burleson then chose Tom Hickey’s *Rebel*—which had exposed the desperate condition

of the tenants on Burleson's plantation and brought scrutiny from the Commission on Industrial Relations—for the honor of being the first publication banned from the mails through the Espionage Act.³⁷ Hickey was arrested but released when the government was unable to present charges of conspiracy. He immediately issued a circular proclaiming that the action proved the Wilson administration was “controlled by Texas politicians of the landlord and banker stripe.”³⁸

Free but still under indictment, the leaders of the Working Class Union planned their next move. In July they began planning joint action with a mysterious interracial band known as the “Jones Family,” described as uniquely indigenous by historian James Green:

It drew less upon Socialist ideas and syndicalist tactics than it did upon the traditionally clannish resistance of southwestern “hillbillies” to government laws that violated their natural rights and to law enforcers who attempted to regulate their simple, “non-progressive” communities. The ancestors of the Jones Family had been notorious for bushwhacking federal “revenoors” and Confederate draft recruiters. In 1917 they were simply carrying on a long tradition of self-defense. Some members of the Family were Socialists, others were Democrats angry at President Wilson's breach of faith. And others were illiterate, nonpartisan tenants who simply thought the draft violated their rights. They were determined to resist being taken away from their families and sent far away to fight a bloody war they neither knew nor cared anything about.³⁹

Within hours of the lynching of their fellow Oklahoman Frank Little, on the morning of August 3, there gathered on a bluff in Pontotoc County a hardy band of militants from both the Working Class Union and Jones Family. Among them were several black sharecroppers and Creek Indians, including a few aging veterans of the last Indian Wars. An unanticipated strike had broken out the previous day in nearby coal country, and overnight several telephone and telegraph lines were cut and railroad bridges and oil pipelines burned.

The armed militants set out to march all the way to Washington, DC, believing they would be joined by thousands of other likeminded groups along the way and would be able to subsist on live steer and green corn foraged as they traveled. Thus named the Green Corn Rebellion, it was over before it began when a hastily gathered posse of seventy surrounded the bluff.⁴⁰ The incident supplied the pretext for a general crackdown on the Socialist Party of Oklahoma, even though it was in no way directly implicated and actively opposed armed resistance. Though less than half of the 184 individuals indicted in the alleged conspiracy were ever sentenced to prison, most of the principals of the Oklahoma SP spent the better part of the following year incarcerated, effectively crippling the party in what had long been its most promising terrain. Among those given a lengthy federal sentence was the colorful Oklahoma left-winger Tad Cumbie, only nominally associated with the Working Class Union he helped found after it fell under entirely different leadership.⁴¹ The Green Corn Rebellion entered the realm of legend, in the words of Daniel Bell, as a “wartime opera bouffe.”⁴²

However misguided, the events in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma, were no isolated incident, and it was not implausible that there could spring up a mass movement along such lines throughout the region. An incident almost exactly like the Green Corn Rebellion occurred the very same day in Chatham County, North Carolina, and there were armed skirmishes around the same time in Dallas and Toledo and against a troop train in California.⁴³ In Louisiana, a State Farmers Union convention went on record opposing the war by a vote of 341 to 9.⁴⁴ But no one was more ready to lead this revolution of Southern farmers than the man who had nearly pulled off the feat twenty-five years earlier, Tom Watson. As early as May, Watson announced in his widely read magazine *The Jeffersonian* that he was filing a federal lawsuit against the constitutionality of the Conscription Act, as only a son of the Confederacy knew how—by challenging the imprisonment of two black men in Augusta for failing to register for the draft on Thirteenth Amendment grounds. Not surprisingly, after he raised \$100,000 from all parts of the country and gave one of his greatest speeches in a preliminary hearing on August

18, Watson's incipient movement was crushed when *The Jeffersonian* was promptly banned from the mails.⁴⁵

Seen against this larger backdrop, the Green Corn Rebellion and the handful of similar incidents are best understood as the final, desperate gasps of old Populist resistance to the triumph of the state capitalist regime, as it reached its apotheosis in the world war that made the United States a dominant world power. One apostle of the new world order, a Hungarian immigrant and sometime fair-weather friend of the SP, Rabbi Stephen Wise, lamented "the inexplicable failure to understand the meaning of this war among the representatives of the oldest American stock."⁴⁶ Indeed, as David Shannon notes of the St. Louis convention, "The list of delegates shows that an overwhelming majority of them were American-born. Less than a dozen were of German, Austrian, or Irish birth . . . about one half of the delegates were farmers or workers, although many of them had worked with their hands in their younger days. The delegates represented a homegrown variety of radicalism."⁴⁷ Yet this understanding was, not surprisingly, lost on many later students of the era. As Daniel Bell wrote in the heady early years of the Cold War,

One viewpoint ascribes the antiwar stand of the Socialist Party to the high proportion of German, Jewish, and foreign-language elements in the party. Another points to the party's distance from the scene and consequent lack of involvement. Both of these carry a degree of truth. But equally relevant is the fact (obscured by the taunts of "yellow" and "reformist" made by extremist elements) that the American Socialist Party was heavily a doctrinaire socialist party, more so than most of its European counterparts because of its lack of commitments to the labor movement. With none of the strings of responsibilities which held the European socialists, the party, reacting by formulas, branded the war "imperialist" and then stood apart from it.⁴⁸

If anything, this was the very opposite of the case. The St. Louis Platform reflected an indigenous Populist radicalism and the warnings of

George Washington against foreign entanglements far more than any Marxist dogma. Indeed, the pro-war socialists were far more likely, in their parlor discussion clubs and ossified premises from the previous decade, to justify their views on avowedly Marxist grounds. And there could be little doubt that the Socialists spoke for a far wider segment of the American public, if not necessarily the majority. As Morris Hillquit recalled,

If Mr. Hughes had been elected instead of Mr. Wilson, as he almost was, the probable result would have been that the Republican Party would have drawn us into the war, while the Democratic Party would have remained in the opposition and continued to condemn the policy of “hurling us headlong into the maelstrom of the war across the seas,” as did Martin H. Glynn in his eloquent keynote speech at the National Democratic Convention of 1916. But as it happened it was a Democratic administration that led us into this war. The Democratic Party thus changed from a peace party to a war party, leaving the Republicans no choice except to go it one better as an ultra-war party. . . . The only party that still remained a peace party in American politics was the Socialist Party.⁴⁹

With all the flames of discontent burning across America in August 1917, it was reasonable to believe that the organization formed for the express purpose of uniting them in revolutionary opposition to the Wilson war regime, the People’s Council for Democracy and Peace, could succeed despite the repression already in evidence, and even yet do so through the ballot box. The first national conference of the People’s Council was scheduled to open September 1 in Minneapolis, where Socialist mayor Thomas Van Lear planned to give them an enthusiastic welcome.⁵⁰ But the governor of Minnesota, Joseph Burnquist, threatened that “if anti-American meetings cannot be stopped by local officials, every resource at our command will be used to punish the offenders and prevent such meetings from being held.” Van Lear replied defiantly, “I assume that constitutional democracy is still the form of government in the United

States, and that the people may, with all propriety, peaceably discuss subjects of vital importance to themselves. By the oath of office taken when I became mayor, I am bound to defend the constitution of the state of Minnesota and of the United States.”⁵¹

The Council nevertheless began to look elsewhere. Lynn Frazier, the Non-Partisan League governor of North Dakota, assured the People’s Council that it would be guaranteed its constitutional rights in his state, but Fargo, the only city large enough to accommodate the convention, was controlled by business interests hostile to the administration. The Council ultimately accepted the offer of the fiercely antiwar Republican mayor of Chicago, Bill Thompson. After the convention was dispersed by the police on its opening day, with Thompson out of town, Morris Hillquit and Judah Magnes arrived the next morning and managed to locate several delegates secretly meeting in a closed factory on the outskirts of the city. After taking charge of the meeting, they went immediately to confer with Mayor Thompson, who assured them of his support but told them they were in a race against time with the inevitable arrival of state troops.⁵² Maintaining a sense of humor, Hillquit observed, “For the first time in my experience I witnessed a meeting of radicals ready to cut out discussion and eager to settle down to practical work.”⁵³

After adjourning for the day, Hillquit reserved a large suite at one of Chicago’s more fashionable hotels for the concluding session of the convention; when the state troops arrived from Springfield, they found the hall occupied that evening by a wedding. He then recalled,

Bright and early the next morning, when our work was done and we were congratulating ourselves on our clever ruse to evade publicity, a horde of newspaper reporters invaded our secret quarters asking for news about our conspiratory deliberations, which we cheerfully furnished. The People’s Council of America for Democracy and Peace continued in existence until the end of the war. Several large public meetings were held under its auspices in different parts of the country, but its experience in connection with the first constituent convention

had convincingly demonstrated the impossibility of organizing an extensive peace propaganda during the war.⁵⁴

In direct response to the founding of the People's Council, Samuel Gompers organized the American Alliance for Labor and Democracy (AALD) to combat antiwar sentiment in the ranks of organized labor, with generous financial assistance from the Committee on Public Information. James Maurer, as president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor, wrote to Gompers demanding to know on what authority he could commit the AFL to this new outfit, whereas he spoke for his own state federation that had officially gone on record opposing the war. Gompers never formally replied.⁵⁵ The AALD convention opened in Minneapolis on September 5, with several members of the Social Democratic League joining the frenzy of patriotic speechmaking.

But the SDL was badly split in a schism reflecting past factional affiliations within the SP. John Spargo led those who were generally identified with the right wing, including Graham Stokes, in favoring a merger with the Prohibition Party and the remnants of the Progressive Party into the new National Party, "in favor of God, patriotism, prohibition, and reform."⁵⁶ But William English Walling, who still fancied himself a revolutionary ideologue, drew close to Gompers, his fellow orthodox syndicalist in the war party, and embraced the AFL chief's suspicion of the National Party as yet another of socialism's "57 varieties." Indeed, in great contrast to most in the SP, the pro-war socialists mostly followed the lead of those with whom they most identified in Europe—Gompers and Walling with syndicalist French trade unionism, and Spargo the ultra-left British imperialism of H. M. Hyndman. As one historian of their milieu acidly observes, "Three interrelated organizations stressing pro-war patriotism and industrial democracy had been established—all they lacked were followers."⁵⁷

Shortly after the People's Council drama in late September, the *Milwaukee Leader* was banned from the mails. Victor Berger attempted to personally intervene with Postmaster General Albert Burleson, a former

congressional colleague, to no avail, as Seymour Stedman began his heroic role as the attorney of record for the Socialist Party in the struggle for its First Amendment rights.⁵⁸ Berger was ready to shut down the paper until Oscar Ameringer, on the ground in Milwaukee for the entire war period, convinced him of the necessity to take a stand for free speech. On October 13, a mass meeting of five thousand gathered in response to an appeal to save the *Leader*. Berger assured the crowd that suppression of the Socialist press would only make a violent “impossibilist” revolution inevitable.⁵⁹ Then, as Ameringer recalled,

The answer was several washtubs full of bills and coins totaling some four thousand dollars. The audience had told us to carry on. Among the offerings of that night was a quart of ladies’ rings, earrings, and bracelets, which spoke louder than the cash itself. By the next morning lines of women, some with shawls on their heads, brought more money along with pledges of Liberty Bonds and war-savings stamps their husbands had been compelled to buy. Democracy had given its mandate. We carried on.⁶⁰

Milwaukee and its surrounding areas, with their large population of German ancestry, naturally bore the brunt of the national violence against all things German. This no doubt helped make the *Leader* an early target in the crackdown, but Oscar Ameringer, as ever, captured the true spirit of the place and its people:

Our greatest help, however, came from the Huns of Wisconsin, the descendants of the “forty-eighters”—immigrants who had pulled the eternal stumps from Wisconsin’s cedar swamps, reared the marvelous stone fences with boulders dug out of the five-and-ten acre fields they still surround, in short, converted the wasteland of Wisconsin into the smiling countryside it is today. These people were not Kaiser lovers. Their republican, revolutionary fathers and grandfathers had been defeated by “Shrapnel Prince William,” grandfather of William II. They had found asylum in the wilds of the new state of Wisconsin. . . . When war

came it was the small town and county seat people that became the “real patriots,” while the old line German farmers were decidedly hostile to the mess. This situation provided the late-comers with a fine opportunity to show the original settlers who the true Americans were.⁶¹

Probably the headiest and most hopeful moment in the entire history of the Socialist Party came in the fall campaign of 1917, which yielded dramatic advances in off-year city elections, nowhere more than in New York. Morris Hillquit declared for mayor of New York against John Mitchel, the Democratic incumbent running on a rabidly pro-war Fusion ticket; regular Democrat John Hylan, handpicked by William Randolph Hearst and nominally antiwar; and the obscure Republican William F. Bennett. Hillquit declared the following upon accepting the Socialist nomination:

We are for peace. We are unalterably opposed to the killing of our manhood and the draining of our resources in the bewildering pursuit of an incomprehensible “democracy,” a pursuit of democracy which begins by suppressing the freedom of speech, press, and public assemblage and by stifling legitimate political criticism. Not warfare and terrorism, but Socialism and social justice will make the world safe for democracy.⁶²

To the party’s complete surprise, the ratification meeting at Madison Square Garden was filled to capacity, where “every allusion to peace was greeted with thunderous applause and loud shouts of approval.”⁶³ By October, every crowd where Hillquit spoke jammed the halls and the surrounding streets. One night, when he gave three speeches on the Lower East Side, a spontaneous and massive parade of singing and cheering supporters formed behind the car that shuttled him between events.⁶⁴ Panic soon set in that Hillquit could be elected, with the *New York Times* denouncing him as an agent of the Kaiser.⁶⁵ On October 13, the *New York Call* got its inevitable banning from the mails, to which Hillquit responded defiantly in a major address the following evening:

In the face of this grave threat to the freedom of the American press, there is but one organized force, one political party in the whole country that has the courage to raise its voice in public protest, warning, and condemnation, the party of the Socialists. In attempting to suppress our publications the powers that be are challenging the Socialist movement. We accept the challenge. The *Call* will lose several thousand readers out of town by the withholding of its mailing right. Let us get for our paper ten thousand new readers in the City for every thousand lost in the country. We can do it. The Post Office Department has made the task easy.⁶⁶

The jingoist campaign of Mayor Mitchel included several of the pro-war socialists as stump speakers, among them the previous SP mayoral nominee in 1913, Charles Edward Russell.⁶⁷ But no speaker for Mitchel was more distinguished or sought after than Theodore Roosevelt, who less than two years before his death threw himself into this campaign as in no other after 1912. "Morris Hillquit is pandering to treasonable and cowardly Americanism, to the pacifists, the pro-Germans, and the man who wishes Uncle Sam to negotiate an inconclusive peace," he declared in one speech, adding, "I don't like the Hun outside our gates, but I tell you, I like the Hun inside them less. And even worse than the Hun is the man who cringes before them!"⁶⁸ Yet many disillusioned supporters of Roosevelt's moribund Progressive Party were backing Hillquit, notably Amos Pinchot, Dudley Field Malone, and J. A. H. Hopkins. Pinchot even chaired the final meeting for Hillquit at Madison Square Garden, where the candidate gave his valedictory address:

With us are aligned the forces of labor . . . the great mass of disinherited, the humble, the poor, the large mass of the people of this city. . . . Aligned with us are the best, the noblest, the most progressive elements in the city of New York, and arrayed against us are all the powers of oppression, the preachers of reaction, and the dark elements that make for lawlessness and suppression. It is to the credit of the Socialists in this campaign that they have forced off the mask

of hypocrisy from the hideous faces of these base elements and have shown them up to their fellow men in all their brutal nakedness. . . . Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, the hero, who calls for the formation of vigilantes to suppress hostile criticism and views, just a thinly veiled disguise, which is in substance an appeal to mob law and to lynching, Mr. Elihu Root, who publicly advocates shooting of dissenting editors. . . . If a plain, ordinary anarchist would be guilty of very much milder incitement, he would be behind the prison bars, but these anarchists of distinction, position, and wealth can preach murder with impunity.⁶⁹

Hillquit received 145,332 votes at 22 percent, more than four times the mayoral vote of 1913, just 10,000 votes behind the incumbent mayor, and far ahead of the hapless regular Republican. Similarly massive increases appeared in the Socialist vote over the previous elections in Chicago, Cleveland, Dayton, Toledo, Rochester, and Reading. At an average of 21.6 percent, this led to a projection of four million votes in the next national election.⁷⁰ In New York, the Socialists elected seven aldermen, ten members of the state assembly, and a municipal court judge. Hillquit also claimed that his challenge to all three of his opponents to support the state ballot referendum for women's suffrage ensured its passage, considered the watershed that finally led to granting the vote to women nationally.⁷¹ Victor Berger wrote in a telegram of congratulations after the campaign, "It marks an epoch in the history of the Socialist Party of America and its real results will show all over the country in the near future."⁷²

Yet the Hillquit campaign of 1917 was perhaps most notable for bringing into the Socialist Party the two most consequential figures of its long life after the war: Norman Thomas and A. Philip Randolph.

Norman Mattoon Thomas was born on November 20, 1884, in Marion, Ohio, to a prominent family of the Presbyterian ministry; his father was a second-generation minister and his mother the daughter of

Presbyterian missionaries at the Court of Siam. After graduating from Princeton in 1905, he rejected an open path to one of New York's most elite pulpits and instead ministered to the working class. When Thomas joined the American Union Against Militarism in 1916, he had already served several years in an East Harlem pulpit and was married to a woman of social register pedigree, the former Violet Stewart. After long struggling with his personal faith in Calvinist orthodoxy, Thomas was profoundly affected by the rush of his church into the national war hysteria, as he wrote for *The Nation* in an article titled "Conscience and the Church":

Conscience is individual and not corporate, not all conscientious objectors are Quakers. When the Church countenances the denial of this fact she is cutting the ground out from underneath her. Her Bible was written by men who were in small minorities. The claim of the state to coerce conscience is a blow to that freedom of religion which has made America great.⁷³

Thomas wrote a personal letter of endorsement to Morris Hillquit on October 2:

I believe that the hope for the future lies in a new social and economic order which demands the abolition of the capitalistic system. War itself is only the most horrible and dramatic of the many evil fruits of our present organized system of exploitation and the philosophy of life which exalts competition instead of cooperation. Entirely apart from the so-called peace issue I think your election or even a very large vote for you must be of very great significance in the struggle for a new day.⁷⁴

Thomas quickly became a popular speaker for the Hillquit campaign, one of the few to unequivocally declare his refusal to buy Liberty Bonds.⁷⁵ To his distraught conservative mother Thomas wrote,

I did not know that you would be so surprised at my supporting Hillquit. I am not a member of the Socialist Party but as I have told you I agree very nearly with many of their fundamental doctrines and I have for some time admired Mr. Hillquit personally. When you were here last summer . . . Mr. Mitchel had not called every man a traitor who disagreed with the most violent pro-war party . . . and Mr. Hillquit had not made plain his own position in municipal affairs as he has now. . . . I believe that the struggle for the preservation of freedom of speech and assemblage is absolutely vital.⁷⁶

Having cast his first presidential ballot for William Howard Taft in 1908 and for his former professor Woodrow Wilson the succeeding two times, Norman Thomas would let another year pass before he formally applied for membership in the Socialist Party in 1918. In so doing, he prophetically wrote, “Perhaps to certain members of the party my socialism would not be of the most orthodox variety. I have a profound fear of the undue exaltation of the state and a profound faith that the new world we desire must depend upon freedom and fellowship rather than upon any sort of coercion whatsoever.”⁷⁷

Asa Philip Randolph—the essential forbear of the civil rights movement in the first half of the twentieth century—was born on April 15, 1889, in Crescent City, Florida. The son of an African Methodist minister, he moved to Jacksonville with his family when he was very young, and although the family remained poor, he and his brother both excelled at the city’s most elite colored academy. Radicalized by reading W. E. B. DuBois, the young Randolph moved to New York in 1911 in hopes of becoming an actor. Increasingly drawn to the left-wing Socialist circle at the City College of New York, he took most of his cues from Hubert Harrison, the St. Croix-born Harlemite who belonged to the SP from its earliest years and was an occasional Negro voice in *International Socialist Review*. In 1914, Randolph married Lucille Campbell Green, a protégé of Madame C. J. Walker, who became the first African American millionaire with her patented hair straightener. The owner

of her own prosperous salon, Lucille could comfortably support her husband's pursuits as a full-time Socialist.

Randolph did not formally join the SP until 1916, when he and collaborator Chandler Owen made their first attempt to form a Negro trade union, the Headwaiters and Sidewaiters Society of Greater New York. Although this organization soon fizzled, its remnants were recruited to campaign for Hillquit, becoming the first permanent party organization in black Harlem.⁷⁸ After the abortive union earned Hillquit an estimated 25 percent of the black vote, in November 1917 its surviving publication, the *Hotel Messenger*, was transformed into *The Messenger*. As Randolph announced,

Our aim is to appeal to reason, to lift our pens above the cringing demagoguery of the times, and above the cheap peanut politics of the old reactionary Negro leaders. Patriotism has no appeal to us, justice has. Party has no weight with us, principle has. Loyalty is meaningless, it depends on what one is loyal to.⁷⁹

A deeply irreverent magazine, *The Messenger* was especially affronted when its inspiration, W. E. B. DuBois, declared that "the German power spells death to the aspirations of Negroes and all darker races for equality, freedom, and democracy," seemingly oblivious that it was America's ally Great Britain that had "the white man's burden" as its sacred story. To this claim, Chandler Owen replied in *The Messenger*, "Since when has the subject race come out of a war with its rights and privileges accorded for such a participation? Did not the Negro fight in the Revolutionary War, with Crispus Attucks dying first, and come out to be a miserable chattel slave in this country for nearly 100 years?"⁸⁰ Naturally, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer branded *The Messenger* "the most dangerous Negro publication in America" because it made such unbowed declarations as "the Huns of Georgia are far more menacing to Negroes than the Huns of Germany. The Huns of Alsace have never threatened the Negroes' life, liberty and property like the Huns of Alabama. The

Huns of Lorraine are as shining angels of light compared to the Huns of Louisiana.”⁸¹

The day after the 1917 election, November 7, the course of history changed when the Bolshevik Party seized power in Russia after the collapse of the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky that had recklessly stayed in the war after the overthrow of the Tsar. The official statement adopted a few months later by the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party was exultant:

The revolution of the Russian Socialists threatens the thrones of Europe and makes the whole capitalist structure tremble. With hunger stalking in their midst, without financial credit, without international recognition and with a ruling caste intriguing to regain control, the Russian Socialists have yet accomplished their revolution, and they inspired the working class of the world with the ideal of humanity’s supremacy over class rule. They come with a message of proletarian revolution. We glory in their achievement and inevitable triumph. The Socialist Party of the United States offers its encouragement and pledges its support to the fundamental revolutionary aims and purposes of the enlightened workers of every country.⁸²

The victory banquet for the elected Socialist aldermen and assemblymen in New York had for entertainment a soprano who included in her set “the new Russian national anthem.”⁸³ The seven aldermen included Algernon Lee and Baruch Charney Vladeck, a long-time general manager at the *Jewish Daily Forward*; the ten assemblymen included Louis Waldman and August Claessens among the four from Manhattan, Abraham Shiplacoff and William Feigenbaum of three from Brooklyn, and future Communist-turned rabid anti-Communist Benjamin Gitlow of the three from the Bronx.⁸⁴ But the most memorable New York officeholder elected in 1917 was the first elected Socialist judge, Jacob Panken. Born to poor peasants in Kiev in 1879, Panken attributed his Socialist convictions to the failure of his father’s ill-fated farming venture in

Connecticut after first arriving in the United States, when prices were too low for their rotting surplus apple crop to be shipped to feed the starving masses in New York.⁸⁵ Victories beyond New York in 1917 included mayors elected in Union City, Pennsylvania; Elwood, Indiana; Duluth, Minnesota; and Frontenac, Kansas.⁸⁶

The triumph of the Bolsheviks, combined with evidence of widespread Socialist support in the 1917 municipal elections, emboldened the Wilson administration to indiscriminately crack down on all opposition to the war. The previous summer, Kate Richards O'Hare was indicted in North Dakota for declaring "that the women of the United States were nothing more or less than brood sows, to raise children to get into the army and be made into fertilizer."⁸⁷ Around the same time, the citadel of the Old Southwest movement, People's College in Fort Scott, Kansas, was demolished by ax-wielding vigilantes.⁸⁸ State party leaders in Minnesota, South Dakota, Nevada, Oregon, New Jersey, and Alaska territory were all convicted of speech crimes, mostly relating to opposition to conscription.⁸⁹ In a speech in Kansas City, Rose Pastor Stokes was quoted by the press saying, "No government which is for the profiteers can also be for the people, and I am for the people, while the government is for the profiteers." George Creel sought an indictment not only of Stokes, who eventually divorced her husband and joined the Communist Party, but also of the offending editors at the *Kansas City Post*.⁹⁰

Yet there were limits to how far the government could go. Morris Hillquit believed that the potential for unrest his large mayoral vote represented was his personal protection against indictment. In May 1918, James Maurer was told by a federal agent that he was to be arrested if he lost reelection to his AFL post the next day, but not if he won. He was reelected by a three-to-one margin.⁹¹ These were the exceptions that proved the rule: that political imperatives dictated practically all individual acts of repression. There was no clearer illustration of this principle than the prosecution that struck most directly at the Socialist Party as an organization. Early in 1918, Victor Berger was nominated to stand in a special election that followed the death of an incumbent U.S. senator in Wisconsin. Running against arch-militarist Democrat Joseph Davies

(later an infamous apologist for Stalin as ambassador to the Soviet Union) and Republican Irvine Lenroot, who defeated the primary candidate backed by Robert LaFollette (himself battling attempted expulsion from the Senate), there seemed an excellent chance that Berger could win. As if to confirm Berger's boast that his candidacy would "send a chill to the Wall Street Hog Islanders and the munitions makers,"⁹² on March 11 it was announced that Berger was being indicted along with the four paid employees of the SP national office: Executive Secretary Adolph Germer, Literature Secretary Irwin St. John Tucker, Information Secretary J. Louis Engdahl, and Young People's Director William Kruse.⁹³ In response, Berger insisted, "I was picked out as the one member of the National Executive Committee who was of German extraction and because the Socialist Party is strong in Milwaukee, and furthermore because I dared to be a candidate for the United States Senate against Woodrow Wilson's favorite."⁹⁴

During the campaign as many as fifty billboards in Milwaukee declared "War is Hell Caused by Capitalism—Socialists Demand Peace."⁹⁵ But outside Milwaukee it was often a challenge for Berger to find speaking venues, his meetings were constantly broken up by vigilantes, and those distributing his campaign literature were arbitrarily arrested. Said literature typically called "for an early, general and lasting peace; against militarism and imperialism, against race hatred; for freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of assemblage; for compelling the profiteers of the war to pay the cost of the war."⁹⁶ In the end, Berger secured 110,487 votes, 26 percent of the total.⁹⁷

Of the subsequent trial of Berger and the SP national office employees, Irwin St. John Tucker would recall, "I lost interest in this trial when the second day was half through. No good sportsman cares to play a game where the dice are loaded and deck is cold, and the opponent neither knows or cares nothing about the rules of the game and even the ordinary rules of decency and honor."⁹⁸ All five defendants were sentenced to twenty years in prison in February 1919 by the flagrantly biased judge, future Major League Baseball Commissioner Kennesaw Mountain Landis. However, none saw any jail time because the Supreme Court ultimately

overturned the convictions in 1921, based on Landis's refusal to grant a change of venue in light of his outspoken pro-war views.⁹⁹ Also in the early months of 1918, the government was directing a crackdown against the IWW exceeding even that against the Socialists. After brutal mining wars in Butte, Montana, and Bisbee, Arizona, which ensnared federal troops in the months just after the United States entered the war, a series of random mass arrests over the course of a year ultimately led to the indictment of 105 IWW officials, including Bill Haywood, in the spring of 1918. This crackdown naturally led to increased agitation and militancy in the Socialist left wing.

The key event prompting this renewed agitation within the party was the vote of the New York Socialist aldermen to support a third Liberty Loan. The situation was fraught with irony and confusion: any change in sentiment about the war was a consequence of the German invasion of Russia that occurred between the Bolshevik triumph and the signing of a separate peace, and yet this was what was seized on by the left wing.¹⁰⁰ By the time of the vote in March 1918, it was less an expression of new pro-war conviction than of having a ready rationale, in the Russian situation, to avoid a new line of attack from an increasingly savage war party against the Socialists. Meyer London was also a frequent target of left-wing ire because of his habit of voting present on war appropriations bills in Congress. Criticism began almost as soon as London voted against entering the war, when in a telegram to the Russian Socialists his words in favor of a comprehensive peace, as opposed to a separate peace between Russia and Germany, were interpreted by many on both the left and right as an endorsement of U.S. policy and possibly also of the Social Democratic League.¹⁰¹

Many historians have misinterpreted this situation, to a large extent repeating the early left-wing conceit that the SP leadership was at once pro-war and pro-German.¹⁰² In great measure this view has been distorted through the prism of the experiences of Eugene Debs in the first year after the United States entered the war. His health had continued to deteriorate after the 1916 campaign, and he could only follow developments from Terre Haute. In this emotionally trying time, Debs began

a passionate affair with a suffragist leader in Terre Haute, Mabel Curry, encouraged by his brother Theodore to seek the release from his marriage no longer afforded by frequent visits to the brothel on his speaking tours.¹⁰³ Much is made of the letter Debs wrote to Adolph Germer in April 1918 urging that a conference be held to reconsider the St. Louis Platform, insisting, “The Russian Revolution and Germany’s treatment of Russia . . . has created a tremendous change of sentiment throughout the world which we can no longer afford to ignore.”¹⁰⁴ Often portrayed as a left-wing missive that attacked the party leadership as being akin to the pro-war German Social Democrats,¹⁰⁵ it in fact endorsed the “Labor War Aims” formulated at a London conference that included members of the SDL, which is why many in the press took it as a sign Debs was coming out in support of the war. The letter only reflected the confusion obtaining among all Socialists until it was clear that Soviet Russia would sign a separate peace with Germany.

Like all Socialists, Debs was aroused most of all by how the war hysteria was devastating the country generally and the party in particular. Nothing could have shaken him more profoundly than to witness the pro-war mobs rampaging in his beloved community of Terre Haute, where a schoolteacher was fired for belonging to the SP, private homes were ransacked in search of German books to be burned, and a coal miner was lynched for refusing to buy a Liberty Bond.¹⁰⁶ To his dearly loved comrade Kate Richards O’Hare, Debs wrote, “I cannot yet believe that they will ever dare to send you to prison for exercising your constitutional rights of free speech, but if they do I shall feel guilty to be at large.”¹⁰⁷ In early June he decided the time had come to back up these words with action. Stenographers from the U.S. Attorney’s Office were present at Nimisilla Park in Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918, where Debs took center stage to meet his destiny:

I realize that, in speaking to you this afternoon, there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I must be exceedingly careful, prudent, as to what I say, and even more careful and

prudent as to how I say it. I may not be able to say all I think, but I am not going to say anything that I do not think. I would rather a thousand times be a free soul in jail than to be a sycophant and coward in the streets. They may put those boys in jail—and some of the rest of us in jail—but they cannot put the Socialist movement in jail. . . . I have no earthly use for the Junkers of Germany, and not one particle more use for the Junkers in the United States. They tell us that we live in a great free republic, that our institutions are democratic, that we are a free and self-governing people. This is too much, even for a joke. . . . Who appoints our federal judges? The people? In all the history of the country, the working class have never named a federal judge. There are 121 of these judges and every solitary one holds his position, his tenure, through the influence and power of corporate capital. The corporations and trusts dictate their appointment. . . . Here, in this alert and inspiring assemblage our hearts are with the Bolsheviki of Russia. Those heroic men and women, those unconquerable comrades have by their incomparable valor and sacrifice added fresh luster to the fame of the international movement. The very first act of the triumphant Russian Revolution was to proclaim a state of peace with all mankind, coupled with a fervent moral appeal, not to kings, not to emperors, rulers or diplomats but to *the people* of all nations. When the Bolsheviki came into power and went through the archives they found and exposed the secret treaties—the treaties that were made between the Czar and the French Government, the British Government. . . . And here let me emphasize the fact—and it cannot be repeated too often—that the working class who fight all the battles, the working class who make the supreme sacrifices, the working class who freely shed their blood and furnish the corpses, have never yet had a voice in either declaring war or making peace. It is the ruling class that invariably does both. They alone declare war and they alone make peace. . . . Do you wish to hasten the day of victory? Join the Socialist Party! Don't wait for the morrow. . . . To turn your back on the corrupt Republican Party and the corrupt Democratic Party—the gold-dust lackeys of the ruling

class, counts for something. It counts for still more after you have stepped out of those popular and corrupt capitalist parties to join a minority party that has an ideal, that stands for a principle, and fights for a cause. This will be the most important change you have ever made and the time will come when you will thank me for having made the suggestion. It was the day of days for me.¹⁰⁸

The U.S. Attorney immediately convened a grand jury—against the advice of the Justice Department—and on June 30 an indictment was handed down against Debs for ten violations of the Espionage Act.¹⁰⁹ Arrested at a Socialist picnic in Cleveland, he returned to Terre Haute the next day after two wealthy local Socialists posted his \$100,000 bail.¹¹⁰ The black humor of the situation was perhaps best illustrated a few days later when the acclaimed cartoonist of the Socialist press, Art Young, arrived in Terre Haute to call on Debs, accompanied by John Reed, who had just returned from witnessing firsthand the Bolshevik rise to power. As they relaxed in the parlor, the annual Fourth of July Parade passed by, and a few participants could be heard murmuring, “That’s the house of the traitor.” But the ever cheerfully disposed Debs implored his guests, “Come on, let’s go out on the front porch and give ‘em a good show, if they want to see me.”¹¹¹

Seymour Stedman led a team of four lawyers to conduct Debs’s defense as his trial opened on September 9. They did not contest the facts, only the law, as Stedman cross-examined each of the prosecution witnesses, all of whom had been present at the Canton speech. When the prosecution rested after two days, Stedman announced that the defense would call no witnesses and that Debs would personally address the jury. Debs forthrightly explained,

The very first amendment to the Constitution reads: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof, nor abridging the right of freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” That is perfectly

plain English. It can be understood by a child. . . . That is the right I exercised at Canton on the 16th day of last June, and for the exercise of that right, I now have to answer to this indictment. I believe in the right of free speech, in war as well as in peace. I would not under any circumstances gag the lips of my bitterest enemy. I would under no circumstances suppress free speech. It is far more dangerous to attempt to gag the people than to allow them to speak freely what is in their hearts. . . . If the Espionage Law finally stands, then the Constitution of the United States is dead. I am the smallest part of this trial. I have lived long enough to know my own personal insignificance in relation to a great issue that involves the welfare of the whole people. What you may choose to do to me will be of small consequence after all. I am not on trial here. There is an infinitely greater issue that is being tried today in this court, though you may not be conscious of it. American institutions are on trial here before a court of American citizens.¹¹²

Per the instructions of the judge to convict only on charges of encouraging resistance to conscription, the jury returned with a conviction on three of the ten counts. Debs's attorneys urged him to give another statement before sentencing, which took considerable convincing and led him to drink heavily the night before as he composed it.¹¹³ The result was probably the most famous speech he ever gave, the moment for which the man raised on the idealist sentimentalism of his namesakes had been rehearsing his entire life:

Years ago I recognized my kinship with all living beings, and I made up my mind that I was not one bit better than the meanest on earth. I said then, and I say now, that while there is a lower class, I am in it, while there is a criminal element, I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free. . . . Standing here this morning, I recall my boyhood. At fourteen I went to work in a railroad shop, at sixteen I was firing a freight engine on a railroad. I remember all the hardships and privations of that earlier day, and from that time until now

my heart has been with the working class. I could have been in Congress long ago. I have preferred to go to prison.¹¹⁴

The tone of saintliness in this speech is probably the principal reason the mythic Debs has persisted beyond his own lifetime. Yet it is critical to humanize both the man and this moment. The personal and emotional pathos that led Debs to seek this martyrdom for the First Amendment was very real. But the fact that he was propelled into this role by the need to reaffirm his romantic image of himself and his role in the Socialist movement, accentuated by advancing age as much as anything else, does not make it any less noble or heroic. Judge David Westenhaver pronounced himself amazed by the “remarkable self-delusion and self-deception of Mr. Debs who assumes that he is serving humanity” and that he had to enforce the law against “those within our borders who would strike the sword from the hand of this nation while she is engaged in defending herself against a foreign and brutal power.” Debs was sentenced to ten years, but remained free on bail while he exhausted his appeals.¹¹⁵

The Socialist Party began its 1918 campaign optimistically with an appeal to raise a million-dollar campaign fund.¹¹⁶ But by early fall it was clear the Wilson terror had taken its toll and that the party was confronting a major setback. Nowhere was this more in evidence than in Oklahoma, where the SP was barely stumbling along in the aftermath of the Green Corn Rebellion. Some party veterans were fleeing to the utopian colonies established as a desperate response to the war by an aging Job Harriman in Nevada City, Nevada, and New Llano, Louisiana. A few leaders of the Oklahoma party such as H. H. Stallard bolted to the pro-war *New Appeal to Reason*.¹¹⁷ By the beginning of 1918, membership rolls had declined from ten thousand to less than four thousand, and local pro-war agitators made a point of forcing, under threat of violence, the active participation of long-time Socialists in their activities.¹¹⁸

The situation in highly polarized Minnesota foreshadowed the possibilities and pitfalls that awaited the party after the war. When the labor movement in Minneapolis was intimidated into withdrawing from the SP and officially supporting the war, Mayor Thomas Van Lear also formally withdrew from the party and assumed the leadership of a new local Non-Partisan League, intended to serve as the permanent political arm of the local labor movement, while retaining the full support of the Socialists. Van Lear campaigned arm in arm with the NPL candidate for the Senate in Minnesota, Charles Lindbergh Sr., who was burned in effigy in some parts of the state.¹¹⁹ Van Lear very narrowly lost reelection as mayor, but the Socialist-NPL coalition expanded its cohort of aldermen from four to seven.¹²⁰

In New York, there were high hopes of electing several congressmen on the heels of the previous year's municipal breakthrough. These included Hillquit once again in East Harlem, Scott Nearing in Lower Manhattan, and Abraham Shiplacoff in the Flatbush and Brownsville sections of Brooklyn. But Meyer London was facing a stiff battle for reelection, with his Tammany predecessor Henry Goldfogle running with the backing of both major parties. Indeed, fusion tickets were being put up against all the strong Socialist prospects in the city. London's loss in 1918 has usually been attributed to his lack of support from the restive left wing, in spite of the deep hostility of the war party toward this "dangerous radical" and "pro-German."¹²¹ But less attention has been given to the impact of the declaration issued by the British Foreign Office in November 1917, which read in part, "His Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."

Though it gained a substantial following in Eastern Europe before the war, in the immigrant communities of the United States the Zionist movement was almost marginal until what became known as the "Balfour Declaration" made its aims the policy of a wartime ally. The avowedly socialist branch of the movement, the Poale Zion, was nominally aligned with the SP (counting among its acolytes in Milwaukee a young woman

eventually known on the world stage as Golda Meir), but most Jewish Socialists, with roots in the Bund, continued to hold opposition to Zionism as a cardinal principle. Yet a significant number were attracted to Zionism with this breakthrough, perhaps most notably the United Hebrew Trades veteran Joseph Barondess. When Eugene Debs accepted an invitation to address the Poale Zion around the time of his indictment, a frantic letter was sent him by Workmen's Circle leader Jacob Salutsky (later known as J. B. S. Hardman), pleading that,

The Socialist organizations of the Jewish workers could never agree to the extreme nationalism of the Poale Zion movement, and a nationalism which in their case eliminates any tinge of Socialism in their every-day activities. We, of the Socialist Party, therefore, could never find common ground for work, anxious as we are to avoid party strife and dissension in the ranks of organized labor.¹²²

The invitation to speak appears to have been forgotten as Debs was soon faced with more pressing matters. Yet shortly before his death in 1926 Debs would attend a Zionist conference in Chicago where he was warmly received by Isaac Ben-Zvi of the Jewish Agency.¹²³ In contrast, shortly before the United States entered the war, Morris Hillquit gave a speech on the question of ending the political repression of Jews throughout Europe that could easily have been given by the anti-Zionist Reform rabbis who ministered to America's wealthiest and most conservative Jews:

I do not view the problem of Jewish emancipation as a specifically Jewish problem. . . . The emancipation of the Jews abroad is a problem of democracy, and a problem in which all liberty loving citizens of all nations and races are equally interested with the Jews. Democracy is a process of gradual elimination of class and caste distinction.¹²⁴

Meyer London hoped to split the difference, stating in his 1918 campaign that he could support the Balfour Declaration so long as it

did not lead to any forcible annexation of Palestine or conflict with its people's right to self-determination. The Poale Zion denounced London as "a half or quarter Jew, who was more detrimental to the Jewish cause than a non-Jew." Combined with attacks for having attended a session of Congress on Yom Kippur and the active opposition of the New York Jewish elite, it is remarkable that London ever had a fighting chance.¹²⁵

That the Yiddish-speaking Socialists of the Lower East Side were identified by themselves and others as "Jewish" did not mean that they believed themselves to belong to the "Jewish nation" of Zionist imagination. How the name of their language, Yiddish, became translated as "Jewish" was highly analogous to the case of another prominent Socialist language federation, the Lettish. Morris Hillquit described as follows the transformation of the city of his birth within his lifetime:

In my day the Letts played a very subordinate part in the economic, political, and cultural life of Riga or any part of the region which subsequently went to make up the Latvian republic. As conquered aborigines they were relegated to the status of peasants. . . . Their national consciousness sprang up and was more or less artificially fostered towards the latter part of the last century in line with the general nationalist renaissance of that period.¹²⁶

Harry Rogoff, in his biography of Meyer London in 1930, began the rewriting of history in which Bundism was merely a rival form of "Jewish nationalism," but later Zionist historians would not be so charitable.¹²⁷ The Bundists certainly had very different ideas about their ethnic identity than those who called themselves "Americans of the Jewish faith." But even to suggest that they were simply nationalists of "Yiddishland" in the manner of a Polish or Latvian bourgeois nationalist would have unsettled them. The idea that, with the few other scattered communities adhering to Judaism that survived into the twentieth century, they constituted a modern nationality called "the Jewish people" would have struck them as absurd. That this invention became an object of

idolatry to future generations of American nationalists would have been beyond their wildest imaginations.

Meyer London lost reelection with 47 percent of the vote—compared to 39 percent for Hillquit, 30 percent for Scott Nearing, and 23 percent for Abraham Shiplacoff. Dismal results in Oklahoma made clear just how much the party's other historic strongholds had been devastated. In the historically top-performing seventh district, Orville Enfield still managed over 8 percent, but in the Oklahoma City-based fifth district state AFL leader Luther Langston came just a hair under 3 percent. The stunning exception to the general rule was Wisconsin, where Victor Berger was victorious in the fighting fifth at nearly 44 percent, only to be denied his seat as a convicted traitor after exhaustive hearings. In the fourth district neighboring to the south, Edmund Melms earned just under 42 percent. Oscar Ameringer managed 20 percent in the second district that stretched from Sheboygan to Madison, and Leo Krzycki, the leading Socialist representative of Milwaukee's Polish community, polled over 22 percent in the eighth district. In addition, a nationwide and all-time record twenty-two Socialist legislators were elected in the Badger State.

In other past strongholds, there were unmistakable signs that a large vote was flocking to an embryonic Labor Party movement. In addition to Charles Lindbergh Sr. in Minnesota, in Nevada, colorful women's suffrage leader Anne Martin won 18 percent of the vote for the U.S. Senate, far ahead of Socialist Martin Scanlan.¹²⁸ And in Montana, the stridently antiwar congresswoman Jeanette Rankin, just two years earlier the first woman ever elected to the U.S. House, won more than 23 percent of the vote as the Senate candidate of the short-lived National Party. Originally conceived as a pro-war radical party by John Spargo and others in the SDL, this party fell under the influence of such war critics as J. A. H. Hopkins before folding into the nascent Labor Party movement.¹²⁹

Such was the combined crisis and opportunity facing the Socialist Party when, within a week of the 1918 election, the armistice was signed

that ended the First World War. Not a few Socialists and their fellow travelers were swept up in the war rhetoric that spoke to their idealism. But on the eve of the second, yet worse war that set in stone the revolution wrought by the first, Oscar Ameringer wrote with typical bluntness:

The leader in that national self-deception was Woodrow Wilson. His cocksureness, and magnificent talent for phrasemaking—“neutral even in spirit,” “too proud to fight,” “benevolent neutrality,” “peace without victory,” and finally, “war to make the world safe for democracy”—made him the mouthpiece of the very forces which in the beginning of his career he had denounced as the “invisible government” and threatened to “hang higher than Haman.” In the end the man hanged himself and his country, the peace of the world, and became the godfather of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin.¹³⁰

8 Fatal Alienation

(1919–1920)

The Third International conceived at Zimmerwald in 1915 was founded in January 1919 in a meeting hastily arranged by Lenin in the former royal bedchamber of the Tsar. Only a few Europeans were present; in an odd twist, the one American present was Boris Reinstein, an official of the Socialist Labor Party, lured back to his homeland from Stockholm after illegally making his way there to attend the 1917 conference for which Morris Hillquit, Victor Berger, and Algernon Lee were denied passports.¹ Four American groups were named in the invitation to affiliate with the new International: the SLP, the IWW, the paper remnant of the SLP splinter from the IWW in 1908, and “the elements of the Left Wing of the American Socialist Party (tendency represented by E. V. Debs and the Socialist Propaganda League).”²

By this time, the organization of a left-wing bloc in the Socialist Party had proceeded far beyond developments known in Russia. To speak of the “tendency represented by Debs” was a misnomer, a relic of the left wing line before 1912. A few weeks before the founding of the Third International, Lenin’s *Letter to American Workingmen* was published in Louis Fraina’s *Revolutionary Age*, having been smuggled into the country by Carl Sandburg when he returned from reporting on the revolutionary upheaval in Finland.³ Whereas American left-wingers were feverishly campaigning to depose the “social patriot” party leadership, Lenin affirmed that Gompers, not Hillquit or Berger, was the leader of American “social patriotism.”⁴ In sharp contrast to Trotsky, who personally initiated and inspired much of the left-wing fury, Lenin

consistently held a romantic view of the American movement, typified by the *Letter to American Workingmen* with its fulsome praise of Debs. Thus, it appears that it was only through the intervention of Trotsky, motivated by his pathological hatred for Hillquit in particular, that the Socialist Party did not receive an unqualified invitation to join the Third International.

The events of January 1919 impressed upon the SP leadership that not all was well with the revolutionary ferment sweeping from Russia into the heart of Europe. The much-maligned German Social Democracy led the revolution that finally ended the war, yet in the American party even Victor Berger was now in greater sympathy with the followers of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the former leading and the latter merely implicated in the disastrous Spartacist uprising, crushed with brute force by the new Social Democratic regime.⁵ But the mere fact of any kind of armed insurrection against this first revolution, with the assumed blessing of the Bolsheviks, raised a host of disturbing questions. If American right-wing Socialists were ambivalent about the circumstances of the Spartacist uprising, there could be no doubting the ramifications of the fate of the short-lived Bavarian Socialist Republic. After this revolutionary government was declared by impeccable left-wingers with clearly articulated differences with Lenin, Bolshevik agents deposed its leaders in the spring of 1919 before being crushed themselves.

In light of later history, much is surreal about the American scene in the years immediately following the Russian Revolution. Ethnic groups that were later reliably and fervently anti-Communist in American politics briefly and fatefully flocked to ostensible American Bolshevism, seen for a brief moment as the harbinger of national liberation from the Tsar. Lenin had been especially aware of the Socialist Propaganda League because its founders were essentially the Latvian Socialist Party in exile. In fact, the leader of the League in Boston, Fricis Rozins, was the first leader of the revolutionary regime in Latvia.⁶ American exiles were also prominent in the short-lived Finnish Socialist Republic. Santeri Nuorteva, a member of the Finnish parliament exiled in 1910, served

as its emissary in the United States in the early months of 1919. But whereas Nuorteva fled to Russia after the fall of Socialist Finland, its first prime minister, former Western Federation of Miners organizer Oskari Tokoi, lived out his exile in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, where he led the Finnish Socialist Federation in its fierce anti-Communism.

By February 1919, the left wing of the Socialist Party raised in earnest the specter of bolting to form a new party. Nicholas Hourwich, son of New York's left wing elder statesman Isaac Hourwich, now led the Russian Federation, formed by Bolshevik exiles in 1915. The Russian Federation was most notable among the numerous language federations hailing from the dominion of the Russian Empire in being overwhelmed with new members, spurred more by national pride in the freedom fighters back home than any socialist conviction. Hourwich reasoned that even if the record of the SP leadership was not the "social patriot" caricature that Louis Fraina and others made it out to be, a split was still necessary because this was a precondition to the revolutions in Russia as well as Germany.⁷

Fraina had maintained his ultra-left posture through the war principally by attacking the allegedly bourgeois and reformist People's Council for Democracy and Peace, ignoring the fact that it was largely modeled on the Russian Soviets and was almost entirely initiated by Socialist Party members.⁸ By early 1919, such People's Council leaders as Scott Nearing and Louis Lochner were even arguing for doing away with the advocacy of immediate demands in favor of exclusive agitation for the overthrow of capitalism, in daring contention with historic SP policy. But blindly following the communications from the recent First Congress of the Third International, the left wing identified the People's Council as the "center" that, in the words of *Revolutionary Age*, had to be "smashed as a necessary means of conquering the party for revolutionary socialism."⁹

The first direct organizational link to the future Communist Party emerged when the Left Wing Section of New York was formed, led by Fraina, John Reed, Ben Gitlow, and the two leaders of the City College

Socialist organization, Jay Lovestone and William Weinstone. The Manhattan SP local remained firmly in the control of Hillquit and his allies, but the Left Wing quickly secured the allegiance of Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx and ultimately cities as far flung as Buffalo, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, Philadelphia, and Cleveland—home of national left wing leader Charles Ruthenberg. The left wing slogan of “no compromise, no hesitation” left no doubt that its policy was rule or ruin.¹⁰

At that time the news was encouraging enough to those convinced that revolutionary insurrection on the Russian model was both desirable and imminent in the United States. A general strike broke out in Seattle in February 1919, prompted by a routine labor dispute, with much of the city briefly policed by local “soviets” as similar episodes occurred in Portland and Butte.¹¹ These strikes were followed over the course of the year by a nationwide coal strike, a police strike in Boston, and, in Chicago, a steel strike led by William Z. Foster, a protégé of veteran SP ultra-leftist Herman Titus who led a small syndicalist sect on friendly terms with the AFL leadership.¹² It was against this backdrop that Eugene Debs identified with the left wing in the weeks leading up to his imprisonment, joining the editorial board of *Class Struggle* in which he declared, “From the crown of my head to the soles of my feet I am a Bolshevik.” But as ever in the past, there was a wide gulf between Debs’s emotional posture and his actions, as he soon made clear his strong opposition to a split.¹³

The SP mainstream, so despised by the aspiring Bolsheviks, still endured unabated repression in the months following the end of the war. In New York, the legislature convened the Lusk Committee to investigate “criminal syndicalism”—a dangerously vague concept going on statute books in many states—which ordered a massive police raid on the Rand School. Across the Midwest, many towns with strong Socialist organizations were less vulnerable to wartime repression than the rural Old Southwest with its dependence on the mails. But militarist mobs became increasingly institutionalized and menacing with the founding in 1919 of the American Legion and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. One of the most

bitter and sustained clashes took place in Dayton, Ohio, where the local Socialist Party was led by Joseph Sharts, an attorney who assisted in the trial defense of Eugene Debs.¹⁴

Victor Berger faced overwhelming hostility as the U.S. House refused to seat him. The committee to hear his case was chaired by Frederick Dallinger of Massachusetts, who held that the section of the Fourteenth Amendment barring from Congress any who had given aid and comfort to the enemy was applicable to Berger. The hearings consisted mostly of Berger's own testimony, arguing among other points that many other prominent opponents of the Wilson war policies were serving without dishonor.¹⁵ Yet in a sign of how much he had been radicalized by the war, Berger refused the invitation to unequivocally denounce the IWW as he would have without a second thought for most of his career, reducing his difference with them to one of tactics.¹⁶ One non-Socialist submitted an amicus brief pointing out the precedent of Matthew Lyons, convicted under the Alien and Sedition Acts in the 1790s before being elected to Congress and seated without objection.¹⁷ Yet another letter to Berger read,

I am not a Socialist—never was one—never expect to become one. I never have had any use for your party principles, your candidacy or yourself up to the present time. BUT when a constituency of American citizens acting in an orderly manner and in a regular way elect a man to Congress and that man is not allowed to take his seat because his opinions are at variance with those of their bosses from whom they take orders, well that is different. Then it is not a question of your views or mine. It is a question of the very foundation principles of our government.¹⁸

After Berger adamantly stood by the St. Louis Platform in his testimony and spoke of the late war as “criminal” and “imperialist,” the House committee upheld the refusal to seat him by a vote of eight to one.¹⁹ Adding insult to injury, Berger prevailed in the special election to replace him and was again denied his seat.

The most tragicomic episode of the entire Wilson terror had to be the abortive prosecution of A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen. On a tour of the Midwest to promote *The Messenger* in the summer of 1919, they were arrested on August 4 in Cleveland after the local authorities were alerted that Owen was a draft evader. After spending two days in jail, Seymour Stedman met them in court to represent them. The judge appeared perplexed as the evidence was presented, believing that two colored men could not have been intelligent enough to write *The Messenger* and evidently also believing them to be minors. He promptly ordered them released into Stedman's custody to "see to it that they return to their parents' homes." The judge then asked Randolph and Owen to approach. Randolph recalled,

"You really wrote this magazine?" We assured him that we had. "What do you know about socialism?" he said. We told him we were students of Marx and fervent believers in the socialization of social property. "Don't you know that you are opposing your own government and that you are subject to imprisonment for treason?" We told him we believed in the principle of human justice and that our right to express our conscience was above the law. He almost changed his mind then and there. "I ought to throw you in jail," he said. "But take my advice and get out of town. If we catch you here again, you won't be so lucky."²⁰

From Cleveland the pair triumphantly proceeded to Chicago and Milwaukee, where aging veteran German Socialists were "astonished to find black men who knew anything about Socialism." Speeches in Washington and Boston followed, at great risk of arrest, before returning to New York. Looking back, said Randolph, "We knew we were risking jail, but we didn't give a fig. We were young, we were against everything, and we weren't going to back down from anything."²¹

The Supreme Court unanimously upheld the conviction of Eugene Debs on March 10, 1919, and he reported to the federal prison at Moundsville, West

Virginia, a month later. His time at Moundsville greatly resembled his imprisonment after the Pullman Strike nearly a quarter-century earlier, with only a token work assignment and more or less complete freedom within the confines of the prison, including unrestricted mailing and visitation privileges.²² Among the visitors he received in Moundsville was a leading Socialist in the West Virginia AFL, Valentine Reuther, who brought with him his two young sons Walter and Victor.²³ However, the relatively idyllic conditions in Moundsville abruptly ended after just two months, when Debs was transferred to the Atlanta federal prison.

President Wilson received numerous pleas to grant clemency to Debs, including from members of the Social Democratic League.²⁴ Then attending the Versailles Conference, Wilson deferred the matter to Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, but the infamous anti-radical zealot would have none of it, and Wilson echoed his sentiments as time went on. Several SDL members were active in Europe at the time of Versailles, including William English Walling as an advisor to Samuel Gompers. John Spargo served in Italy directing an office of the Committee on Public Information, which he allied with the leading pro-war socialist in Italy, Benito Mussolini.²⁵ The trajectory of Mussolini's political evolution—from the left-wing syndicalism of Georges Sorel to a militarist nationalism expressed in orthodox syndicalist terms—bore an uncanny resemblance to that of William English Walling. Indeed, Gompers's lingering youthful idealism led him to praise Mussolini's "national syndicalism" as "the promise of industrial democracy in Italy, pledged in declarations and phrases which might easily enough have been taken from the mouths of American trade unionists."²⁶

But any influence the SDL had ever enjoyed with European Socialists had by now collapsed, particularly after Spargo and other SDL emissaries presented themselves as American Socialist representatives to the British Labour Party, only to be angrily denounced by Ramsay MacDonald for deliberate misrepresentation.²⁷ By early 1920, Spargo was drafting for Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby the so-called Colby Note establishing the principle of nonrecognition of Soviet Russia, forging one of the bluntest weapons of American imperialism: the withholding

of diplomatic recognition from “rogue states.”²⁸ Indeed, the scheme for joint condominium rule of the globe by Britain and France that was called the League of Nations set the precedent for the American global hegemony that emerged at the end of the twentieth century.

Despite the fact that it was stalwart antiwar progressives in the Senate such as Robert LaFollette, Hiram Johnson, and William Borah who kept the United States out of the League, there are still those who portray Woodrow Wilson as a martyr for enlightened internationalism. But perhaps no one more forthrightly described the horror and outrage Versailles afflicted upon Germany, which sent it rushing into the arms of a disgruntled corporal with the mind of a serial killer, than Meyer London, upon his return to the House floor two years later:

Germany was mutilated by the terms of the Versailles treaty. Through the loss of all her colonies she was deprived of many sources of raw material so essential to her manufactures. She was stripped of a substantial part of her European population. She was deprived of her merchant fleet. Her organization for commerce with the outside world was battered. She was deprived of a large portion of her iron and coal producing sections. The principal means of communication were put under the control of the Reparations Commission. An alien army, the maintenance of which was charged to Germany and which costs Germany more than her entire army and navy cost her annually before the war, was placed upon her soil. The power of the Reparations Commission practically destroyed Germany as a sovereign country. Not content with having divested Germany of a substantial portion of her population, of her territory in Europe, of all her colonies and many of her resources, an indemnity has been imposed which cannot be paid without dooming to serfdom more than one generation of the German people.²⁹

As the struggle with the left wing approached its climax in the spring of 1919, the National Executive Committee launched a National League for the Release of Political Prisoners. Under the direction of J. Mahlon

Barnes, it called for an “American Freedom Convention” to meet in Chicago on July 3 to demand the release of all those imprisoned for resisting the war and the draft. Other sponsors included the Machinists Union, the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, the Illinois AFL, the Milwaukee AFL, the United Hebrew Trades, and the Workmen’s Circle. The campaign was ultimately endorsed by more than 120 union locals.³⁰ Barnes grew desperate and frustrated in his appeals as the party and movement he helped build were coming undone by the imminent Communist split: “All this spying, lying, suppression and frantic effort to keep the people separated and in ignorance of facts is a menace to every citizen. New and more reactionary and repressive laws are being prepared by both old parties in the several states and in Congress. . . . Join forces for freedom for all.”³¹

By the spring of 1919, all official publications and communications from the SP national office were banned from the mails; only dues receipts were permitted to be mailed, and they had to be explicitly marked. As in all prosecutions and convictions during the war, there was little doubt of the underlying political calculation when it became clear that left wing publications were allowed to pass freely through the mails. As Adolph Germer would one day recall in a letter to historian David Shannon,

You ask whether I had definitive proof that the Wilson Administration was “fostering left-wingers.” No, I had no specific proof for no one would admit it, but the circumstances were so convincing that it left little room for doubt. Woodrow Wilson hated the Socialist Party and everything about it, and it was not only my sincere judgment, but the judgment of others that Wilson allowed his agencies to aid the elements in the Socialist Party who later caused a split and organized the two Communist parties.³²

James Weinstein adds,

Many Socialists were convinced, as James Maurer put it, that the ranks of the Communists were “honeycombed with spies,” and that many

Communist leaders were “financed by the government and big business” to corrupt and destroy the Socialist Party. At the time of the Palmer Raids, in January 1920, the *New York Times* shed some light on this question when it reported that for months, that is, even before the split occurred, “Department of Justice men, dropping all other work, had concentrated on the Reds,” and that agents had “quietly infiltrated into the radical ranks,” . . . The extent to which they encouraged a split in Socialist ranks cannot be determined, but agents of this type have traditionally played the role of provocateur. It must be assumed that in varying degrees these agents followed the custom of their profession. . . . In Michigan, for example, a former antiunion militia man was active in the left wing at its inception, while in Detroit the reputed organizer of the first branch of the Russian Federation became the most prominent witness for the Department of Justice after the Palmer Raids.³³

The balloting for a new National Executive Committee that spring led to a nearly clean sweep by the left wing, with the election of Alfred Wagenknecht as executive secretary, joined by Louis Fraina, Charles Ruthenberg, John Reed, Nicholas Hourwich, Ludwig Katterfeld, and William Bross Lloyd. Yet the left wing continued its rule-or-ruin policy to the point of going forward with a “National Conference of the Left Wing” in June. On May 21, Morris Hillquit, recovering from tuberculosis at Saranac Lake, published a statement in the *New York Call* interpreted by both sides as a declaration of war: “Better a hundred times to have two numerically small Socialist organizations, each homogenous and harmonious within itself, than to have one big party torn by dissensions and squabbles, an impotent colossus on feet of clay. The time for action is near. Let us clear the decks.”³⁴ With this blessing, the incumbent NEC led a high-handed purge of the left wing from the party at its annual meeting three days later.

On a party-line vote of eight to two (Wagenknecht and Katterfeld being the only two left wing incumbents on the NEC), three votes were taken in the following order: First, the state party of Michigan was expelled

as a unit for officially adopting the short lived Nearing-Lochner platform of repudiating immediate demands, in keeping with the “anti-sabotage amendment” of 1912.³⁵ Second, seven foreign language federations were summarily expelled: the Russian, Lettish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, South Slavic (Slovenian), and Polish. With the partial exception of the Lettish, each had acquired a vastly inflated membership in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. As early as January 1918, Gregory Weinstein, Bukharin’s successor as editor of *Novy Mir*, was nominated to serve on the New York state committee, but was ruled ineligible because he had been a party member for less than two years.³⁶ This two-year requirement also disqualified many of the members of the pro-tem NEC, including John Reed and Louis Fraina.

Following the logic of the second vote, the NEC then declared the previous NEC election void upon alleged fraud, and an “Emergency Convention” to rectify the damage was called for late summer. The NEC could determine, from the small sampling of ballots in its possession, that many ballots had been marked before signature, others had even been marked to indicate how members should vote (undoubtedly a widespread practice among the many non-English speakers), and some locals had submitted inaccurate tallies.³⁷ As plans went ahead for the National Left Wing Conference, the Cleveland local controlled by Charles Ruthenberg initiated a motion for a membership referendum to reverse the actions of the NEC, with form letters of support coming from locals as far flung as Vale, Oregon; Staunton, Virginia; San Francisco, and German Branch Terre Haute.³⁸ In New York, Socialist branch meetings frequently degenerated into the hurling of furniture between the opposing sides.³⁹

When the Left Wing Conference opened in New York on June 21, the host city was represented by Fraina, Reed, Ben Gitlow, James Larkin, Bertram Wolfe, and Nicholas Hourwich for the Russian Federation. The most prominent Midwesterners were Charles Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, William Bross Lloyd, and James P. Cannon, an IWW veteran from Kansas City who edited the leading left wing paper in the West, *Workers World*.⁴⁰ A motion to found a new Communist Party then and there was defeated by a vote of 55 to 38, followed by a solid majority vote in favor of

“capturing the Socialist Party for revolutionary Socialism.”⁴¹ But Hourwich and Fraina were won over during the convention to dispensing with the attempt to capture the Socialist Party and instead joining a convention called by the expelled Michigan party to coincide with the SP Emergency Convention.⁴² James Oneal reported on these developments for the Socialist press:

But the lefts also arranged so that they can immediately constitute themselves as another party if they fail to capture the party in August. The National Council is authorized to elect a national secretary and to issue dues stamps to the faithful. Furthermore, if they do not capture the emergency convention in August and reinstate the suspended federations, then the National Council “shall proceed with the work of organizing the Communist Party.” In other words, unless the Socialist Party is willing to submit to the dictatorship of the Left Wing the latter is prepared to organize its motley elements into another political party.⁴³

It was left to the embattled executive secretary, Adolph Germer, to make a final plea for Socialist unity:

Where were these “revolutionary mass actionists” during the war? Most of those who are now hurling invectives at the National Executive Committee, and charging it with being yellow, were in their dugouts and did not make their appearance until after the armistice was signed. . . . Five of the translator secretaries, whose federations were suspended by the National Executive Committee, in a signed statement said they would refuse to cooperate in a conference for the release of political prisoners. In furtherance of that, literature has been circulated urging the party members not only to remain aloof from it, but to do all they can to prevent the conference from being held. In other words, the left wingers are perfectly willing to let Debs, O’Hare, and our other comrades remain in prison until they can be freed by what is euphoniously termed “revolutionary mass action.” If my

associates and I have to stay in Leavenworth until the left-wingers get us out by their “revolutionary mass action,” we will serve our full twenty years.⁴⁴

The Socialist “Emergency Convention” was to open on August 30 at Machinists Hall in Chicago. The night before, the remaining left-wingers determined to capture the convention—John Reed, Ben Gitlow, Alfred Wagenknecht, Ludwig Katterfeld, and Charles Ruthenberg—met in the downstairs bar and billiard room of the hall to finalize the details of their plot: to plant themselves on the delegates’ floor before the arrival of the convention managers and demand recognition. Unbeknownst to them, the bartender who also maintained the building was a former union brother of Adolph Germer from the Illinois coal fields, who promptly informed him of the plot. When the left wing party arrived in the hall early the next morning, the man charged with thwarting them was the well-prepared Julius Gerber, who had chaired most of the New York meetings at which the New York left-wingers had made their stand. Reed and an especially large comrade began to assault Gerber, prompting old-timer George Goebel to rush across the street to the SP national office to get Germer on the scene to restore order.⁴⁵

Germer told Reed and his party that they could either retreat to the area reserved for spectators or he would escort them out himself. At that moment, an attachment of police arrived, offering to clear the hall entirely before allowing the convention to restart. Germer explained more than thirty years later to David Shannon,

I have been accused time and again, and still am sometimes by the Communists, of getting the police into the hall. After the convention, I learned that no one else but Mr. Wagenknecht was responsible for it. The night before the convention opened, he was interviewed by a *Chicago Tribune* reporter and was asked what their plan was. The reporter telephoned the story into the *Tribune* desk and somehow a city detective who knew Wagenknecht learned of it, which brought the police into the hall. . . . A new party was what they had in mind,

and like good Communists, they found a pretext for withdrawing by maneuvering a situation which would bring the police into the picture.⁴⁶

Many delegates who identified with the left wing remained, but their minority status was confirmed when Seymour Stedman was elected permanent chairman of the convention over the left wing candidate, Joseph Coldwell of Rhode Island.⁴⁷ Jacob Panken was then named to chair a committee to review the status of contested delegates, with twenty-six delegates walking out over the course of the next two days.⁴⁸ Germer gave an opening address declaring the purpose of the Socialist Party to be “to unite the working class of the United States, that we might follow the splendid example set by our comrades in Russia,” but stressing that different social conditions in the two countries demanded different methods by American Socialists; he hastened to add that these different social conditions, in fact, were the actual basis of the unfolding split.⁴⁹ Seymour Stedman followed with a yet firmer delineation of the real issue:

Many, influenced by the rapid changes taking place in Russia and Europe—and believing that in this country, the richest creditor nation in the world, with a working class discontented, but by no means revolutionary—believe that it is not only possible to follow the Russian example, but mandatory. They declare that they alone hold the secret of success, and that it is their duty to impose it upon the party.⁵⁰

Yet there could be no doubting the enduring militancy of these Socialist regulars, articulated in the manifesto adopted by the convention and drafted by Morris Hillquit, still in recuperation at Saranac Lake:

In every modern country, whether monarchical or republican in form, the capitalist class was in control, monopolized the national wealth and directed the industrial processes. Its rule has been one of oppression, disorder, and civil and international strife. The capitalist interests of every leading nation fully exploited the resources of their

countries, and reduced their peoples to wretchedness and then set out to conquer the markets of the world for the sale of their surplus commodities, for the investment of their surplus capital, and for the acquisition of additional sources of raw material and natural wealth. . . . Then came the inevitable collapse. The world was precipitated into the most savage and inhuman slaughter in history. Millions of young men were killed. Millions more were maimed and crippled. Countries were devastated and depopulated. . . . We, the organized Socialists of America, pledge our support to the revolutionary workers of Russia in the support of their Soviet government, to the radical Socialists of Germany, Austria, and Hungary in their efforts to establish working class rule in their countries, and to those Socialist organizations in England, France, and Italy and other countries who during the war, as after the war, have remained true to the principles of uncompromising international socialism. We are utterly opposed to the so-called League of Nations. Against this international alliance of capitalist governments, we hold out to the world the ideal of a federation of free and equal Socialist nations.⁵¹

On its first day, the convention adopted several constitutional changes in response to the debacle that transpired. The National Executive Committee would now be elected by convention, and a Board of Appeals was established to mediate disputes between the NEC and the membership. Conventions were also now to be held annually. Finally, Adolph Germer resigned as executive secretary, succeeded by Otto Branstetter.

On the evening of August 31, the second day of the Socialist convention, the thwarted left-wingers returned to the bar and billiard room of Machinists Hall to found their new party, the Communist Labor Party. The next day, the former Michigan SP and expelled foreign language federations founded the Communist Party of America across town at the Russian Federation hall. Then, on September 2, after the Communist Labor Party concluded its convention at the IWW hall, a large group from the party, including Charles Ruthenberg and Jay Lovestone, immediately bolted to the Communist Party of America.⁵² The following year,

the two parties were forced into a merger by the Third International, increasingly known by then as the Communist International or Comintern. A bizarre two-year drama of mostly underground existence followed for the merged party.

The followers of the two Michigan leaders, Dennis Batt and John Keracher, were expelled from the Communist Party of America before the end of 1919 for continuing to hold many old Socialist assumptions, chief among them that American capitalism was not on the verge of collapse but had in fact been strengthened by the First World War. The result was the formation of the Proletarian Party, which remained a tiny sect, almost entirely based in Detroit, until the end of the 1960s.⁵³ William Bross Lloyd, who was ferried to the Communist Labor Party convention by his chauffeur, abruptly abandoned the young Communist movement in 1922 and became an arch-conservative, known to listen to eight hours a day of anti-FDR broadcasting in his autumn years.⁵⁴ But the oddest incident had to have been early in the Communist Labor Party convention, when John Reed and Louis Boudin found themselves in a heated argument over the correct translation of *The Communist Manifesto*. A shaken and hysterical Boudin walked out declaring, "I did not leave a party of crooks to join a party of lunatics!"⁵⁵

If anything approaches a consensus view of what caused the decline and collapse of the Socialist Party of America, it is to identify it in the split that formed the Communist Party in 1919. It is certainly true that, as James Weinstein declares as his thesis statement in the final sentence of his brilliant study, "The legacy of 1919 was the alienation of American Socialism."⁵⁶ But because it ultimately proved to be the *legacy* of 1919 does not mean that the Communist split is what made the decline and collapse of the Socialist Party a *fait accompli*. Indeed, Weinstein demonstrates this more clearly than anyone, giving attention to the emergence of the Labor Party movement as the breakup of the Socialist Party unfolded and illustrating the causal relationship between these events.

An empirical measurement that may foster confusion between the ultimate legacy and immediate consequences of the 1919 split is the rise

and fall of dues-paying membership. As early as 1913, nearly 30 percent of the total SP membership was affiliated through the foreign language federations. By 1917, when the average membership was 80,379, the number of language federation members had only modestly increased by about 5,000, but now constituted over 44 percent of the total membership. At the most inflated post-1912 peak of membership—104,822 in the first quarter of 1919—the language federations constituted 54 percent of the membership at 56,740. Excluding the language federation numbers, which rapidly evaporated after the founding of the rival Communist parties,⁵⁷ the SP membership average of 34,926 in the fourth quarter of 1919 represents a serious, but, in proper perspective, relatively modest loss of 13,156, or 27 percent, from the beginning of 1919, when there was only a slight increase in non-federation membership of roughly 3,000 from 1917.⁵⁸

Tellingly, even among new left historians the one-dimensional attribution of the Socialist Party's decline has distracted from assessing the real impact of government repression during the war, which James Weinstein is second to none in forthrightly describing as "a reign of terror far worse than any conducted in Europe, either among the Allied Powers or within the German Empire."⁵⁹ The impact of the war, the Communist split, and decisions made in the months after the split must all be given their due in diagnosing the collapse of the Socialist Party. But one unmistakable fact balances the scales to decisively assign blame to wartime repression: the two places where a formidable party organization survived through the 1920s, New York and Milwaukee, were the two large cities where banning from the mails was not a death sentence for a viable party press.

It also bears emphasis that the departure of the future Communist Party did not notably rupture either the historic base or leadership of American Socialism—potential candidates for leadership such as Charles Ruthenberg and Alfred Wagenknecht were the exception and not the rule. Indeed, the Socialist Party lost a far larger and longer established portion of its talent to the pro-war defection. Finally, although there was certainly some basic continuity from the historic left wing,

particularly *International Socialist Review*, to American Communism, the program of the Third International nevertheless represented a fundamental break with the historic left wing. In the words of James Weinstein,

Most of the Americans who joined the left wing had no concept of what later came to be called the Leninist party. Quite the contrary, they had traditionally opposed Hillquit and Berger as bureaucrats, and had advocated greater decentralization and autonomy. . . . The native left-wingers who went Communist did so out of romantic identification with the Russian Revolution, and because of the panicked, bureaucratic action of the Old Guard in expelling the foreign language federations in the spring of 1919. But few of them could remain for long in a party that boasted, as Alexander Bittelman did in 1924, of its ability to change its line in 24 hours at the behest of the International.⁶⁰

Once the split was an accomplished fact, there was more oxygen in the Socialist Party for airing differences with the Soviets beyond tactics. Attitudes toward the Soviet experiment would remain a basis for controversy among the Socialists into the 1930s. But Victor Berger, despite his own radicalization by the war, expressed in a letter to Morris Hillquit the increasingly mainstream Socialist view:

In this game of would-be radical phrases the one who can play the game the hardest will naturally win. And the emptier the barrel the louder the sound. I am sick and tired of the business. If there is to be a revolution some day, I and my crowd will surely be there. But that continuous threat of a "revolution" reminds me of a man who is continuously brandishing a revolver that is not loaded. . . . Our party is Marxian, of course, and Karl Marx, who later in life deprecated communism as utopian, really started out as a communist. *The Communist Manifesto*, crude and impossibilistic as it is, will forever remain the Bible of the communists and the bane of the Marxian

Socialists. Personally, let me tell you that I shall never become a communist but remain a Socialist—a Social Democrat, if you please. I consider communism only possible in a very primitive and backward civilization—and for that reason it may be successful in Russia for a while. . . . I wish the Bolsheviki in Russia good luck and God speed and I shall fight like a tiger against any interference in Russian affairs, but while we can learn from them—accept some Soviet ideas and a little guild socialism from them—we cannot transfer Russia to America. And as to the Moscow Internationale, which is to be made up of Bolsheviks, Spartacans, and Hungarian communists, I would not become a delegate to that convention if the election was tendered to me unanimously and on a gold platter.⁶¹

In many ways of far greater consequence to the Socialist Party than the momentous Communist split was the founding convention of the National Labor Party in Chicago in November 1919. The leaders of the Chicago Federation of Labor had issued the call a year earlier, backed by the Illinois State Federation and greeted with enthusiasm by central labor councils in cities as varied as Bridgeport, Connecticut; Charleston, South Carolina; Barre, Vermont; and Allentown, Pennsylvania. In New York, an “American Labor Party” was formed that year by James Boyle, a former president of the Brooklyn Central Labor Union who envisioned the Socialists, Labor Party, and Non-Partisan League united in a new radical coalition.⁶² In Chicago, an ambitious goal to earn 100,000 votes for its mayoral candidate, Chicago Federation of Labor president John Fitzpatrick, fell short at 56,000, but he was running against a popular independent progressive and Socialist John Collins. The Labor Party nonetheless elected eight mayors in Illinois in 1919, including in Aurora, Elgin, and Rock Island.⁶³ In Rockford, the new “Labor Legion” would govern the city in coalition with the Socialists well into the 1930s.

The evidence suggests that, excluding those who were disillusioned with radicalism altogether, the larger portion of Socialist losses from 1919 went not to the Communist movement but to the Labor Party movement. Max Hayes, long-time leader of the Socialist bloc in the AFL, was

a leader in the Labor Party movement from the beginning, after being unceremoniously driven out of the party he helped found by the left-wingers who dominated his Cleveland local.⁶⁴ In California, the leading Socialist papers in Los Angeles and Oakland extended olive branches to the Labor Party movement, whereas in Seattle the Socialist organization defected almost wholesale into the new Washington Farmer-Labor Party. In Pennsylvania, though James Maurer remained in the Socialist Party, he led the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor in endorsing the movement. In Chicago, SP losses to the Labor Party included Illinois Federation president Duncan McDonald and Chicago aldermen John C. Kennedy and William Rodriguez. Still, in many places the Socialists maintained the upper hand in potentially negotiating unity. In Schenectady, for instance, the Socialist mayoral candidate lost by only 998 votes in 1919, whereas a Labor Party candidate polled 1,523 votes.⁶⁵

Another new movement and potentially valuable ally in helping the Socialists rebuild was inaugurated in December. In St. Louis, a group of radicalized Progressive Party survivors held a gathering to form a new national organization called the Committee of 48, so named to reflect its intention to have a representative from every state in the union. The principals of this group—Amos Pinchot, George L. Record, J. A. H. Hopkins, and Dudley Field Malone—all had records of fruitful cooperation with the Socialist Party after campaigning for Morris Hillquit in 1917. They were also joined by Parley P. Christensen, a former Progressive in the Utah legislature more recently distinguished as an attorney for the IWW. Their conference was attended by Frank O'Hare, whose wife was probably the best known political prisoner after Eugene Debs. James Weinstein argues, "In the postwar period they might have given qualified support to a united and vital Socialist movement, but with the party breaking up they followed a course similar to that of the Labor Party."⁶⁶

A few municipal victories—in Buffalo and Lackawanna, New York; Massillon, Ohio; and Sheboygan, Wisconsin—leavened the otherwise dreadful year of 1919 for the Socialist Party.⁶⁷ But the lowest point of the Wilson terror was yet to come. In New York City, two of the Socialist

aldermen, Algernon Lee and Abraham Beckerman, were reelected in 1919 along with new member Edward F. Cassidy, but Lee and Cassidy were denied their seats; their expulsion was finally overturned with only two months left in their terms. Then, on January 6, 1920, the five Socialist members of the New York Assembly—Louis Waldman, August Claessens, Charles Solomon, Samuel De Witt, and Samuel Orr—were summoned before the Bar of the House, where it was pronounced, “You have been elected on a platform that is absolutely inimical to the best interests of the State of New York and of the United States.” A resolution was then introduced to expel them from the Assembly that falsely claimed their party had been convicted as an organization under the Espionage Act; the resolution passed by a vote of 140 to 6.⁶⁸ A formal statement to the press by the five assemblymen read,

We regard our exclusion from the Assembly as organized violence against the very essence of democracy—the sacred right of the ballot. It is a denial of self-government. It is the shameless establishment of an ugly dictatorship. The whole procedure is violative of the fundamental law of this land as expressed in the Constitution and the deepest traditions of this nation as voiced in the Declaration of Independence.⁶⁹

Coinciding with the notorious Palmer Raids as the year 1920 began, the expulsion of the New York Socialists served to galvanize widespread disgust throughout the nation against what the Wilson terror had wrought. The Republican *Pittsburgh Leader* editorialized, “Perhaps the next time the favorite Southern pastime of lynching Negroes is condemned, the advocates of lynch law may ask Northern critics to give consideration to the mob tactics of the New York Legislature.”⁷⁰ An alarmed Charles Evans Hughes wrote to New York Assembly Speaker Thaddeus Sweet,

It is absolutely opposed to the fundamental principles of our government for a majority to undertake to deny representation to a minority through its representatives elected by ballots lawfully cast. But I understand that the action is not directed against these five elected members

as individuals, but that the proceeding is virtually an attempt to indict a political party and deny it representation in the Legislature. That is not, in my judgment, American government.⁷¹

The five Assemblymen engaged as counsel before the Judiciary Committee the stellar team of Morris Hillquit, Seymour Stedman, and Gilbert Roe of the Committee of 48, and the New York Bar Association submitted a lengthy brief on their behalf.⁷² The long series of hearings quickly degenerated into farce, with such moments as Hillquit stumping an obscure anti-Socialist pamphleteer on the theory of surplus value, and one member of the committee, fuming about a speech in which Debs described a bouquet of roses given to him as representing “the springtime of revolution,” declared, “He meant blood! It isn’t susceptible to any other interpretation!!” The Assembly ultimately upheld the expulsions by a vote of 115 to 28.⁷³

When the battered Socialist Party gathered for its national convention at the Finnish Socialist Hall in New York on May 8, 1920, there was no hope of dissuading them from giving the presidential nomination to Federal Convict #9653, Eugene V. Debs. Sentiment at the convention was such that they might have gone so far as to nominate a ticket with two jailed First Amendment martyrs, but the need to have one candidate on the stump militated against the strongly expressed desire to honor Kate Richards O’Hare; thus the vice presidential nomination went to Seymour Stedman. It was unfortunate because the great female hell-raiser was granted early release a month later, and did more than her share to barnstorm the country for #9653.⁷⁴ Morris Hillquit gave an unbowed address to the convention:

We have nothing to retract, nothing to apologize for, in connection with our stand of recent years. When Congress committed the United States to participation in the world war, ours was the only organized political voice in the country to protest. We declared that the inhuman slaughter in Europe was born in a sanguinary clash of

commercial interests and imperialistic ambitions. We warned our countrymen that the savage contest of arms would bring no peace, no liberty, and no happiness in the world, but that it would result in misery and desolation. . . . Today it is becoming increasingly clearer that if the “treaty of peace” is not written all over, the war will have to be fought all over—unless the worldwide triumph of Socialism overtakes both the treaty and the war.⁷⁵

The one controversial matter before the convention had to do with the future international affiliation of the party. The Socialist Party lacked any affiliation since quietly defaulting on its dues to the Second International in 1915.⁷⁶ The 1919 convention denounced the so-called Berne Conference that sought to revive the Second International at the close of the war, yet even after the tortuous events of the past year, a stubborn left-wing faction led by J. Louis Engdahl made a motion to apply for membership in the Third International, losing by a vote of 61 to 34.⁷⁷ Despite this loss, the minority forced a membership referendum that directed the party to apply for membership by a vote of 3,475 to 1,444.⁷⁸ Faithful to party democracy, Hillquit wrote a long and shrewd letter to the Secretary of the Comintern, Grigori Zinoviev:

The reasons that impelled the United States to make war upon Russia are exactly the same reasons that impel American Socialists to support Soviet Russia in all of its struggles. But that does not mean that we abdicate our reason, forget the circumstances surrounding us, and blindly accept every formula, every dogma coming from Russia as holy, as a Papal decree. Nor does it mean that we accept for this country the special institutions and forms into which the struggles have been molded by the historical conditions of Russia.⁷⁹

Shortly thereafter, Zinoviev issued the “21 points,” the conditions by which a party could affiliate with the Comintern. The “21 points” explicitly named several prominent figures of the Second International as hate objects, including Karl Kautsky, Ramsay MacDonald, and Hillquit himself,

who cheerfully declared himself “in good company.”⁸⁰ On the entire saga of wrestling with the Russian Revolution, Hillquit ultimately reflected in his memoirs,

In 1917 Nicolai Lenin and his followers conceived themselves to be facing a situation similar to that which confronted Karl Marx in 1848, and accordingly resurrected the discarded Communist label for their reorganized movement. With the change of name the Bolsheviks not only signaled their complete break with international Social Democracy, but proclaimed relentless war upon it. . . . At first blush such an attitude would seem to be absurd, if not suicidal, even from a narrow Bolshevik point of view. Soviet Russia was surrounded by an iron ring of hostile capitalist powers, who shrank from no measure of overt or covert attack. The forces of organized labor and Social Democracy were strong enough to exert effective pressure on the policies of some of the most important governments and were strenuously opposing any foreign interference with the Soviet regime.⁸¹

A party of leading Socialists, including Seymour Stedman, James Oneal, and Julius Gerber, arrived at Atlanta Penitentiary on May 31 to formally notify Debs of his nomination. Though he endured much harsher conditions in Atlanta than in Moundsville, Debs still had unrestricted mail and visitation privileges and was given only a light work assignment. The prison administration wisely did not want to face the consequences of allowing Debs to die in prison.⁸² After the formal notification ceremony took place in the prison yard, the visiting Socialists were allowed to accompany Debs into the warden’s office for an impromptu meeting. Debs criticized the party for its recently articulated differences with Lenin, but after Hillquit wrote a long letter explaining his position to Debs, particularly emphasizing the distinction between the Soviet government and the Comintern, Debs indicated his basic agreement.⁸³

But it was at the 1920 convention that the Socialist Party made its single greatest mistake, when, in the words of an in-house Rand School

historian writing almost a decade later, “it took but one minute to vote down a resolution calling for cooperation with other groups.”⁸⁴ Though by no means unambiguously so, the general tone of the party after the Communist split was of foolishly seeking to reaffirm its revolutionary bona fides, instead of reaching out to the Labor Party movement and the Committee of 48, many of whose principals had been actively courted throughout the party’s history. The opportunity for a radical party to reach major-party status in the radically disillusioned America of 1920 was greater than at any time in U.S. history, even at the peak of the Great Depression—and all the more so after the two major parties chose their candidates in June: the Democrats went with arch-Wilsonian James Cox, and the Republicans nominated the uninspired compromise candidate Warren Harding, who assured himself the largest popular vote landslide in the history of presidential elections by calling for a return to “normalcy.”

A joint nominating convention of what was now called the Farmer-Labor Party and the Committee of 48 opened in Chicago on July 9. Also present were the Non-Partisan League and the short-lived American Party of Texas Governor Jim Ferguson.⁸⁵ Max Hayes was now the national chairman of the Farmer-Labor Party. The Committee of 48 came to the convention determined to secure the nomination for Robert LaFollette, with whom they were in close contact.⁸⁶ But in an ominous foreshadowing of his future antics, William Z. Foster, leader of the recent steel strike and serving as floor manager of the Farmer-Labor delegates, riled up both them and many Non-Partisan League agrarians against the “slick city lawyers” of the Committee of 48.⁸⁷ LaFollette drafted a platform for the Wisconsin delegation to present to the Republican convention that was tailor-made for a Farmer-Labor convention, but the major sticking points related to recognition of Soviet Russia and the Irish Republic, as well as a strident public ownership plank pushed by the Farmer-Labor forces. Most of the Committee of 48, including Amos Pinchot and George L. Record, walked out after the radicalized Farmer-Labor elements defeated the LaFollette platform by a vote of 308 to 125.⁸⁸

It could have been the perfect opportunity for the Socialist Party; what the situation demanded was precisely the sort of compromise at which Morris Hillquit was so talented. Indeed, the titular leaders of the two factions of this convention, Amos Pinchot of the Committee of 48 and Max Hayes of the Farmer-Labor Party, were two of Hillquit's oldest and closest political friends. It is no exaggeration that the next four years of the Socialist Party's history were entirely defined by the attempt to recoup this loss. But the chance would not come again for the Socialists to win over the country, as it was poised to overwhelmingly repudiate the legacy of Woodrow Wilson in 1920. Based on the nearly five million votes LaFollette would receive in 1924, six million votes for a Farmer-Labor ticket in 1920 is a reasonable and possibly even conservative estimate—a 50 percent increase over the four million votes once projected for the Socialist Party based on its municipal performance in 1917. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this represented the enduring possibility of overturning the revolution wrought by the Wilson terror at the ballot box and for the Socialists to overcome all the hardship caused by the war and the Communist split.

After LaFollette faded out of contention, some effort was made to recruit a candidate of comparable distinction, including North Dakota governor Lynn Frazier and the widely admired Food Relief Administration director in Europe, Herbert Hoover, who was being courted by both major parties and had an advocate at the Farmer-Labor convention in publisher E. W. Scripps, one of the stalwart LaFollette backers in 1912.⁸⁹ No such candidacy emerged, though the highly regarded Jane Addams rose to enter Eugene Debs into nomination. The first ballot tallied at 166 votes for Dudley Field Malone of the Committee of 48; 121 for the highly respected permanent chairman of the convention, Parley Christensen; and 68 votes for Debs.⁹⁰ Then, Otto Branstetter, present as an observer for the Socialist Party, inexplicably rose to remove Debs from contention.⁹¹ Christensen was then narrowly nominated on the second ballot, with Max Hayes as his running mate.

The warden at Atlanta allowed Debs one press release a week throughout the fall campaign, though most were little more than pro forma

evangelism for the cooperative commonwealth. Aside from the disastrous decision of James Cox to openly proclaim the 1920 election a referendum on the League of Nations, the most talked about issue that year was amnesty for political prisoners. Parley Christensen wrote to both Harding and Cox urging that they unite in asking Wilson to release Debs.⁹² Tom Watson, in his most unlikely comeback riding the backlash against Wilson in his native Georgia into the U.S. Senate, declared on the stump, "Woodrow Wilson should be in prison and Eugene Debs in the White House."⁹³ But perhaps the most enthusiastic praise for Debs in his final campaign came from the man who would soon begin the campaign that ultimately succeeded where Debs had failed in humbling the mighty Pullman Company, A. Philip Randolph, who wrote in *The Messenger*,

Debs is greater than Lincoln. Debs is the spokesman of the great struggling working class of all races, nationalities, creeds, sexes. Lincoln was the spokesman of the rising capitalist class of the North, who viewed the emancipation of Negro slaves as indispensable to the development and triumph of the manufacturers and bankers of the industrial North, East and West over the slave-holder of the South. Slavery would have passed if Lincoln had never been born. Lincoln merely nominally freed the bodies of Negroes. But Debs would free the bodies and minds of Negroes.⁹⁴

With Warren Harding elected by the enduring record popular vote margin of 26.17 percent over James Cox, Federal Convict #9653 received the highest number of actual votes of his five campaigns for the White House with 913,917 votes. But in the first election where women could vote in every state, this represented a significant loss from the 1912 percentage high at 3.41 percent. Reflecting the massive eastward movement of the Socialist base as a consequence of wartime repression, Debs's best showing was in Wisconsin at over 11 percent, followed by Minnesota and New York at over 7 percent. Debs was also excluded from the ballot in eight states, and in only three of these were any write-in votes recorded.

In Milwaukee County, with just over 30 percent, Debs beat Cox by about 20,000 votes.⁹⁵ The Farmer-Labor Party candidate, Parley P. Christensen, polled just 265,398 votes. However, this included 19 percent of the vote in Washington and South Dakota, a clear indication of how much potential remained for a united Socialist movement.

Victor Berger lost his third attempt to be elected and rightfully seated in the House with only 45 percent, but Meyer London returned to Congress with an impressive 54 percent of the vote against nemesis Henry Goldfogle on a fusion ticket. Nine U.S. House candidates managed to earn more than 20 percent of the vote in 1920, including Hillquit with over 42 percent in East Harlem and Milwaukee Sheriff Bob Buech with over 38.5 percent in Wisconsin's fourth district. One notable municipal victory occurred in Davenport, Iowa. The overwhelmingly German city had suffered terrible abuse at the hands of the local Republican machine for the last four years, and thus Socialist physician Charles Barewald was elected mayor, leading a ticket that elected the police magistrate, city clerk, and five of eight councilmen.⁹⁶ But in New York, one race illustrated the high price of demurring on unity with the Labor Party movement. In the eighteenth district on the Brooklyn waterfront, Jeremiah O'Leary, one of the most militant and prominently persecuted advocates for Irish independence during the war, received over 25 percent of the vote as the Farmer-Labor candidate, while Socialist Marie MacDonald won over 14 percent. On a unified ticket, O'Leary would have been handily elected in a race decided by a mere thousand votes between the major parties.⁹⁷

The myth has persisted that the 1920 landside against Woodrow Wilson's party represented a pernicious conservatism in rejecting the call for normalcy of Warren Harding, probably the most maligned president in U.S. history. In this context, the high vote for Debs in 1920 is most often seen as an aberration, a mere protest vote for free speech. But as ever, James Weinstein sets the record straight:

In several states Debs did not even run ahead of the Socialist ticket. In others, the combined vote of Debs and the Farmer-Labor Party's

Presidential candidate just about equaled the combined Socialist and Farmer-Labor Party vote for state and local offices. In other words, where Debs ran ahead of his ticket, Parley Parker Christensen, the Farmer-Labor Party candidate, ran behind his. In program and general perspective, the Farmer-Laborites differed little from the Socialist Party. Christensen campaigned for nationalization of all major segments of the American economy, for amnesty of the wartime political prisoners, and for the restoration of full civil liberties. On the question of the Soviet Union, too, Christensen took a stand close to that of Debs and Stedman. Debs' vote does not seem to exaggerate the extent of radical sentiment in 1920, but to understate it by at least the extent of Christensen's poll.⁹⁸

If there was one lesson for the Socialist movement to take from the events of the last four years, they could have learned it from one of the original American revolutionaries—that if they would not hang together, they would most assuredly hang separately.



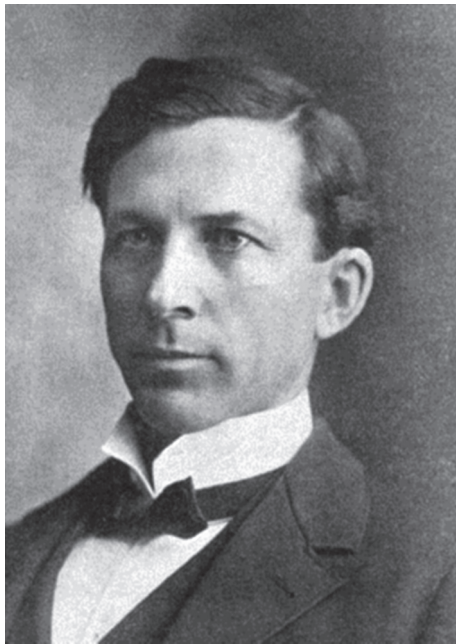
1. The founders of the Social Democratic Party in the 1890s (left to right): Frederic Heath, Victor Berger, Eugene V. Debs, and Seymour Stedman. Picture File, Box 14, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

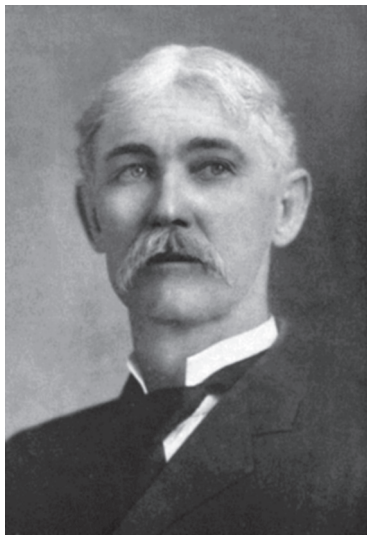
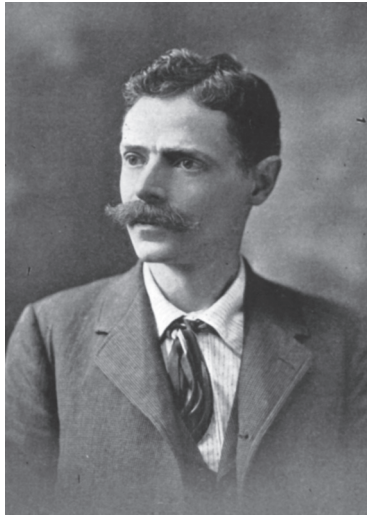


2. Morris Hillquit, about the time of his arrival in New York. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-97270

3. (*opposite top*) Max Hayes, an ally of Hillquit in the Socialist Labor Party, was titular leader of the Socialist bloc in the American Federation of Labor (AFL) before the First World War. George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland

4. (*opposite bottom*) Job Harriman, another Hillquit ally in the Socialist Labor Party, came painfully close to being elected mayor of Los Angeles as a Socialist in 1911. Wikimedia Commons





5. (top) Ben Hanford, Eugene Debs's running mate in 1904 and 1908, was perhaps the most loved propagandist of the Socialist Party's first decade. Tamiment Library, New York University

6. (bottom) Julius Wayland, publisher of *Appeal to Reason* in Girard, Kansas. The *Appeal* was the most widely circulated Socialist newspaper in U.S. history, yet Wayland was not a well-regarded voice in Socialist Party affairs. Wikimedia Commons



The “Millionaire Socialists”

7. (top) Joseph Medill Patterson. [Wikimedia Commons](#)

8. (bottom left) James Graham Phelps Stokes. [Wikimedia Commons](#)

9. (bottom right) William English Walling. [Wikimedia Commons](#)



10. Kate Richards O'Hare, editor of the *National Rip-Saw* in Kansas City and outstanding personality of the Socialist encampment circuit in the "Old Southwest" states. Picture File, Box 14, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University



11. Popular speakers at the encampments: Oscar Ameringer and Walter Thomas Mills (standing), Caroline Lowe and Eugene Debs (seated). Courtesy of the estate of Freda Hogan Ameringer

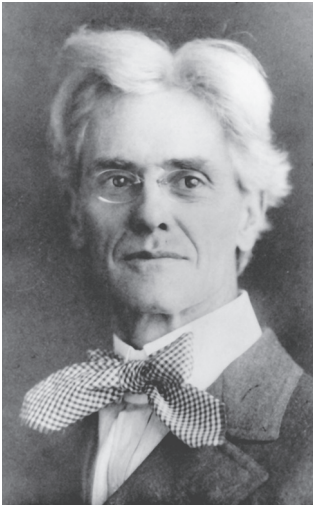


12. Debs at Madison Square Garden during the presidential campaign of 1912, as the Socialist Party approached high tide. AP Photo/Bill Achatz



13. (top) Algie Simons, founder of the left-wing journal *International Socialist Review*, became one of the most belligerent pro-war defectors from the party in 1917. Wikimedia Commons

14. (bottom) Bill Haywood, leader of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The IWW was already opposed by most Socialists when Haywood was elected to the party's National Executive Committee in 1912, and he was expelled from the committee the following year for advocating "sabotage" and "violence as a weapon of the working class." Wikimedia Commons



Socialist Mayors of the 1910s

15. (*top left*) Emil Seidel of Milwaukee. Wikimedia Commons

16. (*top right*) George Lunn of Schenectady, New York. Schenectady County Historical Society

17. (*bottom left*) Lewis Duncan of Butte, Montana. Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives

18. (*bottom right*) Thomas Van Lear of Minneapolis. Hennepin County History Museum



19. Meyer London, about the time of his election to Congress from the Lower East Side of New York in 1914. Wikimedia Commons



20. The National Executive Committee in 1911. Standing (left to right): Victor Berger, Socialist congressman from Milwaukee; George Goebel of New Jersey, and Robert Hunter, leading advocate of forming a Labor Party who was closely aligned with the “millionaire socialists.” Seated (left to right): Morris Hillquit; John Spargo, perhaps the leading pro-war defector in 1917; Lena Morrow Lewis of California; James F. Carey, a one-time Socialist member of the Massachusetts legislature; and Executive Secretary J. Mahlon Barnes. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-97273)



21. The National Executive Committee in 1914. Seated at left is Adolph Germer, who served as executive secretary in the trying years of American involvement in the First World War and the Communist split; Victor Berger is seated at right. Standing (left to right): Berkeley, California, mayor J. Stitt Wilson; Executive Secretary Walter Lanfersiek; George Goebel; and James Maurer, president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor and architect of the party's stronghold in Reading. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-97268



22. Allan Benson, the unlikely Socialist presidential nominee of 1916. Benson was catapulted to the nomination from obscurity as an outspoken antiwar propagandist, yet left the party soon after as a supporter of U.S. entry into the war.
[Wikimedia Commons](#)



23. Morris Hillquit, about the time of his historic campaign for mayor of New York in 1917. Wikimedia Commons



24. The victorious Socialist candidates in New York City in 1917. Standing (left to right): Abraham Beckerman, Barnett Wolff, Alexander Braunstein, Algernon Lee, B. Charney Vladeck, Adolph Held, and Maurice Kalman. Seated (left to right): August Claessens, William Feigenbaum, Elmer Rosenberg, Louis Waldman, Joseph Whitehorn, Jacob Panken, Abraham Shiplacoff, William Karlin, Samuel Orr, Charles Garfinkle, Benjamin Gitlow, and Joseph Weil. Their victory celebration, days after the October Revolution, included the singing of “the new Russian national anthem,” but within a few years nearly all became strident anticommunists of the Socialist Party “Old Guard.” Tamiment Library, New York University



25. (top) A. Philip Randolph, publisher of *The Messenger* in Harlem, became the leading African American Socialist during and after the First World War. Schomburg Center, New York Public Library

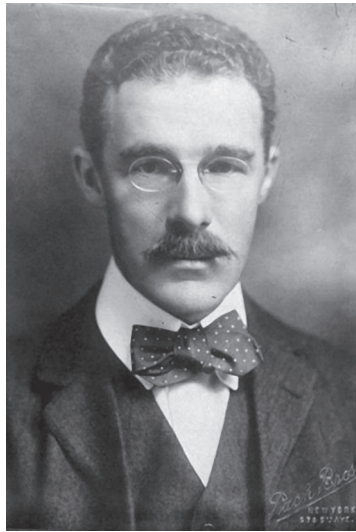
26. (bottom) Charles Ruthenberg, the most prominent Socialist Party figure among the founders of the American Communist Party. Tamiment Library, New York University



27. Eugene V. Debs in Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918. He was sentenced to ten years in prison for this antiwar speech before being pardoned in 1921, the most prominent martyr for the First Amendment in U.S. history. Eugene V. Debs Foundation



28. Debs's notification ceremony at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary as the Socialist Party presidential nominee in 1920. Also present (left to right) are George Roewer, Madge P. Stephens, Sam Castleton, Julius Gerber, Otto Branstetter, Seymour Stedman, unknown, and James Oneal. Indiana State University Special Collections



29. (top) William Johnston, Socialist president of the Machinists Union who launched the Conference for Progressive Political Action in 1922. George Meany Memorial Archives, University of Maryland

30. (bottom) Amos Pinchot, one of several radicalized Progressive era reformers who supported the Socialist Party during and after the First World War. Wikimedia Commons



31. Senators Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin (right) and Burton Wheeler of Montana, the presidential ticket nominated by the Conference for Progressive Political Action in 1924. The Socialist Party supported LaFollette and Wheeler with the hope that their campaign would lead to a permanent formation along the lines of the British Labour Party. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-30465



32. Eugene V. Debs, the man who was American Socialism, lying in state, October 1926. Picture File, Box 12, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University

Part II

9 A New Hope

(1921–1924)

There was no clearer indication that the beginning of the 1920s marked the end of an era in American radicalism than the fate of the IWW. In three mass trials held since 1917, 168 convictions were brought down against its members, including a twenty-year sentence against Bill Haywood. In April 1921, after exhausting his appeals, Haywood fled to Soviet Russia where he died in 1928, leaving his loyal followers cruelly disillusioned. Mary Marcy, a loyal secretary for both the IWW and *ISR*, was driven to suicide, and another IWW veteran was painfully blunt: “If Bill ever comes back to the United States, he will be met at the dock by a direct action committee of the IWW, who will leave very little for the government to do.”¹ A shadow of the organization lingered through the interwar years and beyond, keeping the flame of anarcho-syndicalism alive for its modest new left revival.

On January 31, 1921, A. Mitchell Palmer recommended that Woodrow Wilson grant a pardon to Eugene Debs in the final month of his presidency. When Wilson denied the recommendation, Debs wrote to the press:

I understand perfectly the feelings of Wilson. When he reviews what he has done, when he realizes the suffering he has brought about, then he is being punished. It is he, not I, who needs a pardon. If I had it in my power I would give him the pardon which would set him free. Woodrow Wilson is an exile from the hearts of his people. The

betrayal of his ideals makes him the most pathetic figure in the world. No man in public life in American history ever retired so thoroughly discredited, so scathingly rebuked, so overwhelmingly impeached and repudiated as Woodrow Wilson.²

Warren Harding entered the White House on March 4 committed to granting generous amnesty on a case-by-case basis. The Socialist Party had an indispensable asset in encouraging this commitment in its fast-rising star in New York, Norman Thomas, who as a youth was a paperboy for Harding's newspaper, the *Marion Star*. For the last few years, Thomas had been editor of the magazine of the religious-pacifist Fellowship of Reconciliation, *The World Tomorrow*. Having become increasingly ill at ease with an avowedly religious approach to politics, by 1921 he accepted Oswald Garrison Villard's offer to be co-editor at *The Nation*. Yet if Thomas was becoming a religious skeptic, he retained a deeply conservative sensibility from his religious training. He openly blasted the mindless feel-good atmosphere he felt at the first and only gathering he attended of the National Conference of Christians and Jews and was appalled when a Social Gospel bishop confided to him, "Of course, when I pray to God I am really thinking of Lenin and Trotsky and all the workers of the world."³

Thomas and Villard were received by President Harding in the spring. After Harding demonstrated the solemnity with which he took his duties regarding amnesty, he began chatting with the hometown boy Norman on a first-name basis, recalling a good-natured German in Marion whom Harding said he thought of every time he was asked to pardon a completely apolitical German American who had been jailed for the most dubious reasons.⁴ Harding bluntly stated he saw no good reason to keep Debs in jail, but that he needed to be convinced that there was as much sentiment in the country in favor of his release as against it, with the American Legion in particular remaining vocal in opposition. At the end of March, Attorney General Harry Daugherty ordered the warden at Atlanta to send Debs unescorted to Washington for a personal meeting. The campaign for Debs's release reached critical

mass by the summer, with “Ireland is Free—Why Not Debs” among its more popular slogans. No fewer than three hundred thousand petition signatures and seven hundred organizational resolutions were ultimately presented to the Harding administration in favor of Debs’s release.⁵

In the meantime, the Socialist Party gathered for its now annually mandated national convention in Detroit on June 25. The short-lived Committee for the Third International was overwhelmingly repudiated, and its principals defected to the Communists before the end of the year. This was followed by a last hiccup of contention with the all-but departed left wing, a debate about the concept of the “dictatorship of the proletariat” that led an exasperated Morris Hillquit to exclaim, “This is a political convention, not a dictionary.”⁶ The eagerness to purge all reminders of the left wing was made clear when Executive Secretary Otto Branstetter suggested that all foreign language federations be abolished.⁷ Indeed, there was no mistaking that this convention marked a drastic course correction. By a vote of 37 to 2, the convention instructed the incoming National Executive Committee “to make a careful survey of all radical and labor organizations in the country, with a view to ascertaining their strength, disposition, and readiness to cooperate with the Socialist movement upon a platform not inconsistent with that of the party.” In other words, the Socialists were ready to build a Labor Party.⁸

President Harding initially looked to pardon Debs on July 4, but an aggressive campaign by the American Legion forced a delay, a poignant metaphor for how American patriotism was being redefined as the United States began its rise as a world power.⁹ But the clamor for Debs’s release continued unabated, with virtually the entire AFL leadership now on board, including Samuel Gompers in an awkward and self-serving posture.¹⁰ Nothing got under the Socialists’ skin more than the appeals on Debs’s behalf by old adversaries, of which there were more than a few. Most memorable was John Spargo, who seems to have had principled misgivings about Wilson’s suppression of civil liberties, but to whom the *New York Call* could only reply, “Better the frank opposition of

Mr. Spargo's imperialist associates in the holy war for petroleum than this obscurantist and cowardly apology for his own conduct."¹¹

On December 23, President Harding announced that Debs would be one of twenty-three political prisoners to have their sentences commuted on Christmas Day. To the cheers of his fellow prisoners as he departed them, Debs was met at dawn on Christmas morning just outside Atlanta Penitentiary by his brother Theodore, who was to accompany him for a short stop in Washington, where the president was eager to meet this man he had heard so much about. A crowd of twenty thousand greeted Debs when he reached his final destination of Terre Haute on the evening of December 28. Every fire bell in the city rang as the throng followed him to his house, where as he at last graced the front porch, a colored band was playing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."¹²

Yet even after Debs's release, the Socialists hardly slowed down their efforts for a general amnesty. Kate Richards O'Hare led the wives and children of the remaining Old Southwest stalwarts in Leavenworth to the White House the following spring, and Meyer London urged his congressional colleagues to honor those who suffered for the cause of peace in time for the Washington Disarmament Conference, held throughout late 1921 and early 1922.¹³ The last thirty-three Espionage Act prisoners were released on December 15, 1923, to the continuing displeasure of the American Legion, the *New York Times*, and Kennesaw Mountain Landis.¹⁴

However conservative, Harding was sincerely committed to healing the deep wounds the war and its aftermath had left on the American psyche, and even his harshest historical critics usually concede that he was among the most kind and decent men to grace the American presidency. The scandals that plagued his administration and that one way or another led to his mysterious death were mostly the doing of his attorney general, Harry Daugherty, and implicated both major parties equally. Warren Harding was no paragon of virtue to be sure, but the real reason he is so despised by the men and women who make a handsome living celebrating certain American presidents as demigods is because, in seeking to largely repeal the revolution effected by Woodrow Wilson,

he was one of very few to hold the office who believed the United States should be a republic, not an empire.

By 1921 Norman Thomas had achieved such popularity among the battered New York Socialists that he was their first choice to be their candidate for mayor that year. With his oldest son terminally ill, he declined in favor of Judge Jacob Panken, who polled a respectable 82,019 votes.¹⁵ By 1922, *The Nation* could no longer afford to keep Thomas as a full-time editor, but his indispensability as a professional Socialist was such that he quickly found a new post.¹⁶ After maintaining a tenuous existence through the war as the one awkward meeting ground between pro-war socialists and their SP adversaries, the crumbling Intercollegiate Socialist Society was renamed the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) in 1921 under the leadership of Harry Laidler, a Columbia-educated lifelong Brooklynite.¹⁷ Thomas served as co-director of the LID with Laidler, beginning their lifelong collaboration by launching an ambitious campaign to establish a major presence on America's college campuses.¹⁸

The most consequential development in New York Socialism as the new decade began was the rise of *The Messenger*, a voice of Negro radicalism that not a few white Socialists considered the best Socialist publication of its era. Eugene Debs praised its editors for their "splendid work in the education of your race and in the quickening of the consciousness of their class interests," and its reputation spread all the way to Europe.¹⁹ After Chandler Owen relocated to Chicago in 1921, A. Philip Randolph found a new partner in running the magazine in George Schuyler, who in the words of historian Jervis Anderson "had a greater admiration for H. L. Mencken than for Karl Marx" and indeed achieved fame a decade later writing for Mencken's *American Mercury*.²⁰

The greatest distinction to this Harlem Socialist circle came in its opposition to the quixotic mass movement led by Marcus Garvey. In 1916, Randolph was the first to introduce the recent arrival from Jamaica at the fabled "speaker's corner" at 135th Street and Lenox Avenue. For a time the Harlem Socialists worked harmoniously with Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), collaborating on

its more radical response to the question of African freedom as a consequence of the war than that promoted by the increasingly suspect elitist W. E. B. DuBois.²¹ But by the time Garvey packed Madison Square Garden in 1921 to declare himself “Provisional President of Africa,” Randolph and his comrades were perhaps the least of those in the black community who looked on in horror.

In large measure at the instigation of Randolph and *The Messenger*, the Friends of Negro Freedom was established to organize community sentiment against Garvey. This placed Randolph and his colleagues sharply at odds with the growing nationalist zeitgeist in Harlem. As early as 1917, Randolph’s early mentor Hubert Harrison had expressed his disillusionment with the Socialists, writing that “the roots of class-consciousness inhere in a temporary economic order, whereas the roots of race-consciousness must of necessity survive any and all changes in the economic order.”²² The defectors from *The Messenger* into the Communist movement formed an organization committed to a Harrison-inspired left-wing nationalism called the African Blood Brotherhood, itself embittered after an uneasy alliance with Garvey.²³ One early Jamaican collaborator of Randolph, W. A. Domingo, left to become editor of Garvey’s *Negro World*, while another West Indian, Frank Crosswaith, became the outstanding black Socialist of the 1930s as Randolph devoted most of his energies to the trade union movement.

The UNIA degenerated before long into fratricidal violence, but this violence also threatened its enemies, and with the possible exception of DuBois, none was more violently despised than Randolph. Tensions intensified after it became known in the summer of 1922 that Garvey had met with leaders of the Ku Klux Klan in an attempt to form an alliance. On September 5, 1922, Randolph received a suspicious package that he first believed to be a bomb. When the police arrived to inspect the package, it was discovered to contain the severed hand of a white man, holding a note imploring Randolph to “get right with your own race movement” and signed “KKK.” The origin was never determined, but the police suspected the package had been sent from New York despite a New Orleans postmark, and Randolph believed it was sent not by a Klansman but by

a Garveyite.²⁴ But by this time, the government had already begun its ultimately successful prosecution of Garvey for mail fraud, and an earlier civil judgment against him had been handed down by none other than New York's Socialist judge, Jacob Panken, who pronounced from the bench, "You should have taken the \$600,000 and built a hospital for colored people in this city instead of purchasing a few old boats."²⁵

Panken may have come down with such force against Garvey in part because he saw in his movement an unmistakable mirror image of the growing Zionist movement among the Jews of New York. The highly idealistic Judah Magnes had gone to Palestine to become a founder of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem before becoming cruelly disillusioned. Meyer London remained unbowed in his anti-Zionism, expressing exactly the position of Panken and other members of the American Council for Judaism in the 1950s: "If there are Jews who want a home land of their own and who believe that the Jewish people cannot accomplish their mission in the world without living a separate and distinct national existence fortified by a Jewish state, they are welcome to it. All that I ask of them is that they should not be speaking in the name of all the Jews. Then they will be within their rights."²⁶

By the end of 1921, the great hope of reviving the missed opportunity of the previous election appeared to materialize when William Johnston, the Socialist president of the Machinists Union, invited Morris Hillquit to attend a conference of national labor leaders to consider organizing a new party modeled on the British Labour Party. Hillquit spent most of the second half of 1921 in Europe surveying the state of the Socialist movement as it was rebuilding from the war, and he was especially impressed by the British party.²⁷ He greeted Johnston's invitation with the utmost excitement and anticipation, later recalling, "Johnston himself represented the highest type of trade union official. . . . His initiation of the new movement was a guarantee of its solid prospects, good faith, and progressive character."²⁸

More than 150 delegates gathered in Chicago on February 20, 1922, to found the Conference for Progressive Political Action (CPPA). The

Socialist Party delegation consisted of Hillquit, Victor Berger, Daniel Hoan, James Oneal, Otto Branstetter, and Bertha Hale White.²⁹ Other Socialists present included James Maurer, Thomas Van Lear, and Herbert Bigelow, a Cincinnati minister who had been the victim of one of the most scandalous pro-war mob actions of 1917.³⁰ Hillquit was named to represent the Socialist Party on the executive committee of the CPPA, joined by Johnston, Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, William Green of the United Mine Workers, and representatives of the Non-Partisan League, the Farmer-Labor Party, and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The manifesto issued by the meeting proclaimed,

We hold that the splendid structure of the visible American government is sound and well adapted to the genius of our people. But through the apathy of the people and their division upon false issues, the control of this visible government has been usurped by the “invisible government” of plutocracy and privilege and, administered in every branch by their creatures and servitors, has become destructive of those sacred rights to secure which it was established. . . . We, therefore, citizens of the United States of America, in conference assembled, do solemnly publish and declare that our government of right ought to be administered for the common good and for the protection, prosperity, and happiness of the people, that its present usurpation by the invisible government of plutocracy and privilege must be broken, that this can be best accomplished by united political action suited to the peculiar conditions and needs of each section and state.³¹

Most historians of the labor party movement of this era tend to dismiss the CPPA as a cynical ploy by the Railroad Brotherhoods who came to dominate it, in their efforts to restore government administration of the railroads that had been implemented during the First World War; and further see Socialist involvement in the CPPA as an act of pathetic desperation as the SP limped into the 1920s. This may be largely accurate with respect to the Brotherhoods, but the CPPA was initiated by the leaders of large, SP-sympathizing industrial unions such as William

Johnston, William Green, and Sidney Hillman, who were at this time genuinely interested in forming a Labor Party. The two groups came together in a dubious alliance of convenience, each seeking to use the other to its ends. It was certainly a gamble, but a reasonable one for the Socialist Party to marshal its diminished assets behind what was historically its bloc in the AFL in this power struggle.

Still, the tension that proved the undoing of the CPPA was clear from the beginning. As Hillquit stated his position to his colleagues at the outset,

We Socialists have come to this conference in the frank hope and with the confident expectation that the movement initiated here will ultimately lead to the formation of a labor party in direct and consistent opposition to the Republican and Democratic parties alike. We have no faith whatever in the slogan of “rewarding our friends and punishing our enemies” within the old parties. . . . We hope our arguments and your experiences will eventually convince you that we are right. But we have no intention to attempt to capture the conference by intrigue, maneuvers, or machinations. We have no personal stakes in the movement and are here solely to serve the interests of the working class as we see them.³²

Tremendous strides were made by politicians aligned with the Non-Partisan League and Farmer-Labor Party in 1922, in what Daniel Bell would later call “the Indian summer of progressivism.”³³ In North Dakota, the Non-Partisan League suffered a harsh blow when the recall mechanism it implemented was used by the state’s business interests to boot Governor Lynn Frazier from office in 1921, yet the following year Frazier was triumphantly elected to the U.S. Senate. In that body, “Fighting Bob” LaFollette could count on such allies as Frazier and Gerald Nye of North Dakota, George Norris of Nebraska, and William Borah of Idaho. In Montana, Burton Wheeler had been badly beaten as a Non-Partisan League candidate for Governor in 1920, but was elected to the Senate two years later on the Democratic ticket.³⁴ The most spectacular

breakthrough occurred in Minnesota, where the Farmer-Labor Party elected Henrik Shipstead, a former Republican legislator who had campaigned for Charles Lindbergh Sr., to the Senate in 1922, followed by the special election victory of Norwegian-born Farmers Union leader Magnus Johnson to join him the following year.

But the spirit of American Socialism may have had no truer representative in the U.S. Senate in this era than Tom Watson, whose return to Congress, in the words of C. Vann Woodward, “after thirty years was like the emergence of a hermit, already a little legendary.”³⁵ Drawing upon his youthful passion for the history of Revolutionary France in calling for recognition of Soviet Russia, he recalled that “President Washington, himself a revolutionist, not only recognized the French republic, whose garments dripped with blood, but he put up to Congress in a respectful way an application for a loan. Let us not affect too much saintliness. Are our skirts entirely clean of wrong doing in Hawaii, the Philippines, and Santo Domingo?”³⁶ In typical form, he thundered to his colleagues,

You are afraid of your own proletariat . . . the dissatisfied workman, thrown out of employment by these soulless, these heartless, these insatiable trusts and combinations of capital, you are afraid of the millions of men and women and children who do not have enough to eat in this land of bounteous harvests, not enough to wear in the very cotton fields where their hands bring forth the staple that clothes the world. . . . The American people will not submit. Therefore, these vast combinations of capital want a standing army in order to beat down the dissatisfied, who have a right to be discontented.³⁷

Yet Watson was overcome by his usual melancholy as he wandered the imperial capital at the dawn of the American century. He died on September 26, 1922 at his boarding house in Chevy Chase, Maryland. Eugene Debs wrote in heartfelt tribute to Watson’s widow: “He was a great man, a heroic soul who fought the power of evil his whole life,

long in the interest of the common people, and they loved and honored him.”³⁸

The desperate organizational state of the Socialist Party was abundantly clear when a national convention of only twenty-two delegates from seventeen states met in Cleveland on April, 29, 1922. On Hillquit’s recommendation, they voted 11–9 to affiliate with the Labor and Socialist International recently convened in Vienna. Charles Ruthenberg, present as an observer for the Communists, reported for their press, “A glance at these delegates tells the story of the Socialist Party. A majority of them are portly, gray-haired men with a look of petty-bourgeois prosperity about them. They talk in the language of past Socialist conventions, but there is no enthusiasm, no fervor, in what they say.”³⁹ This was the context in which the Socialists decided they had little to lose with the Conference for Progressive Political Action, which Hillquit even took credit for naming.⁴⁰

August Claessens embarked on a tour of the Western states in the latter part of 1921, attempting to rebuild the party there but achieving dismal results.⁴¹ In small towns across the Great Plains, the American Legion typically used the threat of force to keep out radicals of all stripes. In Sidney, Nebraska, Claessens had to shame the mayor and sheriff into allowing him to lead a meeting on the courthouse steps.⁴² Typical was a sign posted on the entrance into town of St. John, Kansas: “Keep Out! Warning to all Non-Partisan Leaguers, IWW’s and Socialists. Stay out of St. John. By order of the American Legion.”⁴³ In Fort Dodge, Kansas, where 105 out of 110 votes were cast for Debs in 1920, it was discovered that the Socialist local was entirely contained within the Civil War Old Soldiers’ Home. The wise-cracking Claessens wrote that “had we found at least a few, say, around 78 years old, believe me, we would have organized a YPSL branch.”⁴⁴

Debs took to the stump twice thereafter in a similar rebuilding effort, but could only bring about a fleeting temporary revival to the local parties wherever he went.⁴⁵ The brutal reality of the Socialist collapse was brought home in the election results of 1922. In New York, where the Socialist

and Farmer-Labor parties established a harmonious fusion ticket under the big tent of the American Labor Party, Meyer London suffered a crushing loss, earning only 32 percent of the vote against Democrat Samuel Dickstein, who would be the founding chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1930s ultimately exposed to have been on the payroll of Soviet intelligence. But in Milwaukee, Victor Berger finally earned his much-deserved vindication with more than 53 percent of the vote and, with the Wilson terror fading into history, was seated without controversy.

In deeply traumatized Oklahoma, the regrouped Farmers Union joined such Socialist veterans as Dan Hogan and Luther Langston in forming the Farmer-Labor Reconstruction League in late 1921, with its platform drafted by John Hagel, publisher of the *Oklahoma Leader* founded by Oscar Ameringer and a member of the SP National Executive Committee. Its founding convention drew an unprecedented level of support from Oklahoma's African American community, freshly wounded by the infamous Tulsa race riot. Its successful candidate for governor of Oklahoma was Jack Walton, then-mayor of Oklahoma City, railroad brotherhood member, and fierce opponent of the Ku Klux Klan. As "Our Jack" toured the state with a jazz band and a cohort of battle-hardened Socialist campaign advisors, Texas Non-Partisan League candidate Fred Rodgers ran a surprisingly close race for governor in that state, and in Louisiana, a son of deeply red Winn Parish named Huey Pierce Long was waging his first campaign for statewide office.⁴⁶ As governor, the corruptible Walton proved an easy target for the Klan-dominated political class of Oklahoma, yet an especially disillusioned Oscar Ameringer could still look back and recall,

Without money to speak of, with virtually the entire press of the state and all the spokesmen and spellbinders of the financial and monopolistic interests against us, we had triumphantly elected Our Jack, destined to become the Andrew Jackson of the 1920s. Naïve as we were, we realized that the winning of the first battle did not necessarily mean the winning of the war. Many more battles would have

to be fought to restore the government of Oklahoma and the wealth of mineral resources to the people of the state.⁴⁷

The bright Indian summer of progressivism was fatally dashed by the harsh chill of American Communism's arrival as a force to be reckoned with. By late 1922, the unified Communist Party had emerged from its underground beginnings, though known as the Workers Party until 1929. Theodore Draper, the dean of the historians of the movement, famously postulates that the trauma of being so profoundly mistaken in the underlying premise of founding the Communist Party—that the global collapse of capitalism was imminent—was the essential root cause of an emotional dependence on Soviet dictation that transcended mere ideology:

It was a difficult birth and an unhappy childhood. Like most people with unpleasant memories, the older Communists would rather forget them, they prefer to give the impression that the real history of the movement started much later. But something crucially important did happen to this movement in its infancy. It was transformed from a new expression of American radicalism to the American appendage of a Russian revolutionary power. Nothing else so important ever happened to it again.⁴⁸

Yet the face of American Communism did change substantially during its earliest years. John Reed died in Russia of a chronic kidney ailment in 1920, by most accounts almost completely disillusioned. Also out of the picture was the man who did more than any individual to create American Communism, Louis Fraina. After being suspected of everything from working for the Justice Department to stealing party funds, Fraina was reassigned from the American party to Comintern duty in Mexico, where he disappeared only to resurface a decade later as an idiosyncratic left-wing economist named Lewis Corey. Charles Ruthenberg remained national secretary, joined in the top-tier leadership by the effectively co-equal national chairman, James P. Cannon, along with their respective protégés, Jay Lovestone and Earl Browder. Cannon and

Browder brought in the party's most prized recruit, the gifted radical union organizer in Chicago with whom each of them worked at different times, William Z. Foster.⁴⁹

The American Communists, whose formative political experience had been opposition to the Socialist Party majority, were in for a rude awakening when Lenin began to elaborate his concept of the “united front” with the publication of *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* in 1920. First defining the united front in connection to the miniscule Communist movement in Great Britain, Lenin urged the British Communists to agitate for acceptance as an autonomous entity in the Labour Party coalition structure. If they succeeded, the party would be open to a Communist propaganda offensive from within, and if they failed, the Labour Party would be exposed as an enemy of working-class unity. In his characteristically blunt idiom, Lenin described it as support “in the same way as a rope supports one who is hanged.”⁵⁰

After the founding of the CPPA in 1922, the applicability of this principle to the American scene became obvious. Indeed, Lenin may have been set on this path in part by his meeting with Parley P. Christensen, who passed through Moscow on a world tour in 1921 and was warmly greeted by Lenin, who said, “I know you! You and Cox were the also-rans!”⁵¹ This united front strategy was championed by an unlikely figure who dominated the party in its earliest years as an open and legal party—Joseph Pogany, the Comintern representative to the American party under the alias John Pepper. With a reputation for incompetence ever since he was minister of war in the ill-fated Hungarian regime of Bela Kun, Pepper amateurishly observed American conditions, in which, it must be said, he took a far keener interest than the American Communists themselves.⁵² He put forward a bizarre analysis positing Robert LaFollette as the American Kerensky who must be supported to set the stage for the Communists’ ultimate triumph:

The revolution is here. World history stands before one of its greatest turning points. America faces her third revolution—the LaFollette revolution of the well-to-do and exploited farmers, small businessmen

and workers. It will contain elements of the great French Revolution, and the Russian Kerensky Revolution. In its ideology it will have elements of Jeffersonianism, Danish cooperatives, Ku Klux Klan and Bolshevism. The proletariat as a class will not play an independent role in this revolution. After the victory of this LaFollette revolution, there will begin the independent role of workers and exploited farmers, and there will begin then, the period of the fourth American revolution—the period of the proletarian revolution.⁵³

Thus would the events leading up to the 1924 election set the pattern for the downfall of American Socialism in the 1930s. As Theodore Draper plainly and bitterly puts it, the duplicity “in the Communist version of the united front, more than anything else, has been responsible for the most tragic experiences in the labor and radical movements of the 20th century.”⁵⁴

On December 11, 1922, the CPPA held its second meeting in Cleveland. The Workers Party sent four delegates to attempt to be seated, but the CPPA credentials committee immediately refused to allow that, asserting that their belief in the dictatorship of the proletariat was incompatible with the democratic aims of the CPPA.⁵⁵ The one member organization objecting to this move was the declining Farmer-Labor Party, and William Z. Foster, denounced by the newborn Communists during the 1919 steel strike as an AFL stooge, would here prove his tremendous value. The guiding spirit of the Farmer-Labor Party, John Fitzpatrick, was Foster’s indispensable partner in his massive Chicago organizing drives, and the mid-level leadership of the Chicago AFL was dominated by followers of Foster who entered the party with him.⁵⁶ The significance of this coup for the Communists could hardly be overstated—within a year of emerging from the underground, they not only had a significant beachhead in the labor movement but had it in what was widely seen to have replaced the Socialists leading the radical opposition in the AFL.

By a narrow vote of 64 to 52, the CPPA rejected a proposal by the Farmer-Labor Party to immediately organize a new party; this

proposal may have had a better chance of passage had it been proposed by a different group.⁵⁷ This rejection was in any event an extremely short-sighted move, giving the Communists their essential opening to take up the mantle of a national Farmer-Labor Party and carry out exactly the stratagem laid out by Lenin. This was lost on the parochial Railroad Brotherhood leaders, whose increasingly clear objective was to secure the Democratic nomination in 1924 for William McAdoo, Woodrow Wilson's secretary of the treasury and son-in-law who had come out strongly for re-nationalization of the railroads. However, the implications of this delay in forming a new party were likely appreciated by William Johnston and William Green, the industrial union leaders experienced in dealing with the Communists and their syndicalist predecessors. Morris Hillquit certainly understood the potential consequences of this delay, as he addressed his CPPA colleagues:

We are convinced that we have made the initial step. But these gains or these victories in the old party primaries, we are convinced, are temporary. We are convinced that the workers of this country will eventually go by the road which has brought power and progress to the workers and farmers of the other countries of the world. I want you to know that this is my sentiment, my hope and inspiration. But personally I take the position that progress is always made safely and slowly, step by step.⁵⁸

The Farmer-Labor Party resigned from the CPPA in protest, though the fast-rising Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party was affiliated separately and remained.⁵⁹ A call for a founding convention of a "Federated Farmer-Labor Party," so named to suggest that it was taking the step of establishing a British Labour-style coalition party, was issued for July 3. John Fitzpatrick, an Irish labor militant of the old school, frankly yet naively told his Communist subordinates in the Chicago AFL, "We are willing to go along, but we think you Communists should occupy a back seat in this affair."⁶⁰ When the Federated-Farmer Labor Party convention opened, a few unions officially participated, most notably the

Amalgamated Clothing Workers, in one of the earliest indications of Sidney Hillman's ambiguous alliance with the Communist movement for the next quarter-century. The welcoming address was given by Richard Pettigrew, the seventy-five-year-old former Silver Republican senator from South Dakota, who lavishly praised the Soviet constitution to the wild cheers of the crowd.⁶¹ It was clear that the Communists completely dominated the convention, as Theodore Draper writes:

Only ten delegates were officially allotted to the Workers Party, compared with approximately 50 for the Farmer-Laborites. But the Communists had other ways of getting in. Dozens of Communists attended as delegates from local trade unions. Others managed to represent such organizations as the Lithuanian Workers' Literature Society, the Rumanian Progressive Club, and the United Workingmen Singers. Pepper and Ruthenberg later admitted that the Communist delegates numbered about 200, and the Communists therefore went into the convention with from one-third to almost one-half of all the delegates. . . . For the first time, the Communists demonstrated their superiority in the technique of electing delegates to a united front.⁶²

The Railroad Brotherhoods' paper *Labor* ran a caustic headline that would resonate for generations to come as the perfectly distilled essence and folly of Leninist maneuvering—"Communists Capture Selves."⁶³ A shell-shocked and outraged John Fitzpatrick attacked the convention's entire proceedings on the final day:

I know Brother Foster and the others who are identified and connected with him, and if they think they can attract the attention of the rank and file of the working men and women of America to their organization, I say to them and to this organization, that is a hopeless course, and they cannot do it. Then what have they done? They have killed the Farmer-Labor Party, and they have killed the possibility of uniting the forces of independent political action in America, and they have broken the spirit of this whole thing so that we will not be

able to rally the forces for the next twenty years! I know, as a practical proposition, that the minute the Workers Party is identified with this movement, then that will be the battering ram that is going to be used against every group.⁶⁴

A few remnants of the original Farmer-Labor Party of 1919 remained with the Communists, most notably the initially mighty Washington state party led by John C. Kennedy, former Socialist alderman in Chicago and now a reliable Communist ally. More typical was the Detroit Federation of Labor, for whom the returning delegates urged affiliation with the Communist-run Federated Farmer-Labor Party, but were beaten back largely by members of the tiny Proletarian Party.⁶⁵ At the national AFL convention that year, Gompers subjected Fitzpatrick to an unprecedented public humiliation, even after he led the Illinois state convention in a dramatic reversal of all the offending positions associated with the Labor Party movement and Foster.

In the meantime, the Socialist Party opened its once again very modestly attended convention in New York on May 19. One notable feature was that it was the first Socialist convention personally attended by Eugene Debs since 1904, though he took no official part other than to address a banquet of the delegates. The major address was given by Abraham Cahan, who shocked many in the audience with a speech denouncing the Soviet Union. Lobbing personal attacks on Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, Cahan also signaled his tenuous future relationship to the Socialist Party in declaring it a failure.⁶⁶ Cahan had praised the Soviets as late as 1920, but he resisted the affiliation of the Workmen's Circle with the Communists in 1921, which indeed proved extremely short-lived.⁶⁷ Cahan's lieutenant Alexander Kahn led the minority Jewish Socialist Verband out of the Workmen's Circle, an act that decades later proved consequential in the ultimate demise of the Socialist Party.

A mood of optimism returned among the New York Socialists by the fall of 1923. The previous year, a recent Harvard graduate named Charles Garland gave 90 percent of his million-dollar inheritance to

support left-wing enterprises. When a \$50,000 grant to start a labor daily in New York was matched by both the ILGWU and Amalgamated, the struggling *New York Call* folded its assets into the new startup to launch the *New York Leader* on October 1, 1923, with Norman Thomas as editor-in-chief. Despite a promising start, it survived as a daily for less than a year. But the successor weekly, *The New Leader*, became a much-needed pillar in rebuilding a national Socialist press.⁶⁸ This renewed optimism was also greatly enhanced by the exciting prospects for the CPPA as the election of 1924 approached. Even Eugene Debs was excited by these possibilities. The sentimental Debs became all the more so with age, so the notion that the Railroad Brotherhoods, with whom he had parted ways at the start of his Socialist career, were in the vanguard of this new movement was overwhelming to him.

In the fall of 1923, after a speech at Cooper Union, Debs had as his dinner guests Louis Waldman and David Karsner, the *New York Call* reporter who was his first biographer. Over a lavish Italian meal at the East Side restaurant of an Italian Socialist Federation stalwart, just before dawn Debs finally broke the news to his young admirers:

I've run my last campaign. I say this not only because I'm tired, but because in the coming Presidential election the Socialists must be free to go with the entire American labor movement. It's my firm hope and belief that labor is waking up at last and will soon move towards independent political action. The Railway Brotherhoods and Machinists and the Chicago Federation of Labor mean business this time. They're slow to get started, but when they do they'll sweep everything before them. I'm not their kind of candidate. The Socialist Party must work with these organizations and be part of something as big as America itself. I must ask that my name be withdrawn from any consideration. I hope this conference for political action may turn out to be the very thing we've been working for in the past 25 years.⁶⁹

After the debacle of the Federated Farmer-Labor convention, Minnesota AFL leader and SP veteran William Mahoney believed that the

Minnesota party, with its recent smashing success, was in a position to pick up the pieces and organize a national party that would be impossible “for extremists of the right or the left to arrest or divert.”⁷⁰ It was evident that he was mistaken when the conference he called to this end opened on November 15 in St. Paul. Though Mahoney unreservedly blasted the Communists for their antics at the Chicago convention, he admitted both the Workers Party and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party into his convention, largely out of disgust with the heavy-handedness of Gompers.⁷¹ Senator Henrik Shipstead denounced the conference as soon as the Communist specter became evident,⁷² whereas Morris Hillquit pleaded to Mahoney,

Such labor organizations as are at all interested in politics and in the idea of an independent Farmer-Labor Party are, almost without exception, affiliated with the Conference for Progressive Political Action. . . . Personally I have no illusions about the sentiment of the leadership of the Conference toward independent politics but there is still a widespread feeling that the fast moving political developments may shape themselves in a way to force the Conference to make independent Presidential nominations. Should this hope fail, then a number of the constituent organizations of the Conference will undoubtedly be ready to join a movement having for its purpose to nominate an independent Farmer-Labor ticket.⁷³

The Communists’ beachhead in Minnesota was Clarence Hathaway, a young convert from the Machinists Union in Detroit who upon relocating became a vice president of the Minnesota AFL.⁷⁴ Other close Communist allies, if not party members, entrenched in the St. Paul convention included John C. Kennedy of the Washington Farmer-Labor Party and Charles “Red Flag” Taylor, a burly Farmer-Labor-aligned Republican member of the Montana legislature.⁷⁵ Another noteworthy delegate at St. Paul was John Zahnd, who had been the Socialist candidate for the U.S. House in Indiana’s second district in 1912. The frustrated prophet of a small utopian offshoot of the Reorganized Church of Latter

Day Saints (itself a Mormon splinter group dating back to 1860), after his disillusionment with the Communists Zahnd maintained a small but devoted following in his tiny Greenback Party. This sect, based on a fanciful set of theories about the Federal Reserve, may have been midwife to much of the so-called radical right and persisted in some form through the 1960s.⁷⁶

If Morris Hillquit was fatally missing in action at the Farmer-Labor convention in 1920, the old soldier analogously led astray in 1924 was J. A. H. Hopkins, who led the Committee of 48 in supporting the St. Paul Farmer-Labor convention and attended that gathering. Much as Hillquit could have been an ideal agent of compromise in 1920, the Committee of 48 could have tipped the balance in favor of forming a new party had it instead joined the CPPA. Apparently wracked by guilt over the failure to adopt a compromise platform with the Farmer-Labor Party in 1920, Hopkins was now dealing with a very different creature in the Communist-led Farmer-Labor movement. Hopkins wrote Hillquit that he was “induced to do so partly because of the necessity at the present time of uniting every branch of the progressive or radical movement into one effective political instrument that will become a contender in the 1924 elections.”⁷⁷ Shrewdly recognizing the maneuvers by which the Communists hoped they might still carry out their complete Labor Party gambit, Hillquit replied,

The organization committee of the Conference, of which I am a member, considered the question of giving representation to the body which called the St. Paul conference for May 30. The issue in this case was whether every organization connected with the St. Paul movement should have separate representation on the arrangements committee or whether such representation should be confined to the three persons charged with organizing the St. Paul conference. The latter suggestion prevailed. . . . I know very little about the present condition or stand of your Committee and I need not assure you that my sentiments toward you personally have never ceased to be friendly and cordial.⁷⁸

To be sure, there was plenty of anxiety in Socialist ranks about the insistence of the leadership on staying the course with the CPPA while bolder action was being taken in Minnesota. Kate Richards O'Hare, who managed to keep the *National Rip-Saw* kicking into the early 1920s, editorialized that "all that can be done by political action now rests in a Farmer-Labor Party."⁷⁹ But Hillquit's approach was not as foolhardy as the ultimate failure to form a Farmer-Labor Party might suggest. As committed as the Railroad Brotherhoods were to William McAdoo, Hillquit was correct that if his closer union allies in the CPPA were not necessarily opposed to endorsing a major party candidate in principle, they could not support McAdoo. By early 1924, the groomed dynastic successor to Woodrow Wilson was implicated to a great extent in the Teapot Dome scandal.

Some historians have pushed the erroneous notion, based on the position of the Railroad Brotherhoods, that there would have been no Progressive candidacy in 1924 had William McAdoo emerged as the Democratic nominee. That June, the Democratic convention in New York was among the most legendary and depressing affairs in the annals of American politics. McAdoo, an architect of the Federal Reserve and Council of National Defense, faced off for 103 ballots as the candidate of the Ku Klux Klan against New York governor Al Smith, before the obscure Wall Street lawyer John Davis emerged as the eventual compromise. Even most of the Railroad Brotherhoods, by the time the convention opened, were being led by the force of events to support the increasingly certain candidacy of Robert LaFollette. The aging Samuel Gompers and his inner circle may have had a lingering sympathy for McAdoo, longing for their salad days with Wilson, but the practical men of the AFL saw their champion in the man who was urban ethnic America, Al Smith. In the labor movement no less than in the Democratic Party itself, McAdoo was the symbol of the past and Smith of the future.

LaFollette decided he would seek the presidency in 1924 when he was with his family over the preceding Christmas holidays. According to

the memoirs of his son Philip, he immediately decided that he would run as an independent and not on a third-party ticket in order to avoid the specter of Communist infiltration that had thwarted his candidacy in 1920.⁸⁰ James Weinstein disputes this by pointing to a letter in which LaFollette indicated his likelihood of accepting the nomination of the Farmer-Labor Party when it convened on June 17, but doing so would not have been inconsistent with the wishes of LaFollette, who was already anticipating the support of the Socialist Party.⁸¹ Several gestures were made throughout the spring of 1924 attempting to ensure harmony between the St. Paul convention and the CPPA, which looked increasingly certain to nominate LaFollette in Cleveland on July 4. But William Mahoney insisted on going forward with his plans, thinking he might compel the CPPA to merely endorse LaFollette as the nominee of his Farmer-Labor Party.⁸² One attempt to resolve this impasse was made by Edwin Evans, president of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), who proposed the formation of an entirely new umbrella group that would immediately exclude the Communists.⁸³

On April 28, an anxious Samuel Gompers called a meeting of union leaders and members of Congress aligned with the LaFollette movement to urge them to repudiate the planned St. Paul convention, and thus decisively extricate both the labor and progressive movements from the Communist menace. He was particularly concerned that the assorted congressmen were being manipulated on the Communists' behalf by Henry Teigan, Mahoney's collaborator and one-time secretary of the South Dakota SP, who served as chief of staff to Senator Magnus Johnson. Both Johnson and Henrik Shipstead were at this meeting, as were the three Minnesota Farmer-Laborites in the House. A few misgivings were expressed about Gompers's position, but the unqualified support of William Johnston secured consensus.⁸⁴ On May 29, LaFollette released to the press a letter he had written to Wisconsin attorney general Herman Ekern repudiating Communist support:

I have no doubt that many of those involved in organizing the St. Paul meeting are actuated by the purest desire to promote genuine

political and economic progress. But it will not command the support of the farmers, the workers or other progressives. The Communists have admittedly entered into this political movement not for the purpose of curing, by means of the ballot, the evils which afflict the American people, but only to divide and confuse the Progressive movement and create a condition of chaos favorable to their ultimate aims. Their real purpose is to establish by revolutionary action a dictatorship of the proletariat, which is absolutely repugnant to democratic ideals and to all American aspirations. Not only are the Communists the mortal enemies of the progressive movement and democratic ideals, but, under the cloak of such extremists, the reactionary interests find the best opportunity to plant their spies and provocatory agents for the purpose of confusing and destroying the progressive movements. I have devoted many years of my life to an effort to solve the problems which confront the American people by the ballot and not by force. I have fought steadfastly to achieve this end, and I shall not abandon this fight as long as I may live. I believe, therefore, that all progressives should refuse to participate in any movement which makes common cause with any Communist organization.⁸⁵

LaFollette further emphasized that the Workers Party was “acting under orders from the Communist International in Moscow,” citing a statement by Foster and Ruthenberg that openly acknowledged Comintern instruction in the May 16 issue of the *Daily Worker*. Several groups immediately cut all ties with Mahoney, including the Committee of 48 and virtually all the supportive labor press.⁸⁶ Yet Victor Berger editorialized against LaFollette’s move in the *Milwaukee Leader*: “Had LaFollette wanted the convention to be a success, had he wanted to overwhelm the Communists and make them look like a frog in the ocean, had he wanted a strong and virile new party formed, all he had to do was urge his supporters to go to the convention in large numbers.”⁸⁷

James Weinstein comes down in favor of this view, to the point of strongly suggesting that eventual AFL support for LaFollette’s candidacy was only a means of thwarting the emergence of a Labor Party.⁸⁸ But

this claim ignores several facts, not least LaFollette's own wishes from the outset. Indeed, Lenin's statement about supporting him "as a rope supports one who is hanged" was a matter of public record, and LaFollette may have also been aware of the crazed imaginings of John Pepper. This reading also denies or diminishes the extent of Communist infiltration of the St. Paul movement. Though their involvement was not as brazen as in Chicago a year earlier, the Communists still had decisive control of the executive committee of the St. Paul Farmer-Labor Party, suggesting that all LaFollette could have done was lead the rank and file out, which he effectively did anyway.⁸⁹ William Mahoney emerged as embittered and repentant as John Fitzpatrick before him, all the more in that he could not now even be seated as a delegate at the CPPA convention.⁹⁰

As for the AFL, it is true that it opposed the formation of a new party for reasons all its own, and its official statement endorsing LaFollette took an explicit shot at the Socialist Party. But LaFollette made clear in his official message to the CPPA that, though he was running as an independent, he foresaw a new party being formed after the election, "when the people will register their will and their united purpose by a vote of such magnitude that a new political party will be inevitable."⁹¹ The success of the Non-Partisan League and Farmer-Labor Parties from the Midwest to the Northwest, all of which had stood firmly with the CPPA against the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, strongly suggested that a realignment of such magnitude could indeed be in the offing. The AFL likely wanted to keep its options open for such an eventuality, and Gompers had even made some effort to accommodate the Labor Party movement when it first emerged in 1919. Whatever he was thinking now, it scarcely mattered after he passed away in September. If there was any scheming involved, it was against the insurgency stirring since the end of the war led by John L. Lewis and William Hutcheson, presidents of the Mine Workers and Carpenters, respectively. In another indication of the gravely missed opportunities of 1920, these formidable labor leaders were successfully wooed by the Republicans that year as progressive critics of Gompers.⁹²

The St. Paul convention went forward as scheduled on June 17 and proved a farce. Just a couple of days after LaFollette released his letter blasting the Communists, a frantic communication from the Comintern, reflecting the chaos reigning in Moscow since Lenin's sudden death in January, denounced support for the Farmer-Labor Party as dangerous opportunism, and ordered them to change course. In that spirit, the two most adamant opponents of supporting LaFollette in the Workers Party—Ludwig Lore and Ludwig Katterfeld, who closely identified with the party's roots in the old SP left wing and with Trotsky—were also purged.⁹³ Keeping the new line a secret until the convention opened, Mahoney made a pathetic attempt to decertify the ten delegates officially representing the Workers Party and Federated Farmer-Labor Party, with one of his few allies being Walter Thomas Mills, representing the fledgling Farmer-Labor Party of California.⁹⁴

Charles Taylor of Montana was elected permanent chairman, declaring in perfect jargon, "Out of this convention is destined to grow the great mass-class Farmer-Labor Party, a party that in a few short years will dispose of the two capitalist parties that hold power today, and take over the power in the nation in the name of the workers and producers."⁹⁵ Because the majority of the five hundred delegates were still behind LaFollette, both Mahoney and the Communists were allowed to save face by provisionally nominating Duncan McDonald, former Socialist president of the Illinois Federation of Labor, with the understanding that his nomination would be withdrawn when LaFollette was nominated in Cleveland. Four days after LaFollette was nominated, the Farmer-Labor executive committee voted to liquidate the party and endorsed the recently named candidates of the Workers Party, William Z. Foster for president and Ben Gitlow for vice president.⁹⁶ Foster and Gitlow campaigned in the fall more or less exclusively against LaFollette, whose campaign they described as representing "the forces of American fascism, complete from Hearst to Debs."⁹⁷

The CPPA nominating convention at the Cleveland Municipal Auditorium on July 4 was an infinitely more upbeat affair, with ten thousand

in attendance. William Johnston gave the keynote address, praising the convention as “the mightiest political force ever assembled in our nation to fight unswervingly for truth, for justice and for freedom.” Johnston continued, praising LaFollette as “the tribune of the American people, their greatest spokesman and their most loyal defender.”⁹⁸ But not all was harmonious behind the scenes, as Hillquit continued to plead with his colleagues on the CPPA national committee to announce the intention to form a new party then and there. As Hillquit described the scene,

My appearance on the stage was the signal for a spontaneous and lusty ovation, such as I had seldom, if ever, witnessed. Delegates and visitors stood on chairs, waved and cheered and shouted for many minutes, until I succeeded in establishing a semblance of order and was able to make myself heard. Neither I nor my opponents in the committee were deceived about the nature and meaning of the demonstration. It was not a personal tribute. It was generally known that I was desperately fighting in the committee for the formation of an independent political party, and the popular acclaim was an endorsement of my stand as clearly as articulate language could have expressed it. Had I at that moment proposed the immediate organization of a new party the proposal would have been carried by an overwhelming vote. The temptation was great, but one to be resisted. The National Committee was still debating the crucial point, and some acceptable compromise seemed possible. It would manifestly have been an act of disloyalty for me to attempt to force a decision from the floor of the convention before the committee had reached a conclusion, especially when I was acting as emissary of the committee. A snap convention decision to form a new party would moreover have been a pyrrhic victory.⁹⁹

Robert LaFollette Jr. then read his father’s letter to the convention, which laid out the position of waiting until after the election, with a mandate of the voters behind them, to go forward with the formation of a new party. The CPPA leadership affirmed this by calling a

convention for that purpose to be held on November 29. LaFollette was then nominated by acclamation. Seconding speeches were given by Hillquit; women's suffrage leader Harriet Stanton Blatch; William Pickens, a leader of the NAACP who collaborated with A. Philip Randolph in the Friends of Negro Freedom; and Abraham Lefkowitz, a founder of the American Federation of Teachers and veteran New York Socialist who had been a founder of the Labor Party in 1919.¹⁰⁰ The convention agreed to authorize the executive committee to ratify LaFollette's own choice for a running mate. LaFollette's first choice was Louis Brandeis, who would have led his brain trust had he become president twelve years earlier.¹⁰¹ But Brandeis had no desire to step down from the Supreme Court, and thus it came as something of a surprise when LaFollette named Burton Wheeler, the freshman Democratic senator from Montana.

A product of the Montana Non-Partisan League, where it was most closely aligned with the SP of any state where it was organized, Wheeler distinguished himself with just two years in the Senate as the lead investigator into the Teapot Dome scandal, earning him the continuing ire of Warren Harding's successor, Calvin Coolidge, now running for election to a term of his own.¹⁰² Once all doubt was removed about the outcome of the agonizing Democratic convention, Wheeler announced that "when the Democratic Party goes to Wall Street for a candidate, I must refuse to go with it . . . the uncontrolled, liberal, and progressive forces must look elsewhere for leadership."¹⁰³ At first, Wheeler was reluctant to run and incredulous at LaFollette's personal assurance that "either you or I will be elected President of the United States"—an indication that LaFollette and the CPPA leadership believed that they would win a large enough bloc of states in the West and Northwest to throw the election into the House of Representatives.¹⁰⁴ But when the Justice Department issued a retaliatory indictment against Wheeler, offering to withdraw it if he would not accept the nomination, Wheeler was so galled that he did accept.¹⁰⁵

The Socialist Party opened its convention in Cleveland following the CPPA convention on July 7. Bertha Hale White was now the acting

executive secretary after the tragic drowning death of Otto Branstetter. The majority report submitted to the convention gave the assurance:

The Presidential campaign of the CPPA will develop into an insurgent political movement of labor. It will be supported by the advanced workers of the country. The Socialist Party must take its stand with these workers. During the four months to come the Socialists will have an unparalleled opportunity to work with the organized workers of this country, side by side, as comrades in a common cause.¹⁰⁶

Two members of the NEC, however, were compelled to submit a minority report opposing the nomination of the Progressive ticket. William Snow of Illinois and William Henry of Indiana argued that the CPPA had adopted “a platform so meaningless it might have been written by W. J. Bryan thirty years ago.”¹⁰⁷ Yet the LaFollette platform substantially contained all of the party’s historic immediate demands, including public ownership of natural resources and railroads, a large inheritance tax, direct election of the president, abolition of federal judicial review, and a drastic reduction in the U.S. military arsenal. The convention paid little heed to the minority report and endorsed LaFollette and his platform by a vote of 106 to 17. Eugene Debs, as ever, captured the mood of the party that now honored him with the ceremonial post of national chairman, insisting “there is no compromise in going with the working class when it breaks with the old parties.”¹⁰⁸ To the slurs of William Z. Foster, Debs responded with the sharp anti-Communist riposte that assured his place of pride in American historical memory: “Having no Vatican in Moscow to guide me, I must follow the light I have, and this I have done as I always have in the past.”¹⁰⁹

The pitfalls of Socialist support for the LaFollette-Wheeler campaign were well in evidence, however, as Norman Thomas finally accepted a Socialist nomination to high office, running his first campaign in 1924 for governor of New York. As early as the spring of 1923, the Railroad Brotherhood leaders in the New York state CPPA were alarmed at the predominance of the Socialists, but nonetheless mollified them with a

resolution commending the recent success of the British Labour Party.¹¹⁰ But they were eager to reelect the pro-labor governor, Al Smith, then in a tough reelection battle against Republican Theodore Roosevelt Jr. Thus Thomas was usually prevented from speaking in behalf of his own candidacy at the many LaFollette meetings he addressed across the state.¹¹¹ Still, he was joined many times on the stump by Burton Wheeler, with whom he later stood at the forefront of the campaign to keep the United States out of the Second World War. It was also likely during this campaign that Thomas first heard of the man who would one day gravely affect both his personal legacy and that of American Socialism itself, a rising star of the Young Communist League named Max Shachtman, who wrote of his campaign in the *Daily Worker*, “Every evening before he dons his nightie he lights a lamp and says a prayer for clean government and hopes that the workers will forget that there is or should be or might be such a thing as a class struggle.”¹¹²

Even some former stalwarts of the Social Democratic League, which passed out of existence no later than 1921, supported LaFollette. Most notable were William English Walling and J. G. Phelps Stokes, whose sister Helen, a committed pacifist, would be a leading figure in the Socialist Party of Vermont through the 1930s. But others had moved much further to the right since the war. John Spargo endorsed Calvin Coolidge in what proved the beginning of a long Republican partisan career. Another figure from the Socialist Party’s earliest years in the Coolidge camp was Henry Slobodin, whose letter to Walling defending his position bore the unmistakable marks of his left-wing Socialist background:

Internationally, LaFollette is a bitter reactionary. . . . LaFollette wants the United States to step in now and demand that Europe return to chaos so as to please the German voters in Wisconsin. . . . Economically LaFollette is unsound and reactionary. He promises to smash monopolies. Have the events of the last thirty years been wasted on him?¹¹³

Spargo wrote to Slobodin with a hearty endorsement of this letter, revealing, “Whenever I take a move in matters political which marks any sort

of departure from the old Socialist ways I quite eagerly await your judgment. In all the long years of our association I have always felt the more certain of my own judgment when it coincided with yours.”¹¹⁴

LaFollette and Wheeler appeared exclusively on the Socialist ballot line in California and appeared on Socialist ballot lines beside their independent lines in Connecticut, Missouri, Montana, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. In New York, one of LaFollette’s most outspoken supporters, Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia, was denied renomination as a Republican and, after first being elected to Congress as the fusion candidate against Scott Nearing in 1918, had to run for reelection on the Socialist ballot line. Identifying himself as a Progressive for caucusing purposes in the House, Victor Berger paid tribute to LaGuardia by insisting that there was a “Socialist and a half” in Congress.¹¹⁵ A popular speaker for LaFollette throughout the country during the campaign, LaGuardia had to abruptly cancel a tour through Pennsylvania during the fall campaign and was promptly replaced by August Claessens, who had traversed the Midwest for LaFollette.

After causing chaos at the Democratic convention, the Ku Klux Klan reached its zenith during the 1924 campaign, basing its appeal on continuing to uphold the “100% Americanism” of the war years. It saw the LaFollette campaign as especially menacing, yet Claessens recalled, a generation later, as he campaigned for LaFollette before a besheeted parade in the committed Klan strongholds of Lebanon and Quakertown,

The moment the tail of the procession was in sight I stood up, removed my hat and coat, and without any introduction or explanation of who I was, I opened, “fellow citizens.” Of course, I did not mention the Klan. I did not attack it. I was not that dumb. . . . So I began my speech quite innocently. I talked enthusiastically about our great country . . . then I explained the incompetent, wasteful, anarchic capitalist system and the exploitation of the masses and the ruin of our national resources. And of course I wound up with a plea for a collective and cooperative economy, and that a vote for LaFollette was a step in that

direction. The hundreds of plain working people listened to me with interest and perfect attention. They roared at my funny stories, they donated a handsome collection and cleaned me out of my Socialist booklets and papers. They gave me a warm ovation and I thanked them for their beautiful attention.¹¹⁶

The following week, when the famously bald Claessens arrived in Reading, a leading party stalwart, J. Henry Stump, told him of a friend who warned him, “You Socialists had better watch out . . . damn my soul if I am lying, that bald-headed guy gave an appealing and quite convincing talk on Socialism. You got to hand it to the KKK. They are a damn clever bunch and they are out to win your people away from you.”¹¹⁷

But more insidious hysteria against LaFollette came from the Republican-aligned sections of the business community. The National Association of Manufacturers intoned that “we have in LaFollette and Wheeler a Lenin and Trotsky.”¹¹⁸ By the end of September, the Coolidge campaign ceased targeting the hopeless Democrat and focused all of its fire on LaFollette with the slogan “Coolidge or Chaos.” The incoming vice president, Charles Dawes, declared that the campaign was a fight between “those who favor the Constitution of the United States and those who would destroy its essential parts.” Dawes described LaFollette as “the master demagogue and the leader of a mob of extreme radicals of which the largest part, the Socialists, fly the red flag.”¹¹⁹ Ignoring what actual Communists thought of LaFollette, the *Saturday Evening Post* ran an editorial denouncing LaFollette as a Bolshevik agent that would be printed on the back of every Pennsylvania Railroad dining car menu.¹²⁰

Burton Wheeler began his enthusiastically received national campaign tour in his native Massachusetts, where he had an auspicious supporter in maverick Irish Democrat Joseph P. Kennedy.¹²¹ Mrs. Wheeler joined him in Chicago, along with her antiwar activist colleague Jane Addams, proceeding by private rail car across the West.¹²² After Wheeler addressed a crowd of twenty thousand at the Hollywood Bowl, the *Los Angeles Examiner* reported, “No prima donna, no golden throated tenor,

no orchestra leader with a magic wand has ever known the depths of applause that reverberated through the Hollywood Hills about the Bowl when Senator Wheeler had finished.”¹²³ The major campaign meeting at Madison Square Garden was addressed by Wheeler, Morris Hillquit, Norman Thomas, and A. Philip Randolph.¹²⁴ LaFollette himself returned to the Cleveland Municipal Auditorium for the final speech of the campaign:

The progressive tide is rising, but this is only the beginning of the fight. We cannot in one short struggle capture all the strongholds in which monopoly has been entrenched. For more than fifty years the private monopoly system has been digging itself into the very heart of government. Its allies are in the executive departments, in Congress and in the courts. They are in the state and city governments. They have spent millions in securing their present power, and it would be almost impossible to free the country of their enormous power and influence in a single presidential election. Regardless of the outcome, I shall forever rejoice that I had a part in this great campaign to restore government to the people. I shall be proud that I aided in proclaiming the message of this great movement—the message of humanity, liberty, and justice.¹²⁵

With Calvin Coolidge securing an impressive 54 percent of the vote in a three-way contest, LaFollette polled a generally disappointing, but by historic standards formidable 4,831,706 votes, at 16.6 percent. He carried the electoral votes only of his native Wisconsin, but came excruciatingly close in North Dakota, and in ten other states came in a solid second, including California, where he ran solely on the Socialist ballot line. LaFollette would also receive the majority of his vote on the Socialist line in New York and Missouri. The maiden Communist presidential campaign of Foster and Gitlow received a mere 33,364 votes in the fourteen states where they were on the ballot, coming just a hair behind the Socialist Labor Party’s Frank T. Johns. Of more than 120 U.S. House candidates nominated by the Socialists as part of the LaFollette coalition,

in addition to LaGuardia and Victor Berger, notable campaigns included Leo Krzycki in the ever-elusive fourth district of Wisconsin, August Claessens with 13 percent in the Bronx-based twenty-third district of New York, and SP founding member and perennial candidate John Slayton with 19 percent in the New Castle-based thirty-fifth district of Pennsylvania.¹²⁶ But the general mood of setback, as it extended beyond the presidential ticket, was probably best represented in Oklahoma. “Our Jack” Walton, after his impeachment by the Klan-dominated legislature and the disillusionment of his early Socialist supporters, shocked many by capturing the Democratic nomination for the Senate, only to be beaten in a landslide by the Klan-backed Republican.¹²⁷

It was not immediately clear that the effort for a Labor Party was a complete loss, but the year ended on a tragicomic footnote perfectly encapsulating the transition that was beginning from one era to another in American radicalism. Albert Weisbord, the Harvard-based YPSL chairman, announced that he was defecting to the Communists after the campaign, letting it be revealed that he had long been a Communist plant. In the words of Executive Secretary Bertha Hale White, “We thought him rather immature, if not childish, in some of his communications but considered him perfectly honest and trustworthy . . . his latest action came as a complete surprise, and to say the least, it was a painful shock to all of us here.”¹²⁸ There was a fear that Weisbord might abscond with the records and assets of the YPSL as apparently happened in 1919—indeed, he was the third consecutive YPSL chairman to defect to the Communists.¹²⁹ Weisbord achieved a moment of glory as a gifted Communist union organizer in the textile industry before abandoning the Communist Party, leading a miniscule Trotskyist sect in the 1930s and then fading into obscurity. With the failure to form a Farmer-Labor Party and, in the words of Gene Debs, become part of something as big as America itself, such dubious characters were the future of American radicalism.

10 Changing of the Guard

(1925–1929)

“The delegates had come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.” So wrote Morris Hillquit when the Conference for Progressive Political Action finally gathered in Chicago for its postelection meeting on February 21, 1925:

If a regularly organized and permanent political party had achieved similar results in its debut, it would have left a deep imprint on the political history of the United States. It would have beaten the record of the best performance of any third party in the past . . . it would have elected some United States Senators and a sizable group of Congressmen and local officials, it would have given the party a solid foundation for growth and expansion. But it had been a one man campaign, and the “practical” labor politicians viewed its results solely from the point of view of concrete achievement. . . . The railway brotherhood chiefs frankly declared their intention to withdraw from the movement.¹

Hillquit implored the delegates, “If five million votes were not enough, will you wait until we have swept the country? Did you start your trade unions on that practice? Did you wait until the workers in the different industries clamored to be organized?”² Eugene Debs also addressed the gathering, with a final exhortation to the railway labor movement he once held in the palm of his hand to realize its potential to transform

American politics. As Hillquit described the frustrated end of the thirty-year journey of his party's beloved icon,

As he stood there, tall, gaunt, earnest, and ascetic, before the well-groomed and comfortably situated leaders of a new generation, he seemed like a ghost of reproach risen from their past and calling them back to the glorious days of struggle, suffering, and idealism. He was listened to with close attention. But the railroad men were not moved from their position.³

William Johnston made some effort to salvage what he could and begin anew, but any possibilities were dashed when he suffered a debilitating stroke in October.⁴ A few other ghostly remnants persisted on paper until 1928 at least, described by Hillquit as “a motley array of advocates of heterogeneous political nostrums with a sprinkling of dubious farmers’ organizations and liberal progressive groups without constituencies.”⁵ Immediately after the implosion of the CPPA, the Socialists held their own convention in Chicago on February 23, with forty-five delegates affectionately praised by Hillquit as “the diehards.”⁶ As for Fighting Bob, he was told before embarking on his crusade of 1924 that he did not have long to live unless he slowed down and, in fact, chose to run for that very reason, telling his son Philip, “I want to die as I have lived, with my boots on.”⁷ Thus did Robert Marion LaFollette Sr. pass away, at peace with himself and his conscience, on June 18, 1925, four days after his seventieth birthday.

At their lowest ebb, the Socialists could still count on one asset, diminished but nevertheless essential to any hope for the future—the leadership of the loyal opposition in the AFL. There was more than enough dissension in the AFL to prevent the ascent of Gompers’s heir apparent, Matthew Woll, a former leader of the Photo Engravers and arch-Wilsonian. Yet the potential insurgents, John L. Lewis and William Hutcheson, were not only too polarizing but also had alienated their potential allies in the Socialist bloc by remaining with the Republicans

in 1924. Lewis put forward the secretary of his union, William Green, as the compromise candidate. A founder of the CPPA who would make friendly noises about a Labor Party as late as the beginning of the New Deal, Green represented a potential new direction for the AFL until he was overwhelmed by events a decade later that ultimately led to the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Yet his progressive instincts would be severely hobbled, being surrounded in the AFL leadership by men like Matthew Woll and William English Walling.

The hope for the future was represented by the new institutional center of the Socialist loyal opposition, Brookwood Labor College. Established in 1921 on a pastoral campus in Katonah, New York, its founding president was Abraham Johannes Muste, an officer of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and Dutch Reformed minister who worked with Norman Thomas in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Other prominent members of the faculty included Muste's Socialist co-founder of the AFT, Abraham Lefkowitz; J. B. S. Hardman, the education director of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; and David Saposs, a protégé of John Commons who wrote the first scholarly survey of labor radicalism, *Left Wing Unionism*, in 1926. James Maurer, now the titular leader of the Socialist bloc in the AFL, was also an official supporter of Brookwood along with James Graham, a longtime SP stalwart who was now president of the Montana Federation of Labor.

Muste soon established a political arm of the operation, the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA), to facilitate movement toward reviving a Farmer-Labor Party over the next decade. Socialists such as Norman Thomas, James Maurer, James Oneal, and Frank Crosswaith served on its executive board. The model established by Brookwood also served to inspire the most devastated sections of the Socialist movement. In the Old Southwest, the once-thriving encampment circuit was now gone with the wind. But shortly before his death in 1925, Job Harriman transferred the assets of his Llano Colony in Louisiana to establish Commonwealth College in Mena, Arkansas, which got off to a good start in the capable hands of Frank and Kate Richards O'Hare.⁸

If the Socialists were primarily tending to their gardens in the labor movement in these desperate years, it was fitting that this was done in the most dramatic and consequential fashion by A. Philip Randolph. In June 1925, Randolph gave his first speech to the Pullman Porters Athletic Association—at the invitation of Ashley Totten, a leader in the Association who was an avid reader of *The Messenger*—on the subject of organizing as a trade union.⁹ In response the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was founded on August 25, 1925, making its headquarters in the Harlem offices of *The Messenger*, which became their own after the demise of the magazine in 1928. The Pullman Company historically had hired black porters in what had long been cast in benevolent terms, but in a dehumanizing manner in that, among countless other manifestations of racism, every porter was called “George” in homage to George Pullman, a practice hearkening back to slavery. Thus did the initial wage demands issued by the Brotherhood conclude with this demand: “By no means least, that porters be treated like men.”¹⁰

Randolph’s lieutenants in organizing and defending the Brotherhood included Milton Webster, a longtime porter fired for militancy who then became a Republican ward heeler in black Chicago, and C. L. Dellums of Oakland, the Brotherhood officer who most shared Randolph’s Socialist convictions. The initial response of the Pullman Company was more outrage than alarm, though the company made clear that it had no tolerance for porters found carrying “Bolshevik cards.”¹¹ That the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters inspired as much devotion in its struggle against Pullman as the American Railway Union had more than thirty years before was illustrated when an organizer named Bennie Smith went on a daring organizing trip to Randolph’s hometown of Jacksonville, Florida. After holding a secret meeting in the basement of a private home, Smith was arrested and charged with “preaching social equality in the South.” When Randolph ordered him to leave the area, Smith sent the following telegram:

Am fully mindful of grave seriousness of situation and personal danger.
Conscientiously feel Brotherhood cause is so righteously important

that a firm stand should be taken. Have fully decided to remain and meet consequences. This means that I'm willing to make supreme sacrifice. Have sacredly dedicated my all to the Brotherhood's noble cause. Advise at once.¹²

Milton Webster replied by wiring the \$40 train fare with the blunt message, "Get the hell out of Jacksonville, you can't beat no case down there." Smith went on to a proud and honorable career as leader of the Brotherhood in Detroit.

Growing into his role as the indispensable man of the Socialist Party in New York, Norman Thomas stood for mayor in 1925. Eugene Debs, who first met Thomas on a New York visit three years earlier, came to campaign for him. In the words of Thomas's biographer W. A. Swanberg, "The fearless old warrior was not fully aware of the 'new Socialism' Thomas sought to build," and indeed, neither man realized that this occasion would amount to the passing of the torch of titular leadership of the Socialist Party.¹³ Debs caused Thomas some embarrassment when he let loose the old fire at Carnegie Hall and thundered, "Not only the political parties but the press and the churches have become frank agents of capitalism. Just let Wall Street get us into a new war tomorrow and see how every preacher in the country will yell for blood!" Though Thomas certainly shared the sentiment, he doubted that the barely breathing party could afford to alienate the press and clergy.¹⁴

But the most poignant moment of this valedictory for Debs, in the city where he was adored as in no other, took place at Hunts Point Palace in the Bronx. August Claessens was forced to entertain the audience with typically hammy anecdotes for forty-five minutes until a drunk but glowing Debs arrived, who then took a half-hour to personally embrace most of the audience before beginning his speech. His talk was delivered so clumsily that Algernon Lee held it to be definitive proof that Debs actually hypnotized his crowds. This appearance was followed by a banquet for Debs on the night of his seventieth birthday, at which some of the bitterest enemies from the party splits over the war and Communism all came to pay their respects.¹⁵ In his race for mayor, despite

the endorsement of “half-Socialist” Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia, Norman Thomas won only a paltry 39,083 votes against the dashing Tammany rogue Jimmy Walker and Republican Frank Waterman of fountain-pen fame.

Almost immediately after the 1925 campaign, a great and far-reaching change began to unfold among the Jewish Socialists of New York. On a trip abroad in the second half of 1925, Abraham Cahan spent most of October in the British Mandate of Palestine, partly at the invitation of the Zionist Labor Movement or Histadrut in an attempt to build more amicable relations with the generally hostile Jewish labor movement in the United States.¹⁶ Cahan’s reports on his visit for *The Forward* were glowing:

Let everyone proclaim far and wide the Jewish achievements in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. . . . As if set up to enlarge immigration to Palestine, the Jewish tragedy has grown worse and the gates to America have been slammed shut before them. To date, the Jews who have to escape and migrate have no other destination than Palestine. . . . This psychological situation exists all over the world, so the criticism about what is happening in Palestine is almost considered sacrilege.¹⁷

A long debate unfolded in *The Forward* lasting until the spring of 1926. No riposte to Cahan’s enthusiasms was more unequivocal than that of Charney Vladeck, who remained with *The Forward* for the next decade despite being increasingly at odds in most political matters:

Zionists and Communists have one thing in common—both are extremist fanatics to the point of madness. Like all those whose ideology is based on belief, they consider any opponent a mortal enemy. Nevertheless, let me say that not only do I not believe in the practicality of Zionism, even if it were possible to realize Zionism it would be a catastrophe. When I observe what is taking place in

Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Poland, Bulgaria I thank God that we do not have a state of our own. A Jewish kingdom led by Jewish politicians (leaders of states are always politicians and not idealists) within a large Arab population defended by British rifles. . . . Just as I am unwilling to accept the position of the Yiddishists that the sole basis for the continued protection of Jewish identity is the Yiddish language, or the position of the Orthodox that this basis consists of the Jewish religion, so am I unwilling to accept that the only basis for the continued existence of Jewish identity is a Jewish country.¹⁸

Harry Rogoff was the first of Cahan's lieutenants to engage in the debate, pointing out that the Jewish anti-Zionists were now the minority in the international Socialist movement: the Labor Zionist party of David Ben-Gurion belonged to the same International as the Socialist Party, and most of its European leaders were praising the Labor Zionists. Rogoff argued plainly,

The war broke out, and everything changed . . . the troubles of the Jews in Eastern Europe increased incomparably, and then, precisely, the gates of America closed before them. The entire prewar situation was reversed. These were the circumstances that caused us to re-examine our attitude to Palestine.¹⁹

Jacob Panken responded to Rogoff by anticipating the tragic consequences of Zionist attitudes toward European Jewry twenty years later:

He forgets that most of Palestine belongs to the Arabs, and the number of the latter compared with the Jews is six to one . . . this movement gives precedence to the cause of 200,000 or even a million Jews over the kind of future in store for the 16 million Jews in the world. If there is a Jewish problem, it should be solved for the Jews all over the world, not only for the few who are already in Palestine or are going to be there.²⁰

Cahan's lieutenant Alexander Kahn revealed how far *The Forward* was drifting out of the Socialist mainstream, exulting, "The Zionist movement has ignited the flame of ardor and idealism in the American Jewish middle class."²¹ But Morris Hillquit was given the last word:

Is it possible to consider the Jews, without a home and dispersed, as a "nation" in the same sense, say, as the Poles after the partition of Poland? Or is a re-established Jewish state, or a center of specific Jewish culture, something possible, or desirable? The decision on this question rests with each individual, it is a function of feelings of the heart, not a matter of principle. I, personally, am not a Zionist. I also have doubts about the present possibility of re-establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Nor am I convinced that the Jews, as a nation standing on their own, will be able to make any outstanding or significant contribution to world culture. Yet I am not an anti-Zionist either. . . . Clearly, a sharp line has to be drawn between legitimate demands for national equality and the absurd attitude that claims racial or national superiority. Zionism, like all other national movements, must safeguard itself against the danger of nationalistic decline. If it ever should develop in that direction it will lose any right to the sympathy of a Socialist.²²

William Feigenbaum wrote to Hillquit with praise and gratitude for his stand. Employed at *The Forward* and looked on by Hillquit as a sort of protégé, Feigenbaum optimistically wrote, "It will go far in sobering up a number of our nationalist nuts."²³ But for a complex host of reasons, as the old Jewish Socialist flower slowly wilted on the vine over several decades, its memory would be distorted by the heavy-handed Zionist discourse that overtook American Jewry. Of course, larger historical forces mostly brought this about. But by the end of the decade, it became clear that *The Forward* had its own agenda that diverged from the Socialist movement, and would consciously use its power, including but not limited to continuing financial support, to frustrate the best interests of the

Socialist Party. More literally than Lenin could have conceived, *The Forward* was supporting the Socialist Party as a rope supports one who is hanged.

There was no more unmistakable omen that an era was closing on the Lower East Side than the sudden death of Meyer London, hit by a streetcar on his way to spend a bright Sunday morning reading poetry in Stuyvesant Square, on June 6, 1926. Although he had forsworn any return to public office after his defeat in 1922 and had spent his last years in despair over the growing Communist influence in the Jewish labor movement he did so much to build, London's death prompted a massive public outpouring of grief. The *New York Times* reported, "25,000 men, women, and children, some of whom stood in line for almost an hour, passed his coffin from the time the body arrived in the afternoon . . . many wept openly as they passed from the building . . . for six hours the East Side put aside its duties, pressing or trivial, to do honor to its dead prophet."²⁴ *The New Leader* editorialized,

It is no exaggeration to say that Meyer London was one of the finest type ever flowered by the proletariat. Reared among the working class, he never forgot his origin, his ideals, his fellows. He lived intensely, lived and served as all really great men live and serve a great cause. He never forgot the sufferings, the wrongs, the economic tyranny and the maladjustments of the social order in which he lived. The distress of the workers hurt him. He keenly felt our social and economic wrongs and instinctively recoiled from the suffering they imposed.²⁵

American Jewry would not see his like again, as it was rapidly moving on from the Lower East Side into the middle class and beyond. The fiery antiwar populist would have baffled generations of Jews to come, who religiously identified with the rise of the United States as a superpower under the stern guidance of an entrenched Zionist establishment,

indoctrinated with very different ideas about their identity than those of their immigrant fathers who sought to vicariously Americanize through the man from Terre Haute.

He, too, was not long for this world. In the summer of 1926 Debs and his wife sailed to Bermuda in an attempt to revive his health, only for him to catch pneumonia on the voyage home and return a final time to Chicago's Lindlahr Sanitarium. The emotional agony that Debs's passing represented for the whole Socialist movement was perhaps best illustrated by the letter of William Feigenbaum dated the day before he died:

For God's sake get well! You have no business being ill, and we need you. We need you more than you imagine. We need to have you with us. Even if you can never make another speech in your life it is enough to know that you are with us. . . . Dear old Gene, if I believed in prayer I would be on my knees praying for your health. If I believed in God I would be begging him to spare you to us for many, many years to come.²⁶

Eugene Victor Debs died at Lindlahr Sanitarium the evening of October 20, 1926. Morris Hillquit reported the death in a telegram to Friederich Adler, secretary of the Socialist International:

In the death of Eugene V. Debs the Socialist movement loses its deepest moral inspiration and finest spiritual guidance. His lofty idealism and warm love of mankind, his indomitable courage and flaming faith in our great cause, his purity of character and irresistible charm of personality, his life of service and sacrifice all combined to give him a unique place in the public life of America and in the liberating movements of labor and Socialism everywhere. In behalf of the Labor and Socialist International I shall lay a wreath on his grave and say a sad and loving farewell to one of the truest soldiers in the ranks.²⁷

After Debs lay in state for two days at the Labor Temple of Terre Haute, the funeral was held the afternoon of October 23 on his beloved front

porch. Norman Thomas gave the eulogy, while Kate, the distant wife of forty-one years, remained upstairs.²⁸ But the events surrounding a planned memorial service in New York served as a poignant metaphor for how the American left would never be the same after Debs's passing. After August Claessens put down a deposit to reserve Carnegie Hall for the service, it was announced in the press that the Communists secured Madison Square Garden for their own Debs memorial meeting. When Claessens rushed to plead with the manager of the Garden, he was told that the Workers Party had only put down a small deposit and that the Socialists could have the Garden if he returned first thing the next morning with a full \$1,000 deposit. *The Forward*, which had already put up the Carnegie Hall deposit, gladly obliged, and Madison Square Garden had a capacity crowd of twenty thousand to pay final respects to the man who was American Socialism.²⁹

It is strange and even paradoxical that Eugene V. Debs endures as he has in American historical memory. For a time, he was widely assigned the role of a utopian forerunner of New Deal liberalism, but this narrative belongs squarely to the New Deal/Cold War liberal heyday. The Debs of history ultimately transcends this role in two ways: first, not without irony, as a consistently honored apostle by even the most conservative segments of the American labor movement, and second, as the ultimate icon of antiwar protest in America. In both roles, it would be difficult to overstate his importance to the history of the United States in the First World War era specifically, but also generally as the symbol of the road not taken at the dawn of the American century—the century of horror, the century of mass destruction and genocide. To borrow a phrase from one who would likely be appalled by its invocation in this connection, when Debs fatefully spoke in Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918, no man may have ever more literally stood athwart history yelling “stop!”

For the SP, the veneration of Debs continued in death as it had in life, with a primer on his life giving the full Parson Weems treatment used in Workmen's Circle Sunday Schools as late as the 1950s. The Communist memory of Debs was complicated by his unequivocal parting

of ways with them by the time he left prison, despite his nominal support for the Communist-led International Labor Defense. In the words of Nick Salvatore, “They kept Debs in the wings and after his death found a way in which they could resuscitate him for their own purposes. Debs became a John the Baptist, the precursor to such party leaders as Foster” and, perhaps more literally, to James P. Cannon for the Trotskyists.³⁰ But the world of 1930s radicalism would have frightened Debs, in its obsessions with the grisly events in Europe, with seizing power by non-democratic methods, and its abstruse theoretical discourses that would have embarrassed *International Socialist Review*. It takes no great leap of imagination to see Debs feeling far more at home with that son of *National Rip-Saw* readers, Huey Long, than with the typical Union Square agitator.

This only makes all the more odd certain claims on Debs by Cold War liberalism and, for a time, the fringes of neoconservatism. And yet these claims cannot be dismissed out of hand. After all, Debs’s inheritance was an ancestral connection to revolutionary France, and it was this spirit that drew most of the eventual pro-war Socialists closely to him for the better part of his Socialist career. It would certainly be no more hypocritical to claim Debs for world-redemptive Americanism than, say, Thomas Jefferson or Martin Luther King. Yet in the end, it is appropriate that the most enduring legacy of Eugene V. Debs should be as the greatest martyr for the First Amendment in American history, at the critical moment when the United States crossed the rubicon from republic to empire, rather than as prophet of the cooperative commonwealth. For above all, Debs was an icon of dissent, specifically of that all too rare species, Middle American dissent. And though most future leaders of that dissent would have very different ideas from those of the man from Terre Haute, it was he who blazed the path on which they set forth.

Until the abrupt end of American Socialism as a serious, however small, political movement after 1948, the year that followed Debs’s passing was the lowest, most desperate ebb of the SP. After George Kirkpatrick, the vice

presidential nominee of 1916, succeeded Bertha Hale White for a year as executive secretary, he was followed in 1926 by the disastrous tenure of William Henry. A coal miner from Terre Haute whose main qualifications for the job were party membership from its earliest years and a personal friendship with Debs, Henry had served fairly competently as the state party secretary in Indiana. But running the national office was another matter entirely, and his crude and semi-literate manners embarrassed the party leadership. More importantly, Henry was woefully inadequate to the task of rebuilding a formidable national organization.³¹

Though a few intrepid organizers such as August Claessens could be credited for keeping alive the bare-bones infrastructure of a nationally organized party, the disappearance and temporary reemergence of state organizations occurred so frequently throughout the 1920s that it was necessary to appoint regional organizers. There was little that could have been more frustrating to the Socialists at this low tide than to see the erasure by the mass media of the memory of the father of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, Charles Lindbergh Sr., when his son suddenly became the most admired man in the world after his successful transatlantic flight in July 1927. As Nathan Fine of the Rand School would write the following year, "In the tributes paid to the son the father is never mentioned, nor is his book, *Why Is Your Country at War, and What Happens to You After the War, and Related Subjects*."³²

The specter of apocalypse was even looming over what long seemed the most impenetrable fortress of American Socialism, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). What originally began in 1919 as an innocuous rank-and-file movement, initially inspired by the British Shop Stewards' movement, was easy prey for the Communists.³³ After the debacle leading up to the 1924 election, this restive insurgency in the ILGWU was the one remaining Communist foothold in the AFL.³⁴ A promising precedent in the garment industry was set when Communist Ben Gold led the Fur Workers to a spectacular strike victory at the end of 1925.³⁵ In the ILGWU around this time, a draconian attempt by old Socialist leaders Benjamin Schlesinger and Morris Sigman to

extricate the Communists from the union backfired and instead brought them to the verge of taking over.

The Communist leaders in the ILGWU, Louis Hyman and Charles Zimmerman, were on the verge of successfully concluding a strike when they were suddenly ordered to prolong it by the party as a consequence of an internal party power struggle led by William Weinstone, in what would not be the last time he devastated both Socialist and Communist prospects in the labor movement.³⁶ The ensuing disaster disillusioned the restive rank and filers with the Communist leadership they heretofore had graciously accepted, guided now by the bright young rising star of the ILGWU and irrepressible anti-Communist David Dubinsky. But the Socialists had little cause to celebrate. In a letter to Morris Hillquit, Norman Thomas saw the future foreshadowed by the struggle in the ILGWU all too clearly:

It is thoroughly unhealthy that the one issue on which a great many of our comrades tend to arouse themselves, the one that brings into their eyes the old light of battle is their hatred of Communism. A purely negative anti-Communist position will ultimately kill the Socialist cause body and soul.³⁷

The first sign that the Socialist Party might still have a future was both spectacular and unexpected. In Reading, Pennsylvania, where James Maurer led a labor party-style organization that had remained largely undisturbed by the Wilson terror, there was a truly outstanding municipal victory. J. Henry Stump, a cigar maker and manager of the Socialist Printing Cooperative in Reading, was elected mayor, with Maurer and George Snyder elected to the City Council; the newly elected city controller and two members of the school board were also Socialists. Reading, located in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch country, which was considered generally conservative but also historically pacifist, has fascinated students of labor history as having “a unique position among industrial centers of its size and type in that it lacks their usual degree of ethnic and religious heterogeneity.”³⁸ Curiously enough, the Socialist breakthrough

in Reading was mainly prompted by a property tax revolt. As one Socialist campaign pamphlet read,

You are being compelled to pay more than your share of the taxes, because the politicians and wealthy people whom they serve have actually had their taxes reduced in many cases, and at most very, very slightly increased. And all at your expense—you who are buying homes and paying direct taxes, and you who are renting homes and paying the increased taxes in the form of higher rents.³⁹

Reading also enjoyed, through the efforts of its formidable Socialist labor movement, a network of cooperative businesses that provided nothing less than a way of life. As described by a leading historian of Reading Socialism,

By 1920, the Reading comrades also owned and operated several economic enterprises. These included a publishing company, which published the weekly party paper, the *Reading Labor Advocate*, a small cigar factory which produced several brands of cigars, such as the “Karl Marx,” and a cooperative store. The party also owned the Labor Lyceum, a three-story building in downtown Reading, which housed the party headquarters, a cigar factory, and a hall which was used by both the party and some local unions.⁴⁰

A decade later, as both his health and the SP were in precipitous decline, James Maurer still enthusiastically described the party’s accomplishments in Reading, beginning with the construction of a new city hall and a municipal machine shop:

Every penny we spent on the City Hall went for wages and materials, which explains why we made enemies of the contractors and profiteers. We demonstrated that they are not necessary when it comes to doing public work. When we took over the city’s affairs the street cleaning was done by contract. We abolished that system,

doubling the wages of street cleaners, and yet reducing the cost to the city.⁴¹

Similarly deep-rooted cooperative movements also enabled a few other surviving outposts from the Socialist heyday, such as Manitowoc, Wisconsin, and Barre, Vermont, to elect Socialist mayors in the late 1920s.

On January 27, 1928, a dinner was held by *The New Leader* that foreshadowed differences that were to plague the Socialist Party in the decade ahead. A series of four speeches were given on the question of whether the Soviet Union could still be seen as socialist, with Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee arguing in the negative and Norman Thomas and James Maurer in the affirmative. Though all were sharply critical in their attitudes toward American Communism, Thomas urged the Socialists to take “a sympathetic and interested attitude toward Soviet Russia . . . interesting things are being worked out there whether or not they are socialist or communist. A great effort is being made, which is comparatively successful, to create a society where the love of money is not the motivating force in human endeavor.”⁴² Morris Hillquit offered an impassioned rebuttal:

The Soviet government has been the greatest disaster and calamity that has occurred in the Socialist movement. Norman Thomas has expressed fears as to what might happen if the experiment fails. I say the experiment has already failed. There is no difference between the Soviet government and the Communist movement here. They are one and the same thing. . . . If the Soviet government ceased in Russia there would not be ten Communists left in the United States. . . . Let us dissociate ourselves from the Soviet government and thereby make clear that the Social Democrats have no connection with it, bear no relation to it. Demand recognition of Russia by all means. It will be a good thing to break down the Chinese wall.⁴³

James Maurer, who had only recently returned from visiting Russia, gave a spirited reply:

If I were there, I'd probably be a Communist. They asked me about the Communists in this country and I told them they were a bunch of darn fools. I have seen the Communists in action here. They don't build, they destroy. The Communists there are doing the best under the circumstances. This is a fight of workers, and I don't care what kind of a fight the workers are in, I'm with the workers, first, last and all the time.⁴⁴

On his visit Maurer met both Stalin and Trotsky at the height of their power struggle and claimed Stalin was amused by his deprecating description of the American Communists. He described the urban industrial workforce as highly enthusiastic about the regime, whereas the village and farm population was decidedly more disenchanted, though scoffing at any suggestion of a restoration of the old order; these were probably accurate impressions at the end of the 1920s.⁴⁵

The Socialist Party apparently held on to the elusive hope into the early months of 1928 of once again being able to support some kind of Progressive coalition candidacy; only by the spring did it resolve to nominate its own ticket once it was clear there was no other choice.⁴⁶ Norman Thomas knew he had been groomed for leadership during the past decade by Hillquit and the leadership circle in New York, but attempted to preempt his presidential nomination with a column in *The New Leader* endorsing James Maurer.⁴⁷ Many old-timers no doubt continued to regret that Maurer had not been the nominee in 1916. But Maurer was getting on in years and once again held public office in Reading. Moreover, his outspoken praise for the Soviet experiment cannot have endeared him to the very people in New York pushing for Thomas's nomination.⁴⁸ When the 1928 convention opened in New York on April 13, among the other names considered were Joseph Sharts, who had rebuilt the Ohio organization after the departure of the left wing in 1919, and Freda Hogan, daughter of old Arkansas stalwart Dan Hogan and young trophy wife of Oscar Ameringer.⁴⁹

Louis Waldman gave the speech entering Thomas into nomination: "He came to us at a time when it was dangerous to join the Socialist

Party. He was one of the few intellectuals who instead of running away from us, came to us.”⁵⁰ Thomas was nominated by acclamation, with Maurer gladly accepting the nomination to be his running mate. Two major issues divided the convention. At the insistence of Thomas, who hoped to recruit support from like-minded ministers, the party took no stand on the repeal of Prohibition, to the detriment of the party’s historic base in the brewery capital of Milwaukee. The other debate was over the recent endorsement of the League of Nations by the Socialist International. Hillquit led the argument in favor, though he likely shared the reservations of Thomas, who said he would support the League only if it became “positively an agent of peace and justice.” Victor Berger, who had opposed any new international affiliation by the SP early in the decade, led the opposing side with James Graham of Montana, declaring the League nothing more than a plot by Britain, France, Japan, and the United States to rule the world. The Hillquit position was adopted with the understanding that the party would not actively campaign on the question.⁵¹

Responding to the United States’ rise as a world power, an extended foreign policy platform called for cancellation of all war debts and of German reparation payments, withdrawal of U.S. troops from Nicaragua, independence for the Philippines, and home rule for Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. It also urged “the speedy recognition of Russia, not as an expression of approval of the Bolshevik regime, but to help establish international stability and good will.”⁵² After several years of neglect, the Socialist Party entered the 1928 campaign qualified for the ballot in only four states. It was unthinkable to entrust the task of rebuilding to the incompetent executive secretary William Henry, so the National Executive Committee established a “Socialist Action Committee” with August Gerber, son of New York party warhorse Julius Gerber, at the helm. Through a yeoman effort to organize petition drives and state conventions, the SP ultimately got on the ballot in forty-one states.⁵³

Thomas himself began a national campaign tour almost immediately after he was nominated, on which he was usually accompanied by either

or both August Claessens and McAlister Coleman of *The New Leader*. At an early stop in Memphis, Tennessee, Claessens introduced Thomas with a yarn in homage to the Volunteer State's most recent national media sensation:

Here was fought the great battle against Darwinism. Let me add a few words. . . . I maintain that this doctrine is a cruel, shameless and outrageous insult to animals. Did you ever hear of a cow starving in a luscious pasture of grass? No, you didn't. But in times of economic depression you starve in the midst of plenty. . . . Did you ever hear of bees bringing in honey and handing it over to a honey trust? And getting paid with a mouthful of wax? No, sir! But you farmers do that every day. . . . Take the woodchuck. Skinny rat when he comes out of his hole in the spring. As the summer grows, the woodchuck cuts grass and gets fatter and fatter. By autumn he is so obese he can hardly run. The first frost nips his tail and he hurries to his hole, goes in and takes all the fat with him for his winter's fuel and feed. Were the woodchuck a man, he would hand over the fat to the capitalists, vote the Republican ticket, go down into his hole and starve. Darwin was terribly wrong. We are no kin to the beasts.⁵⁴

Claessens recalled hearing one old man say as they left the meeting, "Norman Thomas is a fine speaker, but that little bald-headed guy, what a shellacking he gave Darwin! Best I ever heard." It was classic Claessens, and a poignant swan song to the spirit of the prewar movement. Nor had Claessens's sense of merriment yet gotten the best of him. Later on in Spokane, Washington, he repeated a routine pitch for funds by asking the audience to throw money at him on the stage. Forgetting the prevalence of silver dollars in Western mining states, as Thomas recalled, "He did some mighty active dodging to avoid dollars aimed at his shiny bald head."⁵⁵

One incident in the summer of 1928, however, indicated that even the most promising strides toward rebuilding American Socialism would

be met with fierce resistance. Matthew Woll continued to wield enormous influence in the AFL and saw Brookwood Labor College as a threat to be neutralized. Woll publicly accused Brookwood of fostering disloyalty to the AFL, sympathy with the Communists, and free love, prompting official condemnation of Brookwood by the AFL Executive Council. In the words of historian Bernard Johnpoll, "The charges were patently false. Except for a single teacher, the entire Brookwood faculty was hostile to the Communist Party, most of Brookwood's support came from AFL unions, and far from sexual liberty, an air of Puritanism, reflecting the religious values of its president, permeated Brookwood's campus."⁵⁶ Indeed, the Communist press took pleasure in the whole episode. The *Daily Worker* intoned, "We have always found that this institution has consistently functioned as a cloak for the destructive policy of the reactionary labor fakers."⁵⁷

A lengthy official response by Brookwood to the AFL was unbowed in answering these charges:

This Brookwood school which is supposed to be so hostile to the AFL practically mortgaged its financial future for an AFL union, the International Ladies Garment Workers in the strike of 1926, in permitting the American Fund for Public Service to use \$100,000 which had been set aside to be paid to Brookwood over a series of years, as collateral for a loan for the garment strikers. . . . It is surely not necessary for people to agree in their social philosophy with AFL officials in order to be regarded as loyal members of that organization.⁵⁸

One of many other letters of protest to William Green came from Harry Elmer Barnes, a protégé of Charles Beard who taught at Smith College: "The Brookwood College is the only reputable institution of higher learning maintained by American labor, and it would appear to me that the AFL would be furthering its interests by establishing a score of similar institutions instead of withdrawing its support from the one existing institution. It has been my privilege to visit Brookwood and to lecture there several times."⁵⁹

An impressive list of Norman Thomas's colleagues in the progressive intelligentsia endorsed him, and would formally organize after the campaign into the League for Independent Political Action (LIPA) to complement the Brookwood-aligned CPLA. This list included Oswald Garrison Villard and Freda Kirchwey of *The Nation*, Thomas's former colleagues at *The World Tomorrow* Devere Allen and Reinhold Niebuhr, Harold Fey of *Christian Century*, Paul Douglas of the University of Chicago, Rev. John Haynes Holmes, Fola LaFollette, and W. E. B. DuBois.⁶⁰ Though the 1920s were regarded both at the time and by history as an era of prosperity, as W. A. Swanberg notes, "There was never less than 10 percent of the labor force unemployed, more than 42 percent of the population got along on incomes under \$1,500, and miners were regularly killed at their hazardous occupation without public outcry."⁶¹

Acknowledging this reality to some degree and certainly the formidable LaFollette vote of 1924, the two major parties both nominated their most highly regarded progressive standard-bearers: the Republicans chose widely admired Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, who might have had any party's nomination for the asking in 1920, and the Democrats nominated New York governor Al Smith. The election was largely polarized over Prohibition and, despite the precipitous decline of the Ku Klux Klan after 1924, a vicious anti-Catholic backlash. Norman Thomas, as throughout his career, took the high road, appealing with little success to fellow Protestant ministers to condemn the anti-Catholic bigotry against Al Smith. But Thomas recognized that Hoover would have won despite that bigotry and praised both candidates as "about the best men in their parties."⁶² Indeed, both the forgotten Iowa Progressive and the pro-labor "new Tammany" governor were in many ways more reflective of the Socialist legacy in American politics than Franklin Roosevelt.

In his first presidential campaign, Norman Thomas received 267,478 votes, just under 0.75 percent. He received his highest vote totals in Berks County, Pennsylvania, with 10 percent of the vote, and in Milwaukee County with over 6 percent, where Al Smith's pledge to repeal

Prohibition swung enough voters behind him and the Democrats that Victor Berger lost reelection to Congress by only 792 votes. As Daniel Hoan wrote to Thomas,

This is the home of the breweries. The brewery workers were originally more nearly 100 percent Socialist than any other unions. They have been thrown out of employment and naturally are deeply incensed at the Prohibition law. They were also incensed at remarks made against Smith in the *Leader* and by Victor that they deliberately and intentionally voted for Smith and many of them deliberately and intentionally voted the straight Democratic ticket.⁶³

But even with the loss of their prized member of Congress through the years of drought, the Socialists took heart that the worst was behind them, and once again had a national party to speak of. James Maurer recalled,

Thomas and I separately made extensive tours of the country and though the results when measured by votes were meager, we found them encouraging because in many places the organization was re-established and many who had become inactive in the movement were brought back into the fold. We felt that we had done a good job in laying the foundation for future successes.⁶⁴

A highly encouraging break came early in 1929 when William Henry finally left his post as executive secretary. Ostensibly, it was a consequence of the breakdown of his marriage, his wife Emma being the Indiana state secretary and an equally devoted party veteran.⁶⁵ Henry was also accused of nativist and anti-Semitic associations; this accusation may or may not have stemmed from mere Midwestern resentment of the New York leadership, though it appears that at a minimum he expressed such sentiments in characteristically crude rhetoric.⁶⁶ The new executive secretary was Clarence Senior, who led the Student League for

Industrial Democracy at the University of Kansas before proving himself a talented organizer for both the party and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in Cleveland.

The appointment of Senior as executive secretary completed the changing of the guard that began with the passing of the torch from Debs to Thomas at Carnegie Hall in October 1925. Moreover, the infrastructure was emerging to recapture the potential of the first half of the decade for a Farmer-Labor Party with the arrival of both the LIPA and the CPLA. In the words of Norman Thomas's first biographer and close friend, Harry Fleischman, "Even before his first nomination, Thomas had no illusions about ever being elected President on the Socialist ticket. He believed that the Socialist Party was unlikely ever to become a mass party itself, but was anxious to make it the spearhead of such a mass party."⁶⁷

Even in the battered ILGWU, a new day was dawning. In 1928, the young anti-Communist firebrand David Dubinsky became acting president for the ailing Benjamin Schlesinger; in that capacity he managed to secure loans from such eminent wealthy Jews as Julius Rosenwald and Felix Warburg, relationships that also led to contracts with America's leading retailers.⁶⁸ This came as the last Communist holdout in the ILGWU was lost to the dissension that for a time seemed to suggest the party's implosion. After the sudden death of Charles Ruthenberg in 1927, his protégé Jay Lovestone took control and ruthlessly expelled Trotsky's partisans led by James Cannon and Max Shachtman. But Lovestone and his inner circle were deeply loyal to Bukharin, and thus the ax inevitably fell on them when Stalin completed his consolidation of power in 1929. Lovestone, Bertram Wolfe, and Ben Gitlow were only able to lead two hundred members out of the Communist Party with them, but they included Charles Zimmerman and most other key supporters in the ILGWU.⁶⁹

The Socialist Party suffered an irreparable loss with the sudden death on August 7, 1929, of the man who did more than any other to conceive and create it in the 1890s, Victor Berger. Like his fellow Socialist

congressman Meyer London, with whom he never served in the same session, Berger died from injuries sustained after being hit by a street-car. Norman Thomas eulogized him as follows in *The New Leader*:

He fitted no conventional pattern of robot or Babbitt or self-made man—not even the false conventional pattern of a typical radical. Victor Berger himself was a pithy and salty human being, full of humor, sometimes irascible, always at heart the soul of friendliness, the lover of his home and friends, the shrewd observer of men. . . . But this lovable, kindly man was also a fighter who never ran away from any conflicts for the cause in which he believed. He met the lies and misrepresentations of the war days, the outrageous persecution of the government, the hysteria of a House which denied the fundamental principle of democracy by refusing to seat a duly elected representative with unflinching courage and great resourcefulness.⁷⁰

Norman Thomas was reluctant to run for mayor of New York in 1929, but duty called, and the election results confirmed that the Socialist Party was indeed enjoying a genuine revival. Thomas had the surprise backing of a nonpartisan “City Affairs Committee” led by John Haynes Holmes, Stephen Wise, and John Dewey that led an outspoken campaign against the blatant corruption of Jimmy Walker’s administration.⁷¹ One of the scandals exposed by this committee was of a gangster who did favors for Walker, but also, at times, for Sidney Hillman; this revelation likely embittered Hillman personally toward Thomas as he became an increasingly shadowy influence on the SP.⁷² Ramsay MacDonald even campaigned for Thomas on an American visit just before his ignominious break with the British Labour Party.⁷³ Figures as unlikely as Republican Congressman Hamilton Fish praised Thomas as “an ideal leader to rally all the forces of reform, regardless of class, for a cleanup of the New York City government.”⁷⁴

But Fiorello LaGuardia was running for the first time as the Republican nominee for mayor. Thomas denounced him as a political chameleon

and opportunist, seconded by *The Nation*, which editorialized, "With all respect to him, he is not of the same stature as Norman Thomas."⁷⁵ A lingering shadow of the old Committee of 48 emerged as the Progressive LaGuardia Non-Partisan Committee chaired by J. A. H. Hopkins and William English Walling, but a split vote hardly mattered in the end, with LaGuardia winning barely 25 percent of the vote, while Thomas earned an astonishing 175,697 votes at 12 percent.⁷⁶ As the new face of American Socialism was profiled in *The New Yorker*,

The quality of being reasonable, the ability to see an opposing viewpoint, will stand as the weakness and also the strength of Norman Thomas. His opposition to war extends to civil war, and so he will never lead the marching battalions of revolt. . . . Eugene Debs is dead. Norman Thomas is the nominal leader of a political party which Debs raised to great numerical strength and which then melted in the sun of American prosperity. He is the leader of an altered party.⁷⁷

The stock market crash that heralded the Great Depression occurred two weeks before the mayoral election on October 24. Notwithstanding, the party now had a dynamic new leader, fresh young talent, a functioning national organization, and was even beginning to rebuild its base in the labor movement and among intellectuals. The Socialist Party of America was getting a second chance.

11 Depression and Renaissance

(1930–1933)

The revival of the Socialist Party from the doldrums of the 1920s was underway as the Great Depression became an unmistakable fact in 1930. But early that year, a crucial event took place that set in motion the decade-long demise of the party's fortunes. After Matthew Woll gave an address at the Rand School in New York, the student body of Brookwood Labor College passed a resolution attacking the decision to invite him, pleading, "He has declared his position against independent political action, as he made clear at the Cleveland convention of the ILGWU." The episode might have been forgotten had not the labor editor of *The Forward*, Louis Schaeffer, written a column attacking the students: "How surprised would these students be, who are infected with the semi-Communist poison of the Brookwood leaders, if I should tell them a secret, namely that a year and a half ago, those same leaders of Brookwood College were running after that same Woll asking that he come and lecture."¹

Whatever the original merits of inviting Woll, there could be no clearer indication that *The Forward* was preparing to break with the Socialists, years before the election of FDR, than for its labor editor not only to identify himself with Matthew Woll's persuasion in the AFL but also to go further in partisan jeering by using a phrase like "semi-Communist poison." In a letter to the editor, A. J. Muste protested the column:

He makes it appear that these young men are opposed to tolerance in the labor movement and to freedom of discussion on all points of view. The whole point of their resolution, however, was that the cause

of tolerance and freedom of discussion was not being served by inviting Brother Woll at this time . . . when he was serving as acting President of the National Civic Federation which opposes old age pension legislation, and when but recently he has again come out vigorously against independent political action. If Brother Schaeffer would frankly discuss that point of the political implication of the invitation of Brother Woll and reveal his own purposes in connection with it, instead of distracting attention from that issue by lecturing these students on tolerance and freedom of expression and throwing a handful of mud at Brookwood, that would be a real contribution to labor thinking at this time.²

The most a sympathetic Charney Vladeck could do was prevail upon Schaeffer to print letters from Muste and the student body in his next Sunday column.³ *The New Leader* came to the defense of Brookwood and the Conference for Progressive Labor Action, but Abraham Cahan and *The Forward* had succeeded in their objective, the essential first condition of the wrecking of the Socialist Party: to drive a wedge between the party leadership and its labor movement allies. The United Hebrew Trades, now little more than a paper organization controlled by Cahan, denounced the CPLA as a dual union movement, leading Muste to indict the United Hebrew Trades as the driving force behind the AFL attacks on Brookwood and the CPLA.⁴

Returns from the 1930 election continued to encourage the Socialists. Norman Thomas won 22 percent of the vote in his race for Congress from the Flatbush and Bedford-Stuyvesant sections of Brooklyn, Jacob Panken nearly 26 percent from Lower Manhattan, Charney Vladeck nearly 17 percent on the Lower East Side, and Frank Crosswaith over 5 percent in Harlem. Outside New York, Andrew Bower polled over 13 percent in the Reading-based fourteenth district of Pennsylvania, and in Milwaukee, William Quick polled over 36 percent in the fourth district and James Sheehan over 40 percent in the fifth. The enduring Socialist delegation in the Wisconsin legislature grew from five to eleven, and in Reading, two Socialists were elected to the Pennsylvania legislature: Lilith Wilson, a former member of the NEC, and Darlington Hoopes, a son of

dairy-farming Quakers converted to Socialism during the party's heyday by a boarding school friend who subscribed to the *Appeal to Reason*.⁵

In addition, Floyd Olson, a one-time IWW member before joining the Non-Partisan League, running on the Farmer-Labor ticket was elected governor of Minnesota. The backdrop of new signs of life at the ballot box, of course, was the Great Depression, as David Shannon vividly describes:

By 1933, 25.2 percent of the civilian labor force was unemployed. These figures are only estimates, perhaps they should be higher. The numbers of those only partially unemployed or working at jobs that required significantly less skill than the workers had and paying significantly less than their skills would normally command will never be known. Nor will it ever be known how many people of the American working force were at one time or another out of work during the depression years. Even the shockingly high unemployment figures do not reflect the true worker displacement of those years. . . . The physical volume of American industrial production dropped nearly 50 percent from 1929 to 1932. Net income from agriculture declined from \$7.7 billion in 1929, which was not a good year for farmers, to \$2.8 billion in 1932. These statistics of economists are very useful, but they do not describe the suffering brought by the Great Depression. Literary artists can tell us something of that. Thomas Wolfe, in his prowling through the "great web and jungle" of New York City during the early depression, saw "a man whose life had subsided into a mass of shapeless and filthy rags, devoured by vermin, wretches huddled together for a little warmth in freezing cold squatting in doorless closets upon the foul seat of a public latrine within the very shadow of the cold shelter of palatial and stupendous monuments of wealth." But no artist could report on more than an extremely small part of the American scene, no observer, no matter how sensitive, could see or appreciate the total impact of the Great Depression.⁶

And in the words of the New York Socialist campaign manifesto in 1930:

The wheels of industry have been slackened or stopped and over five million persons have been robbed of the opportunity to work and to earn a living for themselves and their families. The vast army of unemployed created by the acute industrial depression is augmented by hundreds of thousands of workers, who, at the age of sixty or even fifty, are permanently eliminated as “too old” from our strenuous, life-consuming, and merciless economic system. . . . Unemployment is a product of the capitalist system of private ownership and unregulated and irresponsible direction of industry. It would be eliminated in an economic system of planned production for social use. But even now, the tragic situation of millions of unemployed workers can be relieved.⁷

In 1931, most of the party’s energies were thrown into a national campaign for unemployment relief through social insurance. Norman Thomas personally visited in Washington such friendly senators as Burton Wheeler and Lynn Frazier, who together urged President Hoover to call a special session of Congress to consider a relief program.⁸ The League for Industrial Democracy was active on the ground among striking coal miners in West Virginia. Harry Fleischman, who became executive secretary of the Socialist Party in the 1940s, described coming into the party through this movement:

In the summer of 1931, I graduated from high school and into unemployment, and joined the Young People’s Socialist League. The first time I heard Norman Thomas was at an open air rally in New York to raise funds, food and clothing for the West Virginia miners. I was extremely moved by Thomas’ eloquence and personality. That same rally provided my introduction to Communist tactics. First they heckled and then they began fist fights to break up the meeting.⁹

By all appearances when the decade began, the 1930s should never have belonged to the Communist Party. After the series of events that

culminated in the expulsion of Jay Lovestone, the Communists seemed fated to irrelevance after Stalin decreed the so-called third period. The party line characterizing the “third period” held that, as capitalism was entering its final death spiral, the principal enemies of Communists everywhere were the parties of Social Democracy, deemed “objective allies” of fascism and thus labeled as “social fascists.” Only William Z. Foster remained of the top leadership from the beginning of the open and legal party, and he would soon be overshadowed by Earl Browder, a Comintern favorite after serving several years in China. Most in the second-tier leadership at one time or another had passed through the Socialist Party, but few had ever risen even as far as the rank of a local organizer.

But the Communists still had the weapon whose destructive force was so effectively demonstrated in the Farmer-Labor Party drama of 1923 and 1924: what Lenin originally termed the “united front from below,” meaning, in practice, the rallying of the SP rank and file to their program, thereby sabotaging the SP. The first indication that this could happen with the massive influx of young people into the SP came at the New York City SP convention of 1930, when an organized “Militant” caucus had an unexpected show of strength. Although dueling convention resolutions on the Soviet Union both called for American recognition, opposed foreign intervention in Russia’s internal affairs, and condemned the ongoing Soviet suppression of political dissent, the Militants insisted that the party avow “a definitely friendly attitude towards Soviet Russia.”¹⁰ Historian Bernard Johnpoll hastens to emphasize, “This pro-Sovietism reflected the liberalism which pervaded the Militant wing of the party. Most liberals of the 1930s tended to be uncritically pro-Soviet—on the contrary, most non-Communist radicals, from Emma Goldman to Morris Hillquit, were highly critical of Stalin’s regime.”¹¹

In 1931, a nationally organized Militant faction made its debut with a pamphlet titled *A Militant Program for the Socialist Party of America: Socialism In Our Time* written by McAlister Coleman; a respectable number of individuals with some age and distinction in the Socialist

movement affixed their names to this pamphlet. The most prominent included Upton Sinclair, who had drifted back into the party in the 1920s; Harry Laidler at the LID; Thomas's former colleagues from *The World Tomorrow*, Devere Allen and Reinhold Niebuhr; and Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID) leaders Paul Blanshard, Mary Hillyer, and Maynard Krueger. Their fateful pamphlet proclaimed,

Believing as we do that the Socialist Party of America is the only political instrument for the emancipation of the working class of this country, we must be ready bodily to accept the challenge of these times and to plunge with new hope and fresh vision into the bitter conflict that is before us. That conflict is the class struggle. The moment this Marxian conception is abandoned, not only in theory but in practice as well, that moment Socialism loses its significance. . . . We see the menace of such an outcome in Germany so long as the Socialists of that country subordinate the revolution to the maintenance of the "democratic" republic and in so doing pursue a policy of "tolerating" capitalism. Their conduct is the more to be condemned because it is cloaked with lip service to Marxism. And in our own country we are deeply concerned by the presence in our ranks of apologists for this deadly sort of "gradualness," compromise and political trading parading under the name of Marxism, when the times cry aloud for courageous decisions and bold actions. . . . Against such a departure from Marxian Socialism, this program is a protest.¹²

The Militants, in short, were premature Reform Communists. Like Alexander Dubcek in the 1960s, the "Euro-Communist" movement in the 1970s, and Mikhail Gorbachev in the 1980s, they favored a reform of the Soviet system in which full civil liberties would be restored along with independent civic organizations and trade unions, but with the Communist Party retaining its monopoly of political power. As one of

their major influences, Sidney Hook, would recall in the 1980s, “Some of the positions I developed then . . . were to reappear forty years later in European movements characterized as ‘Communism with a human face.’”¹³

In other words, they were true believers in the cynically peddled narrative of the Communists about the specter of fascism both abroad and at home. It was precisely because of this sincerity of belief that only a relative few ever joined or even seriously entered the orbit of the Communist Party; most had enough certitude in their doctrines to forcefully reject Communist discipline. It was also for this very reason that the vast majority of Militants within a decade became ardent New Deal liberals and anti-Communists. There would, in fact, be a direct organizational link from the Militant faction to the Union for Democratic Action, formed on the eve of U.S. entry into the Second World War and predecessor of Americans for Democratic Action, the essential activist outfit of Cold War liberalism. The origins of Cold War liberalism, therefore, can be identified in the violent rejection of historic Social Democracy, particularly its general record of pacifism, by the majority of Socialist Party youth in favor of Lenin’s phantasm of a “united front from below.”

This rejection may seem puzzling inasmuch as the Communist Party remained, throughout the first half of the decade, decidedly unattractive with its violently argued dogmas often backed up by violence. But to radicals who had not personally experienced the events that led to the founding of the Communist Party nor gone through the pain of watching the rise of the Soviet Union from an avowedly Socialist perspective, the Soviet Union had a distinctive allure in the early years of the Depression that could transcend political affiliation. The quintessential case was the aging Lincoln Steffens, who famously said of his visit to Russia, “I have seen the future and it works,” after a long romance with Mussolini as the exemplary man of action. Even Oswald Garrison Villard, the young Gold Democrat of 1896, argued that the Soviets’ “use of all the methods of repression to which Mussolini resorts so freely and so basely, but with this difference—the Bolsheviks are working for the good of the masses of the working people.”¹⁴

Sidney Hook, who was briefly in the Communist orbit around this time, described the mood of the moment more than a half-century later:

The necessity for political faith created its own object, and the inanities of the Communist Party were overlooked. Some consoled themselves with the hope that things would change. Many more concluded that Marxist politics was an arcane subject to which only those who had mastered the Marxist dialectic had the key. These were the vast majority. . . . Whatever doubts they had about the details of politics they gladly surrendered, the better to enjoy the euphoria of their faith.¹⁵

At least one force deliberately cultivating the pro-Soviet tilt in progressive circles in this period can be identified. The Garland Fund, the endowment for radical causes responsible for launching *The New Leader*, had its board stacked with Communist allies by the late 1920s. The most consequential was Sidney Hillman, who began a business relationship with the Soviet regime as early as 1922, with the Soviets depositing millions into his Amalgamated Bank. Hillman espoused a corporatist ideology of “industrial democracy” that strikingly resembled the theory and practice that once united Gompers and Mussolini and may have had some impact on the development of Lenin’s New Economic Policy.¹⁶ Hillman never kept the American Communists at less than arm’s length, insisting he had only a strict business relationship with the Soviets. Yet Soviet investment may have been necessary to keep afloat the Amalgamated Bank, the one institution of the labor movement’s extensive experiment with the “new capitalism” of the 1920s to survive the Great Depression.¹⁷ Retaining the trust of Socialist old-timers in spite of this, Hillman became an indispensable ally to the bitterly anti-Soviet Abraham Cahan as a shared objective emerged—wrecking the Socialist Party on behalf of the New Deal.

The Militant program in many respects echoed that of the historic left wing and the founders of the Communist Party, with its disdain for the ballot box and reckless and arbitrary application of perceived

European precedents to the American scene. James Oneal was the first to make this argument, commenting on the Militant manifesto in *The New Leader*, “They are dogmatic, impressionistic, and emotional in their unquestioning support of all that is taking place in Russia. It is in fact only pseudo-radicalism, only loosely linked with, and not at all based on, the working class itself.”¹⁸ The hot-tempered Oneal fell back on Marxist and working-class bona fides to express his disenchantment not only with the Militants but also with Norman Thomas and virtually all of the new blood in the SP. In this, Oneal predated by at least a few years virtually all the other grievances of the emerging “Old Guard.”

To the extent the Old Guard was becoming a unified force around *The New Leader*, its adherents were nowhere near contemplating the sort of break with the Socialists planned by the managers of *The Forward* who ruthlessly manipulated them. That the Old Guard staked out its position on orthodox Marxist grounds, to a degree never employed by leading Socialists against the left wing in the 1910s, was starkly illustrated by none other than Julius Gerber. The bête noir of the left wing in 1919, Gerber complained in 1931 that the Socialist Party “spent more time advocating civic virtue than the class struggle.”¹⁹ Bernard Johnpoll explains, “The adherents of the Old Guard were, if anything, more Marxist than the Militants,” describing the factional divide as between “aggressive social gospel progressivism” and “lethargic Marxism.”²⁰

David Shannon largely affirms this view, distinguishing the Militants from those closer to Thomas whom he labels “Progressives.”²¹ What this taxonomy ignores, however, are the external forces on both sides that exacerbated tensions, thwarting the potential for the Socialist Party to take the lead in building a larger Labor or Farmer-Labor Party. A comparison to the events leading up to the 1924 election is instructive. As has been noted, the essential pattern for the events of the 1930s was set then, with the effort to build a new party frustrated and obstructed by the Communists and their fellow travelers, yet ably assisted by parochial opportunists among their opposite number—the Railroad Brotherhoods in 1924 and in the 1930s by the circle around Abraham

Cahan. In 1924, the center held because the external events beyond their control ended up working in their favor, but the opposite proved to be the case in the 1930s.

Yet on all sides in the SP, as the 1932 election approached there was great wariness of any kind of campaign along the lines of 1924. In the fall of 1931, John Dewey issued an appeal on behalf of the League for Independent Political Action (LIPA) to Nebraska senator George Norris, widely regarded as LaFollette's successor and known as a bitter adversary of Herbert Hoover, to run at the head of a new party in 1932. The harshly negative response from practically all Socialists was immediate. James Oneal, until now one of the most supportive of Labor Party prospects, resigned from the LIPA and urged all Socialists to do the same. Speaking for the Militants, Harry Laidler acidly protested, "A party which cannot be launched unless some U.S. Senator waves his magic wand is hardly worth launching and has no assurance of permanence or of helping in fundamental change."²² A valid point to be sure, this nevertheless betrayed a cavalier attitude toward much of the discontent stirring at the peak of the Great Depression.

Perhaps more indicative of missed opportunities in 1932 was the candidacy of William "Alfalfa Bill" Murray—elected governor of Oklahoma in 1930 in a comeback that also included the return of Thomas Gore to the U.S. Senate—for the Democratic presidential nomination. Oscar Ameringer celebrated their return in his *Oklahoma Leader*, and such Sooner Socialist veterans as Luther Langston backed Murray's presidential bid.²³ Ex-Socialist Peter Mehrens of Omaha was even one of his national campaign managers.²⁴ But at least one Socialist survivor in Oklahoma City recalled,

Those Oklahomans who call themselves "the real radicals" recall that as president of the constitutional convention Murray opposed most of the demands made by the organized farmers and workers. . . . During his four years in Washington, his eccentricities seem to have attracted more attention than his statesmanship. He was defeated for

re-nomination when he returned from Washington and, in his campaign, preached preparedness for war.²⁵

Murray had indeed been a down-the-line Wilsonian, from championing the Federal Reserve Act to being among the loudest pro-war agitators in Oklahoma. In sharp contrast on both counts was the blind senator, Thomas Gore, a far more genuine Populist standard-bearer of the old cause. If Gore's age and disability should have precluded him from seeking the presidency, 1932 might have also been the optimal time for Huey Long, who briefly threw his hat into the Democratic ring, before his Louisiana power struggle and the woefully misguided hysteria about "American fascism." In any event, though Murray put up a spirited fight at the Democratic convention, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was favored from the outset.

Morris Hillquit summed up the consensus Socialist view of all new party speculation, saying that the revival of Socialist Party fortunes was making a new party on the British Labour model superfluous.²⁶ This was certainly short-sighted, but what this moment had in common with the Socialist heyday of the 1910s was that there was the least prospect for a Labor Party, allowing the widest possible berth for the Socialists to grow as a party themselves. Despite tensions between them, the LIPA continued to follow the lead of the Socialists into the 1932 election. Indeed, as late as the end of 1933, the SP was in greater command of efforts to build a new party than it had been leading up to 1924 or ever thereafter. Early in 1932, *The Coming of a New Party* was published by Paul Douglas, a leader of the LIPA and professor at the University of Chicago. The future stalwart liberal senator dedicated this book to Norman Thomas, "whose views on policies and tactics differ in some respects from those advanced in this work, but who is, to my mind, the best representative of the new spirit in American political life."²⁷

Yet Hillquit became the most polarizing figure among the Socialists. The *casus belli* for the Militants, allied with assorted Midwesterners who wanted to retake the center of party power from New York, came in the summer of 1931 when it became known that Hillquit was being retained

as counsel by Standard Oil, in its effort to recoup losses from Soviet nationalization of its Russian oil fields. Hillquit had prospered in recent years as counsel in similar matters involving litigation with the Soviets, but this was the first time he appeared to directly challenge the nationalization of natural resources, a critical component of the Socialist Party program. Hillquit was attending a Socialist International conference in Vienna when the controversy first broke, and Norman Thomas took the lead attacking him and rallying the opposition. James Oneal tried frantically to keep the whole matter quiet by refusing to print Thomas's articles in *The New Leader* while privately pleading with Hillquit not to take the case. As it turned out, Hillquit was already preparing to resign from the case when the controversy first erupted.²⁸

But the factional lines of the 1930s were thus drawn. The depth of damage became apparent in January 1932, when a radicalized A. J. Muste appealed directly to the Militant faction, over the heads of the SP leadership, to seize the party on behalf of his original labor party program.²⁹ Indeed, Muste, who was responding to attacks by the Militants against himself and the CPLA, was so embittered by the attacks on Brookwood initiated by *The Forward* that he would not reach out to sympathizers at *The New Leader*.

As the 1932 campaign approached, there were six distinct factions in the Socialist Party, in the following order from right to left: (1) the faction around *The Forward* frankly described as barely Socialist by Bernard Johnpoll; (2) the Old Guard led by Morris Hillquit, supported by *The New Leader* and a majority of old-timers outside New York; (3) a group just to the left of the Old Guard that recognized the treachery of Cahan's circle, led by Charney Vladeck and William Feigenbaum (now at *The New Leader*), whose major coup was to recruit Daniel Hoan as its titular leader; (4) Norman Thomas and his most intimate circle of supporters, distinguished from the Hoan-Vladeck group only by a more charitable view of the Soviet Union, and supported by such outliers among old-timers as James Maurer and Oscar Ameringer; (5) the Militants, with a majority of SP youth and highly doctrinaire program roughly

analogous to the historic left wing of the 1910s; and (6) those following A. J. Muste, who were generally avowed revolutionary socialists but with a decidedly less positive view of the Soviet Union than the Militants.³⁰

None of these factions were mutually exclusive, however, and individuals very frequently had a foot in more than one. Apparently attempting to fortify the party center, Thomas and Vladeck promoted the candidacy of Daniel Hoan to replace Hillquit as the ceremonial national chairman, this figurehead position having passed from Debs to Victor Berger and from Berger to Hillquit upon each of their deaths. However strategically foolish to go after a ceremonial post in such a way that could only offend the most devoted leader the Socialists ever knew and his many friends, it was reasonable to diagnose the party's growing internal problems as arising from a lack of steady leadership, and tragically, Hillquit had alienated much of the party over the Standard Oil affair.

When the 1932 Socialist convention opened in Milwaukee on May 21, the first indication of divisions in the party emerged with the resolution on the Soviet Union. This largest and most optimistic Socialist convention in well over a decade was attended by 223 delegates from thirty-eight states. Yet, against an Old Guard resolution that expounded the differences between socialism and communism, a resolution passed that reiterated the long-standing party view, introduced by Oscar Ameringer and Paul Blanshard of the SLID, by a vote of 117 to 64.³¹ In a repeat performance from four years earlier, after a rousing nominating speech by Louis Waldman, the presidential nomination went to Norman Thomas by acclamation, with James Maurer again serving as his running mate. There was some sentiment for the second spot to go to Meta Berger, widow of Victor Berger and a critical Militant ally in Milwaukee, but she declined, apparently for the sake of party unity.³²

Daniel Hoan, just elected to his eighth two-year term as mayor of Milwaukee, had a most rare quality for the Socialist Party—he was a man of few convictions and appeared interested in the chairmanship only as a matter of prestige. James Maurer entered Hillquit into renomination for the chairmanship after making a desperate attempt to effect a

compromise, but then William Quick of Milwaukee made the blunder of arguing in his nominating speech for Hoan that the national chairman “should be someone unmistakably recognized as American.”³³ At that moment, Norman Thomas reportedly felt instant regret over the whole enterprise, as Hillquit rose to give an unusually emotional speech:

I apologize for having been born abroad, being a Jew and living in New York, a very unpopular place. I stand for the common, garden variety of Socialism. There are the militants, well meaning, immature, effervescent people who will settle down in time, but who for the moment are wild, untamed and dangerous. Then there are the Socialists who do not want Socialism to be a working class movement. They look to college men and the white collar elements. Lastly, there is the practical kind of Socialist, like the ones here in Milwaukee, who believe in building modern sewers and showing results right away.³⁴

Many, including Thomas, felt Hillquit was cynically shaming the delegates for flirting with anti-Semitic prejudice.³⁵ And it was to the apparent embarrassment of most Jewish Old Guardsmen when Joseph Sharts of Ohio stridently charged anti-Semitism.³⁶ Either way, Hillquit was reelected national chairman by a vote of 105 to 80. Joseph Shaplen, the *Forward*-allied reporter on Socialist Party affairs for the *New York Times*, secured a front-page headline for his sensationalist report on the convention, as having been “rent asunder in one of the most bitter factional battles in the history of American Socialism.” Abraham Cahan proceeded to smite Charney Vladeck with a virtual excommunication for his role, despite continuing to employ him as his general manager.³⁷

The New Leader was able to move on, however, setting the tone that prevailed as the Socialist Party set out on its most promising national campaign in twenty years. Two weeks after the convention, Thomas appealed to Hillquit to make a joint statement on party unity. Hillquit demurred with the assurance, “I am heartily in favor of harmony within our ranks and of united and effective action in the coming campaign

and at all times thereafter. . . . These differences should, in my opinion, be ironed out, if possible, in a frank and honest discussion and in an effort to bring about a clear understanding on future policies and methods of practical work.”³⁸ Hillquit was clearly shaken by the challenge to his authority in the party, like none even at the peak of IWW influence a generation earlier. But despite the terrible intraparty conflict that would erupt within two years, most Socialists were sincerely committed to increased unity, and Hillquit was determined to once again be the indispensable agent of unity.

The National Executive Committee elected by the 1932 convention, numbering ten throughout the decade, reflected a delicate factional balance. Three were squarely in the Militant camp—Leo Krzycki of Wisconsin, Powers Hapgood of Indiana, and Albert Sprague Coolidge of Massachusetts. Two were unambiguously of the Old Guard—Jasper McLevy of Connecticut and John Packard of California. The remaining five were in what remained for the time being the vital center—Norman Thomas, Daniel Hoan, James Graham of Montana, and the two Pennsylvania legislators, Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson.

The new vitality of the party was exhibited by the impressive array of literature produced for the campaign. One such pamphlet, *Bankers' Rule Is Workers' Ruin*, called for the nationalization of the Federal Reserve System, with the power to fix interest rates returned to Congress as mandated by the Constitution. Boldly asserting its place at the head of any successor to the late Farmer-Labor Party movement, the Socialist Party proclaimed,

Congressman Charles Lindbergh Sr., a pioneer in politics as his son was a pioneer in aviation, once spoke of Americans as slaves of the “money trust, source of all trusts.” He predicted that we should increasingly come under the rule of bankers. . . . Naturally, the money trust’s power grows. On July 1, 1932, five hundred corporations had one or more directors in common with at least two of New York’s eight largest banks. Bankers manage our railroads, public utilities, insurance

companies, factories, department stores—and the wage earner, both as producer and consumer, pays an unseen tax to them. . . . “The plain truth,” said Congressman Lindbergh, “is that neither the Republican nor the Democratic Party is fit to manage the destinies of a great people. Both are controlled by men who have a vested interest in keeping alive present evils.”³⁹

Though the Socialist platform of 1932 is best remembered for more nearly anticipating the New Deal than the Democratic platform adopted at that year’s convention that nominated FDR, it by no means repudiated the radicalism that defined Socialist platforms in the time of Debs. Reflecting changing times with a lengthy foreign policy section and elevating the call for African American equality to an immediate demand, it was still at sharp divergence with its ultimate New Deal/Cold War liberal legacy—retaining the historic call for the initiative and referendum at all levels of government and the abolition of the Supreme Court power of judicial review.⁴⁰ The preamble of that momentous platform read,

We are facing a breakdown of the capitalist system. This situation the Socialist Party has long predicted. In the last campaign, it warned the people of the increasing insecurity in American life and urged a program of action which, if adopted, would have saved millions from their present tragic plight. Today, in every city in the United States, jobless men and women by the thousands are fighting the grim battle against want and starvation, while factories stand idle and food rots on the ground. Millions of wage-earners and salaried workers are hunting in vain for jobs, while other millions are only partly employed. Unemployment and poverty are inevitable products of the present system. Under capitalism the few run our industries. The many do the work. The wage-earners and farmers are compelled to give a large part of the product of their labor to the few. The many in the factories, mines, shops, offices, and on the farms claim but a paltry income and are able to buy back only a part of the goods that can be produced in such abundance by their own industries.⁴¹

Significant legacies of the 1924 election aided the 1932 campaign, including Farmer-Labor organizations in Illinois and West Virginia that acted as de facto SP affiliates. The powerful Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party agreed not to endorse either major-party candidate for president in exchange for Socialist backing for its entire slate.⁴² Only two labor bodies officially supported Thomas and Maurer by vote of their conventions—the Hosiery Workers led by Emil Rieve of Reading, the most important trade union ally of the Socialist Party for the next two years, and the Vermont Federation of Labor, anchored in the Quarry Workers Union of Barre.⁴³ Other labor bodies whose top officials backed the Socialist ticket included the state federations of Wisconsin and Idaho and the American Federation of Teachers. Thomas spoke in thirty-eight states on a shoestring budget of just a little over \$25,000 in his epic 1932 campaign, including a ten-day tour of New England spending all of \$55.⁴⁴

Of his speeches, Thomas's wife Violet, faithfully at his side in sharp contrast to Debs's wife, would complain to a campaign aide, "Norman is being demagogic about Hoover. I'll have to say something to him about this. I don't like him to be demagogic."⁴⁵ This may have been expressed nowhere with more ferocity than in Hoover's home state of Iowa, at a farmers' encampment in Sioux City. In Philadelphia, Thomas was scheduled to be joined by James Maurer at Rayburn Plaza. After the local Republican machine decreed that only an "educational meeting" was legal, once he properly shamed the Republicans, Thomas provoked roaring laughter from the crowd with his stress upon the "educational" nature of his talk.⁴⁶ The optimistic tone of the campaign seemed vindicated with the largest crowds to come out for a Socialist standard-bearer since 1912, with over 10,000 in Los Angeles, Indianapolis, and Hartford, Connecticut; 14,000 in Milwaukee, and 20,000 at Madison Square Garden. W. A. Swanberg, a future biographer of Norman Thomas, recalled, "I heard Thomas at the University of Minnesota that fall. He bounded to the rostrum and spoke with a vigor, fluency, conviction, and charisma that lingers in my memory 44 years later."⁴⁷

Thomas enjoyed extraordinary popularity on college campuses that might have been downright baffling to Socialists of the party's heyday.

In a nationwide campus straw poll, Thomas carried campuses as varied as Columbia, City College of New York, and Howard University, ultimately polling 18 percent to 50 percent for Hoover, 31 percent for Roosevelt, and 1 percent for William Z. Foster.⁴⁸ Oswald Garrison Villard organized the "Thomas and Maurer Committee of 100,000" to rally non-Socialist progressives to the ticket, a list that included Paul Douglas, John Dewey, W. E. B. DuBois, Kirby Page of *The World Tomorrow*, and Henry Hazlitt of *The Freeman*.⁴⁹ Villard's *The Nation* was joined in endorsing Thomas by *The New Republic* under its new editor Bruce Bliven.⁵⁰ Another supporter was George Gershwin, who had recently collaborated with veteran Socialist Morrie Ryskind on the biting musical satire of the Hoover administration, *Of Thee I Sing*. Ryskind, whose Socialist activism dated back to defiant satire in the Columbia student paper during the Wilson terror, was at the pinnacle of his career after adapting the two hit stage plays of The Four Marx Brothers into their first two films.

The emboldened Socialists made a direct appeal to the supporters of Villard's committee that there was no reason for them not to take the step of actually joining the Socialist Party. Among those named in this appeal were American Civil Liberties Union founders and close Thomas friends Roger Baldwin and Arthur Garfield Hays, Jane Addams, Charles Beard, Harry Elmer Barnes, Bruce Bliven, Lincoln Steffens, Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, and Rabbi Stephen Wise.⁵¹ The most direct response came from Harry Elmer Barnes, the frequent visiting professor at Brookwood widely admired for his groundbreaking study of the causes of the First World War and a syndicated columnist with Scripps-Howard:

It would be hard to prove Norman Thomas a more advanced person in his social and economic views than a realistic liberal like Amos Pinchot. For an American liberal to take on the socialistic label seems to me to add a handicap without any advantage. The present order can either be patched up and made to run with passable efficiency or it must be overthrown root and branch. Those of us who still believe that it can be reconditioned will do well to act under the aegis of liberalism. Those who hold that the present order must go should

espouse communism. There is little in Norman Thomas' program of social, economic and political reform which I do not personally approve. But I see nothing to be gained by branding it "Socialism." Any robust liberal would accept it in general outline. Those who hope and wish to secure a satisfactory social order without completely smashing the existing system should raise as little heat and apprehension as possible.⁵²

The Communist ticket, consisting of William Z. Foster, for the third and final time, with running-mate James Ford, then the leading African American party member, had its own curious intellectual cohort, the League of Professionals for Foster and Ford, to challenge the pre-eminence of the Thomas and Maurer Committee of 100,000. Novelist John Dos Passos, a member of this League, most memorably expressed the representative sentiment: "Joining the Socialist Party would have just about as much effect as drinking a bottle of near beer." The League explained in its manifesto,

We have aligned ourselves with the frankly revolutionary Communist Party, the party of the workers. The Communist Party stands for a Socialism of deeds, not of words. The Communist Party is the only party which has stood in the forefront of the major struggle of the workers against capitalism and the capitalist state. The Communist Party proposes as the real solution of the present crisis the overthrow of the system which is responsible for all crises.⁵³

Sidney Hook drafted the manifesto, and other members included Lincoln Steffens, Langston Hughes, Theodore Dreiser, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Granville Hicks, Lewis Mumford, and Elliot Cohen, later the founding editor of *Commentary* magazine.⁵⁴ Indeed, a large majority of the League later became prominent and often strident anti-Communists.

When a special mayoral election was called to coincide with the presidential election in New York to replace the impeached Jimmy Walker,

Morris Hillquit was nominated in a fit of nostalgia for his campaign of 1917. Enjoying the support of a wide cross-section of the labor movement in New York, including the ILGWU, Amalgamated, other garment mainstays, Ironworkers, Jewelry Workers, and Teamsters, Hillquit declared after launching his campaign,⁵⁵

Honesty and cleanliness in city government is a very important issue and so is economy in administration, but even more vital are the lives, health, and welfare of the city's seven million inhabitants. Our campaign will be made largely on the issue of adequate relief of the 1,150,000 suffering victims of unemployment. This will be the overshadowing, all absorbing problem for the city in the next year.⁵⁶

Running his third consecutive race for governor of New York, Louis Waldman was the hapless object of the most ominous expression yet of the intentions of *The Forward* toward the Socialist Party. Not so brazen as to openly oppose Norman Thomas's candidacy, *The Forward* all but officially supported the candidacy of Democrat Herbert Lehman for governor. Hillquit confessed to one distraught Brooklyn Socialist, "I do not read the *Jewish Daily Forward* . . . I have on several occasions heard complaints about the paper similar to yours and . . . I fully share your indignation and condemnation."⁵⁷ Part of the motive of Abraham Cahan and *The Forward* to begin serving Democratic Party interests can perhaps be gleaned from the parallel behavior of another nominal Thomas supporter in New York, Stephen Wise, who by 1932 was the leading spokesman of the Zionist movement in the United States.

In a conversation with Paul Blanshard, Wise claimed to be sympathetic to Waldman and did not want to make a statement against Lehman, yet had an article in *Opinion* magazine on Jewish candidates for high office that was practically a stump speech for Lehman.⁵⁸ Support for Lehman's candidacy thus appears to have been, at least in part, a Zionist imperative, probably as a means to get the movement's foot in the door with the incoming Roosevelt administration. Having taken a pro-Zionist stance after Cahan's visit to Palestine in 1925, *The Forward*

would certainly have had this in mind when it supported Lehman and in all its subsequent activities in support of FDR. The consensus historians of American Jewry would later argue that *The Forward* met the Jewish masses where they were at the expense of Socialist dogma, but this claim is every bit as deliberately obfuscating as the pro-Communist “social history” of the New Deal and the CIO, with its faith-based notions about the inexorable will of the “people’s movement.”

With the *Literary Digest* poll predicting two million votes for the Thomas-Maurer ticket and with Socialist hopes of electing a handful of congressmen, as ever the high point of the campaign occurred at Madison Square Garden.⁵⁹ The burying of the factional hatchet was symbolized by a joint rally for Thomas and Hillquit with Militants and Old Guardsmen sharing the stage.⁶⁰ In concluding the final political campaign of his career, Morris Hillquit firmly took his stand:

The Socialists can justly claim that they have introduced the only serious and vital note in the campaign. Against Hoover’s alibis, we have presented to the people of the United States an unanswerable and crushing indictment of the national government for its partisan support of the big business interests and its callous and criminal neglect of the starving masses. To the nebulous platform and vague promises of Governor Roosevelt we oppose a clear, comprehensive and consistent program of economic rehabilitation and social regeneration. As against Colonel Lehman’s belated 19th century liberalism we advance the new social claims of our own time and generation, the urgent, vital demands of the people for today and tomorrow. . . . The fundamental differences between us and both old parties arise from the irreconcilable economic interests which we represent and the opposite views on government which we hold. To the Republican and Democratic politicians the people are there to serve the government. To us the government exists to serve the people. To them government is primarily an institution for the protection of property rights and the preservation of class privileges and business interests, a glorified

policeman sternly maintaining “law and order” and wielding a heavy club over the dissatisfied and rebellious. . . . We place life above property, human happiness above business interests.⁶¹

In the end, the Socialist presidential ticket registered 884,885 votes, a fraction over 2 percent. It earned only around 4 percent of the vote in the four top states—Wisconsin, Oregon, New York, and Montana. Berks County, Pennsylvania, once again led among counties with nearly 22 percent. Yet there was considerable evidence that a proper count would have come closer to the two million votes predicted by *Literary Digest* and others. One piece of anecdotal evidence came from a Socialist poll watcher in Chicago who called out the throwing away of ballots marked for the Communists, prompting an embarrassed response, “When you Socialists have no watchers, we do the same to you.”⁶² David Shannon validates this view, arguing that one of the party’s greatest failings was only having poll watchers in its most formidable local machines, speculating that their presence might have made the difference in electing a number of congressmen in the 1910s.⁶³

The highest performing congressional candidate in 1932 was Raymond Hofses, with nearly 27 percent in the Reading-based fourteenth district of Pennsylvania. In California, former Berkeley Mayor J. Stitt Wilson won over 22 percent in the seventh district, and Millen Dempster, the party’s hopeless gubernatorial candidate two years later, got just under 15 percent in the San Francisco-based fourth district. In the fourth and fifth districts of Wisconsin, respectively, Walter Polakowski earned over 23 percent and Herman Kent over 20 percent. In New York, Charney Vladeck received 14 percent in the Lower East Side-based eighth district, former legislator Samuel Orr over 11 percent in the Bronx-based twenty-third district, Harry Laidler just under 11 percent in the Bedford-Stuyvesant-based sixth district, Frank Crosswaith 7 percent in the Harlem-based twenty-first district, and the aging “Jewish Eugene V. Debs,” Abraham Shiplacoff, with nearly 6.5 percent in the Williamsburg-based ninth district. Finally, in the special mayoral election, Morris Hillquit earned

251,656 votes, the highest number of votes he ever received for any office by far, but far short of his 1917 percentage at only 12.6 percent.

The Communist Party ticket of William Z. Foster and James Ford, in this peak year of the Great Depression, achieved the all-time high of 103,307 votes. This same period saw a few Communist mayors and aldermen elected in tiny radical mining hamlets; the early 1930s, not the Popular Front era, was when the Communist Party peaked as an electoral party. Even in the depths of the third period, the Communists made clear they could make their influence felt in such episodes as the legendary mining war in Harlan County, Kentucky, in 1931 and the ill-fated Bonus Army movement in the summer of 1932. There was also a reminder of the enduring Farmer-Labor imperative in 1932. The octogenarian William "Coin" Harvey, the most widely read pamphleteer for William Jennings Bryan in 1896, was on the ballot in ten states at the head of the quixotic Liberty Party. Though tallying only 53,425 votes, Harvey echoed the vote for Parley P. Christensen in 1920 with nearly 5 percent (twice the Thomas vote) in Washington, over 2.5 percent in Idaho (one of five states where the Socialists were not on the ballot), and twice the Socialist vote in South Dakota.

The 1932 election proved the high-water mark by far among the six consecutive campaigns of Norman Thomas as the Socialist standard-bearer; moreover, it would shape the historical legacy of the Socialist Party to a greater extent than any of Eugene Debs's five campaigns. In addition to being widely credited with more nearly anticipating the New Deal than Roosevelt's campaign, the large number of politicians, labor leaders, and others in Cold War liberal Washington who entered politics through Norman Thomas's 1932 campaign proved an exceptionally enduring legacy. But it is a serious mistake to simply assume, as David Shannon does in his brief but comprehensive history of the Socialist Party, that "it was Roosevelt in a word" that killed the party.⁶⁴ Through FDR's first term at least, there was the same opening for the Socialists to provide opposition from the left that there was in the first Wilson administration when the party was able to consolidate its gains before being crushed by repression and internal dissension. But in the 1930s,

internal dissension, shrewdly exacerbated from the outside on two fronts, doomed any possibility of heeding the lessons of the Socialist heyday.

Ten days after his inauguration, on March 14, 1933, Roosevelt received Norman Thomas and Morris Hillquit at the White House, having been an acquaintance of both as governor of New York. Both Thomas and Hillquit were pleased by the dramatic bank closure announcement that marked the inaugural, and Roosevelt gave a courteous and attentive hearing to their plea for a \$12 billion bond issue for relief and public works and for the nationalization of the banks that had been closed.⁶⁵ Thomas wrote a short time later that “without the New Deal, no one knows what stage of disintegration we should have reached,” adding the back-handed compliment for its “immensely bold attempt to stabilize capitalism.”⁶⁶ But from the outset there was the fear that Roosevelt’s National Recovery Administration (NRA) was the beginning of a fascist revolution, with its quasi-military program of economic regimentation typified by such programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps. As historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch notes, throughout 1933, the NRA “blue eagle” was far more ubiquitous and omnipresent in America than the swastika had yet become in Germany.⁶⁷ In his survey of the 1930s Socialist Party, Frank Warren explains,

Whatever the degree of Thomas’ initial enthusiasm for the New Deal, his early attitude contained all the elements that would later develop into a full-scale critique. . . . He did not say that the New Deal was out-and-out fascism, as did the Communists, but he recognized the parallels between the economics of state capitalism and fascism, and he feared, with good reason, considering the administration of it, that the NRA had potential dangers in a fascist direction.⁶⁸

Immediately after the 1932 campaign, the Socialist Party threw all of its energies into organizing the Continental Congress of Workers and Farmers on Economic Reconstruction. Emil Rieve served as chairman and Daniel Hoan as vice chairman for this conference, which took place

in Washington, DC, on May 6–7, 1933. The organizing committee included A. Philip Randolph, David Dubinsky, James Maurer, Luther Langston, Henry Linville of the AFT, Fred Sutor of the Vermont AFL, H. H. Freedheim of the Idaho AFL, and James Sheehan of the Milwaukee AFL.⁶⁹ The principal organizing secretary was Marx Lewis, who had remained in the nation's capital after serving as chief of staff for both Meyer London and Victor Berger.⁷⁰ Other notable organizers included future North Dakota congressman Usher Burdick, aging Non-Partisan League founder Arthur Townley, and SLID rising star Joseph Lash.⁷¹ William “Coin” Harvey also endorsed the Continental Congress and apparently folded his fledgling Liberty Party into the Socialist-led movement, promoting the Congress in a special issue of his Arkansas-based tabloid *The Liberty Bell* that included the writings of Thomas Edison on the evils of usury.⁷²

The number of labor leaders and farmers' representatives, from practically every corner of the country, who gathered in Washington that May would have been impressive even for the Socialists of the 1910s. The ever-enthusiastic Oscar Ameringer published special Continental Congress editions of his classics *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam* and *The Yankee Primer*. As he wrote in the latter,

Now whether this depression, or rather this industrial cataclysm of the first magnitude, is the end or just the beginning of the end of the profit game I cannot tell. . . . Sooner or later, the American people will awaken to the terrible realization that they are all slaves to an ever diminishing number of their countrymen. . . . And once the fetters are cast from their eyes, they will see—and act. The means for the reconquering of their country are at hand. They still have the ballot. They are the overwhelming majority. They are the nation.⁷³

Especially befitting the optimism about the future of the Socialist movement was this Indian summer in the life and work of Ameringer, “the Mark Twain of American Socialism.” After spending the past several years with Adolph Germer in the Illinois coal fields attempting to rally opposition to John L. Lewis in the United Mine Workers, Ameringer was

back for good in his adopted home town of Oklahoma City, publishing a new national weekly, *American Guardian*. The “declaration” adopted by the Continental Congress was written in much the same spirit:

Since the first Declaration of Independence the American people have discovered and created the means for unheard-of wealth. Wide rivers have been tamed to provide electric power, huge mountains have been tunneled to give ore for the creation of new and marvelous machines, and the prairies have been made to yield rich crops. Man’s power to produce wealth has been increased a hundred fold, until now a life of security and abundance is possible for all. But today the nation starves in the midst of plenty. The gigantic machines stand idle, the crops lie in warehouses or rot in the fields. It is for us, workers and farmers of America, to build now a new economic system of justice and freedom. Only through our organized power can mankind be freed from the crushing and needless bonds of poverty and insecurity. Workers and farmers everywhere, unite! We have a world to win!⁷⁴

Yet the most that could be said of the Continental Congress was that it served to consolidate Socialist influence in the AFL. Howard Y. Williams, the new director of the League for Independent Political Action, indicated that the LIPA intended to hold its own conference for the purpose of “the full discussion of political action as to whether or not we ought to use the Socialist Party or form a Labor or Farmer-Labor Party.”⁷⁵ The Communist Party attempted to be seated at the Continental Congress, in one of the earliest indications of the passing of the extremism of the “third period.” As Marx Lewis observed, “It struck me as very modest in tone, but I do not think that we ought to be deceived by it. So far as demands are concerned, I do not see anything in them that are objectionable. It is they who are objectionable.”⁷⁶

This “united front” question became increasingly urgent after the Nazi seizure of power, when a few united fronts from below cropped up, such as the American League Against War and Fascism and the Unemployed Councils led by the Militant David Lasser. In the summer

of 1933, the National Executive Committee debated whether united action with the Communists could be considered on a single-issue campaign basis. Though a solid majority voted to forbid such actions, Norman Thomas opposed going on the record, arguing, "Our position is stronger than it was, so long as we make it apparent that we did try to cooperate, and that cooperation was made impossible not by us but by the Communists."⁷⁷ This dispute clearly presaged the eruption of factional strife the following year and Thomas's position in it, but was not representative of the mood of the Socialist Party throughout 1933.

The LIPA finally issued its call several weeks after the Continental Congress for a conference for the express purpose of forming a Farmer-Labor Party, to be held September 2–3. Signers of the call included North Dakota senator Gerald Nye; Minnesota Farmer-Labor congressman Ernest Lundeen; Wisconsin congressman Thomas Amlie (of the new Wisconsin Progressive Party formed by the two sons of Fighting Bob, Robert Jr. and Philip); Fiorello LaGuardia, running for the second time as the Republican nominee for mayor of New York; and Oswald Garrison Villard. Labor leaders included Henry Linville and Abraham Lefkowitz of the AFT, Max Zaritsky of the Millinery Workers, J. B. S. Hardman of the Amalgamated, and A. F. Whitney of the Railway Labor Executives Association.⁷⁸

In July, the NEC passed a resolution, stating, "Without closing its mind to what future events may make desirable, the NEC of the Socialist Party states its conviction that the present time is not opportune for the formation of any new independent Farmer-Labor Party on a national or local scale." Executive Secretary Clarence Senior went so far as to appeal to all Socialists still affiliated with the LIPA to renounce the conference.⁷⁹ Most followed suit, including the party's most reliable labor ally Emil Rieve. Devere Allen gave the most characteristic statement on the Socialist Party's behalf: "There is no room for a party between this Roosevelt liberalism and the distinctive program of the Socialist Party. . . . I have been moved by the indisputable rise of influence over the working masses, the trade unions, and other significant groups, by the Socialist Party itself."⁸⁰ It was understandable for the Socialists to think they could lead a future

Labor Party under their own banner after the exhilarating Continental Congress. But at no other moment in the history of the Socialist Party did it have the opportunity to seize complete leadership of the movement for a Labor or Farmer-Labor Party, in pushing for a merger of the Continental Congress with the LIPA-led conference on its own terms.

The resistance to seizing the moment can largely be attributed to the growing influence of the quasi-revolutionary and doctrinaire Militants. Andrew Biemiller of Milwaukee even made a point of impressing upon fellow Militant Powers Hapgood not to attend the LIPA conference as a delegate for the Continental Congress.⁸¹ No doubt the divisions with both the LIPA and CPLA, fostered by extremists on both ends of the SP factional spectrum, greatly diminished the prospect for united action. Yet this was not the final word. David Sappos, the economist at Brookwood who was disenchanted with the revolutionist drift of A. J. Muste and his inner circle, published a pamphlet boldly laying out the way forward:

It is highly probable that those who demand a "pure and simple" revolutionary movement will center around the Communists and the CPLA, and that those who believe that diplomatic procedure is more practicable, will gravitate toward the Socialist Party and the Continental Congress. If the LIPA continues to pursue its original course of working among the left middle class elements, it too will undoubtedly join those counseling diplomatic procedure. And it must be borne in mind, as the experience of Germany has sadly taught us, that no mass Farmer-Labor Party is possible without the support of the left middle class. As for the Farmer-Labor Political Union, its role is still uncertain, depending on which of the two factions comes into the ascendancy.⁸²

Morris Hillquit may have had the wisdom and gravitas to cut through the clouds of suspicion and rally his party to seize a more promising Labor Party opportunity than had ever come before. But in the summer of 1933 he was again recuperating from tuberculosis at Saranac Lake.

Hillquit was scheduled to speak at a dinner with Norman Thomas, Daniel Hoan, and Theodore Debs in Chicago on October 29 on the topic, "The New Deal—Toward Fascism or Socialism?" but he never had the opportunity to deliver a definitive statement on the New Deal.⁸³ Morris Hillquit, the most devoted leader the American Socialist movement had ever known, died suddenly on October 8, 1933. Norman Thomas, then on a speaking tour, issued a statement by telegram:

Just read of Morris Hillquit's death with deep sense of sorrow and loss. Socialists everywhere will miss his leadership, we in America most of all. To Socialism he freely gave gifts which employed for ends of personal advancement would have carried him far on the road to power. It is for us to carry on the struggle for the glorious end for which he gave himself so generously.⁸⁴

Hillquit's memoir, *Loose Leaves from a Busy Life*, was posthumously published the following year. The last chapter consisted of a speech he gave at the New York state SP convention in 1932, destined to serve as his final testament:

I am a Socialist because I cannot be anything else. I cannot accept the ugly world of capitalism, with its brutal struggles and needless suffering, its archaic and irrational economic structure, its cruel social contrasts, its moral callousness and spiritual degradation. If there were no organized Socialist movement or Socialist Party, if I were alone, all alone in the whole country and the whole world, I could not help opposing capitalism and pleading for a better, saner order, pleading for Socialism. . . . Having chosen and followed the unpopular course of a Socialist propagandist, I am entirely at peace with myself. I have nothing to regret, nothing to apologize for. . . . To me the Socialist movement with its enthusiasm and idealism, its comradeship and struggles, its hopes and disappointments, its victories and defeats, has been the best that life has had to offer.⁸⁵

Hillquit's absence became painfully evident almost immediately. Just days later, the ILGWU held a celebratory meeting at Madison Square Garden after a strike victory made possible in part by provisions of the National Recovery Act. At this meeting, Abraham Cahan boldly declared, "President Roosevelt has earned the gratitude of every thinking man in the country. He should be a Socialist, if anybody is entitled to membership in our party he is."⁸⁶ Many had to have increasingly doubted whether Cahan was still so entitled. This may have been the moment for Cahan to come out openly for the New Deal in any event, but with Hillquit gone, any challenge to him sorely lacked for leadership and direction. Then, in November, Fiorello LaGuardia, once affectionately called a "half-Socialist" congressman, was elected mayor as a nominal Republican closely aligned with the Farmer-Labor Party movement. With Socialist Charles Solomon earning only 3 percent of the vote, it was apparent that the Socialist era in New York was coming to an end.

There is probably no better metaphor for how the world that defined Morris Hillquit and his movement would vanish than his one published biography. Written in the 1970s by Norma Fain Pratt, the very subtitle, "A Political History of an American Jewish Socialist," serves to seriously limit Hillquit's legacy. Written in the era that produced such works of nostalgia as *The Way We Were*, its biases toward feminism and Zionism and its romance for the New Deal and CIO, if not also for the Popular Front, combined with all the biases against right-wing Socialists gleaned from the pseudo-scholarship of Ira Kipnis. Naturally, such an author would be baffled by Hillquit and his times and could not make more than a superficial attempt at understanding them. But that such a great divide ever emerged is a testimony to the violence that would be done to both American Socialism and its historical legacy.

12 The Two-Front Putsch

(1934–1936)

For the Socialist Party, the most immediate consequence of the death of Morris Hillquit was a vacancy in the ceremonial but significant post of national chairman. Norman Thomas seemed the obvious candidate, but the Old Guard was still resentful over his role at the 1932 convention. For his part, Thomas declined to stand for the honor, in what many felt to be his single greatest mistake, thereby precluding his potential to succeed Hillquit as the party's great compromiser. Some Old Guardsmen even approached Daniel Hoan, whom they lambasted two years earlier as a "sewer socialist," but he was too bruised to want to enter the fray. Thus did the chairmanship go to the unlikely choice of Leo Krzycki, the leading representative of Milwaukee's large Polish community during the Socialist heyday and now a vice president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.¹

The ascent of Krzycki (pronounced kris-kee) was as ironic as it was revealing. The Old Guard was sold on Krzycki by Sidney Hillman, who put him forward knowing he was far to the left of either Thomas or Hoan and would thus exacerbate the tensions in the party. This became clear when President Roosevelt opened diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia at the end of 1933. *The New Leader* had long been outspoken for recognition, but Krzycki issued a press release unabashedly praising the Soviet system:

The next step that must follow government recognition is recognition by the American people of the Russian ideal—an economic

order without private profit. In 15 years Russia has built herself up from a weak and poverty stricken nation to a strong and prosperous one by concentrating on one principle—the elimination of private profit. Because their electorate was uneducated and untrained in democratic methods, they had to exercise that control not only against the dispossessed aristocracy, but against those members of the working class who had not enough vision to understand what they were doing.²

Norman Thomas frantically wrote to Clarence Senior, “The average man in the street or in the factory is bound to think that this is not merely a justification for dictatorship in Russia but of the extraordinary terror which unquestionably has been directed against Russian radicals.” Some of the damage was ameliorated when Thomas joined Louis Waldman in issuing a less inflammatory statement in the form of a congratulatory message to FDR.³ But the incident exposed how vulnerable the party was to the forces seeking to wreck it—the Communist plants at its far left and the *Forward* machine at its far right—and the degree to which they could work in concert through a figure such as Sidney Hillman.

Yet an extraordinary municipal victory in November 1933 perpetuated the spirit of new beginnings for the SP. In 1931, Jasper McLevy, the perennial candidate for mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut, since 1911, had come just three thousand votes shy of being elected. The son of Scottish immigrants and a lifelong resident of Bridgeport, he was a founding member of the Socialist Party as a young AFL roofer and eventually became president of his union, the Slate and Tile Roofers.⁴ After a series of bridge contracting scandals implicated both major parties, McLevy’s high name recognition propelled him to victory in 1933 in a three-way race with 49 percent of the vote. Twelve of sixteen members of the new Bridgeport Common Council were also Socialists. One historian of the local party described them as a perfect reflection of historic municipal socialism: “Like their leader, the majority of these office holders were skilled workers, who demonstrated little desire to bring about a workingman’s revolution.”⁵ The context of the Bridgeport victory was

a nationwide revolt against urban political corruption, whose most significant manifestation was the election of Fiorello LaGuardia as mayor of New York. John Haynes Holmes was among those who urged the Socialists to get behind LaGuardia, one of many “half-Socialists” from the Indian summer of progressivism now in the vanguard of a new insurgent politics.

In the main, Socialists everywhere were taking exactly the wrong lessons from the fall of German Social Democracy to Hitler. This was illustrated nowhere more starkly than by the Austrian Social Democrats and the American Socialist response to events in Austria. A tragic blood-letting broke out when the Austrian Social Democrats, at the urging of the outlawed Communists, declared armed resistance against the government of Engelbert Dolfuss. A conservative of Catholic social sympathies, Dolfuss was pushed into cracking down on the Social Democrats by his ally Mussolini, then desperately trying to rally Europe to contain Hitler through the short-lived Stresa Front. The two mighty pillars of resistance to a Nazi takeover of Austria thus destroyed each other, compounded by the assassination of Dolfuss by a Nazi agent that June.

On February 16, 1934, a mass meeting was held by the Socialist Party and its union allies at Madison Square Garden to protest the crackdown against the Austrian Social Democrats. The Communist Party had a loyal cohort of about 5,000 in the 20,000-strong crowd. As Algernon Lee opened the meeting, a chorus of chanting and booing made him inaudible. A riot broke out as the Communists, many armed with knives, were thrown off balconies by enraged Socialists. Lee was followed at the podium by an equally inaudible David Dubinsky; as he appealed for order, Clarence Hathaway, editor of the *Daily Worker*, appeared at the podium. Several Socialists piled on to Hathaway, who claimed his “scalp was lacerated by the batterings of chairs wielded with social fascist fury.” As the five thousand disciplined Communists began to shout, “We want Hathaway,” the one man who could make himself heard over them, Frank Crosswaith, denounced the Communists in his rich

Barbados baritone as “pigs who will always remain pigs because it is the nature of Communists to be pigs.”⁶ *The New Leader* solemnly declared, “New York learned at first hand how it was that Hitler came into power, through the deliberate and planned action by the gangs that call themselves the Communist Party.”⁷

This shocking episode was the final straw for most of the nominal Communists who had formed the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford and had fashioned the League’s journal, *Partisan Review*, into a new home of their own. The macabre spectacle led many radicals to deem both the Socialists and Communists politically and morally bankrupt. Most significant was A. J. Muste, who by 1934 publicly announced his intention to form a new American Workers Party (AWP), which would be committed to a nondogmatic revolutionary socialism; Muste was joined in this effort by Sidney Hook and his tempestuous colleague in the philosophy department of New York University, James Burnham.⁸ Theirs was a largely faithful rendition of the program of the historic Socialist left wing, illustrating the distance that not only the Communists but also the SP Militants, who took most of their cues from them, had strayed from it:

The Socialist Party is not a party of revolution but of reform and pacifism. . . . Though now as at other periods in its history the Party contains many sound and leftward moving workers, the powerful right wing elements in the party openly spurn and combat all revolutionary tendencies. The radical phrases of the centrist wing represented by the “Militant” leaders serve as a cover for an essentially reformist attitude. . . . The rise of fundamentally anti-Marxian nationalist tendencies and the abandonment of the principle of workers’ democracy in the Third International, constitute the twin source of their decline and impotence. No semblance of party democracy obtains in the International or its sections. . . . These parties, instead of concentrating their energies and attention primarily upon advancing the revolutionary movement and seeking the overthrow of the capitalist state in those countries, become little more than

agitational groups dedicated to so-called “defense of the Soviet Union,” pacifist activities for disarmament and “against war and fascism,” etc.⁹

The founding of the AWP led to the purging of Muste and his supporters from the faculty of Brookwood Labor College, whose board was still controlled by such veteran Socialists as James Maurer, Emil Rieve, and Abraham Lefkowitz. Muste was replaced as director of the faculty by Tucker Smith, an SP loyalist from Manhattan and one of many who in March 1934 formed the new Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC). Declaring that “the failure of Social Democracy to take power in Germany, where the Socialists had gained the support of large numbers of the working people, raises grave questions as to its theoretical soundness,” the RPC seemed far more menacing by the Socialists than the AWP.¹⁰

Most Socialists widely believed the RPC to be a stalking horse for either the Communists or the followers of Jay Lovestone, then known as the Communist Party Opposition. In truth, the RPC was the organizational form finally taken by what was already a distinct faction of the SP—the group to the left of the Militants that was decidedly less friendly to the Communists—at the very time most of its leaders had bolted to the new American Workers Party. Yet both the Communists and Lovestoneites had plants in the RPC. The Communists had J. B. Matthews, a Militant of long standing who would not long after parlay his activities into a successful career as an especially right-wing professional anti-Communist.¹¹ Lovestone’s man in the RPC was a young acolyte named Irving Brown, who was winning valuable friends in the group such as Tucker Smith.¹²

It is testimony to the radicalized nature of the American public in the peak years of the Great Depression that the American Workers Party took a leading role organizing the militant labor actions that marked 1934. Most notable was its leadership in an auto workers strike in Toledo, Ohio, but the AWP was also active among unemployed groups throughout the Midwest. As Sidney Hook recalled, “They marched not under the

red flag singing the 'Internationale' but under the rattlesnake flag of the American Revolution, bearing the words 'Don't Tread On Me,' and singing 'John Brown's Body.'"¹³ The Toledo strike was followed by a successful Teamsters strike in Minneapolis, where the Trotskyists were influential. Then, in May, the rank-and-file longshoremen of San Francisco instigated what ultimately grew to a general strike, whose leadership was captured by the Communists with a devoted ally, Harry Bridges, elected chairman of the strike committee.¹⁴

A key premise underlying the dismissal of the non-Communist left from many histories of the United States in the 1930s is that it was the Communist Party, not the Socialist Party, that was at the forefront of the major popular movements of the period. It is true that events conspired against the Socialists to deprive them of their traditional leadership role of the radical labor movement. It is also true that there was a vast chasm between the Socialists' debilitating factionalism in this decade and the iron discipline of the Communists. Yet the narrative of Communist preeminence does not stand up especially well to scrutiny, and there were major protest movements in which the Socialists took the major leadership role.

The most formidable revived organization in the old Socialist heartland was to be found in the northeast corner of Arkansas. In the small town of Tyronza, H. L. Mitchell built an impressive local at the onset of the Depression, with the assistance of Oscar Ameringer's *American Guardian* and a small circle of Christian Socialists in Tennessee.¹⁵ When Norman Thomas campaigned there in 1932, he was stunned to see the widespread and desperate state of the region's sharecroppers, virtually unchanged since their desperate conditions gave impetus to the rise of the Populist movement almost a half-century earlier. On a return visit to Tyronza in the spring of 1934, Thomas aided Mitchell in establishing the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU), joined by Ernest McKinney, a local black preacher, and Howard Kester, a recent graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School.¹⁶ They were especially outraged by the deleterious impact of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which mandated the destruction of crops that could feed the Depression's untold

desperate masses, denouncing the act as “subsidizing scarcity” and “prosperity through starvation.”¹⁷

In the first of many vain pleas for intervention to Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace, Thomas wrote, “My first and grave complaint is that the entire method of land tenure and operation is wrong, that some of the worst examples of landlordism in the world are to be found in the cotton industry, and that it is idle to talk about prosperity for cotton farmers as long as these conditions of virtual peonage continue.”¹⁸ The degree to which Thomas was swept up in the cause of the Southern tenant farmers was extraordinary—Harry Fleischman recalled that young Socialists would complain that if Thomas was speaking at a dinner meeting it meant “we’ll have sharecroppers again for dinner.”¹⁹ To the extent the sharecroppers’ crusade was a means of avoiding responsibility for preserving party peace, it supports Daniel Bell’s description of Norman Thomas as “the genuine moral man in the immoral society, but as a political man caught inextricably in the dilemmas of expediency, the relevant alternatives, and the lesser evil.”²⁰ Yet the tenant farmers represented a large segment of the U.S. economy and labor movement before the war economy swept them into the industrial North.

The other large protest movement in which the SP and its allies took the leading role was the massive student ferment most evident at the City College of New York. At City College there was a volatile mixture of a highly radicalized student body and an arch-conservative president, Frederick Robinson, who imposed mandatory ROTC on the nonresidential campus and outlawed any Socialist and Communist organizational presence. Members of both parties and all other radicals thus had to colonize apolitical student groups. In one of the earliest signs that the Communists would set the tone for the Depression decade, as early as 1933 there were over 600 members of the Young Communist League (YCL) at City College to only 150 members of the YPSL.²¹

The chairman of the City College YPSL, Morris Milgram, recruited chapter secretary Judah Drob, who had been radicalized by a brutal crackdown on a YPSL protest of ROTC spring exercises in 1933.²² The son of a prominent Conservative rabbi in the Bronx, Drob credited his

conversion to socialism to John T. Flynn, the great polemicist against the Depression-era financial elite in *The New Republic*. Virtually unheard of for a Jewish student radical in the 1930s, Drob remained a devout Jew, even faithfully observing the Sabbath, for the better part of his YPSL career.²³ Indeed, the overwhelmingly Jewish radical movement of City College would have a greater role in defining and establishing the odd enduring legacy of American Jewish radicalism than the actual Jewish Socialists who elected Meyer London to Congress from the Lower East Side. In his vivid memoir of the era, Judah Drob reflected,

Was being Jewish in any way contributory to my decision to become an active Socialist? This is not an easy question, and I have no glib answer. . . . The great majority of Jews were not radicals. Jews may have been disproportionately represented in American radicalism only during the 1920s and the late 1930s when the movement was in severe decline, due more to their stiff-neckedness, remarked already in biblical times, than to any logic or realism. But the Jewish background was just as likely to produce a sense of isolation, nationalism, upward striving, distrust of outsiders, as it was to promote the socialist ideal I accepted of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, noncompetitive mutual aid, and defense of all oppressed individuals and groups. There is much that is unexplainable, or at least so far unexplained, about radical Jews, who conform to neither the world's nor to their co-religionists' attitudes.²⁴

Some might argue that the Socialists, particularly the Old Guard, lost themselves in their attachment to the ballot box as mass protest movements were sweeping the country. But the fact that general strikes were breaking out in numerous American cities did not negate the importance of political action; indeed it underscored it. This was the case when the potential emerged for a mass-based Farmer-Labor Party in 1920 after the harrowing Wilson terror, which could have justly provoked a revolutionary response. Indeed, this was the case going all the way back to the Socialist movement's roots in the Panic of 1893, the Pullman Strike,

and Populism. In many ways those earlier moments represented greater promise than 1930s radicalism, but in no other period was so large a segment of the population ripe for the leadership of a new radical party.

In the spring of 1934, the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the Wisconsin Progressive Party seized the initiative for forming a new national party in establishing the American Commonwealth Federation. It took its name from the growing movement in Western Canada largely formed by northward-migrating veterans of the Socialist heyday. Leaders of the American Commonwealth Federation included Minnesota congressman Ernest Lundeen, Wisconsin congressmen Thomas Amlie and George Schneider, and Paul Douglas and Howard Y. Williams from the LIPA. The Federation's Washington office was directed by Nathan Fine, a former mainstay of the Rand School who wrote the classic *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States: 1828-1928*.²⁵ Floyd Olson wrote the pamphlet announcing the new movement, which read in part,

In a sense, the crisis which we face is a world rather than an American crisis, but we will have to deal with it in an American way. The economic order we know as capitalism is no longer capable of supplying the vital needs of our people. Efforts at reform, which, by their very nature, do not strike at fundamental defects, have proven futile. Wherever we look, whether in this and every other land, the harvest of capitalism is want, suffering, poverty, disease, crime, and even war. . . . But aside from any moral consideration, the capitalist order, as we commonly understand the term, has reached an impasse. As in Rome before the downfall of the Roman Empire, the evidence of decay can be seen on every hand. Only those are blind who do not want to see.²⁶

The potential of a large and powerful bloc in American politics to become this new party was being most dramatically demonstrated by Huey Long, who emerged in the U.S. Senate as the leader of its progressive bloc. With the support of a bipartisan group that included George Norris, William Borah, Robert LaFollette Jr., and Burton Wheeler, Long denounced the NRA for containing "every fault of socialism without

one of its virtues” and warned that the New Deal was exacerbating the Depression and that the country faced a revolution.²⁷ Long was generally distrusted when not violently despised by most other radicals, but as American Socialism’s greatest historian James Weinstein argues, “Long was in fact a uniquely democratic politician who had nothing in common with the dictators except their popularity. As a consistent champion of working people and an implacable enemy of the corporate monopolies and Eastern banks, he commanded one of the largest mass followings in the country.”²⁸

Several former Socialists were elected to office in alignment with the new movement, including Thomas Latimer and William Mahoney as the Farmer-Labor mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul, respectively. Homer Bone, Socialist candidate for mayor of Tacoma, Washington, in the 1910s and a Farmer-Labor member of the Washington legislature in the 1920s, was elected to the U.S. Senate as a Democrat, the only member of that body who was ever a member of the Socialist Party. Also elected to the Senate in 1934 was Rush Holt of West Virginia, son of the old Socialist mayor of Weston. In an attempt to begin a dialogue with the forces organizing for a new party, Paul Porter, a protégé and fellow Kansan of Clarence Senior who held the new national office position of labor and organization secretary, wrote “The Commonwealth Plan.” A founder of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, Porter confidently insisted,

In sharp contrast to the New Deal, which seeks to save Capitalism by promoting artificial scarcity, such as crop reduction and the closing of factories, the Commonwealth Plan will promote abundance in production. Even at the very beginning of Socialism the workers’ income can be greatly increased by the addition of the large sums now kept by the capitalists as profits, interest, and rent.²⁹

That the Commonwealth Plan was put forward by a group associated with the Militants and RPC indicated that conscientious leadership could have brought them around to the Farmer-Labor Party movement. But the real issues before the Socialist Party were becoming confused.

Historically, the Old Guard had been committed to a Farmer-Labor Party, but now it was imperative for the New Deal operatives around *The Forward* to steer them away from this objective. Early in 1934, Alexander Kahn established a paper organization, the League for Democratic Socialism, to serve this purpose. The League published an impressive theoretical volume, entitled *Socialism, Fascism, Communism*. A compendium of mostly European essays, it included the aging Karl Kautsky's definitive essays on both the Nazi rise and the Soviet system, grounded in his authority as the last living direct disciple of Karl Marx. Also noteworthy was an essay by a Soviet economist writing under a pseudonym, which put forth the theory of the Stalinist state as a corporation with the Communist Party as board of directors (highly relevant in understanding contemporary China).³⁰

But the real purpose of the volume was to give the stamp of orthodox Marxist approval to the opportunism of the clique around *The Forward*. This was apparent with the sole American contributor being Joseph Shaplen, Abraham Cahan's man at the *New York Times*. Shaplen boldly asserted in the opening of his essay,

There is nothing new in the New Deal. It is all derived from Socialist conceptions. The old parties in America, insofar as they have shown any capacity for progress, have borrowed whatever advanced ideas they may have absorbed from the Socialist arsenal. If the New Deal is to be truly the beginning of a new progressive phase in the development of American civilization it will have to proceed more and more along the lines long advocated by Socialists. And yet, the Socialist movement itself seems to be almost entirely outside the events as they are now shaping themselves in America.³¹

This essay was written not only before the eruption of factional war at the approaching SP convention but also at the very time the labor movement and liberal intelligentsia were concluding that FDR's immediate relief program, whatever its merits, had run its course and that a real promise for a Farmer-Labor Party was emerging. Only an implosion

by the Socialist Party could halt this momentum, and those with an interest in doing just that knew it.

Having become biannual affairs in the second half of the 1920s, the Socialist national convention of 1934 opened in Detroit on May 31. The potential for a complete rout of the Old Guard was evident when a resolution calling for the destruction of the “bourgeois state” and its replacement by a “dictatorship of the revolutionary masses” was only narrowly defeated.³² But the drama of real consequence took place behind the scenes, as a special committee struggled to draft a new declaration of principles. The committee assigned the task of preparing a rough draft to Devere Allen, who was assured by committee colleagues Norman Thomas and Daniel Hoan that several amendments would immediately be offered from the floor.³³ On the morning of June 3, the Declaration of Principles was read to the convention, with the following hastily conceived section destined to arouse the most controversy:

Capitalism is doomed. If it can be superseded by a majority vote, the Socialist Party will rejoice. If the crisis comes through the denial of majority rights after the electorate has given us a mandate we shall not hesitate to crush by our labor solidarity the reckless force of reaction and to consolidate the Socialist state. If the capitalist system should collapse in a general chaos and confusion, which cannot permit of orderly procedure, the Socialist Party, whether or not in such case it is a majority, will not shrink from the responsibility of organizing and maintaining a government under the workers' rule.³⁴

Thomas and Hoan's amendments would have, among other things, specifically reiterated the party's historic opposition to political violence. But the motion of Old Guardsman Charles Solomon to block all amendments was quickly granted by the Militant chairman, Andrew Bie Miller.³⁵ The two major Socialist factions were clearly spoiling for a fight that each believed it could win. Indeed, there is reason to believe this was a deliberately orchestrated maneuver on both ends: one distinct

power that came with the ceremonial office of national chairman was to open the national convention and nominate the permanent chairman; thus Leo Krzycki could easily install Biemiller, his young Milwaukee Militant ally. Of the chaotic debate that followed, W. A. Swanberg puts it best: “The scene had its grotesquery—a party which claimed 23,000 members, not all of them in robust health, disputing as to whether and under what circumstances they should assume command of the nation’s resources and its 125 million inhabitants, ‘crush the reckless force of reaction’ and rescue the United States of America.”³⁶

Louis Waldman immediately emerged as the most outspoken opponent of the proposed declaration, calling it “unreal” and “maniacal.”³⁷ Devere Allen raised the specter of a new world war, assumed to be the most likely context of a crisis alluded to by the declaration; to which Algernon Lee replied, as one of the authors of the St. Louis Platform, that what the Militants were proposing was exactly the sort of insurrectionary program the St. Louis Platform had been specifically drafted to preclude.³⁸ Leo Krzycki, Andrew Biemiller, and Powers Hapgood were among the others to speak for the declaration from the floor.³⁹ Opponents from the floor included Charney Vladeck and 1916 vice presidential nominee George Kirkpatrick.⁴⁰

Norman Thomas had the power to swing the convention either for or against the Declaration of Principles.⁴¹ There was reason to think he might come down on the side of the Old Guard, after his *New Leader* column just before the convention assailed both dictatorship and violence.⁴² Indeed, Thomas may have intended the draft declaration as a maneuver that, if followed by his amendments, would secure his status as the new great compromiser and earn him the gratitude of the Old Guard. But after the two-front putsch by the *Forward* machine and the Militants proved to be a step ahead of him, Thomas cut his losses and endorsed the declaration:

We have, thanks to Devere Allen, an answer that we are proud to stand on, to the kind of questions we shall be asked. And I rejoice in that statement. We have not superseded past statements, nor wiped

out principles that everybody knows we hold. . . . Mass resistance will mean what we are able to make it mean, and I am proud to say that I would rather, a thousand times over, die in fighting that war of insanity and cruelty than to be conscripted or to hold my peace while the world goes straight to the pit of disaster.⁴³

The Declaration of Principles was adopted by a vote of 99 to 47.⁴⁴ Bernard Johnpoll correctly notes that Thomas still had misgivings about the declaration and defended it by pointedly insisting on the most nonrevolutionary interpretation. But Johnpoll is too glib in ascribing his support to an emotional need of Thomas to be adored by the party youth.⁴⁵ To retain the support of the party's increasingly youthful base after the failure to reach a consensus was no small thing, as illustrated by the election of a new National Executive Committee. Thomas, Daniel Hoan, Darlington Hoopes, and James Graham remained to represent the increasingly tenuous center, but Militants Albert Sprague Coolidge and Powers Hapgood were joined by Maynard Krueger, Franz Daniel of Pennsylvania, and Michael Shadid of Oklahoma. Old Guardsmen who might have been agents of compromise such as Louis Waldman, Jasper McLevy, and Lilith Wilson were defeated. Disastrously, the one representative of the Old Guard on the NEC in the fateful two years ahead was the irrepressible loose cannon James Oneal.

W. A. Swanberg gives a more compelling explanation for Thomas's decision to endorse the Declaration of Principles, arguing it was born of his fear of becoming, like Eugene Debs, a figurehead for the power behind the throne.⁴⁶ Thomas had always been reluctant to be groomed for this role, but knew he was in a far better position than Debs had ever been to assert himself as the real leader of the Socialist Party. Rather than stemming from Thomas's evasion of the challenge of party leadership, the debacle there was the result of his being outmaneuvered.

True to form, Joseph Shaplen secured a front-page headline in the *New York Times* that may have been true enough—"Left Wing Seizes Socialist Party"—but whose main thrust was to suggest that the Old Guard was

preparing to split the party, assisted by intemperate quotations from Louis Waldman in particular.⁴⁷ Seizing the moment, Alexander Kahn refashioned his League for Democratic Socialism into the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party. In the immediate aftermath of the Detroit convention, Old Guard leaders in New York such as Waldman and Algernon Lee were reluctant to line up behind *The Forward*, especially after Abraham Cahan included in his pronouncement on the controversy a denunciation of Socialist opposition to the First World War.⁴⁸

Thus George Goebel, most recently distinguished as the most outspoken defender of prohibition at the 1932 convention, became chairman of the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party.⁴⁹ Even a superannuated James F. Carey was summoned, joined by others who could trace their Socialist commitments to the turn of the century such as Emma Henry of Indiana, Lena Morrow Lewis of California, and old Milwaukee warhorse Frederic Heath.⁵⁰ The enduring Marxian sensibility of the Old Guard was evident in its resentment of Thomas and his followers, with Goebel echoing James Oneal in denouncing their opponents not as Militants but “holy rollers.”⁵¹ The Committee issued its manifesto by the late summer:

Whenever a faction arose to swerve us from those methods of education and propaganda, and to commit us to the adoption of direct action and insurrectionary methods, as in the case of the IWW and later the Communists, the Socialist Party remained true to its principles, its ideals, and its mission, preferring to part company with those to whom our Socialist position seemed untenable rather than depart from the course it had marked out for itself as an American political party. We considered it essential that there must be an agreement, not only as to where we are going, but on how we are going to get there. We could not at one and the same time declare that we place our faith in the democratic processes and convincing the masses of the soundness of our doctrines, and then proceed to achieve by force and violence the changes we advocate.⁵²

The brazen duplicity by which old-timers outside New York were won over to the Committee was vividly illustrated by James Maurer. After he was quoted in *The Forward* as a leading opponent of the declaration, a distraught Norman Thomas wrote to his perennial running mate,

There isn't a man in the Socialist movement that I honor and love more than you. I should be sorry to be on a different side than you on any question like the Declaration of Principles, but, of course, I respect your reasons. What nearly breaks my heart is to find your name used by a group, some of whom seem willing if necessary to split the party, and many of whom are willing to use the most unfair, unscrupulous and dictatorial tactics to carry their way. Did anybody translate for you Abe Cahan's article in *The Forward* with its denunciation of the St. Louis Platform?⁵³

Maurer explained, "My greatest objection to the Detroit announcements is that it plays up the antiwar program as a paramount issue, instead of as it should be played up, as a leading issue in the destruction of capitalism."⁵⁴ By the time he received Thomas's letter, Maurer had already written to ask that his name be removed from the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party, calling them on their purpose "to cause strife and ill feeling among our membership."⁵⁵

Thomas stubbornly defended the Declaration of Principles while reaching out to all potential agents of compromise. In a telegram to Friedrich Adler of the Socialist International, he insisted, "There is much wild talk about a party split if the declaration should be sustained on referendum. Probably not much would come of this talk, which is based on plain misrepresentation of what the declaration states, were it not for *The Forward*."⁵⁶ Samuel Friedman of *The New Leader*, whose exceptionally long Socialist career began in Denver in 1912 when at the age of fifteen he campaigned for Eugene Debs, floated his own compromise proposal, to which Thomas brusquely replied, "Your letter does credit to your love of the party but scarcely to your judgment as to the present

conditions.”⁵⁷ Charney Vladeck, in contrast, could see through the smoke and mirrors with exceptional clarity:

The idea of Krzycki having voted for this declaration is positively disgusting. Only two weeks before he was a delegate to a convention of an organization of which he is vice president. That labor union is becoming increasingly conservative, and in fact has been a demonstration for Roosevelt more than anything else. Our national chairman did not say a word of criticism of that policy, did not lift a finger to try to direct the convention along more radical lines. But as national chairman of the Socialist Party, he votes for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Vladeck bluntly warned Thomas:

Your voting for the declaration will be interpreted as complete agreement with its contents and an assumption on your part of the leadership of the left wing. . . . Our movement has no chance whatsoever with this Declaration of Principles. It simply isolates us from the American worker and middle class, and puts us into a position of antagonism toward labor, which is slowly but surely advancing toward a Labor Party. I contemplate with sadness the inevitable future which will see a strong progressive labor movement with the Socialists in opposition to it. Of course I am against a split, but this declaration gives a justified opportunity to all who are ready for a split both on the right and the left.⁵⁸

A cold peace was reached at the New York state convention on July 1. Louis Waldman was reelected as state chairman and Charles Solomon was easily nominated for governor over Skidmore College professor Coleman Cheney. But Julius Gerber recognized that the appearance of a rout by the Old Guard would perpetuate party strife and proposed that Norman Thomas be nominated for the Senate. In a rare instance of magnanimity, James Oneal declined his nomination by some of the more

bitter Old Guardsmen in favor of Thomas.⁵⁹ But when Thomas, Vladeck, and Samuel Friedman introduced a resolution to amend the Declaration of Principles and for the NEC to issue a series of clarifying statements, they were voted down by an irate majority demanding total repeal.⁶⁰

It was on the other end of the continent, however, that the pressures being brought to bear on the Socialist Party from the outside were unfolding most dramatically. In the summer of 1934, the veteran nominal Socialist Upton Sinclair won an upset victory in the Democratic primary for governor of California over the former Wilson enforcer George Creel, who was backed by FDR. Sinclair resigned from the Socialist Party for the second time a year earlier and had gained a mass following for his End Poverty in California (EPIC) campaign, proposing in his published manifesto a transformation of the state economy with a striking resemblance to the pre-Marxian communism of Edward Bellamy.⁶¹ The business class of California, including staunchly Republican Hollywood moguls, whipped up a frenzy such as had rarely been seen against any Socialist or Populist of years past.⁶²

The Socialist Party was unbowed in running its own candidate for governor, Unitarian minister Millen Dempster of San Francisco, and Norman Thomas wrote sternly to Sinclair, "With all your good intentions, you are doing an enormous injury to the Socialist cause. I rather suspect you may have occasion to regret this error in judgment almost as much as you regretted your support of Wilson in the 'war to end war.'" ⁶³ There was certainly a case to be made for working to capture one of the major parties in some states in the tradition of the Non-Partisan League, but Upton Sinclair was exactly the wrong person to be making it. Most Socialists considered Sinclair a prima donna, and EPIC, which called for greater collectivization of the economy than the SP, reminded Socialists with long enough memories of such embarrassments as Edward Bellamy and the colonization movement of the 1890s Social Democracy.

Still, the California SP suffered massive losses. John Packard, the leading Old Guard supporter in California, was an early defector, along with an aging J. Stitt Wilson and future congressman Jerry Voorhis. Also

prominent on the EPIC bandwagon were the aging transplants Kate Richards O'Hare and Walter Thomas Mills.⁶⁴ These leaders of the long-gone encampment circuit, with a majority of their old followers, had been swept out of the old Socialist heartland and on to the Pacific Coast by the Dust Bowl; thus was the potential appeal of a New Deal-aligned politics to old Socialists shown to extend far beyond the offices of *The Forward*. The nostalgic impulse that led Mills and O'Hare to back Sinclair was also in evidence in Oklahoma, where a congratulatory note after Sinclair's primary victory from Michael Shadid, titular leader of the resurrected state party, nearly led to his removal from the National Executive Committee, allowing the Old Guard to score points for party loyalty.⁶⁵

Sinclair lost decisively to Republican Frank Merriam with less than 38 percent of the vote, while Millen Dempster earned a paltry 2,947 votes, only half as many as Communist Sam Darcy. Norman Thomas earned over 5 percent in his Senate candidacy in New York, and Charles Solomon received only 3 percent running for governor. Congressional candidates in party strongholds, however, did exceptionally well: Raymond Hofses improved on his stellar 1932 showing with over 32 percent in the Reading-based fourteenth district of Pennsylvania, whereas Arnold Freese earned over 17 percent in the Bridgeport-based fourth district of Connecticut, where five state legislators were elected. In Wisconsin, West Allis Mayor Marvin Baxter won over 20 percent in the fourth district and Otto Hauser over 24 percent in the fifth. In Oklahoma, old survivor Orville Enfield got over 6 percent of the vote in the seventh district, but in New York it was clear that the party's historic base was rapidly collapsing. Only Charney Vladeck could break double digits, polling just under 12 percent in the eighth district on the Lower East Side. Indeed, high expectations of possibly electing Vladeck had been a tenuous point of unity among the fractious New York Socialists.⁶⁶

On November 29, the NEC met in Boston. Several Old Guard supporters hoped to demonstrate a show of force, but it became clear at this meeting just how overwhelming were the forces arrayed against them within

the party. The Old Guard cohort suffered a defeat on every matter they brought before the NEC save for one—to reprimand Michael Shadid for his expressions of support for Upton Sinclair.⁶⁷ No development could have angered them more than a report submitted by Paul Porter, proposing an explicit invitation to unity be made to the American Workers Party, the Communist Opposition of Jay Lovestone, the small Trotskyist following of James Cannon, and even the remnant of the IWW; that is, to every radical group but the Communist Party. The NEC endorsed the letter by a straight factional vote of nine to one.⁶⁸

Lovestone, who addressed the NEC meeting and left a favorable impression, had begun to signal his slow but sure movement toward the non-Communist left with a speech given that year at the national convention of the ILGWU, where his followers were being cultivated by David Dubinsky as allies of his leadership.⁶⁹ Indeed, if anyone could have united the increasingly disparate elements of the Socialist movement behind a promising Farmer-Labor Party movement after the death of Hillquit, it was Dubinsky. But the young Socialist was still feeling his oats, and with barely more than a year behind him as president of his union he was in no position to challenge the agenda of Abraham Cahan. Cahan and his lieutenants had by now cemented their leadership of the broader Old Guard by consolidating control of *The New Leader*.

The once fiercely independent paper had clashed with *The Forward* in the past, but in another instance suggesting coordination with Sidney Hillman's pro-Soviet allies, *The Forward* had been subsidizing *The New Leader* ever since its original sponsor, the Garland Fund, began objecting to the paper's unshakable anti-Soviet orientation. Beginning in 1935, the business manager Cahan installed at *The New Leader*, exiled Menshevik leader Sol Levitas, exerted increasing control so that the editorial line was indistinguishable from *The Forward*. James Oneal remained as editor, bitterly resisting the change and vainly attempting to rally his SP allies to assert themselves with Cahan and his men on equal terms. Yet Oneal remained hopelessly intemperate and uncompromising, unable to sense Cahan's real agenda that he was serving.⁷⁰

For his part, however, Lovestone would not yet abandon illusions of ultimately prevailing within the Communist movement, and therefore he could not oblige the Socialist invitation for an “all-inclusive party.” Many of his followers, however, could and did. Ben Gitlow, close collaborator of John Reed in the drama that led to the founding of the Communist Party, was the most prominent, followed by Herbert Zam, who quickly rose as a leader of the Militants, and Louis Nelson, Lovestone’s other major ILGWU supporter after Charles Zimmerman.⁷¹ Yet no one could have been a more inflammatory reminder of 1919 to the Old Guard than Gitlow, as seen in the response of his former New York Assembly colleague Louis Waldman:

The declaration of the Communist faction headed by Ben Gitlow that its members have decided to apply for membership in the Socialist Party, at the invitation of Norman Thomas, in our judgment calls for an immediate statement of policy from every Socialist state organization anxious to preserve the Socialist Party from being turned into a Communist Party. . . . We are convinced that there is no room in the same political home for the Communists and those Socialists who believe in the solution of our economic and political problems by peaceful and democratic means.⁷²

In response to Gitlow’s application for membership, the New York state organization refused to admit members of the overwhelmingly Militant YPSL into the regular party once they came of age. But the Militants extended and escalated the hostilities. By this time they were under the direct intellectual guidance of Haim Kantorovich, an American liaison for the Jewish Socialist Bund in Poland, who advocated a militant antifascist program in Europe based on unity with the Comintern largely on Socialist terms, roughly resembling the program of Lovestone and his European allies.⁷³ One of the earliest demonstrations of growing Militant influence on the Socialist Party occurred at the Socialist International conference in 1933 when, over the objection of Jacob Panken

in an impassioned minority report, the American party was one of the very few to endorse this program.⁷⁴

In February 1935, founding editor Norman Thomas resigned his column at *The New Leader*, and SP centrists and Militants alike called for a new publication of national reach. Thomas was eager that the new paper be published outside New York so that it might play a constructive role fostering party peace, but the New York Militants would not hear of it.⁷⁵ Thus was the new *Socialist Call* launched, edited by leading Militant Jack Altman.⁷⁶ The paper got off to an auspicious start, with eight state parties and the YPSL endorsing it on the masthead. In a subscription drive at City College, Judah Drob secured a pledge from revered philosophy professor Morris Cohen, who expressed the hope that “it will be as good a newspaper as the old *New York Call*.”⁷⁷ But the commitment of the Militant editors to mimic every dictatorial habit of their enemies became clear when they refused to run Thomas’s praise of books by Soviet dissidents.⁷⁸ By June, young Militants were raiding and vandalizing the offices of *The New Leader*.⁷⁹

As the New York faction fighting escalated, Thomas departed for Arkansas, where severe repression was raining down against the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. Thomas and Reinhold Niebuhr, his old colleague at *The World Tomorrow*, arrived the second week in March following the arrest of local organizer Ward Rodgers on charges of “blasphemy, anarchy, and attempting to usurp the government of Arkansas.”⁸⁰ Thomas spoke throughout the region to racially mixed audiences, who took to adapting the old hymn and singing, “Just to see Norman Thomas, I shall not be moved.” Naomi Mitchison, a British journalist covering the STFU, insisted to Thomas, “You are someone divine for them . . . I think all the radios in Arkansas must have been crowded round that afternoon you spoke.”⁸¹ Indeed, the heroics and accolades of this Yankee minister in such a violently repressive Southern backwater rivaled any episode in the career of Eugene Debs.

On March 15, Socialists Howard Kester and Jack Herling were preparing to introduce Thomas in Birdsong, Arkansas, when they were

surrounded by an armed posse of local planters and escorted to the county line. The black chaplain of the STFU, A. B. Brookins, had his home attacked that evening and his church burned to the ground. Thomas and his party took refuge in the home of the attorney representing Ward Rodgers, C. T. Carpenter. When the house was surrounded, Carpenter kept the mob at bay with his pistol, as Thomas wired back to the League for Industrial Democracy office in New York, "Entire Population Terrorized."⁸² The affair became a national sensation, and ameliorative measures from the federal government allowed the STFU to at least survive. President Roosevelt received Norman Thomas to discuss the situation, but Agriculture Secretary Henry Wallace, who would be mercilessly savaged many years later for his own Communist associations, attacked the "Communist and Socialist agitators in the South" as the source of "bitterness."⁸³

In the history of the Socialist Party, perhaps no single meeting of its National Executive Committee was more consequential than that held in Buffalo on March 23, 1935. After a report on the possibilities for a Farmer-Labor Party was tabled, Albert Sprague Coolidge moved to revoke the charter of the New York state party. The NEC issued a resolution aimed at mediating the growing hostilities in New York, reaffirming the "ineligibility of advocates of violence and communism" for party membership while instructing both the New York organization and the YPSL to take conciliatory actions. A further instruction was issued to *The New Leader* to cease acting as a factional organ and to make its editorial board "representative of the entire party membership in New York."⁸⁴ This last action was particularly pathetic, with *The New Leader* firmly in the grip of the unaccountable *Forward* managers, whose recent cutoff of their subsidy to the SP national office in Chicago had such a severe impact that Executive Secretary Clarence Senior usually did without lunch.⁸⁵ In short, the meeting marked the precise moment at which the Socialist Party turned inward into its factional morass, thereby renouncing unparalleled opportunities to recapture the promise of its heyday.

The Socialists had squandered their best opportunity to form a Farmer-Labor Party on their own terms late in 1933, when they distanced

themselves from the League for Independent Political Action just as the Socialist mass following, particularly in the labor movement, was peaking with the Continental Congress. Had it not been for the sudden death of Morris Hillquit, this might have proven only a minor stumble, but now the initiative was completely out of the hands of the SP. In the spring of 1935, the remnant of the LIPA merged with Floyd Olson's American Commonwealth Federation to form the Farmer-Labor Political Federation, and a group of sympathetic congressmen called a July conference for the purpose of forming a new party.⁸⁶ The official call was signed by five members of Congress—Ernest Lundeen of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, Thomas Amlie and George Schneider of the Wisconsin Progressive Party, California Democrat Bryan Scott, and Vito Marcantonio, the nominal Republican who succeeded LaGuardia in Congress.⁸⁷

Of the five, Amlie was most closely aligned with the SP, and North Dakota Senator Gerald Nye was also present when the conference opened in Chicago on July 5. Indeed, it was a rare instance where a firm foundation was in place for a new national party that did not require “some senator to wave his magic wand,” as Harry Laidler had derided the LIPA early in the decade. Adolph Germer led a large contingent of Socialist participants that included Nathan Fine, Maynard Krueger, Michael Shadid, Raymond Hofses, Andrew Biemiller, and Marshall Kirkpatrick, former Socialist mayor of Granite City, Illinois.⁸⁸ But there was a significant Communist presence at the conference, including such notables from their earliest years as Alfred Wagenknecht and Duncan McDonald. A strong anti-Communist resolution by the conference resulted in a walkout, led by Lundeen and Marcantonio.⁸⁹

The Communist Party returned to a new united front posture in 1935. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern that year articulated the concept of the “Popular Front” to be employed by Communist parties in Europe to support left-liberal governments among potential military allies against Hitler, namely France.⁹⁰ The American Communists at first assumed that their task was once again to seize the leadership of a nascent Farmer-Labor Party; the metamorphosis into a militant embrace

of FDR and the New Deal was a relatively slow process over the balance of the year.⁹¹ More than a few who had been historically aligned with the Socialist Party were beguiled by the American version of the Popular Front. The demoralized Upton Sinclair embraced it to the point of initially defending the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939.⁹² Another comparable figure at the Socialist periphery for a generation, W. E. B. DuBois, became an arch-defender of both the Soviet and Chinese Communist regimes in his old age.

Despite their robust aversion to the Communists, the Farmer-Labor Party movement did not see them as their major threat. Rather, they saw it coming from Huey Long and the following of Father Charles Coughlin, whose broadcasts from his parish in Royal Oak, Michigan, reached millions. Though tied together in the public mind both at the time and in history, Long and Coughlin were as suspicious of each other as most old-line progressives were of them. Thomas Amlie denounced Long and Coughlin as “irresponsible demagogues,” and leading Farmer-Labor propagandists such as Howard Y. Williams and Alfred Bingham made no bones about labeling them fascist. Yet the Wisconsin-based magazine *The Progressive*, founded by the elder LaFollette in 1909, routinely carried letters in their defense, and Floyd Olson and the Minnesota party were decidedly friendlier to both Long and Coughlin.⁹³ From the center-right of the Socialist Party, the most forthright statement on the hysteria about an “American fascism” came from Algernon Lee in *The New Leader*:

I do not believe that there is any specific danger of fascism in the United States. Long and Coughlin are just demagogues and unlikely to appeal to a majority, nor are the conditions present—meaning an armed people ready to act on their sense of grievance. In any case, under existing conditions in the U.S. an armed insurrection of ignorantly discontented masses would not have the least possibility of success. If fascism does come here it will be in the uniquely American form of usurpation of dictatorial powers by the government itself. . . . Roosevelt may be forced to start using other than “only democratic and humane methods” and set up a Presidential dictatorship. That,

in my opinion, is a much more present danger than any fascism led by a Long or a Coughlin.⁹⁴

Along with the less inflamed Farmer-Labor leaders, Norman Thomas, who indicated his openness to working with Long for the cause of the Southern tenant farmers, probably shared this view.⁹⁵ But Thomas was increasingly dependent on the support of SP Militants who echoed the Communist conceit that any non-Socialist populist or progressive was a potential fascist. The local SP leader in Huey Long's New Orleans, Richard Babb Whitten, frankly advocated unity between the Socialist and Communist parties, referring to "the Roosevelts, the Coughlins, and the Longs" in the same breath.⁹⁶ Clarence Senior, present as an observer at the Chicago Farmer-Labor conference, concluded, "The third party conference here so far as I can see at the present displays very little hope of anything constructive with any substantial support. Marcantonio at a banquet last night made a speech which could scarcely be distinguished from Huey Long's Share the Wealth program."⁹⁷ This same Vito Marcantonio was soon the most notoriously faithful ally of the Communist Party in Congress. Indeed, stalwarts of the Farmer-Labor movement who were later maligned as "isolationists" of the "far right," such as Ernest Lundeen and Gerald Nye, tended to have few qualms about aligning with the Communists in these years.⁹⁸

For his part, Father Coughlin, fated to a far more fearsome reputation as a rightist demagogue than any of his contemporaries, was actually engaged in a constructive dialogue with Norman Thomas throughout 1935. Coughlin was on record saying, "The kind of Socialism as predicated by Norman Thomas is not Socialism in its real sense and has more right than wrong in it."⁹⁹ On those who charged him with being a fascist, he assured Thomas,

Fascism endeavors to protect private ownership and control of money and credit. Herein I differ from the Fascist. If I understand it, Fascism hopes either to establish a dictatorship or else, if it remains democratic (which I do not believe it can) it hopes to do away with

geographical representation in parliament and establish an economic representation. Thus we would have the Senator from the motor industry, the Senator from the textile industry, etc. As a matter of fact this very thing has been going on at Washington for a long time.¹⁰⁰

Thomas replied that he was “pleased to observe your repudiation of fascism,” adding, “The list of things that should be socially owned that you have given is extraordinarily inadequate.”¹⁰¹ Thomas would not extend the same assumption of good intentions to Huey Long however, though even here he mostly followed the lead of the Militants, who were urging him to tour Louisiana to take his stand against the alleged fascist menace. Thomas considered this a fool’s errand, reminding Clarence Senior, “After all it is Roosevelt who is the one we have to fight the most.”¹⁰² Indeed, Thomas was at this time engaging a far more genuine fascist specter, the declaration of martial law by Indiana Governor Paul McNutt in response to a decidedly unmilitant strike in the Socialist holy place of Terre Haute.¹⁰³ Many Socialists took heart at reports that Long was publicly upbraided by his aging Socialist relatives at a family reunion in Winn Parish that summer, but it could not be ignored that he would be the prohibitive favorite, at least of the rank and file, to head any new Farmer-Labor Party in 1936.¹⁰⁴ All came to naught, however, when Long was assassinated early in September.

By the fall of 1935, hope for factional peace in New York was rapidly deteriorating. Ever since the Detroit convention, William Feigenbaum, the most committed of the remaining SP centrists at *The New Leader*, regularly wrote Thomas what W. A. Swanberg describes as “three and four page letters like distress rockets at sea.”¹⁰⁵ Feigenbaum now prophetically despaired, “I am sadly convinced that as matters stand at this moment we are licked. The Communists have us beaten everywhere. Unless a miracle happens we will be annihilated next year and the Communists will take our place as the principal revolutionary party in America.”¹⁰⁶ He was particularly alarmed by developments in the New York Teachers Union, where Socialist stalwarts were being muscled out by a formidable

Communist caucus with the collusion of SP Militants, setting the pattern for most of the labor movement for the balance of the decade:

What is the result of all this? It is that despite the peace pact we are far from united, that we are suspicious of each other, that we do not trust each other, and that our party work is paralyzed and we are slipping further and further back. In contrast we have the Communists, monolithic, free of controversy, filled with an insane fanaticism, and going forward. They are theoretically in the wrong, practically crazy, morally beneath contempt. But they are winning the position that should be ours as the channel for the discontent of the masses. Further, they are creating the impression that they are the only revolutionary party, and by their antics—in the face of our paralysis—they are giving the revolutionary movement a black eye. Thus they are gaining influence at our expense and at the same time making it impossible for our sound and correct position to get the serious and favorable consideration it deserves. That, of course, is exactly what they have wanted all the time.¹⁰⁷

Feigenbaum, along with fellow New Yorkers David Dubinsky and August Claessens, pleaded with Thomas to devote all his energies to reconciliation.¹⁰⁸ That such centrists still spoke for most Jewish rank and filers in New York was demonstrated when pressure from *The Forward* kept Thomas from being scheduled to address the Workmen's Circle convention in 1935, but the audience nevertheless demanded he come up from the floor to speak. He received a standing ovation from a packed Madison Square Garden.¹⁰⁹

Superficially, the results of off-year elections in 1935 encouraged the Socialists. In addition to the Socialists winning every seat on the Bridgeport Common Council, J. Henry Stump returned a second time to the mayor's office in Reading. The Socialist vote in Reading increased over the 1934 vote that had comfortably returned Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson to the legislature, itself an increase over 1932.¹¹⁰ But the national faction fight was spilling over into Reading. Such Reading leaders

as Raymond Hofses and Birch and Lilith Wilson were solid Old Guardsmen, backed in their state party by Emil and Sarah Limbach of Pittsburgh. But a vocal minority, based in the Reading YPSL, had a set of grievances pertaining to the distribution of power in the local party. This dispute had little to no basis in principle, but was eagerly exploited by the Militants and YPSL through the *Socialist Call*, causing such centrists as James Maurer and Darlington Hoopes to help consolidate a large Old Guard majority in Reading.¹¹¹

The long process by which the Communist Party displaced the Socialist Party as the dominant force on the American left was not completed until about 1938, but a critical threshold was crossed in 1935: the Communists surpassed the Socialists in dues-paying membership. From the heretofore low average of 7,793 members in 1928, during the party's early Depression revival, membership improved to 16,863 in 1932 and reached the interwar era peak of 20,951 in 1934. The eruption of fratricide after the Detroit convention led to a sharp decline to an average of 11,922 in 1936, which plummeted further still to 6,488 in 1937.¹¹² Available numbers for the Communist Party are less reliable, but it is widely held that its card-carrying membership was still in the four figures as late as 1932, rose to around 25,000 in 1935, and peaked somewhere in the range of 80,000 to 100,000 in 1939.¹¹³ Yet in the fall of 1935, the seminal drama in the history of the American labor movement began to unfold, ultimately the most consequential factor determining the fate of both American Socialism and American Communism.

Perhaps the most striking fact about the labor upheavals of 1934 was that none were initiated by AFL unions. As the Great Depression was passing its peak, the national leadership of the AFL remained as ineffectual and out of touch as they had been throughout the prosperous 1920s. The events of 1934 pushed the AFL convention that year to approve the chartering of new industrial unions, most notably the United Auto Workers (UAW), but a lack of progress after a year had much of the labor movement restless. The unlikely figure who channeled this restlessness was the iron-fisted United Mine Workers leader John L. Lewis,

described by one witness on the eve of his dramatic stand as overcome with an almost mystical inspiration to become the champion of industrial unionism.¹¹⁴ Lewis, who came on the executive council of the AFL believing he could become the new power behind the throne of his former lieutenant William Green, soon found himself vastly outnumbered by defenders of the status quo.¹¹⁵

On October 16, 1935, a minority report favoring a large-scale organizing campaign in basic industry was delivered at the AFL convention in Atlantic City. Backed by a coalition virtually identical to the historic Socialist bloc in the AFL—the Mineworkers, Brewery Workers, assorted garment unions, and a significant number of state and local bodies—it received only 38 percent of the vote from the floor. Three days later, a loud argument between Lewis and his former close ally William Hutcheson broke out on the floor, with Lewis finally delivering Hutcheson a blow to the jaw. Thus was born the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO), formally launched on November 9 by a meeting of Lewis, David Dubinsky, Sidney Hillman, Max Zaritsky of the Cap Makers, Charles Howard of the Typographical Union, and Harvey Fremming of the Oil Workers.¹¹⁶ Another year passed before the CIO unions were formally expelled by the AFL and became the Congress of Industrial Organizations.¹¹⁷

Completely obscured in history by the birth of the CIO was the defeat by only four delegate votes of a resolution to form a Labor Party at the AFL convention in Atlantic City.¹¹⁸ The extent of Communist inspiration behind the resolution was ominous, with its major champion being Frank Gorman, president of the United Textile Workers and considered by the Communists their most important trade union ally in this period.¹¹⁹ But the resolution also had the unqualified backing of Socialists at the convention, including the ILGWU leadership, Amalgamated Vice President Joseph Schlossberg, and the Milwaukee Central Labor Council.¹²⁰ Indeed, it is worth noting not only that forming a Labor Party commanded far wider support in the AFL than the new CIO but also that those CIO supporters most adamantly for a Labor Party, Dubinsky and Zaritsky, were also the most opposed to seceding from the AFL. In contrast, on the eve of the 1936 election, John L. Lewis and Sidney

Hillman were most prepared to split with the AFL and most committed to the reelection of FDR.

One early hire of the CIO was Adolph Germer, who with much of the general public saw the nascent new federation as of a piece with the movement for a Labor Party.¹²¹ Lewis managed to win over many activists from his opposition within the union of the past decade, and Germer was joined by John Brophy and Powers Hapgood in plotting strategy with Lewis to unionize the unorganized industries. Hapgood, a leading SP Militant, earlier in the year remarked in wonder, "It's amazing how many radicals think I ought to see Lewis, saying it's much less of a compromise to make peace with him and stay in the labor movement than it is to get a government job and cease to be active in the class struggle."¹²² Germer, impeccably anti-Communist ever since facing down the party's founders as executive secretary of the SP in 1919, confided to Sol Levitas of *The New Leader*, "It is my opinion that the SP has missed the greatest opportunity in its history, and the result is that I have lost all interest in it."¹²³

But Brophy and Hapgood had been on much friendlier terms than Germer with the Communists during their fight with Lewis in the 1920s.¹²⁴ Lewis himself was the first to extend an olive branch to the Communists in what historian Harvey Klehr proclaimed "the most extraordinary irony" in the history of a movement with no shortage of them.¹²⁵ Sidney Hillman also encouraged the move, confident the Communists would serve his agenda. The most important early Communist hire was Lee Pressman as general counsel. Pressman came directly from the Agriculture Department, where he had been recruited into the Communist Party by Harold Ware, organizer of the party-led Soviet espionage ring in Washington. Hillman brought on another principal of the Ware group, John Abt, as general counsel of the Amalgamated.¹²⁶

The *coup de grace* in the implosion of the Socialist Party was delivered by none other than the general secretary of the Communist Party USA himself, Earl Browder. Knowing the desperate financial straits of the SP national office, Browder proposed to debate Norman Thomas at

Madison Square Garden with all proceeds going to the Socialists. The offer was made knowing it would exacerbate tensions with the Old Guard to the breaking point. That it worked exactly as planned became clear when Julius Gerber threatened Thomas with expulsion in New York if he went ahead with it, but the NEC overruled the argument that the debate was an “unauthorized united front.” Held on November 28, the Communists commanded a significant majority of the Garden capacity audience.¹²⁷

If the logic of Thomas and his supporters in agreeing to the debate was sound, what they were not prepared for were the full ramifications of the Popular Front and the unfamiliar tone in which it was advocated. “Social fascism” was forgotten, as in the most unthreatening comradely tones Browder preached, “Why is the united front the central, all-dominating question today . . . because of the danger of fascism and war.”¹²⁸ Thomas was booed for raising such points as Russia’s lucrative oil trade with Mussolini and asking, “Is Russia so weak that it cannot afford, 18 years after the revolution, to grant civil liberties to its citizens?”¹²⁹ Browder also attempted to corner Thomas on the question of a Farmer-Labor Party and a joint presidential ticket of the two parties in the coming election, with Thomas rebuffing such appeals as late as the spring.¹³⁰ Indeed, the Communists were now setting the tone for, if not in command of, the movement for a national Farmer-Labor Party.

The Old Guard sensed it might no longer have even a majority of the New York membership behind it and proceeded to desperate and draconian action. The city central committee summarily dissolved twelve branches squarely in the Militant camp. At a New York general membership meeting held shortly after the Browder debate, a vote narrowly rejecting what the Old Guard euphemistically called a “reorganization plan” was simply ignored by the chair as the meeting degenerated into a scene reminiscent of those leading to the split of 1919. On December 28, the New York Militants held a conference in Utica where, with party locals from Buffalo, Rochester, Schenectady, Syracuse, and Nassau and Westchester counties, they declared themselves the reorganized Socialist Party of New York State.¹³¹

On January 4, 1936, the NEC met to consider whether to revoke the existing charter of the New York party and recognize the Utica gathering. James Graham of Montana, one of two founding members of the Socialist Party on the NEC along with James Oneal, made a final proposal for mediation. Darlington Hoopes offered a compromise of terminating the existing charter and appointing a temporary state committee with an Old Guard majority to work out a final compromise to be approved by the national convention. The Hoopes proposal prevailed by a vote of eight to two, with Graham and Oneal opposed. Oneal immediately walked out, thereby indicating that the New York Old Guard was determined to carry on to the bitter end.¹³²

In the early months of 1936, the strongest movement took place toward a united front with the Communists, nowhere more provocatively than in the student movement and at City College in particular, where YPSL leader Morris Milgram had been expelled for leading an “antiwar strike.” Around this time, the respective auxiliary fronts for the YPSL and YCL, the Student League for Industrial Democracy and the National Students League, merged on the national level into the American Student Union (ASU) based on their shared antiwar commitments. Judah Drob became chairman of the City College ASU, leading a campaign to fire the College’s dictatorial president, Frederick Robinson. Mayor LaGuardia appointed a commission to investigate conditions at City College that included Joseph Schlossberg and John Flynn of *The New Republic*. In their meetings with Drob, both Schlossberg and Flynn upbraided him on the futility of antiwar protest, explaining that the causes of war were strictly economic.¹³³

But at the founding convention of the ASU in Columbus, Ohio, the full ramifications of the Popular Front became apparent. The keynote address was given by Reinhold Niebuhr, a Militant ideologue with pacifist roots, who shocked the delegates with an attack on the Socialist antiwar position and a call for “collective security against fascism.” From the beginning, the Young Communist League had an inside track in ultimate taking over of the ASU. As Judah Drob recalled, “What seems so clear in hindsight, that we no longer had agreement on policy that was

the only possible justification for the formation of ASU, was completely overwhelmed by the momentum that had been built up.” The Communist determination to seize control of the ASU was perhaps best illustrated, as Drob reminisced, by the young female Communist clearly assigned to seduce him on the bus ride back to New York.¹³⁴

Similar drama surrounded the arrival of Socialist cadres into the CIO. The majority of the student body and faculty of Brookwood Labor College dedicated themselves to the organizing drive of the CIO, the single largest factor leading to the demise of Brookwood in 1937.¹³⁵ Roy Reuther was the most consequential Brookwood regular who went to work on the CIO auto drive in Detroit, where his brother Walter had been a leading local organizer of the SP before spending two years abroad with their youngest brother Victor, mostly spent working in a Soviet auto plant. Walter Reuther was an extreme Militant at this time, frankly advocating “a complete united front between the SP and the CP,” and possibly paying dues to the Communist Party throughout 1936.¹³⁶ But Roy was sympathetic to Jay Lovestone, and Victor sympathized increasingly with Roy. The Reuther brothers represented in microcosm the political mayhem in the new UAW. The formidable Communist candidate for the UAW presidency, Wyndham Mortimer, was defeated in 1935 by Homer Martin, a Kansas City minister called “the leaping parson” in homage to his days as a college hop, skip, and jump champion.¹³⁷

The final push necessary for the Old Guard to carry out its threats to secede from the Socialist Party came with the entry of the American Trotskyists into the party. James Cannon’s small following had recently merged with the American Workers Party, founded less than two years earlier by A. J. Muste and Sidney Hook. Both the merger with the AWP and the overtures to the Socialists were part of Trotsky’s “French Turn,” in which he advocated for the better part of the 1930s entering and capturing the parties of Social Democracy, a bitterly controversial policy in the early, desperate years of the American Trotskyists. Trotsky personally approved the attempt to enter the American SP from his Norwegian exile.¹³⁸ The negotiators for the SP were young Militants

all—Jack Altman, Paul Porter, Herbert Zam, and Gus Tyler.¹³⁹ Their entry into the Socialist Party was only agreed to on the condition that they dissolve their party organization and all publications. The Trotskyists, as to be expected, were one step ahead of the SP. One of several who quietly joined the party in the preceding months as individuals was Albert Goldman in Chicago, who quickly seized control of a small publication of the Chicago party, *Socialist Appeal*, to serve as a factional organ inside the Socialist Party.¹⁴⁰

The last stand of the New York Old Guard was in the April party primary for delegates to the national convention, called after the disastrous citywide meeting in December 1935 to settle control of the New York party once and for all. The Old Guard believed it had an advantage in appealing directly to the membership, but the decisive sentiment was expressed by War Resisters League founder Jessie Wallace Hughan, a frequent Socialist candidate in New York throughout the 1930s sharply critical of the Militants: “I, as one member of the rank and file, am declining to stand either for the right or the left, but I do stand unequivocally for Norman Thomas.”¹⁴¹ The Old Guard was handed a decisive defeat in the primary with only 44 percent of the vote, translating to thirty delegates for the Thomas slate and twelve for the Old Guard slate.¹⁴²

The final weeks leading up to the national convention did not lack for desperate pleas for reconciliation, including a final proposed compromise by Samuel Friedman and Jessie Wallace Hughan.¹⁴³ Nor was a Farmer-Labor candidacy that could save face ruled out as late as the spring, with the undeterred Howard Y. Williams promoting a potential national ticket of Gerald Nye and Thomas Amlie.¹⁴⁴ Floyd Olson also encouraged speculation he would challenge Roosevelt and was approached by Louis Waldman and Algernon Lee, but Olson died of stomach cancer that August, having already endorsed the reelection of FDR. The irreconcilable nature of the split in the Socialist Party was best illustrated on May Day in New York. The SP held a united front march with the Communists at Union Square, while the ILGWU hosted a gathering for the Old Guard at the Polo Grounds. Norman Thomas,

conveniently out of town, sent greetings to both, which were booed, though not overwhelmingly, at the latter.¹⁴⁵

The SP national convention opened on May 24 in Cleveland. The ostensible cause of the two-year fratricide was undone to what should have been the satisfaction of the Old Guard: the Declaration of Principles was amended to remove the offending passages, and all united fronts with the Communist Party were unambiguously banned.¹⁴⁶ It was far too late, however, to mollify the New York Old Guard, even though all of its regulars, including James O'Neal, Louis Waldman, and Algernon Lee, were there to contest the seating of the primary-elected New York delegation. A riot nearly broke out when Waldman and Lee, both duly elected delegates from New York, pointedly refused to stand for the singing of "The Internationale," at which point they led with O'Neal the walkout that finally ended the prolonged faction fight.¹⁴⁷ Norman Thomas was then nominated for president by acclamation, with the vice presidential nomination going to virtual unknown George Nelson, a dairy farmer from Polk County, Wisconsin who served in the State Assembly in the 1920s, a rare Socialist in that body from the rural north country.

Ominously, the initial favorite for the second spot was Leo Krzycki.¹⁴⁸ But Krzycki resigned as national chairman of the party, joining Sidney Hillman and the Amalgamated in giving unqualified backing to FDR. A consistent Communist sympathizer, Krzycki later led the CP-front American Slav Congress during the Second World War; in this capacity he defended the Soviet-installed regime in Poland after the war and supported the Communist-backed presidential campaign of Henry Wallace in 1948.¹⁴⁹ As a sign both of the SP's enduring commitment to a genuine Farmer-Labor Party but also of its increasingly desperate straits, the national convention gave its blessing to the Wisconsin party to enter a formal coalition with the Progressive Party of Wisconsin, led by Governor Philip LaFollette. In a letter to James O'Neal, Frederic Heath described the scene that transpired against Krzycki's most important lieutenant in Milwaukee, Andrew Biemiller, editor of the *Milwaukee Leader*:

It may interest you to learn that Andy Biemiller is at last found out. I had him spotted from the first. . . . He came here first, at the insistence of Comrades Hoan and Krzycki (Crazy). . . . From the first he became a sort of spy on all our activities. Not an executive committee meeting could be held but that he was present, helping to guide things with his colossal assurance—and probably making regular reports to Chicago.¹⁵⁰

Biemiller, though clearly doing the bidding of Krzycki and other Communist allies in the SP, was more a careerist than an ideologue, and resigned from the SP shortly after being elected to the Wisconsin legislature. Left behind was the other leading pro-Communist in Milwaukee, Meta Berger, widow of Victor Berger, an unshakable convert ever since visiting the Soviet Union early in the decade. Berger blasted the decision to unite with the Progressives and relished the public campaign by Daniel Hoan to drive her out of the party.¹⁵¹

The formation of a new organization by the disaffected Old Guard, the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), was announced in New York on June 3, with the support of such New York centrists as August Claessens and Charney Vladeck.¹⁵² They were joined by the state organizations of Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Maryland; the Finnish Federation and Workmen's Circle; and through the New York party had control of the Rand School. Jasper McLevy was named honorary chairman, and the Socialist local of San Antonio, Texas, communicated its desire to affiliate.¹⁵³ The New York party, known for two months in the summer of 1936 as the People's Party of New York, initially voted down the proposal of Louis Waldman and James Oneal to endorse the reelection of Roosevelt.¹⁵⁴ But within a month was announced the formation of the American Labor Party of New York (ALP), concocted by Abraham Cahan and FDR's top troubleshooter James Farley as a means for historically Socialist voters in New York to cast their ballot on an independent line for FDR.

The ALP was formally affiliated with Labor's Non-Partisan League, created by John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman to provide the major labor

movement contribution to the reelection of the president. It was in the belief that after the election a genuine Labor Party could be formed out of the ALP and CIO that the very short-lived People's Party was brought around to supporting FDR, as were such old Socialists in the CIO leadership as David Dubinsky and Emil Rieve, though not without misgivings.¹⁵⁵ Waldman urged Hillman to appoint SDF members to run Labor's Non-Partisan League in several states, but Hillman, after humiliating Joseph Schlossberg before the entire Amalgamated executive committee for his pleas to stick with either the Socialists or a genuine Labor Party, barely concealed his displeasure with the idea of perpetuating the ALP after the election.¹⁵⁶ Waldman gave the major statement endorsing Roosevelt in a radio address late in August:

In the little more than three years that President Roosevelt has been in office he has done much to restore the faith of millions of people, here and the world over, in democracy as a means of bringing about vital social changes, in making progress through law. Assuming office in the midst of a grave social crisis, he required, and was accorded, extraordinary powers to meet it. . . . The example he set of how in a democracy resolute leadership can accomplish the things that the people need without resorting to a dictatorship, has given unified direction to the democratic countries of turning the tide of Fascism the world over.¹⁵⁷

To be sure, many aging veterans of the Socialist heyday were drawn to FDR, if as much by despondence over the implosion of the SP as genuine admiration for the New Deal. But by no means did a majority of them feel at home in the Social Democratic Federation. The efforts of the SDF to reach out to old-timers across the country were generally frustrating, but there could have been no ruder shock than when a leading surviving founder of the SP, Seymour Stedman, joined the Communist Party.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, there was a large and grim irony: having agonized for two years over the mere suggestion of the Socialist Party joining any united front with the Communists, the Old Guardsmen in the ALP had done just

that, with the first Communists brought on to its executive board by James Farley and other Democratic operatives before the end of the year.¹⁵⁹

Earl Browder ran the first of two campaigns as the Communist presidential nominee, but only after making clear to the Soviet foreign ministry that the party's open support for FDR would cost him the election. The Soviets, in turn, made clear the imperative to prevent any genuine Farmer-Labor candidacy that could throw the election away from FDR.¹⁶⁰ By the time Browder was nominated in late June, the Communists weakly opposed FDR as the candidate of "finance capital," with Republican Alf Landon cast as the fearsome front man of the major fascist threat—William Randolph Hearst, a Republican since the late 1920s who loomed strangely large in Communist demonology. But with the American Popular Front now identified as the CIO and Labor's Non-Partisan League, it was obvious that the Communists were behind Roosevelt. In a pamphlet on "the crisis in the Socialist Party," William Z. Foster showed off his talent for rhetorical acrobatics in explaining,

The sectarian danger in the Socialist Party was greatly increased by that party's recent absorption of the Trotskyite group. Just at the time when these counter-revolutionary elements were being proved to be terrorists and assassins. . . . Thomas arrives at the conclusion that it makes no difference whether Roosevelt or Landon is elected. But in reality the weight of his arguments favors Landon, and gives him direct support. . . . When Hearst, to elect Landon through a Red Scare, lyingly alleged that the Communists were supporting Roosevelt, Thomas at once rushed into print and seconded Hearst's charge.¹⁶¹

The Communists consolidated control of the Farmer-Labor Party movement throughout the early months of 1936, with Frank Gorman of the Textile Workers giving barn-burning speeches to various Communist fronts.¹⁶² But at a conference called by what remained of the Farmer-Labor Political Federation on May 30, Paul Douglas and Alfred Bingham immediately walked out when Earl Browder appeared at the

invitation of Floyd Olson, both acting to deliberately implode the movement on behalf of FDR.¹⁶³ That sentiment among the labor and Socialist rank and file for a Labor Party remained strong was most vividly demonstrated at the national convention of the UAW in August, where John L. Lewis had to personally intervene to prevent the passage of a Labor Party resolution.¹⁶⁴

With all other new party prospects having evaporated, on June 20, North Dakota Congressman and Non-Partisan League veteran William Lemke announced he was the presidential candidate of the quixotic Union Party launched by Father Coughlin.¹⁶⁵ Most Midwestern progressives were resigned to supporting FDR at this point, though Ernest Lundeen endorsed Lemke before the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party officially endorsed Roosevelt.¹⁶⁶ The Lemke candidacy was a disaster; unable to appear on the ballot in New York, California, and throughout the South, he was completely overshadowed by Coughlin, who might have given qualified support to an SP-backed Farmer-Labor Party, but now as the leader of a lonely crusade was thrust on to his self-destructive future course. The SP indulged in feverish rhetoric about Lemke as a potential fascist, a transparent reaction to his grip on the historically Socialist vote in the West, as the party secretary in South Dakota bitterly lamented.¹⁶⁷ But far from being a potential fascist strongman, Lemke was extremely uncharismatic and promised to serve only one term.

Despite the massive swing of the labor movement to Roosevelt, Thomas could still count on endorsements from such labor leaders as A. Philip Randolph, Julius Hochman and Louis Nelson of the ILGWU, and Walter Reuther, now on the executive board of the UAW and standing that year as a Socialist for the Detroit city council.¹⁶⁸ Other notables on the Independent Committee for Thomas and Nelson were Reinhold Niebuhr, Morris Cohen, Harold Fey of *Christian Century*, and Carl Raushenbush of the Union Theological Seminary.¹⁶⁹ One opinion leader who took the opposite of the well-worn course, endorsing Thomas after backing FDR in 1932, was John Flynn, who praised Thomas for upholding “the right of the people to rule their own economic life.”¹⁷⁰ Under trying

circumstances, Thomas took a page from Gene Debs, casting his campaign squarely on the issue of Socialism:

It is our task to stand four square on our own program and to make it plain. What is that program? It is Socialism. It is the doctrine that since power-driven machinery has made this an age of collectivism we must make collectivism cooperate in order to end poverty in the midst of potential plenty. The Old Deal failed catastrophically, a return to it is unthinkable. The New Deal has already failed and is headed towards new catastrophe of war or new economic collapse.¹⁷¹

After a twenty-state tour in October, Thomas accurately predicted a massive landslide for FDR, adding, “It is foolish for the labor unions to waste more of their good money on the Roosevelt campaign.”¹⁷² In his final address at Madison Square Garden, Thomas continued to prophetically warn that Roosevelt intended to revive the economy through militarization: “There has indeed been talk of universal conscription of men and wealth in the next war but the threat of it will not of itself prevent new war and, in the event of war, conscription of wealth under a capitalist government will be lenient. But the farmer at his plow, the worker at his bench, and, of course, the soldier in the trenches, will be bound in absolute slavery to the war machine.”¹⁷³

In the end, Thomas and Nelson polled a dismal 188,072 votes. Only in New York did Thomas even poll over 1 percent of the vote, and in no county more than 3.25 percent. Down-ballot results were just as depressing. Excluding SDF-aligned candidacies in Reading and Bridgeport, only in New York did any candidate for Congress earn more than 2 percent. William Lemke came just a hair under 2 percent of the national total with 892,378 votes, a majority of which would have likely otherwise gone to the Socialists. The national office made its best effort to spin the situation the morning after. A mass mailing declared, “Landon Rout! Lemke Collapse! CP Confusion! Socialist integrity challenged as in 1917—and vindicated!”¹⁷⁴ But in reality there was no doubting the high cost of the last two years of confusion and fratricide. If Thomas and the SP always

recognized that the most they could realistically aspire to was to be at the vanguard of a Farmer-Labor Party, now they simply needed to become a part of one to have any future at all.

The landslide victory of FDR, with the support of Labor's Non-Partisan League, has led to the near-consensus that the New Deal successfully co-opted all radical opposition in 1936. But it would be more accurate to say that what it succeeded in was marginalizing it. It is true that the leaders of the CIO, whatever their political motives, had a practical motive to support FDR after the passage of the Wagner Act vastly improved the organizing environment for trade unionism. But Roosevelt only reluctantly signed the Wagner Act, less radical than the Norris-LaGuardia Act signed by Hoover, after it was pushed through by pro-labor forces in Congress, and many Socialists and others foresaw how it could be used as a mechanism of labor repression.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the real measure of radical sentiment was not the Thomas vote but the Lemke vote, understated at a minimum by being kept off the ballot in so many states. An insurgent Farmer-Labor Party, had the Socialists rallied to it and kept the Communists from sabotaging it, could have restored the status quo ante foolishly squandered after the LaFollette campaign in 1924.

But there was another new factor in 1936. Since 1920, the SP was consistently prevented from appearing on the ballot in a few states, but in 1936 they were kept off the ballot in an unprecedented thirteen states, and in only three were write-in votes counted. Over the course of the 1930s, no fewer than ten states increased the number of petition signatures required to appear on the ballot by a factor of anywhere from ten to fifty and/or moved the deadline for a candidate or new party to petition to appear on the ballot from the fall to the spring of an election year.¹⁷⁶ What began as measures to suppress the emergence of a new party to challenge the New Deal from the left only accelerated in the decades ahead, so that minor parties have ever since been forced to routinely struggle for basic democratic rights. The United States was not immune from the trend toward monopolization of political power that ravaged Europe in the 1930s.

For all the ground lost to the Communists, the Socialist Party still could boast more than twice their national vote, with Earl Browder and

James Ford polling an unimpressive 79,315 votes. Many would argue that this is no reasonable measurement and indeed a virtue—that in rallying to the New Deal the Communist Party served and influenced the never clearly defined “people’s movement.” In the postwar era, many ex-Socialist liberals argued that the SP should have adopted its own “Popular Front” strategy in alignment with the New Deal.¹⁷⁷ Indeed, the logic of the Popular Front, so puzzling to old Socialists as the 1930s unfolded, has been the substance of the American left forever since. Typified by the politics, culture, and ultimate historical memory of the new CIO, the contempt for political action inherited from the IWW and historic left wing became the rationale for elevating protest over politics, a radical posture in service to the liberal faction of the power elite. The consequence has been the loss of the belief in actual democratic virtue that defined American Socialism.

13 American Catalonia

(1937–1940)

Almost as soon as the Trotskyists came into the Socialist Party, its battle-weary leadership was desperate to drive them out; it was obvious that James Cannon and his followers had not entered the party in good faith and were pursuing a ruthless course of rule or ruin.¹ By late 1936, the new executive secretary, Methodist minister Roy Burt, began devising strategy with Jack Altman, Paul Porter, and Devere Allen. Yet Norman Thomas, implacably opposed to the Communists after the ordeal of his recent campaign and all that led up to it, was thus susceptible to manipulation by the Trotskyists. He was particularly alarmed by the rapidly growing Communist domination of both the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party and the labor movement in Minnesota, where the Trotskyists were influential.²

Yet it was a consequence of Trotskyist strength in the state that the SP had lost all influence in the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, severely hobbling any hope of rebuilding the movement for a new national party. Floyd Olson had been succeeded as governor upon his death by loyal Communist ally Elmer Benson—his ascent orchestrated by Henry Teigan, a Farmer-Labor congressman who had been the key Communist plant in William Mahoney’s movement for a national party in 1924.³ By the beginning of 1937 virtually all Socialists were mobilizing to thwart the Trotskyists. After moving to California, James Cannon came close to taking over the state party, while Max Shachtman rallied the large YPSL following in New York.⁴ Lillian Symes, a fiercely loyal Thomas ally in California, warned Thomas that the Trotskyists intended to “decapitate”

him and that they had enough plants in the national office that he needed to be mindful in communicating party business.⁵ Symes explained, “Like the Stalinists, Cannon hates most bitterly the people who are closest to him but do not accept his line.”⁶ Thomas agreed there was little time to lose and gave unqualified support for necessary actions by the national party.⁷ On March 26, 1937, a hastily called national convention of the Socialist Party was held in Chicago to contain the Trotskyists before they could be elected as delegates to a regularly scheduled convention.

A series of constitutional changes, unprecedented since the founding of the SP, centralized power in the national office at the expense of the state parties. In an equally significant break from historic party practice, by a unanimous vote, all factional publications were banned, and the *Socialist Call* was designated the official publication of the national party.⁸ But the Trotskyists were not yet expelled and could carry on unabated through such papers as *Labor Action*, which Cannon established as the official paper of the California party.⁹ And by this time the Trotskyists had achieved what Cannon later claimed was his primary objective in entering the SP: to gain access to non-Trotskyist liberals and radicals to form the American Committee for the Defense of Leon Trotsky.¹⁰

The Committee included such regular Trotskyists as James Burnham; nominally Trotskyist writers such as Max Eastman, Ludwig Lore, and novelist James T. Farrell; Socialists as diverse as Norman Thomas, Devere Allen, Charney Vladeck, Gus Tyler, and Harry Laidler; and such unaffiliated radicals as Edmund Wilson.¹¹ The most consequential supporter was John Dewey, who personally convened a commission to take testimony from Trotsky in order to investigate the charges in the unfolding Moscow Trials, in which Stalin ultimately executed Bukharin, Zinoviev, and several other “Old Bolsheviks” on charges of a preposterous conspiracy with both Trotsky and Hitler to overthrow the Soviet regime. The Moscow Trials were the watershed moment for many 1930s radicals, marking their transition from being merely non-Communist to decidedly anti-Communist. But the response to these trials also demonstrated for the first time how entrenched and ruthless

apologists for Stalin had become in such pillars of liberal opinion as *The Nation* and the *New York Times*.

Yet the impact of the trials was paradoxical for Socialists—by and large, the Militant true believers in the Soviet Union as an antifascist vanguard—in the process of converting to anti-Communism. Being stripped of their illusions about the Soviet system led, in the main, to equally rapid disillusionment with Trotsky, his unswerving loyalty to Leninist doctrine, and Trotsky's assurance that the Soviet Union remained a "degenerated workers' state." It was no accident, as Trotsky himself might have said, that this was occurring at the very moment he was urging his followers in America and elsewhere to abandon the "French Turn" toward capturing the parties of Social Democracy and preparing for the founding of the Fourth International. The key to understanding this paradox can be found in an essay published by Max Shachtman shortly after the founding of the Fourth International in late 1938 that begins, "We do not envy the future historian of the American revolutionary movement when he faces the problem of tracing the course of the ephemeral sects."¹²

What follows is a whimsical and irreverent survey of the various sects, but what is no less striking than the multiplicity of neurotic and miniscule sects is their underlying commonality. Splitting from the Trotskyist movement during the old man's lifetime, they were forced to rely upon such formulas as "the Trotskyite brand of Stalinism" or that "Lenin was the first fascist" (the latter coming from Ben Gitlow as he completed his transformation into a right-wing anti-Communist). In other words, they were drawn to Trotskyism, but were now disillusioned, for the same reasons the SP Militants were with the "united front" rhetoric of Stalinism. To a large extent, all their conceits could be traced back to Trotsky's hostility to American Socialism in 1917 and eagerness for a revolutionary alternative. When Trotsky chose to retreat into revolutionary purism and establish the Fourth International, he left behind a major contribution to the SP Militant legacy—true believers in social democracy as the vanguard of global revolution. From this legacy proceeded—on two

related but distinct tracks—the development of Cold War liberalism and, ultimately, of neoconservatism.

The last major expression of the united front conceit of the Militants came just after the disastrous 1936 election. At the instigation of Jack Altman, the New York state party answered the call of the Spanish Republic for international volunteers against General Franco's uprising—more famously answered by the Communist Party with its Abraham Lincoln Brigade—by announcing that it would raise up a “Eugene V. Debs Column” of American volunteers. The party's leading pacifist supporters such as John Haynes Holmes and Jessie Wallace Hughan were outraged, charging the party with “profaning the sacred name of Debs.”¹³ Joining their protest was A. J. Muste, who had been in Europe for most of 1936 and while sailing home had a religious experience that moved him to break with his Trotskyist allies and commit himself to a Christian pacifist witness for the rest of his life.¹⁴ Norman Thomas publicly supported the Debs Column, but privately expressed misgivings, insisting that supporting volunteers was the least the Socialists could do short of invoking a greater moral dilemma.¹⁵

The Debs Column remained extremely controversial among the Socialists, and the National Executive Committee refused to endorse it.¹⁶ The Party of Marxist Unity (POUM) and its armed struggle in Catalonia against the increasingly Soviet-aligned Republic enjoyed sympathy throughout the party—not only from the Trotskyists but also the Lovestoneites, now unambiguously aligned with the SP and a sister party of the POUM in the International Right Opposition. The POUM was championed in the Socialist Party by the new “Clarity Caucus,” led by Herbert Zam and Gus Tyler, the latter having succeeded Jack Altman as editor of the *Socialist Call*. With a revolutionary socialist position that was both anti-Communist and anti-Trotskyist, the Clarity Caucus bitterly contended with the orthodox Militants led by Altman and Paul Porter. Most accounts of the Socialist Party in the 1930s, following the lead of Daniel Bell (a participant in this drama) in *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, view the Militant-Clarity struggle as central to the party's

history in the second half of the decade.¹⁷ But in fact this factional cleavage became irrelevant by the end of 1937.

Thomas was convinced that the civil war in Spain would determine the general trend toward war and fascism, and allowed for some compromise of principles accordingly.¹⁸ But a European tour served as the final confirmation of the implacable anti-Communism that would distinguish Thomas for the rest of his life. After visiting the Soviet Union at the height of Stalin's purges, he prophetically concluded,

What has happened in Russia represents the degeneration of Socialism, the complete subversion of revolutionary idealism, an all but fatal wound to working class integrity and confidence in its own destiny. There is no hope for Socialism, which indeed deserves no support, unless it can divorce itself from everything that the Moscow trials stand for. Lenin, Trotsky, and above all, Stalin, pioneered in that contempt for pity and that Machiavellian ruthlessness in which Hitler has become so adept.¹⁹

Thomas was further disillusioned when he stopped in Spain on his return voyage, seeing the republican regime completely compromised by Communist infiltration as it began its violent suppression of the POUM.²⁰ As for the Debs Column, the few volunteers who found their way to Spain were absorbed by an Italian volunteer brigade under Communist control.²¹

The other major controversy at the time was over the party's position toward the new American Labor Party (ALP) in New York. Jack Altman, now an officer of the Retail and Wholesale Workers, was probably the first to call for unambiguous support for the ALP. Thomas, determined to not be drafted into running for mayor, was inclined to agree. As early as March, Paul Porter and his successor as labor and organization secretary, Frank Trager, attended the national conference of Labor's Non-Partisan League, where David Dubinsky, Charney Vladeck, and Louis Waldman approached them about making the foundering *Milwaukee Leader* the official CIO paper of the whole Midwest.²² These leaders

of the SDF, once they realized the mess they had gotten themselves into with the Communists in the ALP and other branches of Labor's Non-Partisan League, were especially eager to recruit their recent bitter adversaries as reinforcements in their struggle for a non-Communist and genuine Labor Party. Waldman later described how the Tammany-aligned labor leaders of New York forged their dubious alliance with the Communist Party:

At all important large public meetings and at party events, this "right wing" trade union leadership of the party made it a point to parade pro-Communists on the platform as speakers and guests, to the great delight of the Communist-organized claques in the audience. Thus, they gave the Communists, who are well-known masters of the art of staging demonstrations for their leaders, an opportunity to enhance the prestige of those leaders with the general public.²³

Norman Thomas began negotiating in earnest with the ALP by the spring of 1937, hoping to push it toward true independence from the New Deal and the major parties. He indicated his inclination to support the reelection of Mayor LaGuardia, especially because it appeared he would be running solely as the ALP candidate. Gus Tyler vituperatively rallied his ostensible faction through the *Socialist Call* to oppose the move, but all this did was force a membership referendum that came down decisively in favor of backing LaGuardia.²⁴ Finally, when Trotsky blasted the party for being used "for essentially Communist ends" in backing LaGuardia, Jack Altman successfully moved that the New York local expel its large Trotskyist faction. More than half of the YPSL left to join the new Socialist Workers Party (SWP), including national chairman Ernest Erber and New York stalwarts Hal Draper and Irving Howe.²⁵

After Franklin Roosevelt gave his momentous speech for a foreign policy resembling "collective security" on October 5, 1937, all ambiguity passed that the Communist Party was, if not the principal political force agitating for American intervention in Europe, certainly in a vanguard

role. This easily buried the last lingering traces of sympathy for the Communists in the Socialist Party. For Thomas, preventing a repeat of the American experience in the First World War was his foremost commitment. After the Trotskyist exodus, what remained of the YPSL was even more committed than Thomas, with new YPSL chairman Al Hamilton, a leader in the National Council of Methodist Youth, setting the fiercely antiwar tone for the largely religious-socialist remnant.²⁶ The YPSL performed the last rites for any united front when the American Student Union gathered for its convention between Christmas and New Year's in Chicago. The YPSL knew it could not win a majority against the Communists, but decided to gain what it could from a spirited last stand. The open Communist ally who was the ostensible Socialist in the ASU leadership, Joseph Lash, immediately resigned from the SP after Judah Drob threatened him with expulsion in New York.²⁷

Probably no one more perfectly personified the odyssey of the SP Militants who became the founders of Cold War liberalism than Joseph Lash. Joining the SLID at City College in 1929, he rose to its national chairmanship and, at the peak of Militant romance for a united front in 1935, largely engineered the Socialist-Communist merger that formed the ASU. By his own account, Lash was on the verge of joining the Communist Party when he was disillusioned by the announcement of the Hitler-Stalin pact in 1939.²⁸ Around that time, he established a personal friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt, later writing the two-volume biography *Eleanor and Franklin*. In the meantime, he would join Reinhold Niebuhr in founding the Union for Democratic Action and by the 1950s was a leading press partisan for Americans for Democratic Action as a columnist at the *New York Post*. Indeed, Lash's relationship with the Roosevelts suggests the deliberate cultivation by the White House of the intellectual corps that ultimately became organized liberalism, once the Communists they relied on to sabotage radical opposition could no longer be trusted.

The YPSL activity around the ASU convention set in motion the antiwar agitation that dominated Socialist activity for the next four years. The Youth Committee Against War was hastily formed that week by the

large body of dissidents from the ASU collective security program.²⁹ At their prompting, the Socialist Party called for a mass meeting to launch the Keep America Out of War Congress (KAOWC) on March 6, 1938, at the New York Hippodrome. Speakers included Norman Thomas, Robert LaFollette Jr., Homer Martin, Oswald Garrison Villard, and John Flynn. The KAOWC was a makeshift coalition, whose member organizations included the American Friends Service Committee, the Fellowship of Reconciliation (now led by A. J. Muste), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the War Resisters League, the Socialist Party, and Jay Lovestone's organization, now known as the Independent Labor League of America.³⁰

At last, the divide between the Communist and non-Communist left was once and for all unbridgeable. But the Communists now had powerful allies in the intellectual bodyguard of the New Deal. After initially signing on to John Dewey's Commission, Freda Kirchwey, editor of *The Nation* and long a nominal Thomas ally, came out openly for the Popular Front. The tone of the magazine was increasingly set by Max Lerner, who defended the Moscow Trials and called for a massive domestic rearmament program.³¹ Yet the anti-Communists were not going down without a fight. Dwight Macdonald, the brilliant young editor at *Partisan Review*, organized several prominent signers to a letter to *The Nation* denouncing its endorsement of collective security. Signers included Norman Thomas, Gerald Nye, John Flynn, Alfred Bingham, Edmund Wilson, Sidney Hook, Homer Martin, Charles Zimmerman, Louis Nelson, and Bertram Wolfe.³²

In spite of all that had transpired over the past five years, the Socialist Party still retained the essential institutional pillar that had sustained it through the most desperate years of the 1920s—the opposition bloc in the labor movement. This gave them, as late as 1938, an enduring claim over the Communist Party to the leadership of the American left, and the spectacular rise of the CIO pointed toward tremendous opportunities, including the emergence of a Labor Party. That year, Norman Thomas himself led one of the most dramatic campaigns of the CIO in Jersey

City. Frank Hague, the mayor and perhaps the most notorious urban political boss of his era, decreed a police ban on the First Amendment rights of CIO organizers. Twice that year, the ban was challenged by Thomas, Oswald Garrison Villard, and the new Workers Defense League led by former YPSL leader Morris Milgram, both times in the face of arrest, physical danger, and mob violence.³³

But by 1938, the Communist Party commanded several of the smaller CIO affiliates, including the Transport Workers; State, County and Municipal Workers; Office and Professional Workers; the Newspaper Guild; Woodworkers; Furniture Workers; and Marine Cooks and Stewards. In addition, Communist unions of long standing such as the West Coast Longshoremen and the Fur and Leather Workers had joined the CIO, and one of the pillars of the historic Socialist bloc, the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (the former Western Federation of Miners), defected unexpectedly into the Communist camp.³⁴ Nevertheless, the Communist presence in the CIO was always well contained. John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman, however much they aligned with the Communists in matters of CIO policy, never allowed them to gain a foothold in their own unions. The massive Steelworkers Organizing Committee had a formidable Communist minority among its field organizers, but was led by old Lewis lieutenant Philip Murray, who surrounded himself with a loyal band of non-Communist advisors. Even the reliably pro-Communist Frank Gorman was replaced at the head of the Textile Workers Organizing Committee by Emil Rieve.³⁵

Of the largest CIO unions, the Communists had large followings that could not be ignored in the UAW and the new United Electrical Workers (UE). The case of the UE, which the Communists eventually dominated completely, best illustrates the true record of what were euphemistically called the “left-led unions.” Following the lead of Sidney Hillman, the Communist leaders of the UE effectively made it a company union of General Electric after being sought out by its president, Gerard Swope, a relationship that enabled them to survive as outcasts from the labor movement at the height of the Cold War. An architect of the National Recovery Act as well as the Wagner Act, Swope

welcomed industrial unions as vital to the integration of the working class into the corporate system.³⁶ Norman Thomas had early denounced Swope's vision as "a complete denial of the bases of the old capitalism, but it set up instead a capitalist syndicalism still operated for profit, a scheme which in essence is fascist."³⁷

The decisive battle for the CIO, and to a very large extent for the fate of the American left and labor movement, was waged in and for the UAW. The Communists greatly enhanced their prestige in that union through the stunning success of the Flint Sit-Down Strike in the early months of 1937, under the direction of leading UAW Communist Wyndham Mortimer. It was an open secret that Mortimer was in close consultation throughout the strike with William Weinstone, now the Communist Party chairman in Michigan. On the heels of this success, the Communists and their allies began agitating for the removal of Homer Martin—along with David Dubinsky, the most important Socialist ally in the leadership of the CIO—from the UAW presidency. To reinforce Martin's position, Dubinsky dispatched several young acolytes of Jay Lovestone to advise Martin how to take on the Communists. Tucker Smith became the union's education director, his protégé Francis Henson became Martin's administrative assistant, and Irving Brown became the UAW organizing director on the East Coast.³⁸ The Lovestoneites already had a large following in Michigan, where years earlier they had nearly merged with the idiosyncratic Proletarian Party and ultimately absorbed most of its membership, including future UAW leader Emil Mazey.³⁹

The Socialists in the UAW, however, were badly divided. Though the SP was bitterly anti-Communist and aligned with Martin and the Lovestoneites on all matters of policy, many still prized Communist ally Walter Reuther as their man on the UAW executive board. Factional war first erupted in February, when Mortimer and Reuther led a series of strikes against Pontiac that were opposed by both Martin and John L. Lewis. Masterminded by William Weinstone, the strikes were intended to galvanize sentiment against Martin in the UAW. With the tacit support of William Z. Foster, Weinstone hoped that success in taking over the UAW would lead to a coup against the CP regime of Earl Browder. Browder's

policy of maximum collaboration with the CIO leadership of Lewis and Hillman, dictated by Moscow, was nevertheless resented by many of the founding CP cadre.⁴⁰

The specter of a new world war dashed any possibility for a “united front” in the UAW. As early as January, the UAW executive board went on record opposing collective security, calling for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the Sino-Japanese theater and supporting the so-called Ludlow Amendment to require a national referendum for any declaration of war.⁴¹ Walter Reuther and his supporters were fully behind this stand, and the Communists quickly earned his wrath when they retaliated by withdrawing their support for his brother Victor’s bid for a leadership post in the Michigan CIO. Following a typical arc for the Militant true believers, Reuther was further disillusioned when the Communists abandoned their loyal firebrand Wyndham Mortimer for the nondescript opportunist Richard Frankenstein as their candidate to depose Homer Martin.⁴²

With the consolidation of the Communist bloc in the CIO occurring at the very peak of the Popular Front, it was the ostensible right wing of the CIO, led by Homer Martin and David Dubinsky, who remained in favor of forming a Labor Party. With the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party now firmly in Communist hands, there was no hope of reviving the Farmer-Labor Political Federation from before the 1936 election. Nevertheless, Philip LaFollette took it upon himself, confident of support from his Socialist Party allies, to launch the National Progressives of America in the spring of 1938. A series of radio speeches led up to a convention attended by four thousand in Madison, Wisconsin, on April 22, 1938. The Socialist Party held its regularly scheduled convention that same weekend in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and reaffirmed the need for a new national party. If the SP’s resolution remained doctrinaire, it took a lucid and uncompromising view of where they now stood with the rise of the Popular Front:

The Communist Party has become one of the best organized and most determined opponents of independent political action by labor.

The forces in officialdom of the labor movement aligned with Roosevelt and the New Deal are compelled to take a similar position. Therefore, the Socialist Party alone assumes the political leadership of the struggle for genuine labor political action. The Socialist Party, therefore, cannot be content merely to go along with labor party movements but must lead in the fight for independence on the political field. The fundamental reason for the New Deal attitude of comparative friendliness to labor is its perspective. The New Deal is interested in preserving the capitalist system. While individual capitalists think mainly in terms of immediate profit and commercial advantage, the New Deal originally encouraged labor's efforts to secure greater purchasing power because it understood that only that method could alleviate the Depression and allow capitalism to stabilize itself in a world facing economic collapse. The perspective of the New Deal is expressed even more clearly now in the international situation. Because the New Deal is tied to the defense of capitalism and capitalism breeds war, the New Deal has become a streamlined instrument for war preparations. The New Deal and the Communist Party are both attempting to strengthen the war machine. Both seek to create the greatest possible unity in the nation in the face of war—unity in support of that war. This gives additional impetus to the drive against a Labor Party since such a party would encourage an independent expression of the workers on the question of war. A Labor Party would be an important instrument of education and action in the fight against war.⁴³

Fiorello LaGuardia declared enthusiastically for the new movement and sent his advisor Adolf Berle to address the Madison gathering.⁴⁴ Soon after, a mass meeting for the National Progressives in Chicago was addressed by Daniel Hoan, Homer Martin, Maynard Krueger, and Marx Lewis of the Social Democratic Federation.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the response to this new Farmer-Labor agitation was lackluster. Almost as soon as Philip LaFollette launched his organization, he was denounced by the New Deal/Popular Front camp as a potential fascist.

This denunciation was largely based on LaFollette's innocent but woeful choice of insignia for his organization: an "x" signifying the multiplication symbol, to represent ever-increasing economic productivity, inside a circle to symbolize the equality of all Americans at the ballot box. At any other moment in history this would not have seemed threatening, however peculiar, but in 1938 it was all too easy for it to be portrayed, in the words of one opponent, as "a circumcised swastika." Even among other leading Wisconsin Progressives, only Thomas Amlie was behind LaFollette with any enthusiasm.⁴⁶ The cohabitation of the LaFollette machine and the Milwaukee Socialists was also becoming strained, with the aging Frederic Heath complaining, "We have permitted a new party to come into our field, lure our membership away by lower dues and run us out of business in our own wards."⁴⁷ Daniel Hoan, after two decades as mayor of Milwaukee, also chafed at the prospect of higher office after allying with LaFollette failed to materialize.⁴⁸ Still others regarded the National Progressives of America as little more than a vehicle for LaFollette to test the waters for a presidential run in 1940.⁴⁹

The one chance for there yet to emerge a Farmer-Labor Party at this late hour was for the Socialists to consolidate their tenuous support in the CIO and rally these forces behind the National Progressives. But the Communists could easily neutralize any Socialist pockets of strength, demonstrated most vividly when the Southern Tenant Farmers Union was admitted into the CIO. A Communist union organizer named Donald Henderson secured a CIO charter for his United Cannery and Agricultural Workers, which welcomed the struggling STFU into its ranks. To marginalize the influence of the Socialists, Henderson demanded that the tenant farmers pay dues they simply could not afford. The Communists also gained from the collapse of Commonwealth College amidst the violent repression of the STFU; its remains absorbed by the Highlander School in eastern Tennessee, largely though never completely Communist and for a time all but directly run by the CIO. By 1939, STFU founders H. L. Mitchell and Ernest McKinney were fleeing back into the AFL, becoming the agricultural division of the Amalgamated Meat

Cutters led by Patrick Gorman, a sympathetic old Socialist who strove to maintain the party's legacy in the AFL in the postwar era.⁵⁰

But of greatest significance were the events in the UAW. The Communists were gaining momentum in their efforts to depose Homer Martin despite alienating such allies as Walter Reuther along the way. In response, the earnest but ineffectual Martin was encouraged by his Lovestoneite advisors to take desperate measures against them. In June, he suspended five members of the UAW executive council, including Richard Frankenstein, Wyndham Mortimer, and George Addes, citing their varying allegiance to the Communist Party. For a time this action reversed Reuther's drift away from the Communists—the extent of his relationship with the Communist Party in this period through early 1939 remains controversial, yet Reuther's path from 1930s radicalism to the leadership of Cold War liberalism tracked with his fellow Militants almost precisely.⁵¹ Shortly after the suspensions Reuther announced the formation of a “middle of the road” caucus. Professing a third way between Martin and the Communists, it was really a daring attempt by the young Reuther to capture the UAW presidency himself.

The Socialists were hopelessly divided over the developments in the UAW. Ben Fischer, secretary of the Detroit SP local, was Reuther's strongest party ally, if at times wary of the extent of his dealings with the Communists.⁵² They shared a deep-seated antipathy toward Homer Martin, deploring the entreaties of ILGWU Socialists to line up with the Lovestoneites.⁵³ The most important support for Reuther and Fischer came from the *Socialist Call*, little more than a megaphone for the personal prejudices of its reckless young editor Gus Tyler, who was so strident and vindictive that the *Call* was formally repudiated by the formal SP caucus in the UAW.⁵⁴ Indeed, the majority of the Socialist Party remained sympathetic, if no longer uncritical, toward Martin and his supporters, with Labor and Organization Secretary Frank Trager pleading, “In such a crisis as this the absence of firm, outspoken, critical leadership on our part may actually play into the hands of the crazy decision of Martin and the more damaging disruption brought about by the Frankenstein-Mortimer-CP group.”⁵⁵

The Communists retook the offensive against Martin in August, when a UAW paper they controlled published extensive correspondence between Martin, his advisors, and Jay Lovestone. Lovestone charged that the correspondence was seized in a burglary ordered by Soviet intelligence, and decades later FBI files would reveal how the elaborate heist was orchestrated by the highest echelons of the Communist Party USA.⁵⁶ Whichever side prevailed, disaster loomed for the UAW, and thus Walter Reuther appealed to the CIO leadership to intervene and take the union into receivership. His brother Roy, now a member of the SP National Executive Committee, used his influence to bring the party behind these efforts.⁵⁷ Both Reuther and the Communists urged intervention by Lewis, each mistakenly believing they would thereby be installed at the head of the UAW.

It was in 1938 that the Communist Party, through the Popular Front, unambiguously surpassed the Socialist Party as the dominant force on the American left, which meant the decisive defeat of any genuine radical alternative to the New Deal. Several trends developing for the better part of the decade came to a head that year, but the decisive struggle was for leadership of the UAW. The peace that was ultimately imposed on the UAW confirmed the pervasive yet limited influence of the Communists in the CIO for the decade ahead, and when a more mature Walter Reuther won the UAW presidency after the Second World War and proceeded to purge the Communists, it set the tone for the entire CIO as the Cold War began. Indeed, the Communist triumph over its opponents on the left soon proved pyrrhic, barely a year later all but completely undone by the Hitler-Stalin pact.

The year 1938 also saw the collapse of what remained of the progressive bloc in Congress, which was seen as providing the foundation for a Farmer-Labor Party before 1936. Philip LaFollette lost reelection in Wisconsin, as did the Communist ally Elmer Benson in Minnesota. The House delegations of both the Wisconsin Progressives and Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party were all but completely wiped out. Robert LaFollette Jr. remained in the Senate, as did Ernest Lundeen and Henrik Shipstead from Minnesota, but in 1940 Lundeen was killed in a plane

crash and Shipstead sought his final term in the Senate as a Republican. The Socialists were without representation in the Wisconsin legislature for the first time in more than three decades. Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson had been voted out of the Pennsylvania legislature two years earlier, and the last Socialist legislators in Connecticut would be gone in 1940. The absence of a Farmer-Labor Party to appeal to the widespread dissatisfaction with the New Deal in 1938, leading to large Republican gains by default, represented a watershed in the consolidation of the two-party system.

The *fait accompli* came in February 1939 when John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman appointed the unassuming UAW vice president R. J. Thomas to replace Homer Martin under their *de facto* receivership, frustrating the ambitions of both the Communists and Walter Reuther. The bold UAW takeover attempt by William Weinstone had been an unqualified disaster, with William Z. Foster sternly reprimanded by the Comintern for daring to disrupt the united front with the CIO leadership.⁵⁸ But most devastated was Homer Martin, who had worked for genuine labor radicalism in the era of the Popular Front and led his most loyal supporters back into the AFL, followed shortly by Dubinsky and the ILGWU.⁵⁹ The Lovestoneites, whatever their reckless ways and other failings, were victims of criminal Communist sabotage with the tacit support of certain Socialists—an eerily analogous fate with that of their comrades in Catalonia.

Thus, by the end of 1938, it was obvious how the Communists had succeeded in dividing and conquering the Socialist movement, leading both the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Federation to make moves toward reconciliation. As early as September 1938, the question of reunification was considered by a gathering of the SDF, but both Abraham Cahan and Joseph Shaplen were present to thwart it. Nevertheless, a Unity Committee consisting of Jasper McLevy, Louis Waldman, and Sarah Limbach responded favorably to a solicitation from SP executive secretary Roy Burt.⁶⁰ Most SDF stalwarts were now increasingly at odds with the *Forward* machine, which had completely consolidated its control

of *The New Leader* after a disillusioned James Oneal resigned at the end of 1937: both publications were now indistinguishable from the right wing of New Deal liberalism. Yet *The New Leader* continued to operate out of the Rand School building off the southwest corner of Union Square, as Norman Thomas based his operations off the northeast corner in the far less grand office of the League for Industrial Democracy, which by 1937 had been reduced to a pacifist rump of his oldest and closest collaborators. Thomas literally lived in this office much of the time while his devoted wife Violet bred cocker spaniels at their home in Cold Spring Harbor.

One confidence-building measure took place in California, where the battered SP worked with an SDF group led by Florence Kirkpatrick, widow of old-timer George Kirkpatrick, to prevent a Communist takeover of the Progressive Party of California. Left over from a centrist candidacy against Upton Sinclair in 1934, the Socialists thus secured a much-needed ballot line in the Golden State.⁶¹ In Reading, where Thomas and his former running mate James Maurer had agonized over finding themselves on opposite sides of the split, the Socialist organization successfully routed its Militant discontents and now supported unqualified reunification with the SP.⁶²

In New York, the cause of reunification suffered an irreparable loss with the sudden death of Charney Vladeck in 1938. But the SDF was increasingly desperate to prevent a Communist takeover of the American Labor Party. In December, the Socialists agreed to enter the ALP, with Thomas setting an optimistic tone as he declared to Louis Waldman, one of his bitterest adversaries in the late unpleasantness, "I, for one, need you for a real Labor Party."⁶³ Waldman led the charge for internal ALP democracy that was equally threatening to both the Communists and *Forward*-aligned labor leaders.⁶⁴ Even the Lovestoneites were working closely with Old Guard veterans in their efforts to beat back Communist advances in unions all across New York.⁶⁵ Major resistance to reunification came from Gus Tyler, whose extremist posturing continued to have a disproportionate impact through the *Socialist Call*.⁶⁶

Bertram Wolfe, Jay Lovestone's co-equal as leader of the Independent Labor League, wrote of his concerns about the interventionist leanings

of the SDF, but Thomas assured him that antiwar sentiment remained strong with such Old Guardsmen as James Maurer and Morrie Ryskind, who lauded the founding of the SDF in *The Nation* in 1936.⁶⁷ Indeed, the KAOWC was taking on solid organizational form in early 1939: John Flynn became national chairman; Clarence Senior the executive secretary; and Norman Thomas, A. Philip Randolph, Jay Lovestone, Joseph Schlossberg, and John Haynes Holmes were vice chairmen. Other prominent supporters in New York included A. J. Muste, Bertram Wolfe, Louis Nelson, Harry Laidler, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Rev. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Rabbi Isidor Hoffman, well-known Catholic radical Dorothy Day, and Randolph's co-founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Ashley Totten.

No presence was more auspicious than that of Randolph, having only in the past few years completed the twelve-year struggle for recognition by the Pullman Company. On the strength of that breakthrough, Randolph helped found the National Negro Congress, his first attempt to lay a foundation for the broader struggle for civil rights. But with his first duty being ever to his union, his lack of attention to the new organization allowed it to fall to a swift Communist takeover.⁶⁸ When Randolph denounced the Negro Congress and signed on with KAOWC, it marked the beginning of a courageous anti-Communist witness in the trying decade of the 1940s—the true foundation for the future civil rights movement. Among his protégés was the African American chairman of the Youth Committee Against War, James Farmer, a leader in the United Christian Youth Movement.⁶⁹

In the spring and summer of 1939, the soundness of a traditional antiwar program was taken for granted by all Socialists and was all the more satisfying with the hated Communists on the other side. But all that began to change on August 23, 1939, when it was announced that Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union had signed a nonaggression pact, what became popularly known as the Hitler-Stalin pact. Overnight, the Communist Party line changed to hysterical if half-hearted antiwar agitation,

and thousands who joined under the banner of the Popular Front left in disillusion; though American Communism never recovered, party membership remained in the neighborhood of 50,000 through the end of the 1940s. Eight days later, Hitler invaded Poland, divided it up with Stalin, and the Second World War began.

The first casualty for the Socialists was the prospect of unity with the SDF, though this was not immediately obvious. At its general membership meeting late in September, the SDF called for “a genuine neutrality in place of the false neutrality which now handicaps the democratic belligerents.”⁷⁰ But the New York leadership of the SDF was moving in an unmistakably interventionist direction. Propelled by the impassioned antiwar stand of Darlington Hoopes and the ailing James Maurer, the Reading organization would return to the SP alone.⁷¹ By October, Algernon Lee published a pamphlet with the SDF imprimatur, insisting, “It is silly when it is not willfully dishonest for anyone to call this a war between rival imperialisms.”⁷² Yet the level of interventionist zeal undeniably sprang from the fact that the Soviets were temporarily on the side of the fascists, with SDF speakers fond of using the term “Communazi.”⁷³ With the old Finnish Federation still an anchor of the SDF, no cause was closer to their hearts than the defense of Finland from the Red Army.⁷⁴

James Oneal joined Lee in unrestrained interventionist vitriol, directing much of it at such old comrades as Adolph Germer for colluding with “Nazi-Communists” in the CIO.⁷⁵ This hostility to the CIO was not new—Oneal had earlier denounced the Flint Sit-Down Strike for emulating the sabotage tactics of the IWW, while the superannuated Max Hayes, in his final years, was an outspoken defender of the AFL leadership against the CIO.⁷⁶ Indeed, the remaining old Socialists in the top echelons of the CIO, such as Germer, Emil Rieve, and Joseph Schlossberg, were by now resigned to the fate of the old cause, with little more to hope for than to at least keep the Communists in check. The SDF was now reduced to a small sect, with Algernon Lee and James Oneal joined by such nostalgic hangers-on as August Claessens and *Forward* operatives who deigned to humor them but kept them far from power. Oneal regularly

kept in touch with such aging comrades as Lena Morrow Lewis and Theodore Debs, who retained friends on all sides of the crackup but took most of his cues from fellow Terre Hautean Oneal.⁷⁷

With Lee and Oneal basing their sectarian stand on an outspoken interventionist platform, there were obvious parallels to the old Social Democratic League. Two aging veterans of the League, Charles Edward Russell and William J. Ghent, even nostalgically joined the SDF.⁷⁸ This may superficially suggest a pattern that culminated in neoconservatism, but the difference is crucial. On the one hand, in contrast to the principled conservative, the fact that “the right” tends to merely be the enemy of the left certainly goes far in explaining why so much of the right historically, from Mussolini to the neoconservatives, has been rooted in the left. Yet with few caveats, Lee and Oneal remained doctrinaire Marxists to their dying days, taking their movement, such as it was, with the utmost seriousness. Those who in later generations traced their ideological beginnings back to Lenin and Trotsky inherited from them a frank elitism and embrace of duplicity as a virtue, leading them ever further away from Marxism, if not from any principle whatsoever, in vast contrast to such fanatical and ossified ideologues.

By 1940, the last living remnant of American Socialism’s lost innocence was Oscar Ameringer. Generally distant from SP affairs, he nevertheless remained steadfastly loyal to the party through all the ups and downs of the Depression decade. His *American Guardian* had over forty thousand subscribers, but more from the two coasts than from Texas and Oklahoma.⁷⁹ In early 1940, his engrossing yet whimsical autobiography, *If You Don’t Weaken*, was published and widely reviewed. A foreword was contributed by Carl Sandburg, who had first known Ameringer as a reporter for the *Milwaukee Leader* and was now one of the most popular writers in America: “As a crusader, however, he is limited by the fact of being a philosopher and endowed with a sense of humor. Had this humor been lacking in Ameringer he might have become an American Gandhi, though possibly no Gandhi could get far in this country because of the

national sense of humor.”⁸⁰ The acclaim the book received was all the more remarkable for its unbowed commitment to staying out of the European war just as interventionist sentiment was aborning. As Oswald Garrison Villard wrote to Ameringer,

I have just read your grand book and am reviewing it for *The Nation*. It has made me long for a sight of you and a good talk, for I know how you feel about the present insanity, and you know where I stand. I have felt sure that this was coming with Roosevelt . . . but I never dreamed that he would do it so openly, boldly, and skillfully. It is a high-water mark of demagoguery and puts him on the highest plane ever reached by a man of his type. He makes Machiavelli look like thirty cents, and Bismarck just a common faker.⁸¹

Ameringer was almost unique in maintaining friendships on all sides of the crackup, from grizzled New York Old Guardsmen to his more left-wing comrades from the Illinois coal fields. Especially despondent over what had become of his beloved movement, he gave his last elegy to the old-time religion:

Old friends and comrades assail one another’s character and bloody one another’s noses over policies and tactics the correctness of which only trial and error can prove or disprove. Wings over Union Square. Right wings, left wings, winglets of wings, and most of them attached to dead birds. For the problem that cries for solution is an exclusively American problem. Nowhere and at no earlier time in all the history of the race have men suffered widespread want because there is abundance for all. This exclusive, new, and strictly American problem can neither be solved by theories spun in the Manchester or London of the long ago, nor by the new shibboleths and slogans emanating from the sick-beds of Europe. It can only be solved in America, in the American way of practical thinking, the ballot box, and a genuine love of country. We Americans must solve it.⁸²

Among Ameringer's oldest and dearest friends now at odds with him politically was Meta Berger. As early as 1938, she and four supporters in the Milwaukee SP were threatened with expulsion for supporting collective security.⁸³ Then, in the spring of 1940, a weary Daniel Hoan stepped down after twenty-four years as mayor of Milwaukee, making a few unsuccessful runs for statewide office as a Democrat before his death in 1961. Frank Zeidler, the energetic young secretary of the Milwaukee local, with the blessing of the SP national office proceeded with the grim task of expulsion proceedings against the widow of Victor Berger, who resigned before a scheduled hearing.⁸⁴ Rumored to be a secret Communist Party member, she was in any event a steadfastly loyal fellow traveler until her death in 1944.⁸⁵ Along with Leo Krzycki, she had built a large following for the Communist Party line among Milwaukee old-timers.⁸⁶ Their exit was an irreparable blow to the Milwaukee organization, followed in 1941 by the demise of the *Milwaukee Leader*. Frank Zeidler led the respectable remnant for another generation, but the citadel of Milwaukee, the pride and joy of American Socialism, had effectively imploded.

The national convention of the Socialist Party opened on April 6 at the National Press Club auditorium in Washington, DC, with the antiwar tone of the campaign set by new executive secretary Travers Clement, husband of California stalwart Lillian Symes. After the three major radio networks agreed to carry Norman Thomas's speech accepting the presidential nomination, Thomas was forced to decline the offer, because he refused to accept the nomination before the party platform was agreed to. The press core was bewildered, and one young reporter from Chicago declared then and there that she was voting for Thomas out of awe for his integrity.⁸⁷ At issue in the platform deliberations were objections of a small but vocal interventionist minority, led by Jack Altman, Paul Porter, and Gus Tyler. Altman was even publicly identifying with the Committee to Aid and Defend the Allies, founded by the aging 1912 Progressive William Allen White and directed by a young operative of Abraham Cahan named George Field.

The vote for the antiwar platform was not even close at 159 to 28, and the pro-war group resigned from the party before the end of the year. Gus Tyler improbably went to work for the ILGWU, ultimately rising to a vice presidency and capping his career more than a half-century later as an anodyne left-liberal op-ed columnist for the English *Forward*. The departure of the last of the Militants initially appeared to be compensated for by the letter of Jay Lovestone that effectively proposed a merger with the SP, based on “opposition to involvement of America in war and support to the antiwar movements of the warring countries, work for a united and democratically organized labor movement and independent political action of labor,” complete with the assertion, “Socialism is inseparable from freedom and democracy.”⁸⁸ As ever, Thomas was nominated by acclamation. Maynard Krueger, the young economics professor at the University of Chicago who never quite lived up to the expectations of future party leadership that both friend and foe held for him, was chosen as his running mate.

The anti-interventionism of the Socialist Party platform in 1940 could not have been stated more strongly:

The very existence of the Hitler regime is based on the kind of peace that the Allies effected at the close of the World War. Like war, fascism has its origins in capitalism. Both war and fascism spring from the failure of the capitalist economy to solve domestic problems and provide security for the masses of people. . . . Defeat of Hitler will be welcomed by all anti-fascists. But defeat of Hitler will mean the defeat of Hitlerism and a victory for democracy only if the roots of fascism and the war system are destroyed. The United States cannot contribute toward that end nor vindicate real democracy if it loses itself in the processes of war. If America enters the war, we shall be subjected to military dictatorship, the regimentation of labor and the ultimate economic collapse that must follow war. In an effort to “save democracy,” we shall have destroyed its only remaining citadel.⁸⁹

Yet two changes mandated by the 1940 convention set the SP on the path it would follow in its twilight. The first was a major change to the party's platform, unprecedented from the time of its founding. The old formula of "immediate demands" was scrapped, and specific policy proposals were woven into a declaration of principles. Substantively, the radical constitutional changes the party historically called for were no more, and its economic program was largely reduced to progressive taxation.⁹⁰ The second was the relocation of the national office, after thirty-five years, from Chicago to New York. Though there would be great political and organizational consequences of this move, the most immediate was the abandonment by the party of its papers going all the way back to its founding. It was thanks to the wastepaper dealer called in to clear out the office that these papers were saved; sold to a used book dealer named Leon Kramer, who then sold the papers of the Socialist Party of America to their unlikely home, Duke University.⁹¹

The fall of France in June 1940 led to the first setbacks for the Keep America Out of War Congress. Charles Zimmerman, the ILGWU leader still aligned with Lovestone, resigned, declaring himself for intervention.⁹² Lovestone himself began moving in this direction and ultimately led a majority of his followers against Bertram Wolfe, who remained a pacifist and fiercely loyal to the Socialist Party throughout the 1940s.⁹³ Though Lovestone, Wolfe, and their chief propagandist Will Herberg were all listed on the Independent Committee for Thomas in 1940, their organization was dissolved at the end of the year.⁹⁴ The nominations by the major parties further complicated the picture. FDR successfully maneuvered his way into being "drafted" for a third term, while the Republicans, desperate to have a candidate who could simply make a respectable showing, engineered the nomination of an obscure businessman (and son of a one-time Socialist) named Wendell Willkie. Both Roosevelt and Willkie campaigned against direct intervention in Europe but for such militarist policies as peacetime conscription.

The final traces of the decade-long agony over a potential labor party were kicked over by the ALP in New York. The party's New Deal

managers shrewdly used the war to take up the anti-Communist cause as a means to neutralize any movement for internal democracy.⁹⁵ The Socialists found themselves completely marginal to the farce that played out when a strong anti-Communist resolution was passed with the votes of the Communists themselves, only allowing them to stay in the ALP and consolidate their power in it.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, John L. Lewis, as a strident anti-interventionist, dramatically broke with FDR and Sidney Hillman. Lewis hoped in the beginning of 1940 to deliver the Democratic nomination to an old Socialist favorite, Senator Burton Wheeler.⁹⁷ Wheeler, who worked closely with the KAOWC, was still being talked about when the Democratic convention opened, counting among his biggest boosters the *New York Daily News* of Joseph Medill Patterson, campaign manager for Eugene Debs in 1908 and “millionaire socialist” celebrity of a bygone era. But Wheeler was up for reelection to the Senate, recording in his memoirs that he cast his ballot that year for Norman Thomas.⁹⁸

Throughout the summer, Lewis made noises about drafting Wheeler onto a third-party ticket.⁹⁹ Lewis’s radical posturing peaked with a rousing anti-militarist speech at the UAW convention that August:

Build up a gigantic military instrumentality and quarter it upon the people under a Roosevelt or under any other President, call it a defensive mechanism, but sooner or later will come a Chief Executive, a man on horseback, who will believe this instrumentality is not a defensive instrument but an offensive instrumentality that will carry out his imperialistic dreams and conceptions.¹⁰⁰

But Lewis, who had resisted any move toward a labor party when the moment was ripe as he was founding the CIO, quelled any such talk just after the speech to the UAW. Socialists in the UAW such as Victor Reuther and new NEC member Leonard Woodcock noted the enthusiastic response to Lewis at the convention, reporting that there was no greater applause line than the call for a Labor Party, and felt that it represented enduring opportunities in the UAW and CIO.¹⁰¹ However, Lewis

endorsed Wendell Willkie the week before the election and resigned as president of the CIO when FDR was reelected, succeeded by Steelworkers leader Philip Murray. Labor historians have traditionally portrayed sentiment in the CIO for Lewis's antiwar stand as the shallow and opportunistic posturing of the Communists during the period of the Hitler-Stalin pact. This certainly occurred, and Lewis largely welcomed it with characteristic recklessness, but to so reduce it maligns the enduring radicalism of the Socialists and many others. The KAOWC denounced the Communist front of the Hitler-Stalin pact period, the American Peace Mobilization, a sectarian pariah to virtually all anti-interventionists, in no uncertain terms.¹⁰²

Virtually alone among surviving founding members of the SP to campaign for Thomas was James Graham, still serving as president of the Montana AFL and thus, after forty years, the last remnant of the historic Socialist bloc in the AFL.¹⁰³ With Graham's blessing, Thomas endorsed the campaign of Jeanette Rankin to return to Congress after twenty-two years, having been nominated by the Montana Republicans to force out the frank Hitlerite Jacob Thorkelson who snuck into the House in the Republican sweep of 1938.¹⁰⁴ Other pacifist allies resurfacing from another era included Lola Maverick Lloyd, who with her son and such other SP friends as Harry Elmer Barnes led a "campaign for world government."¹⁰⁵ In September, the organization was founded that would overshadow the KAOWC, the more conservative America First Committee. Yet from the beginning, KAOWC enjoyed the support not only of such traditional Socialist allies as Burton Wheeler and Gerald Nye but also of more conservative politicians like Missouri Senator Bennett Clark and New York Congressman Hamilton Fish.¹⁰⁶

The Independent Committee for Thomas and Krueger, led by Lillian Symes, was distinguished by the presence of A. Philip Randolph, John Dewey, Sidney Hook, A. J. Muste, and leading pacifists George Hartmann and Milton Mayer. The Committee was also graced by no fewer than four rabbis, including Isidor Hoffman, who founded the Jewish Peace Fellowship, and Stanley Brav, who served as SP state secretary in Mississippi from his pulpit in Vicksburg. After Thomas

attacked Roosevelt on conscription, the president publicly upbraided Thomas for “the grossly unfair suggestion that I am in favor of some form of conscription because of the executive power which it gives to me personally.” Not long after, the *Army and Navy Register* called for Thomas to be arrested, and the American Legion fought to prevent Thomas from speaking in Carbondale, Illinois.¹⁰⁷ The most forthright statement of the campaign may have come from the new chairman of the YPSL, Judah Drob:

The talk about a national government, a coalition cabinet, a Roosevelt-Willkie ticket in the 1940 elections, is a dangerous prelude to the familiar European sacred union in which all the forces of the government are massed against the people who stand out against the government policy (which may be war, or just preparation for war). The huge armaments program is a prelude to the lowering of living and wage standards. . . . The tide is running toward war and totalitarianism, not against. Only the most determined work on our part, and on the part of a mass of workers and farmers who do not yet see all the implications of their present plight, can stem the tide.¹⁰⁸

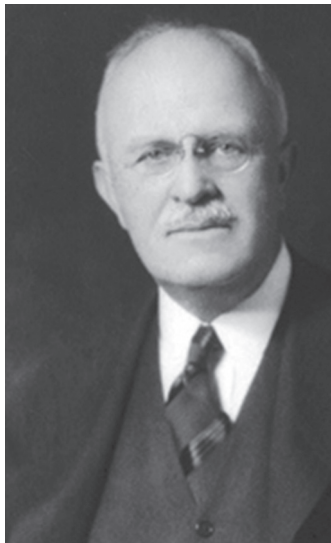
With Franklin Roosevelt comfortably elected to an unprecedented third term, the only serious antiwar candidate in the race, Norman Thomas, received a pathetic 117,326 votes. Nearly the entire decrease from his 1936 vote total came from New York, and only in Wisconsin could he muster 1 percent of the vote. In a sign of the effect of the militarization of American politics on U.S. democracy, Thomas and Krueger were kept off the ballot in an unprecedented nineteen of the forty-eight states, with write-in votes counted in only four. There was no doubting that American Socialism had reached its lowest ebb.

Many contemporary Americans would no doubt find the warnings of Norman Thomas and the Socialist Party about the danger of an American fascism arising out of the “good war” against fascism ridiculous, if not appalling and outrageous. It is well that the word “fascism” is widely regarded in the twenty-first century as an anti-concept, as George

Orwell early recognized, designating little more than something not desirable. But it is necessary to appreciate what it was that the non-Communist American left of the 1930s, however problematically, knew and feared by the name of fascism—in short, the permanent war economy as the solution to the chronic crisis of American capitalism and a greatly restricted polity to ensure its continuance. This, indeed, was wrought by American participation in the Second World War and was necessary to assure the superpower status of the United States. That a formal two-party system would remain, legally entrenched as never before, would hardly have surprised the Socialists. That dissent would be subdued by more subtle and sophisticated means than the totalitarian state would not have altered their view either. The Socialist Party and its forebears had waged a long twilight struggle against this eventuality for a half-century. On the eve of American entry into the Second World War, all that remained were a few final rearguard actions.



33. Norman Thomas and James Maurer, the Socialist presidential ticket of 1928 and 1932. Tamiment Library, New York University



34. (*top*) Abraham J. Muste, founder of Brookwood Labor College, where much of the historic Socialist base regrouped after the collapse of hopes associated with the LaFollette campaign. Muste later led the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Swarthmore College Peace Collection

35. (*bottom*) Oswald Garrison Villard, close pacifist collaborator of Thomas and Muste, helped organize efforts to revive the Progressive coalition of 1924 in the early 1930s. Wikimedia Commons



36. Morris Hillquit in his final years. Tamiment Library, New York University



37. Norman Thomas (standing at right) speaking to a typical crowd of youthful admirers in his historic 1932 presidential campaign. Tamiment Library, New York University



Socialist Mayors of the 1930s

38. *(top left)* Jasper McLevy of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Bridgeport Public Library

39. *(top right)* Daniel Hoan of Milwaukee. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-97271

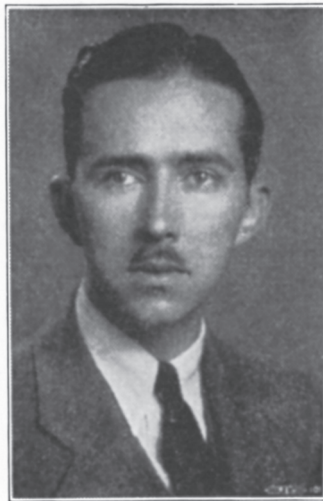
40. *(bottom)* J. Henry Stump of Reading, Pennsylvania. Berks County Historical Society



41. Abraham Cahan, the powerful editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward* who went back to the earliest roots of the American Socialist movement. The Socialist Party was principally subsidized by *The Forward* throughout the 1920s, but Cahan and his loyalists were preparing to break with the party as early as 1930. Wikimedia Commons



42. Leo Krzycki, whose unlikely ascent as the ceremonial national chairman of the Socialist Party was orchestrated by Cahan and his allies, proved to be a Communist fellow traveler. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-97272



43. (*top*) Devere Allen, an old peace movement friend of Norman Thomas, drafted the “Declaration of Principles” for the 1934 Socialist Party convention that ignited the party’s implosion. Swarthmore College Peace Collection

44. (*bottom*) Clarence Senior, executive secretary of the Socialist Party for most of the 1930s, was an ally of the tempestuous “Militant” faction. Courtesy of Tim Davenport



Socialist Vice-Presidential Candidates of the 1930s

45. (*top*) George Nelson, 1936. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-83106

46. (*bottom*) Maynard Kreuger, 1940. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library



The leading labor movement allies of the Socialist Party in the early and late 1930s, respectively.

47. (*top*) Emil Rieve of the Textile Workers. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

48. (*bottom*) Homer Martin of the United Auto Workers. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University



49. Ernest McKinney, H. L. Mitchell, and Howard Kester, youthful Socialist leaders of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



50. Norman Thomas, an outspoken opponent of entering the Second World War until Pearl Harbor, headlines the America First Committee rally at Madison Square Garden in May 1941. Also pictured (left to right) are Burton Wheeler, Charles Lindbergh, and Kathleen Norris. © Norman Thomas/Corbis



51. (*top*) Oscar Ameringer in the 1930s, a “living shrine” to the old movement. Courtesy of the estate of Freda Hogan Ameringer

52. (*bottom*) Harry Fleischman, executive secretary of the Socialist Party in the 1940s, was a fiercely loyal Thomas protégé. Courtesy of Peter N. Fleischman

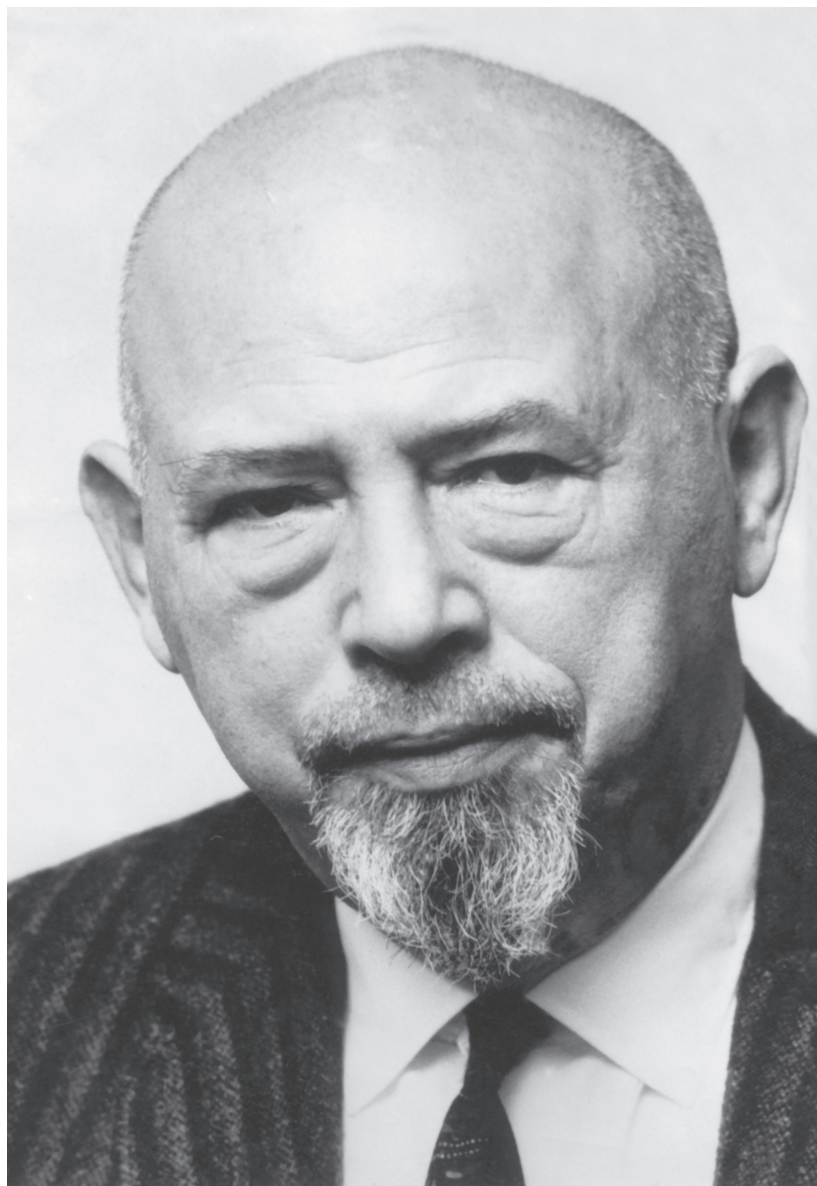


53. (top) Norman Thomas, in his final presidential campaign in 1948, with running mate Tucker Smith. AP Photo

54. (bottom) Frank Zeidler, hoisted in the air by jubilant supporters on the night of his unlikely election as mayor of Milwaukee in 1948. Courtesy of the Socialist Party Archives of Steve Rossignol



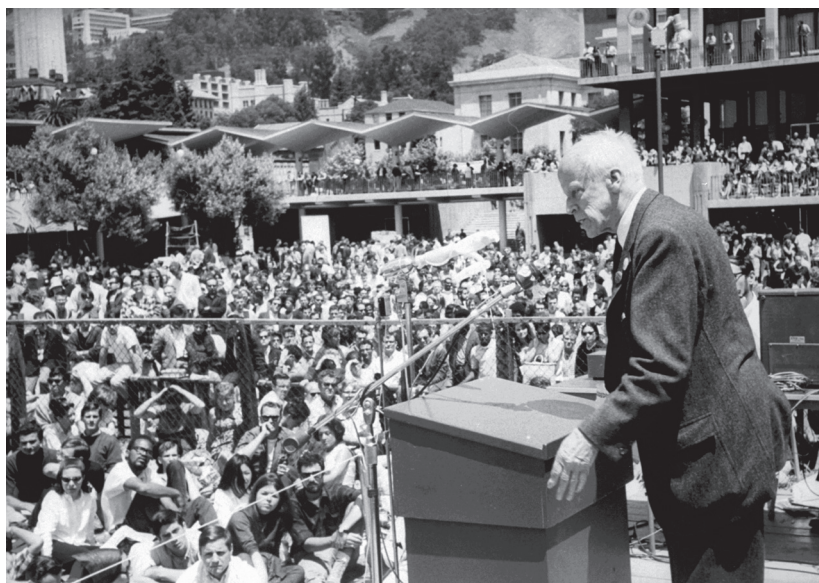
55. Darlington Hoopes, the token presidential candidate of 1952 and 1956, was nominated over the objection of Norman Thomas and others. Picture File, Box 13, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University



56. Max Shachtman in the 1960s. The followers of the former confidant of Leon Trotsky swiftly took over what remained of the Socialist Party at the end of the 1950s, though Shachtman himself remained reclusive until his death in 1972. Tamiment Library, New York University



57. Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph, organizers of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, intimately linked the rump Socialist Party to the leadership of the civil rights movement. Schomburg Center, New York Public Library



58. Norman Thomas speaks to an admiring crowd at “Vietnam Day” at the University of California-Berkeley in 1965. Thomas was deeply committed to the antiwar movement in his final years, but he lamented “the tendency . . . to appear more interested in a Communist victory in Vietnam than in a constructive peace.” Leonard McCombe, The LIFE Picture Collection, Getty Images



59. Virgil Vogel and Harry Siitonen, leading figures in the “Debs Caucus” that organized against the Socialist Party majority after 1968. The majority, dominated by followers of Max Shachtman, supported the Humphrey-Jackson wing of the Democratic Party and violently despised the antiwar movement. Courtesy of Harry Siitonen



60. (*top*) Carl Gershman, who effectively transformed what remained of the Socialist Party into an Israeli propaganda agency around 1970. Jay Lovestone Papers, Hoover Institution Archives

61. (*bottom*) Tom Kahn, one of Max Shachtman's "children," as director of the AFL-CIO International Affairs Department in the 1980s. Wikimedia Commons



62. Michael Harrington, about the time his Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee peaked in influence in the 1970s. Courtesy of Maxine Phillips



63. David McReynolds, presidential candidate of the re-formed Socialist Party USA in 1980, with running mate Diane Drufenbrock, a Franciscan nun. Portraits of Debs and Thomas look on from behind. Courtesy of the Socialist Party Archives of Steve Rossignol

14 Not to the Swift

(1941–1948)

A few days after his 1940 reelection, Franklin Roosevelt wrote to Norman Thomas that he was “worried about the trend of undemocratic forces in this country,” with apparent confidence that any man of the left could be persuaded to accept his definition thereof.¹ But this confidence about Thomas and the majority of his collaborators since the First World War proved to be misplaced. On January 6, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation and announced his “Lend-Lease” proposal, asking Congress to invest him with the unchecked power to provide unlimited military assistance to Great Britain short of a declaration of war. In subsequent testimony before Congress, Thomas denounced the terms and implications of the Lend-Lease bill as “so belligerent that even a German who hated Hitler could not support it.”² He immediately received a torrent of supportive correspondence. The fierce anti-interventionist Harry Elmer Barnes wrote that thanks to Thomas he had found his voice.³ Another glowing tribute came from a superannuated J. A. H. Hopkins, who prefaced his letter declaring himself “opposed to war in any form.”⁴

This letter from one of the more tragic figures in the Farmer-Labor drama of the 1920s underscored how the movement against intervention, particularly as represented by the America First Committee, was a tragic reflection of what might have been: a progressive-isolationist major party, built on the foundation of American Socialism, that could have kept the United States a republic and not an empire. Amos Pinchot, Hopkins’s collaborator of days gone by, was prominent in the leadership

of America First, and Alfred Bingham of the more recent Farmer-Labor drama was an active propagandist. The leading isolationist publishers had in their youth been the hope of the Socialist heyday for ascent to major-party status. Joseph Medill Patterson, founder and publisher of the *New York Daily News* and campaign manager for the fondly remembered “Red Special” in 1908, was a staunch New Dealer until the gathering of the war clouds. If his flamboyant cousin, *Chicago Tribune* publisher Robert McCormick, was more conservative, this was more a function of Republican partisanship than ideology. Closer in sensibility was his sister, *Washington Times-Herald* publisher Eleanor “Cissy” Patterson. And the major political spokesmen were such senators with roots in Socialist fellow-traveling progressivism as Burton Wheeler, Gerald Nye, Rush Holt, Homer Bone, and Henrik Shipstead.

Contrary to its enduring portrayal as an arch-conservative curiosity, the America First Committee was initiated in the fall of 1940 by R. Douglas Stuart, a Yale Law graduate who aspired to work in New Deal Washington. Its chairman, retired general and Sears-Roebuck chairman Robert Wood, was an outspoken New Dealer until he opposed Roosevelt’s campaign for a third term.⁵ KAOWC stalwarts such as John Flynn and Oswald Garrison Villard rushed to support America First, but there were important differences that separated the two groups. Making its case on the imperative to build an “impregnable defense” to deter potential aggression against the United States, the America First Committee was on record in support of peacetime conscription, if at times ambiguously, but still an irreconcilable difference with the Socialist Party and KAOWC. This difference was reinforced by the business community friends whom Wood recruited to America First, many of whom may have joined for little other reason than fear of a return to the labor regime of the First World War. Still, an internal Socialist Party memo on the America First Committee praised many of these businessmen for their labor records.⁶

Although KAOWC and American First remained separate organizations because of these programmatic differences, Norman Thomas favored close cooperation and joint action between the two groups. This policy was first implemented with a joint rally in New York on February 20,

featuring Thomas, John Flynn, and Senators Wheeler and Nye, which netted several thousand dollars for America First. Remaining in the national leadership of KAOWC, Flynn served as chairman of the New York chapter of the America First Committee; a position in which he was welcomed and entrusted by Wood and Stuart to keep out genuine pro-fascists, a task he performed with particular zeal. A small contingent of anti-Semites led by a well-known agitator named Joe McWilliams made its presence known at this rally before being booted by Flynn.⁷ At Flynn's urging, two bright young Jewish Socialists took important staff positions with America First: Sidney Hertzberg as publicity director in the national office in Chicago and James Lipsig as secretary of the Washington office.⁸ Indeed, professional anti-Semites attacked America First for its "New Deal tendencies" and for receiving support from such Jews as Wood's friend and predecessor at Sears-Roebuck, Lessing Rosenwald.⁹

As the debate over intervention rose to fever pitch in early 1941, Dorothy Thompson, a leading press partisan of the Committee to Aid and Defend the Allies, attacked Thomas with the assertion, "This is not an imperialist war except on the side of the Axis." Thomas bluntly responded,

It is clothed, to be sure, in beautiful and glowing words. It is the "American century" of Henry Luce, the "American destiny" of Dorothy Thompson, but the words merely clothe in language the nakedness of imperial ambition. The English-speaking nations are to police in God's name such places as we think necessary for our advantage, doing justice, as that British Nazi poet, Rudyard Kipling, told us was our duty, to the "lesser breeds without the law."¹⁰

In direct response to Thomas's pronouncements in the Lend-Lease debate, several former SP Militants launched a new organization, the Union for Democratic Action (UDA), committed in its words to "a two-front fight for democracy—at home and abroad." Reinhold Niebuhr, one of the earliest SP Militants to openly declare for collective security, was the group's chairman. Other Militant veterans present at its creation

were Jack Altman, Andrew Biemiller, Paul Porter, and Paul Douglas. Historically Socialist labor leaders who lent their names to the UDA included A. Philip Randolph, Abraham Lefkowitz, H. L. Mitchell, Frank Crosswaith, and Ashley Totten.¹¹ Many who joined the UDA remained members of the Socialist Party and may not have been passionate on the question of intervention—Ashley Totten even remained with the KAOWC. A former young Socialist named James Loeb was named executive secretary of UDA and wrote Norman Thomas urging that the UDA and the SP continue to regard each other “in the most considerate and comradely terms.”¹² Indicating his agreement, Thomas confided to Loeb his usually concealed fatalism about world events:

I still take a very gloomy view of the outcome. I do not think either you or we will greatly effect events. I still think we shall get into a war of indefinite duration after which there will be a type of reaction which I hate to contemplate. I think Randolph Bourne’s famous simile about the child on the back of the wild elephant applies to your efforts. Ours perhaps are like the same child on the road trying to steer the elephant. The war is going to be run, it is now quite clear to me, by people a good deal more like Claude Pepper than like Reinhold Niebuhr.¹³

After the 1940 election, there was no serious internal dissension in the Socialist Party on the war question. Two members of the NEC, Frank Trager and Leonard Woodcock, resigned in early 1941 without fanfare.¹⁴ But there were also those entering the party such as Bertram Wolfe, Dwight Macdonald, and James T. Farrell who remained strongly antiwar even as they shed the vestiges of earlier revolutionary socialism. This group also included Freda Utley, the granddaughter of an English collaborator of Marx and Engels who had settled in the Soviet Union before the disappearance of her husband in Stalin’s purges. The book she published on settling in America, *The Dream We Lost*, was the one to which Norman Thomas referred all inquirers in this period for his view on Stalin and Soviet Communism.¹⁵

Some might argue that the devastating factionalism of 1934–1936 merely got out of the way the dissension that would have inevitably occurred when the party faced U.S. entry into the Second World War. But a compromise would not have been inconceivable on what remained the one matter of substantive disagreement—the question of aid to Britain short of war. Virtually no one in the anti-interventionist camp was indifferent to the plight of Britain; even Robert Wood of the America First Committee endorsed Herbert Hoover’s argument for aid short of direct military aid.¹⁶ Frank Zeidler and his Milwaukee organization urged Thomas to adopt a similar position.¹⁷ Moreover, by the time Lend-Lease passed Congress in March 1941, the possibility of an unequivocal British defeat had passed, with Nazi Germany overextended in both Europe and Africa. Anti-interventionists felt this demonstrated that the real purpose of Lend-Lease was a power-grab by the Roosevelt administration, the beginning of the decade-long march toward virtually unchallenged presidential war-making powers in the postwar era.¹⁸ That so many former SP Militants so firmly took their stand in favor of Lend-Lease, without considering any constructive alternative, revealed their fundamental interest to be the aggrandizement of power. This was both the inheritance of their 1930s Communist fellow traveling and a defining feature of the Cold War liberalism they were beginning to invent.

To be sure, the great majority of aging Old Guardsmen were also in the interventionist camp, but while many were active with the Committee to Aid and Defend the Allies, others were more circumspect, as illustrated by the letter of Jacob Panken to Burton Wheeler on the eve of the fall of France. Emphasizing his continued admiration for Wheeler, the loss of America’s freedom of the seas, and the possibility of the British government being forced to flee to Canada, Panken wrote much more in sorrow than in anger, with no anticipation of the myth of “the good war” that was to come.¹⁹ Nor was there any mention, as was generally the case in the debate before Pearl Harbor, of any moral imperative to save the Jews from Hitler, which became the war’s *ex post facto* rationale. Indeed, Hitler only ordered the Final Solution after the United States

entered the war. Until then, the Allies simply had no concept of what they were dealing with—a hostage situation, in which a psychopath held millions of Jews captive and proceeded to systematically slaughter them at the expense of the rational end of winning the war.

On May 23, 1941, the America First Committee packed Madison Square Garden to capacity, with another ten thousand listening on the sound system outside.²⁰ The biggest draw that evening was Charles Lindbergh, the most visible spokesman for America First though he never formally became a member. Thomas and other Socialists enthusiastically welcomed Lindbergh to their side, cherishing the memory of his father's heroic stand during the First World War. One loyal Socialist, Morris Milgram, argued at great length on Lindbergh's behalf with his wife, who was sold on the line that Lindbergh was a potential fascist "man on horseback," though apparently she at least partly came around after hearing him speak.²¹ This notion that Lindbergh, a conventional Republican, was a fascist sprang from a speech in April 1941 by Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, who also leveled the charge against John Flynn and Oswald Garrison Villard. Lindbergh was joined on stage by Norman Thomas and Burton Wheeler. Thomas had been invited just days earlier to join the America First Committee executive, but declined in keeping with his earlier position on their principled differences.²²

There was no shortage of outraged reactions to Thomas's cooperation with America First. Bertha Maily, the aging Rand School secretary who had moved from Tennessee in the Socialist Party's earliest years, sent Thomas a terse telegram declaring herself "deeply surprised you allow your name associated with Communists and Fascists."²³ The ever-melodramatic James Oneal issued a press release on behalf of the shriveled Social Democratic Federation: "Mr. Thomas is a lost leader. He does not represent the democratic ideals of Social Democracy. He has been repudiated at the polls by his former supporters and by the overwhelming majority of former members of his party. His new allies are blind appeasers, the quitters and quislings, and the fifth columnists of Moscow and Berlin."²⁴ But Thomas was unbowed after receiving a standing ovation at

the Garden for his repudiation of anti-Semitic and pro-Fascist support. "I had a chance before a vast audience to speak for a unity of brotherhood, against anti-Semitism, and these sentiments were applauded," he explained. "Where could I get a better chance to do the same sort of work?"²⁵

Meanwhile, the Keep America Out of War Congress hardly slowed in its efforts with the dramatic rise of America First. John Flynn remained national chairman even as most of his energies went to America First. Mary Hillyer, a veteran of Norman Thomas's storied 1932 campaign, was now the executive secretary, and the vice chairmen now included Oscar Ameringer, Harry Elmer Barnes, and Morrie Ryskind. KAOWC held its national conference in Washington at the end of May. Senator Charles Tobey of New Hampshire joined Burton Wheeler and Jeanette Rankin, as well as such Socialist regulars as Devere Allen, Bertram Wolfe, Lillian Symes, A. J. Muste, Al Hamilton, James Farmer, Maynard Krueger, and Stanley Brav.²⁶ Then, on June 22, Hitler invaded Russia, and the anti-interventionists believed it a blessing: the two dictators would destroy each other, the public would be resistant to intervening on the side of the Soviet Union, and the annoyance of nominal Communist support for their side was no more. A newly optimistic Flynn was consulting with Gerald Nye as he planned Senate hearings to expose the pro-war agenda of Hollywood.²⁷

Norman Thomas, however, knew better, writing to Burton Wheeler of his alarm at the complacency of most America First leaders toward Roosevelt's increasingly apparent maneuvers to take the "back door to war" through the Pacific:

You people have been doing a grand job but there is one thing that worries me and that is the tendency of our folks to support Roosevelt's enormously dangerous policy in the Far East. Churchill . . . made it appear that the English were doing us a good turn in backing us in a quarrel with Japan. Actually Roosevelt is pulling British chestnuts out of the fire. . . . We are going to fight for Singapore and the Dutch East Indies, I suppose on the theory that we may be senior partner in empire. . . . I am afraid a gullible public is going to

swallow this criminal Far Eastern policy. If we go to war over empire in southeastern Asia, neither our descendants nor history will grant forgiveness to those responsible.²⁸

Wheeler assured Thomas of his full agreement and that he knew firsthand from his sources in Washington that the real danger was now of war with Japan.²⁹ (In the days just before Pearl Harbor, Wheeler would publish a cache of documents in the *Chicago Tribune* detailing the deliberate provocation of Japan by an oil embargo). Norman Thomas was especially sensitive, as few other Americans were, to the prospect of the United States being seen as taking up the white man's burden. All anti-interventionists were sympathetic to the independence movement in India, but Thomas had an especially long and close relationship with Sirdar Jagjit Singh, the official emissary of the Indian National Congress in New York.³⁰ Thomas also took an interest in the case of W. A. Domingo, the early collaborator of A. Philip Randolph who had long since returned to lead the independence movement in his native Jamaica, as the British cracked down on his party for urging resistance to the war effort.³¹

On September 11, 1941, Charles Lindbergh gave an ill-fated speech in Des Moines, Iowa, specifically naming "the British, the Jews, and the Roosevelt administration" as the three forces driving America to war. John Flynn was aghast when a colleague enthusiastically relayed the speech early the next morning, and at least three members of the America First Committee executive resigned in protest.³² The KAOWC issued a statement deploring the speech, though noting that Lindbergh had immediately qualified his remarks with a denunciation of Nazi treatment of the Jews.³³ In marked contrast to Flynn, Norman Thomas remained circumspect, insisting that Lindbergh was not an anti-Semite but "an awful idiot" who "made about as bad a mistake as could be made."³⁴ Nor were the Socialists oblivious to the potential ramifications of these cries of anti-Semitism. As Travers Clement wrote in the *Socialist Call*,

In answering charges of anti-Semitism hurled at Senator Wheeler, Frank Hanighen wrote that Wheeler was not an anti-Semite, but that

he was deeply disturbed by the familiar charge of the anti-Semites that “the Jews were getting us into the war,” that knowing very well that all Jews were not pro-war, he was angry at Jewish spokesmen who were conveying the impression that the Jews were completely united on this subject—thus playing into the hands of anti-Semites who claim that Jews function as “Jews,” as a tight, cohesive, group . . . he has been charged with “conscious or unconscious anti-Semitism” in *The New Republic*, which concludes its editorial thus—“whoever starts talking or writing about ‘the Jews’ has himself consciously or unconsciously caught the deadly virus of anti-Semitism.” . . . We believe that all thoughtful Jews will repudiate *The New Republic’s* inverted racism, just as thoughtful Negroes have repudiated the inverted Negro chauvinism promulgated by the Communists. The Socialist Party knows, without being assured from any outside source, that all Jews are not interventionists, for we have plenty of non-interventionist Jews in our ranks.³⁵

There were practical consequences of the Lindbergh speech for the SP. Louis Nelson, who remained a supporter of KAOWC, was unable to get his loyal ILGWU local to endorse the Socialist campaign in New York that fall.³⁶ Columbia professor George Hartmann earned, under the circumstances, a respectable 22,616 votes in his antiwar-themed campaign for mayor, as Fiorello LaGuardia, now squarely in the camp of the resurrected Popular Front, was comfortably elected to a third term. Yet neither Norman Thomas nor the Socialist Party severed their ties with America First after the Lindbergh speech, which were never formal to begin with.

The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, and the America First Committee executive hastily met to disband four days later. The KAOWC dissolved into a hastily formed Provisional Committee Towards a Democratic Peace, which Norman Thomas ultimately fashioned into the forum for his actions as a free agent for the remainder of his life, the Postwar World Council. KAOWC’s formal statement condemned “the crimes of Japan’s military clique,” but said the attack was ultimately

borne of generations of western imperialism.³⁷ Thomas was devastated; in the words of Harry Fleischman, “It was the irreparable defeat of his dearest hope—that the generation of his children should not know a world war.”³⁸ Thomas declared, “I see no escape from the choice: military success for the Axis or its enemies . . . we are in a literal hell but the deepest pit of all would be an Axis victory.”³⁹ It took considerable effort on his part to persuade an emergency meeting of the National Executive Committee just one day after Pearl Harbor to endorse his position of “critical support” for an Allied victory while standing firm against the inevitable outrages of wartime at home.

With the myth of “the greatest generation” having become a pillar of American culture itself, it has been banished from American historical memory that many of that generation were idealists of the non-Communist left, who until their country was attacked had opposed war on grounds not at all unlike later generations of radicals. (*In the course of researching this book, the author discovered that his grandfather, Stanley Ruttenberg, addressed a meeting of the KAOWC in his capacity as an assistant to John L. Lewis, and that his brother Harold, an important CIO figure in his own right, was a delegate to the 1935 conference for a Farmer-Labor Party and a signer of the 1938 letter to The Nation protesting its endorsement of collective security.*) One striking case is of a young Socialist named Emanuel Muravchik, who in a letter to John Flynn described himself and his wife as “Jewish-American isolationists” and even awkwardly spoke of “the America First Committee’s approach to the Jewish question.”⁴⁰ More than a half-century later, Muravchik responded with exasperation to an item in a small newsletter protesting the characterization of Norman Thomas as a pacifist. He insisted, “The opposition included pacifists but consisted primarily of those who regarded themselves as revolutionary or left socialists who still saw the war as an imperialist struggle between capitalist powers.”⁴¹

Thomas and the SP certainly did not take an absolute pacifist position against entering the war, but they echoed Lenin and Zimmerwald far less. Indeed, the Socialist-KAOWC position was in many ways closer to what could be fairly labeled “isolationism” than that of the America

First Committee. But the world was ended and begun again by the Second World War, so the isolationism of some young radicals was as conveniently forgotten as the Communist dalliances of others. It was the truest of believers in a great antifascist crusade, the old SP Militants, who stood to be vindicated. Their uniquely noxious notion that to oppose waging aggression abroad was “purely provincial selfishness,” in the words of one of the earliest statements of the Union for Democratic Action, became the core credo of the new American colossus.⁴²

The NEC accepted Thomas’s position of “critical support” in the immediate shock of Pearl Harbor, but the final word rested with the party’s regularly scheduled convention, which opened in Milwaukee on May 30, 1942. A small faction urging unqualified support for the war was led by Irving Barshop of New York, and an even smaller faction of antique avowed revolutionary socialists was based in Los Angeles. Three days of debate were consumed by the dispute in the broad center between “critical support” and “political non-support.” The latter stand was championed by outgoing executive secretary Travers Clement and such absolute pacifist allies as David Dellinger, prevailing on the floor by a vote of 52 to 50.⁴³ But the incoming executive secretary, Harry Fleischman, pleaded that the difference between the two positions in practice was meaningless. The ultimate convention resolution substantively adhered to the notion of critical support, with language giving greater emphasis to a general condemnation of war.⁴⁴ What little it mattered for the enfeebled party was illustrated in the fall by the plight of their candidate for governor of New York, Coleman Cheney. Drafted into the military no sooner than he was nominated, possibly by vindictive Democrats on the state draft board, he had to formally accept his nomination by a prerecorded message from an army base in Colorado.⁴⁵

Organized opposition to the war effort by the Marxist left was generally treated by the federal government with benign neglect. Probably the most outspokenly antiwar group was the following that Max Shachtman led out of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in 1940, believing that the Soviet Union under Stalin was no longer socialist after the Hitler-Stalin

pact and invasion of Finland. Their paper *Labor Action* was banned from the mails, which turned out to be a mere nuisance since it was more effectively distributed on industrial shop floors.⁴⁶ The exception proving the rule of benign neglect was the SWP, which continued to nominally support the military defense of the Soviet Union while denouncing the war as a capitalist war. The prosecution of the SWP, beginning before Pearl Harbor, was almost certainly done as a favor by Roosevelt to Teamsters Union president Daniel Tobin, one of his few intimate allies in the AFL who was eager to purge a formidable Trotskyist opposition.⁴⁷ Among the Shachtmanites, as early as 1942 a small group led by Philip Selznick split to join the Socialist Party and briefly published the journal *Enquiry*. The first issue's statement of political perspective was written by Lillian Symes, accompanied by an essay on W. H. Auden by a twenty-two-year old veteran of the City College radical hothouse named Irving Kristol.⁴⁸

Many white Socialists channeled their desire for protest into the movement launched by A. Philip Randolph in early 1941 for a "March on Washington" to ensure nondiscrimination in the war industries. Once enough time had passed after Pearl Harbor, Randolph reiterated his demands, complete with the call for a march, to a capacity crowd at Madison Square Garden. Only then did FDR issue an executive order for equal employment opportunity in war industries to prevent the threatened march.⁴⁹ Never content to rest on his laurels, Randolph refused to disband the movement, immediately pressing on with a call for the desegregation of the military.⁵⁰ Dwight Macdonald was the most active and enthusiastic white radical to serve the movement, seeing it as a means to oppose both the war effort and the Communists.⁵¹ During one trip to Washington with Randolph in 1943, Macdonald made an unannounced visit before dawn to a young Socialist working for the War Production Board named Morris Weisz, frantic about whether he could get around paper rationing in order to secure enough newsprint to start a new publication.⁵² With his help, Macdonald was able to launch *Politics* the following year and so establish himself as one of the great cultural critics of the twentieth century.

Though Randolph resigned from KAOWC to launch the March on Washington movement, the future civil rights movement was firmly rooted in that group, with James Farmer, Ashley Totten, and George Schuyler (who even attacked Randolph as insufficiently radical at the height of his wartime agitation) active to the end.⁵³ A prominent Communist fellow traveler in the NAACP, Charlotta Bass, attacked the March on Washington movement claiming, "Mr. Randolph does not, in truth, give a damn whether the war is won or lost."⁵⁴ It is a tragedy and a scandal that rather than recognizing these unmistakable and unmistakably radical roots of the civil rights movement, many locate them in such Communist figures as Paul Robeson, whose frank Stalinist apologetics bore no substantive relationship to the actual struggle for civil rights. Yet it must also be said that in launching the March on Washington movement, Randolph completed the sacrifice of enduring radical convictions, which began with the founding of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, for the more pressing goal of upward social mobility for his people. Beginning with this appeal to the war economy and the military, the cause of civil rights would be increasingly beholden to the agenda of the power elite.

It is no exaggeration that the Communist Party was the most aggressive enforcer of maximum loyalty to the war effort in the public square, as well as the most belligerent in calling for the repression of dissenters. Having actively opposed black protest movements, particularly in the war industries and the UAW, that American Communism is viewed by many as having been in the vanguard for civil rights is especially ironic and disturbing. Other incidents in which Communists muzzled dissent included the Communist-dominated CIO council in Minneapolis intervening to prevent Norman Thomas from speaking at the University of Minnesota and the use of physical force by seamen from a Communist union to sabotage a talk by Thomas and Bertram Wolfe in Seattle.⁵⁵ Both the pro-Soviet tabloid *PM* and Thomas's old enemies at *The Forward* accused him of favoring a Nazi victory.⁵⁶ The Communist view of Thomas and his party was put most bluntly by Israel Amter, the long-serving chairman of the New York state CP:

Mussolini was a “socialist,” Laval was a “socialist,” Norman Thomas, too, is a “socialist.” He offers the world only one kind of peace—the peace of a Hitler, a Mussolini, a Laval. The Socialist Party realizes that its antiwar position is unacceptable to the American people, nevertheless to perform its service to Hitler, it must raise questions that will keep it before the public eye. Hence Thomas and the Socialist Party become the stalwart “champions” of civil liberties. It is the function of Thomas and the Socialist Party to appear as revolutionary leaders, to obstruct the war effort. This is nothing but downright fifth column activity—activity that must be stifled. Norman Thomas, fifth columnist and spearhead of fascism, still has access to the radio and spews forth his traitorous program. It is a distinct disservice to our country to allow this worker for fascism to use the air in order to spread disunity and hatred for our allies. Let us rather adopt the methods of the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

The Wisconsin-based weekly *The Progressive* provided sanctuary for unbowed stalwarts of the old cause, some of whom, such as Oswald Garrison Villard and Harry Elmer Barnes, were hounded out of once-enviable journalistic perches well before Pearl Harbor. When Oscar Ameringer folded the *American Guardian* early in 1941, *The Progressive* absorbed both its circulation and Ameringer’s regular column. Standing squarely with the most unrepentant isolationists, Ameringer was actively in touch with George Hartmann in New York, who launched the Peace Now movement in 1943 to agitate for a negotiated end to the war.⁵⁸ When Ameringer fell ill in the summer of 1943, Milton Mayer visited him as he was recuperating at a sanitarium in Elk City, Oklahoma, reverentially profiling him for *The Progressive*:

His first day in the hospital he remembered—his memory had been fading—that in 1909 he went to Elk City to arrange a Socialist encampment and persuaded the Elk City Chamber of Commerce to defray the expenses of the encampment and decorate the main streets with red flags. . . . Everyone who passed knew and called him Oscar and

patted him and told him to keep up the fight. “I’ll keep up the fight” said the man who forced the New Orleans brewers to hire Negroes, organized the Tenant Farmers Union, cleaned up Milwaukee with Victor Berger, and whipped the Klan in Oklahoma. . . . Then a man stopped and asked him who will win the war. “There will be two winners” said Oscar, “the buzzards and the sharks.”⁵⁹

Ameringer died on November 5, 1943, in Oklahoma City. Judah Drob, now secretary of the Michigan SP, wrote simply, “American labor has lost one of its finest fighters,” as Oswald Garrison Villard mourned “a deep place in my affection that cannot be filled, and what is true of me is true of multitudes.”⁶⁰

If the old movement—the movement of Gene Debs, the Southwest encampments, and the AFL loyal opposition—died with any one individual, it was Oscar Ameringer. Indeed, this loss may have been felt more deeply than anyone by his admirers at *The Progressive*, who saw him as a living shrine, in Milton Mayer’s words, to the possibilities they and their forebears had lost to save the republic. The remaining old survivors slowly died off over the next decade—James Maurer in 1944, Max Hayes and Theodore Debs in 1945, Kate Richards O’Hare in 1948, James Graham in 1951, and Frederic Heath in 1954. The legacy of the *American Guardian* in the Depression-era heartland, particularly with the “Minuteman” motif of its promoters, may have imprinted movements of that region in the postwar era typically seen as belonging to the radical right. For those in the heartland and for those who left to work in the new military-industrial complex on the West Coast, a vague memory of how their parents’ movement was sabotaged by the Communist Party may have helped lead them into such groups as the John Birch Society.

One such “Minuteman” was Elmer Garner, a first cousin of FDR’s first vice president and veteran of the Kansas Populist heyday who had promoted the KAOWC-inspired “Ludlow Amendment” for a national referendum on any declaration of war in his small newsletter *Publicity*. In January 1944 Garner was swept up in a federal indictment for

sedition of thirty obscure individuals, most of them frank Nazi partisans. After Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt eagerly pushed his Justice Department for prosecutions akin to those seen in the First World War, and this ill-conceived indictment came after one targeting such high-profile figures as Robert McCormick, Joseph Medill Patterson, and Congressman Hamilton Fish proved untenable. The eighty-three-year old Garner died in a Washington, DC, flophouse as he was awaiting trial, with all of forty cents in his pocket.⁶¹ The zealous prosecutor, O. John Rogge, became a leading attorney for various American Communists after a mistrial was declared.

One of the few other non-Hitlerites named in this indictment was the enigmatic Lawrence Dennis. A mulatto who passed for white, Dennis became a popular author at the peak of the Depression by playing up his disillusioning experiences in the Foreign Service and on Wall Street. His theories about a “coming American fascism” got him branded a fascist by Communists and New Dealers, yet he anticipated by several years the theory of “the managerial revolution” popularized by a disaffected collaborator of Max Shachtman named James Burnham, much as Lenin’s theory of imperialism owed so much to the far more articulate John Hobson and Charles Beard. Dennis was also echoed by John Flynn in his 1944 book *As We Go Marching*.⁶² Dennis took a decidedly conservative posture for much of the 1930s with regular appearances in *American Mercury*, though by the end of the decade his audience had moved left, and he began counting such SP fellow travelers as Freda Utey and Harry Elmer Barnes among his closest friends.⁶³

Norman Thomas was particularly despondent over the state of civil liberties during “the good war,” especially after he was unable to even get the ACLU, from which he helped purge the Communists just a few years earlier, to go on the record opposing Japanese internment.⁶⁴ He wrote to Dennis, whom he had debated more than once in years past, “I think the coming of some form of fascism all too likely . . . I am inclined to agree that our participation in the war tends to make the coming of that fascism, of course under another name, more, not less likely.”⁶⁵ Dennis replied,

The issues are not, as the *ci-devant* liberals are trying to make it appear, fascism versus democracy, internationalism versus nationalism, or universalism versus racism. I am glad John Flynn has had the guts to write his latest book. . . . The present danger is that these stunt persecutions are part of a scheme for permanent war on foreign devils and a permanent Roosevelt dictatorship. Success in these prosecutions would establish precedents by which every present friend of Soviet Russia could later be convicted if it be decided that Stalin, also, is powerful sinful and that his brand of sin has to be extirpated before the dream of enduring peace and one world can be realized.⁶⁶

Thomas replied in what could be read as his credo for the balance of his life: "I almost always find myself in agreement with your analyses of things, I think them brilliant. . . . We are at the end of an epoch and I see little hope for the near future. But as long as there is any I want to keep on fighting for what ought to be, provided that it is not logically or psychologically an impossibility. I agree with your opinion of *ci-devant* or totalitarian liberals."⁶⁷

The 1944 national convention of the Socialist Party opened on June 2 in Reading, Pennsylvania, where J. Henry Stump had been elected the previous fall to the third of three nonconsecutive terms as mayor. That there was yet hope of rebuilding the party as the war wound down was also illustrated as Jasper McLevy, still going strong as mayor of Bridgeport, returned to the SP fold declaring, "We owe it to our boys and girls in the armed forces to work for a peace which will make future wars impossible."⁶⁸ But nothing brought new hope to the beleaguered Socialists like the news from Canada, where the Commonwealth Federation was elected for the first time to lead the provincial government of Saskatchewan. The Federation sent fraternal greetings to this wartime Socialist convention, along with such parties in exile as the POUM, the Polish Trade Union and Socialist Movement, the Union of German and Austrian Socialists, and the Socialist Workers and Peasants Party of France.⁶⁹

Norman Thomas was once again nominated for president by acclamation. Nominations for vice president were entered on behalf of Darlington Hoopes and A. Philip Randolph. Hoopes, elder statesman of the proud but diminished Reading organization, accepted after the following message from Randolph was read to the convention:

I keenly regret that my obligations to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters . . . prevent my accepting nomination for Vice President. Nothing would give me greater pleasure and joy than to share in the national campaign as a part of the Socialist ticket, not to achieve immediate office, but to build the intellectual and spiritual foundation for the development of a broad political movement in America in the pattern of and comparable to the Canadian Commonwealth Federation. I believe that the American people and especially workers, farmers, and lower middle class, need a political organization based upon the Socialist philosophy of production for use and not for profit. As I see it, such a political movement can alone save the people of America from economic chaos and confusion and provide peace and plenty, democracy, and freedom.⁷⁰

With a renewed hope for the future along the lines laid out by Randolph, the Socialist platform of 1944 took its stand:

The winning of the peace cannot be the result of appeasement of Nazism or of any other aggressive imperialisms. Neither can it be the consequence of the “unconditional surrender” of the Germans and Japanese to the rulers of the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States of America. Shouting that slogan, the Roosevelt administration is prolonging this war and inviting the next by underwriting with the lives of our sons the restoration and maintenance of the British, Dutch, and French empires in the Far East, and the Balkanization of Europe between London and Moscow. . . . The commanding heights of our economic order—our system of money, banking, and credit, our natural resources, our public utilities and all monopolies,

semi-monopolies, and other exploitative industries—must be socially controlled. To be effective that requires social ownership, but not autocratic administration by agents of a bureaucratic state. We do not need to exchange “government of the workers, by the bosses, and for the absentee owners” for “government of the workers, by the bureaucrats, for the glory and power of the military state.”⁷¹

The nomination of Franklin Roosevelt for a fourth term was the high-water mark of the Popular Front, its rude interruption by the Hitler-Stalin pact benevolently forgotten. Sidney Hillman formed the new CIO Political Action Committee (CIO-PAC), and in New York and other states where there was Communist strength made it the backbone of FDR’s campaign. Hillman was also responsible in this position for merging the Communist rump remnant of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party with the state Democratic Party and for completing the Communist takeover of the American Labor Party in New York. It was widely reported that when Harry Truman was chosen to replace Henry Wallace as vice president, Roosevelt’s first instruction to his handlers was to “clear it with Sidney.” Ironically given the circumstances of the next election, Wallace’s most steadfast partisans in 1944 were Reinhold Niebuhr and the former SP Militants in the Union for Democratic Action. As Dwight Macdonald later described the rise of Henry Wallace,

No Vice President has played so important a role: he threw himself into the crusade for democracy with an ardor that made Winston Churchill seem a quisling. Not only did he occupy important posts in the warmaking apparatus, but, above all, he became the country’s outstanding moral apologist for the conflict. The role Wilson played in the first war was assumed by Wallace in the second. After the early Atlantic Charter-Four Freedoms period, Roosevelt lost interest in noble war aims and made no secret of his growing “realism.” He must have often congratulated himself on his choice of Wallace, who never lost heart and produced ardent moral rhetoric to the very end.⁷²

Perhaps the most outspoken promoter of Wallace's "ardent moral rhetoric" in the 1944 campaign was Reinhold Niebuhr. Though he soon made his reputation as the great philosopher of moral realism, Niebuhr had just begun his rise to intellectual stardom with his most frankly moralist work, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*. After the hopes of Niebuhr and the UDA for the renomination of Wallace were dashed, Norman Thomas appealed to them to return to the SP now that past differences over entering the war were moot:

You left us because of honest differences over an interventionist policy before Pearl Harbor. We got war. It—especially the European war—is almost won. . . . You may reply that the kind of peace we want is impossible now. Very likely. But to work for it is the only self-respecting thing to do, the effort may have greater influence than you think—and the struggle need not stop in the postwar years. The larger the Socialist vote, the greater and more immediate the pressure for a decent peace and for freedom and plenty with which the cause of peace is bound up.⁷³

Thomas and Niebuhr had up to now remained on amiable terms, even sometimes working together for the cause of European refugees. But now Niebuhr chose to bitterly repudiate his Socialist past to Thomas:

There is an exasperating quality of irresponsibility about the whole Socialist position, and it is difficult to take seriously your criticisms. This irresponsibility, which led to the folly of your pre-Pearl Harbor isolationism, stems from your inability to conceive of politics as the act of choosing among possible alternatives. . . . America, in the years immediately ahead, may be the scene of basic political realignments. But Americans will not, in the foreseeable future, be called on to make a choice between Socialism and reaction. The realistic, actual choice before Americans is that of reverting to . . . the *laissez-faire* formula which failed before and ended in depression or of moving militantly

forward in the determination to make the last four years of the Roosevelt era a period of social reconstruction and reform.⁷⁴

Bernard Johnpoll calls Niebuhr's letter "devastating—one of the most effective and accurate critiques of Norman Thomas ever written."⁷⁵ But when viewed next to Thomas's correspondence with Lawrence Dennis and its bleak prognosis of what the new "liberalism" held in store, Niebuhr's view that Thomas should have rallied to it appears extremely myopic. Indeed, one can even see in Niebuhr's riposte the roots of the militant spirit that, by the end of the twentieth century, regularly turned the most trivial contests between the two major parties into ideological battles. In the words of historian Frank Warren,

Nothing should be clearer than the fact that, whatever its individual accomplishments on specific measures, the general philosophy of Niebuhrian liberalism buttressed a politics—the Democratic Party politics—of the postwar years that ultimately brought bankruptcy to the general philosophy. And one of the reasons for this is clearly expressed in Niebuhr's original statement: the assumption that the battle between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party was, in 1944, a battle between "the laissez faire formula" and a party that might be dedicated to "social reconstruction and reform." . . . There have been various policy differences between the two parties, but the Niebuhrian language, in order to give meaning to the daily political skirmishes, exalted the battle into a fundamental ideological battle between the two parties. The language says little about reality nor adds anything to a comprehension of the political and economic forces and decisions that shaped American capitalism in the 20th century.⁷⁶

The most incisive old Socialist critique of the new organized liberalism came from a somewhat unlikely source—Louis Waldman, who published his stirring memoir *Labor Lawyer* in 1944 and, despite his ardent interventionism before Pearl Harbor, was now working closely with John

Flynn to organize the anti-Communist American Writers Association.⁷⁷ Waldman described his former Militant nemeses in the UDA as “one of the conglomerate factions of the latter-day New Deal and regard themselves as its major prophets,” arguing that the 1934 fight in the SP foreshadowed the threat posed to American democracy by the Communist-Militant collusion that shaped the agenda of the CIO.⁷⁸ Of the former Militants coming to power in Washington, Waldman wrote frankly,

I have not been able to join in the chorus which condemns as “fascists” and “labor baiters” those who have objected to the inclusion in the government of persons holding the philosophy Biemiller and the other Militants propounded at Detroit and who object to these persons acquiring power over and influence in our trade union movement. I rather agreed with them. Nor do I now feel a special sense of elation or hope for peace and security when I see that men holding the political views and philosophic convictions which Biemiller had outlined are entrenched in the governmental and public agencies charged with the duty of making our brave new world.⁷⁹

The Socialists hoped to make their voice heard in the building of the postwar world through the organization that Norman Thomas fashioned out of the former KAOWC, the Postwar World Council. With an ambitious start, Thomas was named chairman and Oswald Garrison Villard treasurer. The large board included George Schuyler, Clarence Senior, Freda Utley, Sidney Hertzberg, Harry Elmer Barnes, Harry Fleischman, John Haynes Holmes, Victor Reuther, Frank Zeidler, John Dos Passos, and Frank Crosswaith.⁸⁰ The pamphlet announcing the Council’s formation declared,

It is inconceivable that men can make the wrong choices about race relations here in America and be able at some future peace conference to settle the tangled racial problems of the world. It is equally inconceivable that we can sacrifice our democracy increasingly to a domestic dictatorship or totalitarianism and yet make democracy

victorious in tomorrow's world. The wisest plans for the future will come to nothing if they must be carried out by a generation broken and twisted by hunger and hate.⁸¹

With the ailing FDR comfortably prevailing in a close-fought race against Republican Thomas Dewey, Norman Thomas received the lowest vote of all his six presidential campaigns at 81,738 in the mere twenty-six states where he was on the ballot, with write-in votes recorded in another six. That this was the best any minor party could muster reflected not only the erosion of democratic values in America as the postwar world was dawning but also one of the gravely missed opportunities of the Socialists in the war years.

This opportunity was in great measure ceded to Max Shachtman's Workers Party. The Socialists cheered the widely unpopular wartime coal strikes led by John L. Lewis, as he slowly made his way out of the CIO he founded and back into the AFL, but it was the Workers Party that rallied widespread rank-and-file opposition in the UAW to the wartime no-strike pledge.⁸² Despite the commitment of both the AFL and CIO leaderships to the war effort and the no-strike pledge, by several measures labor unrest during the war was greater than during the heroic years of the CIO. Some historians have feigned shock toward the antiwar activities of the Shachtmanites in light of their later politics, but to view them through a moral prism misses their real significance.⁸³ The opening they seized in the UAW led to positions of influence in the union as allies of Walter Reuther in his ascendancy after the war. This was the essential first step in their rise to the apex of organized liberalism in the 1960s, not least capturing the dying Socialist Party itself along the way, and ultimately to their indispensable role in the forging of neoconservatism.

The end of the war brought little hope to the Socialists. The terminally ill Lillian Symes wrote a long and outraged lament in the *Socialist Call* over the betrayal of Poland, the nominal *casus belli* of the Allies, to Soviet conquest.⁸⁴ The dropping of the atomic bombs horrified Norman Thomas, though he wondered if "the terrible power now in men's hands would mean the end of war, if science had made it obsolete."⁸⁵ After Thomas

organized a letter to the Nuremberg tribunal imploring against Soviet demands to introduce the charges of a Nazi conspiracy against Stalin leveled at the Moscow Trials, Dwight Macdonald refused to commit himself to “the view that the tribunal is a court of justice worthy of respect.”⁸⁶ Thomas assured him of his sympathy and indeed spoke out against the precedent being set by this exercise in victor’s justice.⁸⁷ Jacob Panken and Morrie Ryskind were among other Socialists who spoke out publicly against the trials.⁸⁸ As Panken defined the precedent, “All that would be necessary to indict the losing side, in charging it with crimes against humanity, against international peace, and even genocide, would be to establish conspiracy.”⁸⁹

The conquering victors, like their predecessors at Versailles, presumed to establish dominion over the globe with the new United Nations. Thomas gave his reluctant endorsement to the organization in testimony before Congress, though he deemed it “a glorified and uneasy alliance which in its fundamental principles defeats its declared aims of the establishment of peace.”⁹⁰ The two lone votes in the Senate against entering the UN came from the hardest representatives of the dying remnant of the old progressive bloc, Henrik Shipstead of Minnesota and William Langer of North Dakota. But many unrepentant anti-interventionists believed, like Thomas, that there was no good alternative. Hardly the province of some nationalistic right, opposition to the UN focused on its domination by the United States and Soviet Union through the Security Council. As John Flynn plainly put it, “Practically everybody is restrained from making war by this charter but the war makers.”⁹¹

As 1945 came to a close, the hope that American Socialism might yet have a future was bolstered not only by the success of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation but also by the landslide victory of Clement Atlee and the British Labour Party in the postwar election. During the 1944 election, two state parties had been formed that raised the prospect of a new move to establish a labor party in postwar America. In New York, David Dubinsky and his allies bolted from the American Labor Party after the Communist takeover to form the new Liberal Party,

announcing its goal of joining a new national party. The Michigan Commonwealth Federation was formed by veterans of the Socialist bloc in the UAW, including Victor Reuther, Emil Mazey, and Tucker Smith, now an economics professor at Olivet College. Other more nebulous groups included the Chicago-based American Commonwealth Party, jointly led by Maynard Krueger of the SP and Morris Polin of the SDF, and the Cooperative Commonwealth Party of Washington State.⁹²

The National Educational Committee for a New Party (NECNP) was launched by the beginning of 1946, led by A. Philip Randolph and the aging John Dewey. Showing great promise for bringing together disparate groups of Socialist heritage, numerous farmers' organizations followed the lead of North Dakota Senator William Langer, the last surviving legacy of the Non-Partisan League in Congress, in endorsing the committee.⁹³ Samuel Wolchok, president of the Retail and Wholesale Workers, represented the New York Liberal Party on the committee, with the Michigan Commonwealth Federation represented by a young UAW operative named Martin Gerber.⁹⁴ Leading Socialist participants included Roy Reuther, H. L. Mitchell, James Graham, Roy Burt, Frank Zeidler, and Harry Fleischman. Morris Rubin, editor of *The Progressive*; Congressman Charles LaFollette of Indiana; and Patrick Gorman of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters were also notable supporters, along with such typically apolitical officers of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters as Milton Webster and Bennie Smith.⁹⁵

The most memorable personality in this virtually forgotten movement was Herbert Holdridge, the only American general to retire during the course of the Second World War who campaigned for Norman Thomas in 1944. With a self-styled "People's Party" platform and clearly envisioning himself as the presidential candidate of the new party, Holdridge channeled Socialist rhetoric of the distant past to boldly declare, "Maintenance of scarcity produces wars and depressions; an economy of abundance would exclude private profit."⁹⁶ It was undoubtedly such characters as Holdridge and William Langer who alienated the young organizing secretary of the NECNP, Daniel Bell. A City College Socialist veteran who spent the war years at *The New Leader*, Bell confided to

Dwight Macdonald, “My heart is not in it, but I’m going through the motions.”⁹⁷

Such a new party may well have only become a regional party in the historic Non-Partisan League strongholds extending from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest, with a few pockets in major cities—much like its Canadian counterpart, eventually renamed the New Democratic Party. But however real the opportunities for a new party, at this point, the Socialists were too badly beaten to set the terms for any realignment. Initially, it appeared the Communists were still riding high. Henry Wallace was forced to resign as Truman’s secretary of commerce in September 1946 after a speech blasting U.S. hostility toward the Soviet Union since the end of the war. Around the same time, a handful of wartime Communist front groups merged to form the Progressive Citizens of America (PCA), intending to back Wallace as a presidential candidate either for the Democratic nomination or for a new party. Alarmed, the Union for Democratic Action implemented plans to expand into a mass-membership organization that could thwart the nascent PCA. The result, in the first week of 1947 and just a week after the formal launch of PCA, was the founding conference of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) at the Willard Hotel in Washington.

Eleanor Roosevelt gave the keynote address at this momentous conference, a not-so-subtle rebuke of Wallace’s pretensions to be the rightful successor of FDR. Also prominently featured at the founding of ADA were David Dubinsky and Walter Reuther, the latter having only just defeated Communist George Addes to secure the UAW presidency; other links to the past on the founding board included the widow of Gifford Pinchot and former SDF stalwart Sarah Limbach. Their presence indicated they were determined to cast down their bucket in the Democratic Party, though Dubinsky, having not entirely abandoned hopes for a future Labor Party, believed that a majority at the conference would have voted to form a new party were this not directly contrary to the aim of its organizers.⁹⁸ The NECNP nevertheless issued a cautiously optimistic press release on the founding of the ADA:

The death of the New Deal and the defeat of so many progressives in the 1946 elections have, among other things, given the reactionary forces in America an opening for which they had long been waiting. . . . American democracy must rise to the defense of labor's rights. American democracy must combat vigorously all tendencies toward American imperialism. . . . In the fight against these threats to democratic living, the NECNP and the ADA see eye to eye. If our nation is to provide leadership for peace, prosperity, and democracy, we in the NECNP believe that our people must seek an immediate realignment of political forces. . . . We heartily congratulate the ADA upon its forthright declaration disassociating itself from the Communists. We are not unmindful of the fact that, while the ADA is an independent organization of liberals, it nevertheless has strong ties with the Democratic Party which many of its members hope to reform along New Deal lines. Those who follow the line of immediate expediency may regard this as good politics. In our judgment, however, this is no sound approach to the solution of a fundamental problem. Unless independence of political thinking is matched by independence in political action, the principle of independence is compromised.⁹⁹

Ex-Militants among the ADA founders likely took a bitterly condescending view of the SP-aligned new party movement. The SP point man responding to the emergence of ADA was Bill Gausmann, leader of the Washington, DC local. After James Loeb, responsible for organizing the ADA founding conference, politely declined Gausmann's request for an invitation, Gausmann came to believe the whole affair was a desperate ploy to save the UDA and that Loeb himself was the major enforcer against any moves toward a new party.¹⁰⁰ But the Socialists greeted any move toward a large-scale liberal break from the Communists and the Popular Front enthusiastically, and as early as February 1947 the National Executive Committee approved a plan for SP members to join ADA as individuals and agitate within for the new party movement.¹⁰¹ The Socialists were also increasingly wary of the eccentric Herbert Holdridge

and his attempts to dominate the new party movement, if not the Socialist Party itself. Gausmann confided to Harry Fleischman that he discussed the ex-general at length with “a very trusted friend who is a psychiatrist . . . there is no question that the guy is completely mad.”¹⁰² The SP labor and organization secretary, Bill Becker, went as far as to suggest that electoral activity should be abandoned to focus on assuring the merger of the ADA and NECNP on agreeable terms.¹⁰³

In this last, desperate agitation to form a labor party, the Socialists had a sincere ally in the earliest critics of the founders of Cold War liberalism who were now thwarting them—the Social Democratic Federation. By the end of the war, the SP and SDF were holding unified May Day observances in New York; they would have likely reunified in anticipation of the 1948 election were it not for the aging and embittered Algernon Lee, who defended Japanese internment and now called for universal conscription in anticipation of a war against the Soviets.¹⁰⁴ August Claessens, ever the optimist, still insisted to a friend in the spring of 1948, “You are right in believing that conditions are ripe for a new political alignment . . . the Americans for Democratic Action, Liberal Party of New York and similar groups in other states are moving in this direction.”¹⁰⁵ Claessens would even tell the occasional young person who wandered into his office at the Rand School asking to join the SDF that they were better off joining the SP.¹⁰⁶ But surviving Old Guardsmen were not prepared for just how much had changed in the postwar world.

In one particularly poignant example, when James Oneal wrote of the bewildered reports of old comrades of the hatred and abuse to which the Jewish Labor Bund was being subjected for its continuing anti-Zionism, especially by *The Forward* and particularly for standing by the British Labour government and its much-maligned Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin, Claessens was at pains to defend *The Forward*.¹⁰⁷ Another strange sight indeed to Old Guard veterans was the number of former adversaries who became “State Department Socialists” as the Cold War began in Europe. Paul Porter and Irving Brown served as advisors to the State Department, organizing anti-Communist unions in war-ravaged Europe

in an integral part of the Marshall Plan. Their assistant in Paris, Morris Weisz, eventually went on to similar work with the U.S. Embassy in India. Clarence Senior worked this beat in Latin America, along with a 1930s firebrand, Robert Alexander, who retained his ties to the SP all through its twilight. And in East Asia was Frank Trager, who eventually capped his career as the defiantly hawkish Vietnam expert at *National Review*. Indeed, the likes of Sidney Hook and Bertram Wolfe, anathema less than a decade earlier, were now frequent lecturers at the Rand School.

No spot on the map, however, better illustrated the death of the historic Social Democratic dream than Germany. In 1947, Kurt Schumacher, the courageous and embattled leader of the German Social Democrats, received a hero's welcome at the Rand School, where Jacob Panken extolled him as "the hope of the German people" in the face of "the heel of Russia's military forces aided and abetted by German Communists, grinding as hard if not harder than the Nazi SS."¹⁰⁸ Jay Lovestone, who largely masterminded the rise of the "State Department Socialists" as head of the International Affairs department of the AFL, was an especially committed advocate for Schumacher on the ground in Europe. But he faced such obstacles as the enduring influence of Sidney Hillman, who shortly before his death in 1946 was vouching for Communist agents in the Office of German Reconstruction.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, in the Social Democratic strongholds of historic East Prussia, the Soviets simply expelled three million Germans in the greatest act of ethnic cleansing in human history. With France and the United States determined to install Konrad Adenauer as chancellor of the new West Germany, Socialist Clement Atlee could only weakly declare his support for Schumacher, whom the Americans considered a "rabid nationalist."¹¹⁰ How profoundly the Old Guardsmen were shaken by the failure of a proud, united, and Social Democratic Germany to emerge from the ashes of Nazism was perhaps best illustrated by Louis Waldman. After campaigning for Thomas Dewey in both 1944 and 1948, ostensibly on anti-Communist grounds but likely believing himself a prospective secretary of labor in a Dewey administration, in 1952 Waldman was

equally outspoken for Democrat Adlai Stevenson, citing first and foremost Eisenhower's failure to get to Berlin before the Red Army.¹¹¹

As the non-Communist new party movement began to fade in late 1947, some surprising municipal victories encouraged the Socialists to think they could yet play a substantial role in bringing about a national realignment. In Norwalk, Connecticut, a protégé of Jasper McLevy named Irving Freese was elected mayor. And in Milwaukee, a group of businessmen formed the Municipal Enterprise Committee, believing the city was in danger of serious decline and declaring that "planning, free from the influence of private pressures, must extend to all phases of city life."¹¹² With several of its members the sons of old Milwaukee Socialists, they convinced Frank Zeidler to stand as their candidate for mayor, victorious in the spring 1948 election.

As the 1948 election approached, Norman Thomas was reluctant to once more take up his party's standard. The previous summer, he had learned of the death of his wife Violet, finally succumbing to a chronic heart ailment, while at a meeting of the NEC in Reading.¹¹³ Thomas appealed to A. Philip Randolph to accept the quadrennial honor, but Randolph's first loyalty was to his union and the struggle for civil rights.¹¹⁴ Despite their earnest effort to become an influence in the new organized liberalism, the Socialists felt it imperative to take a stand in the election of 1948. They actively campaigned against the continuation of conscription, the very issue that proved the undoing of Cold War liberalism a generation later. Thomas thundered, "It is the bitterest of ironies that this adoption of conscription is so widely hailed as a triumph over 'reactionaries' and 'isolationists' who opposed it. . . . We have the draft because President Truman and Congress find it easier to substitute force for a sound policy and the brass hats have found in hysterical exaggeration of present dangers a chance to obtain that power which has long been their heart's desire."¹¹⁵

Thomas also endorsed the earliest works of Second World War revisionism, including Charles Beard's final opus before his death in 1948 on Roosevelt's foreign policy, the first major work on the provocation

of the Pearl Harbor attack by George Morgenstern, and the indictment of the Nuremberg Trials and their foundation for the future of international law, *Advance to Barbarism*, by the Englishman F. J. P. Veale.¹¹⁶ In November 1947, Norman Thomas wrote his most searing indictment of the abhorning liberalism for *American Mercury*:

In the national field the two “liberal” outfits, the PCA and the ADA, each declare their own liberalism and are suspicious of the other’s brand. And there are “liberals” suspicious of both. In recent years those Americans who most stridently proclaimed their liberalism were usually the most vociferous preachers of a peace of vengeance against Germany and Japan . . . far better able to discover seditionists at home than the FBI, and far surer than the Supreme Court that foolish speech constituted sedition. . . . More recently, that great “liberal,” Henry Wallace, has been able to discover in the most absolute dictatorship in the world, the Russian, a “directed democracy” not to be judged at all as he once judged Hitler’s, or as he now judges Anglo-American imperialism. That contradiction in terms was—no, still is—one of the most ominous phenomena of our time. The Hearst press or the *Daily Worker* might sit at the feet of some of these totalitarian liberals to learn the smear technique, a fact which John Flynn has documented in pamphlets which have never been answered.¹¹⁷

Henry Wallace announced his candidacy for president, with the PCA being refashioned into the new Progressive Party, in the final week of 1947. A sense of dread came over the Socialists, sensing that this Communist-dominated campaign could discredit not only their efforts toward a new party but even their principled criticisms of postwar American policy. The National Educational Committee for a New Party denounced the Wallace movement as “a distinct disservice to the cause of a peaceful world and a democratic America” that would have “a deterrent effect on the formation of a genuinely democratic farmer-labor-progressive party which the NECNP is anxious to see emerge on the American scene after the next presidential election.”¹¹⁸ The *Socialist Call*

was even more direct in its editorial: “The Communists support Wallace, not because they want peace, but because they want war, which they consider inevitable, to come on the best possible terms for Russia.”¹¹⁹

By 1948 the Communist Party faced the prospect of losing all it had spectacularly gained through the Popular Front. Earl Browder was deposed and expelled immediately after the war on the order of Moscow, and under the renewed leadership of the aging William Z. Foster, it then bolted from the Democratic Party.¹²⁰ Though the Communists would later largely bury the memory of the Progressive Party, an intense cult of ex-Communists and true-believing fellow travelers would fetishize its memory for decades. Yet few have ever stopped to consider, by the twenty-first century, just how great a distance separates that lost cause from contemporary progressive sensibilities. Henry Wallace made his fame as an innovator of industrialized agriculture and was known for an unmatched zeal for the cause of free trade, placing him deeply at odds with a progressive sensibility illustrated by, for instance, fair trade organic coffee. But perhaps most of all, no American political campaign in 1948 was more zealously committed to the maximalist demands of the new State of Israel, with the American Labor Party declaring, “It is a part of the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan to sacrifice Jewish blood for Arab oil.”¹²¹

The Socialist Party gathered for its national convention in Reading on May 7, 1948. For the sixth and final time, Norman Thomas was nominated for president by acclamation, with the vice presidential nomination going to Tucker Smith. An old stalwart of Brookwood Labor College and the Martin-Lovestone operation in the UAW, as a symbol of the lost cause of the 1930s Smith was a highly poignant presence on this valedictory ticket. In its platform preamble, the Socialist Party of America made its final and prophetic stand:

In 1948, we face the elemental question of survival. The atomic revolution has burst upon the world and a new unity has been forged among

the human race: men who have refused to be brothers one of another may now become children of a common doom. The American people, because of the accidents of geography, will make the decision for mankind. Our mines and factories were not devastated by the physical havoc of the last war. For America, and consequently the world, it is not too late.¹²²

In large measure, to be sure, as a useful foil against Wallace and the Communists, Thomas received nearly universal praise from major newspapers on his nomination. The *New York Times* wrote, "His socialism is of the democratic variety . . . it is good to have Mr. Thomas in the field," with the *Washington Post* adding, "Mr. Thomas is a radical in a sense of the term not quite understood by the House Committee on Un-American Activities."¹²³ If the praises of the establishment for Thomas throughout the balance of his life were anticipated in his final campaign, so too were the consequences of American Socialism's loss of a serious grassroots movement. When Arthur Klein ran for reelection from the Lower Manhattan-based nineteenth district of New York as both the Democratic and American Labor Party candidate, Liberal Party candidate Stephen Vladeck (son of Charney Vladeck) could only bring in a little over 5 percent of the vote.

The future in some measure was represented by the marginal Shachtmanite candidacy of Emanuel Geltman, who campaigned with a strident Zionist tone yet called for "a reunited Palestine where Arabs and Jews live peaceably together with full independence."¹²⁴ In the SP, similar confusion reigned on this question of major significance to the Socialist Party's twilight and ultimate demise. The resolution passed by the national convention was virtually identical with the program of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, with which Thomas had begun to collaborate: "Whether the political structure necessary to establish these rights is partition or a federation of cantons somewhat on the Swiss model, the civil rights of minorities must be preserved within each district. In no event can immigration into Palestine be considered a complete and adequate answer to the problem of anti-Semitism. Every country

must be made a desirable homeland for those who live in it.” Yet when Israel declared its independence days later, the SP called for immediate de jure recognition as opposed to Truman’s de facto recognition.¹²⁵

The Socialists were also affected by the degree to which they were linked to ADA in their mutual antipathy for Henry Wallace. Thomas, for his part, would not forgive Wallace for his willful inaction in the case of the Southern tenant farmers in the 1930s. Dwight Macdonald, whose scathing book-length treatment of Wallace was published before his candidacy was announced, eagerly solicited the ADA to sponsor him on a college speaking tour.¹²⁶ (Among those drawn to Macdonald was Al Shanker, a student ADA leader at the University of Chicago who would play a significant role in the Socialist Party’s ultimate demise.¹²⁷) Many young admirers of Thomas and Macdonald were likely sympathetic to the perspective of the youthful intellectual leading light of ADA, Arthur Schlesinger, who argued in an extensive essay in the now largely like-minded *Partisan Review* that the United States would become socialist through “a series of New Deals.”¹²⁸

Though urged to endorse Norman Thomas by such board members as Benjamin McLaurin of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, throughout the first half of 1948 ADA urged political blank slate Dwight Eisenhower to announce for the Democratic nomination against the hopeless Harry Truman. Harry Fleischman recalled, “These Eisenhower fans admitted that while ADA was on record against universal military training and the draft, Ike had just testified in favor of both.”¹²⁹ Thomas’s final campaign arguably became his most interesting when he convinced the *Denver Post* to hire him as a journalist to report on the conventions of his three opponents.¹³⁰ After Thomas was a magnet for publicity at the decidedly dull Republican convention, once Eisenhower refused to be a candidate, at the Democratic convention some ADA stalwarts made a desperate effort to draft Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas. When this failed, many of them personally assured Thomas of their votes in November.

Thomas joined the picket line that A. Philip Randolph led outside the Democratic convention demanding desegregation of the military

and then watched his former protégé Andrew Biemiller serve as floor manager for Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey's successful push for a civil rights plank, prompting the walkout that led to the "Dixiecrat" candidacy of Strom Thurmond.¹³¹ Then, at Henry Wallace's convention, the Communists made an aggressive show of force against any who wished to steer the Progressive Party toward an independent radicalism.¹³² Harry Fleischman noted "an abnormal sensitivity to the color red" when a meeting of the rules committee was hastily moved from the hotel's pink room to the green room. Wallace, who challenged Truman and Dewey to a public debate, adamantly refused to debate Thomas, and his running mate Glen Taylor even refused to appear on a radio panel with him.¹³³ Hardly letting up in long-standing hostility toward Norman Thomas, the *Daily Worker* asserted "that Wall Street's buildup of its 'Socialist' Party is related to the perspective to form a spurious, pro-imperialist third party as a counter-movement . . . against the people's coalition."¹³⁴

The Independent Committee for Thomas in 1948 was the most distinguished of any such list after 1932. Joining such close Thomas friends as John Haynes Holmes, Oswald Garrison Villard, and A. Philip Randolph, novelist James T. Farrell served as the committee's secretary. Other labor leaders included Joseph Schlossberg and Louis Nelson, joined by Bertram Wolfe, Dwight Macdonald, Daniel Bell, Milton Mayer, George Schuyler, Morrie Ryskind, Rabbis Isidor Hoffman and Stanley Brav, sociologist C. Wright Mills, Emanuel Novgorodsky of the Jewish Labor Bund, and German refugee philosopher Erich Fromm. There were also two superannuated eminences from the era of the "millionaire socialists"—Leonard Abbott and Anna Strunsky Walling, estranged but never divorced from her late husband and a lifelong Socialist and pacifist. But perhaps the most distinguished figure to come out for Norman Thomas in 1948 was his one-time adversary Dorothy Thompson, explaining in her column,

We are in the gravest crisis in our history, which has its center in the German capital. This crisis is the result of a chain of actions whose

results could be, and were, foreseen by some but not by President Truman, Governor Dewey or Henry Wallace. The only candidate for President who can stand on a record of foresight and principle is Norman Thomas. He, alone, saw how false policies logically must turn out. All the Republican leaders and Henry Wallace supported Truman, not only at Potsdam, but also when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, an act which damaged our moral position and instilled worldwide fears by demonstrating that the United States regarded the atom bomb as a legitimate instrument of warfare. Because I am not a Socialist, it is hard to vote for Thomas who foresaw the result of all these policies. But the issue in the world is not between socialism and capitalism, but between civilization and barbarism.¹³⁵

In a rare move, *The Progressive* officially endorsed Thomas and Smith, denouncing Henry Wallace and his party as “a perversion of progressivism” and urging that a vote for the Socialists would “speed the development of that long overdue political realignment.”¹³⁶ Even *The Forward* put in a kind word for voting Socialist, perhaps hedging their bets in case non-Communist new party sentiment revived in the event of a Dewey victory.¹³⁷ Thomas’s younger and more optimistic supporters even predicted he would earn a half-million votes. A. Philip Randolph plainly declared, “I cannot say there is any fundamental difference between President Truman and Governor Dewey, they have the same basic foreign and domestic policy,” and headlined the final rally in New York the Sunday before the election with Thomas and James T. Farrell.¹³⁸ But the mood of valedictory was best captured by H. L. Mencken, a man who, like Thomas, was at the sunset of his career as the sun set on the old America. Reporting on a campaign speech of Thomas at the ILGWU hall in Baltimore, Mencken lamented of his countrymen:

They would have gone away, as they came, with more or less disabled minds, kidneys, and morals. But while they were giving him ear they would have at least enjoyed a rare and exhilarating pleasure, to wit, that of listening to a political speech by a really intelligent and

civilized man. Thomas poked gentle but devastating fun at all the clowns in the political circus, by no means forgetting himself. There was not a trace of rancor in his speech and not a trace of messianic bombast. He never starts a sentence that doesn't stop and he never accents the wrong syllable in a word or the wrong word in a sentence. It is not often in this great republic that one hears a political hulla-balloo that is also a work of art.¹³⁹

On the ballot in only thirty-one states, with write-in votes recorded in another nine, in the end the Socialists received a disappointing 143,297 votes. Henry Wallace received (for a former vice president) a pathetic 2 percent of the vote, over half coming from New York and California, and 18,000 votes fewer than Strom Thurmond, who was not on the ballot in enough states to theoretically be elected. Most consequential, of course, was the upset victory of Harry Truman over Thomas Dewey. As Harry Fleischman vividly recalled,

On election night, I accompanied Thomas to the studios of the TV networks, where we watched the returns come in. As it became obvious that Truman, despite all expectations, was winning, we realized that the Socialist Party's last hope of creating a new political alignment through a new mass party had gone down the drain. Of far greater importance than the meager Socialist vote was the fact that all the labor and liberal forces which had expressed interest during the campaign in a possible new party immediately jumped back on the Truman bandwagon.¹⁴⁰

A. Philip Randolph and the erratic Herbert Holdridge continued to desperately keep the NECNP alive for some months after the election,¹⁴¹ but hardly any traces were even left to kick over. The Michigan Commonwealth Federation disappeared after the election, and the New York Liberal Party slowly morphed into a crass patronage machine before finally expiring in 2002. The young Irving Howe, a labor reporter for *The Progressive* though still nominally a Shachtmanite, saw a hopeful analogy in the rise of Walter Reuther and the UAW to Eugene Debs and the American Railway Union.¹⁴² The romance inevitably cooled over

time, but Howe would have an immense influence shaping postwar liberalism's memory of American Socialism.

Two veterans of the 1930s SP were now Democrats in Congress. In Wisconsin, Andrew Biemiller was elected to the second of two non-consecutive terms from Milwaukee; he then served for decades as the chief lobbyist for the AFL and later for the AFL-CIO. George Rhodes was elected from Reading, Pennsylvania, in 1948, serving for twenty years and achieving considerable seniority. Two new U.S. senators had been at the SP periphery—Paul Douglas of Illinois and Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota—and would come to symbolize the very attributes of Cold War liberalism—faith in technocracy and bigness supplemented by militarism—that were its major affronts to the American Socialist legacy.

Thus did the seventy-two-year saga of American Socialism as a serious political movement come to its anticlimactic end. After so many ups and downs over generations, how was it that the Socialist Party all but vanished by the 1950s, as though it had never existed?

Nothing is clearer from the history of the Socialist Party than that it exposed the limits of organizing a mass-based party of social democracy without a solid foundation in and consistent support from the trade union movement. The history of American political parties suggests that party organizations are immovable objects; even when the Republican Party displaced the Whig Party, it was largely built up from local party organizations that remained standing after the national collapse of the Whigs. State and local trade union councils held a virtually unparalleled potential to provide the necessary infrastructure to create viable and competitive party organizations and sustain them over the long haul. This was borne out when that model of organization was employed by the Socialists in Milwaukee and a handful of other cities, leading in almost every case to notable success.

At bottom, there was always the original sin of Eugene V. Debs declining the nomination of the Populist Party in 1896, when it could have been his for the asking. The alienation of the young, hopeful Socialist

Party from the AFL, the remnant of Populism, and finally the Progressive insurgency of 1911 can all be traced back to that momentous turning point. Yet even all these events can ultimately be seen as mere growing pains of a serious political movement. Only the merciless repression of the Wilson terror was able to truly obstruct the progress of the Socialist Party. Additionally, both before and after the First World War, the Socialists missed numerous opportunities to take the leap toward becoming a more broad-based Labor or Farmer-Labor Party. Two merit special distinction: the Labor Party movement of 1919–1920 and the diffuse movement for a new party immediately after the 1932 election. When the initiative was squandered in the latter case, creating the critical opening for the Communists to set the tone for the 1930s, the fate of the American left was sealed—becoming, in the words of James Weinstein, “hopelessly caught up in conflict over forms of organization, attitudes toward fellow Socialists, and concepts of strategy and tactics that did not grow out of American experience or the problems of transforming American society.”¹⁴³

This was the traditional thesis of historians of the Socialist Party closer to mainstream liberalism than the radical left, synthesized by the sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset in his 2000 book *It Didn't Happen Here*: “These factors appear more powerful than the character of the American political system in explaining the absence of a socialist or labor party in the United States.”¹⁴⁴ But Lipset and most others have avoided the major implication of this thesis: that a Labor or Farmer-Labor Party, had it emerged before the Second World War, would have profoundly differed from postwar liberalism. It would have in all likelihood been a progressive-isolationist major party, having much more in common with so-called right-wing populism than Cold War liberalism. Of course there are caveats—it is true, for instance, that many of the most outspoken advocates for a Labor Party before each of the world wars went on to become convinced interventionists. But on balance, a solid majority of the salient fellow travelers of the Socialist Party both in its heyday and in the 1930s were, to later liberal sensibilities, of a populist, reactionary, and isolationist character.

Exactly how would the United States have been different if American Socialism had succeeded in producing a major party? One should begin by considering what would not have been different. With a few curious exceptions perhaps, the proportions of the American economy publicly and privately owned would not have been fundamentally different. When the future of the American political economy itself was at stake in the period leading up to the election of 1912, the one substantive contribution by the Socialists to that debate was Victor Berger's proposed legislation nationalizing any trust that controlled more than 40 percent of its industry. In practice, after leading to the nationalization of some basic industries, this would have in time served as a check on the consolidation of corporate power—perhaps nurturing an economy and political system with greater respect for traditional republican virtue and restraining what later came to be called the military-industrial complex.

Under such circumstances in the second half of the twentieth century, the eventual deindustrialization of America for the sake of the military-industrial complex would never have happened. Municipal Socialist proposals for various cooperative schemes in agricultural regions could have saved small-scale and family farms from the rise of agribusiness, preventing all its deleterious consequences on the American landscape, diet, and general lifestyle. The great American system of railways, whose labor force was so vital to the conception and birth of American Socialism, would not have wasted away at the mercy of the automobile and an interstate highway system that completely remade the American landscape, habits of dwelling, and commerce—indeed the very fabric of America itself. Not for nothing did the Socialist Party of America declare, in its first national platform in 1904, "Into the midst of the strain and crisis of civilization, the Socialist Party comes as the only conservative force."

The major historiographical reason this understanding of the character of American Socialism has been obscured is the legacy of Ira Kipnis and his recklessly polemical brief for the historic left wing. Yet there is also a much deeper reason—the selective memory of postwar liberalism. In short, the received history of American liberalism has strongly

pushed the notion that the story of liberalism only really began with the founding of Americans for Democratic Action. In large measure this has served to avoid the extent and implications of the Communist presence in the intellectual bodyguard of the New Deal. But at least as significant is the obscuring and repressing of what it meant to be of the non-Communist left during the era of the Popular Front. In short, it meant to be associated not only with isolationism but also with a critique of the New Deal that often likened it to fascism and bore a striking, by no means accidental resemblance to the New Deal liberal caricature of a right-wing reactionary. The SP Militants who became the founders of ADA had a convenient and carefully constructed narrative of the history of the New Deal era, but that would be easily upset if the exact nature of their own baggage from the 1930s was widely understood.

The extent of purging at this historical juncture was underscored when even the stalwartly isolationist magazine *The Progressive* fired Oswald Garrison Villard, just a year before his death in 1949, for writing favorably of the presidential candidacy of Robert Taft, a Republican famously critical of Truman's foreign policy.¹⁴⁵ At least one other member of the Independent Committee for Thomas in 1948, Morrie Ryskind, had also earlier that year campaigned for Taft; indeed, it is striking how many figures categorized by later historians as being of the "old right" still supported Norman Thomas as late as 1948. Some, such as Ryskind, John Flynn, George Schuyler, and Freda Uteley, would soon in varying degrees find themselves on the right, but would never more than superficially embrace laissez-faire economics and, more often than not, regarded themselves as remaining true to their original radicalism as times and circumstances changed. Just as these old isolationists became committed Cold Warriors, the evolution of many youthful admirers of Norman Thomas and Dwight Macdonald into some of the fiercest Cold War liberal hawks was not very different at all.

As for American Communism, the specter that moved so many radicals to make their varying degrees of peace with the Cold War, its fate had already been sealed. In 1949, the ten Communist Party leaders tried under the Smith Act were duly convicted, and the entire Communist

bloc was expelled from the CIO. Although the CP did not implode until after the Khrushchev revelations of 1956, its decline was now irreversible. Just as the Ku Klux Klan arose in the 1920s as mass immigration was ending, and anti-Muslim hysteria arrived in full force nearly a decade after the September 11 attacks, the anti-Communist panic that became known as McCarthyism only began at the very time the power and influence of the Communist Party were inexorably waning. And yet, the historical importance of American Communism remains difficult to overstate.

It is deeply scandalous that the Communist Party USA and its fellow travelers constitute so much of what American history remembers as “radicalism.” There is, of course, the matter of the tens of millions killed by Josef Stalin and the yet larger number killed by Mao Tse Tung. But seldom has the designation of American Communism as a radical movement been properly challenged. At the height of its power and influence, the Communist Party was militant in its defense of the Roosevelt administration, particularly aggressive in serving its agenda in the labor movement. Bitterly opposed to independent political action, the Communists rarely if ever shied away from calling for Soviet-style repression of their opponents. All these actions and pronouncements, of course, were the product of cultish servitude to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, with which the United States ultimately found itself allied in war—a war for which the Communist Party played no small role in creating a favorable climate in American public opinion. Seen in light of the extreme leftism from which it began, American Communism is best understood historically in a pattern with the Social Democratic League before them and the neoconservative movement after them. That it met such a violent end should in no way bestow a halo of martyrdom.

This great insult and injury that befell the Socialist movement was not merely the loss of the name of radicalism to such adversaries, but that they would further to such an extent discredit the substance of radicalism. But the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, and the memory of American Socialism yet endures in spite of it all. The prophetic examples of Debs and Thomas, Hillquit and Berger, London

and Randolph, Ameringer and O'Hare, Villard and Macdonald, and countless others remain for generations to come. A new left would emerge in time, owing virtually its entire patrimony to the flinty remnant of the Socialist Party. That the new left would come to curse its inheritance, with the bizarre usurpers of that inheritance returning the favor, is the strange and macabre tale of the twilight of American Socialism.

Part III

15 The Twilight of American Socialism

(1949–1963)

Norman Thomas wasted no time after the 1948 election making clear that he considered his last campaign to be the end of an era and that the Socialist Party had to take drastic measures if it was to realize any hope of relevance in the new political reality:

I speak from the heart when I say that it is never easy for a man to decide that the way which he has chosen to advance his cause—and the way that ideally he still would strongly prefer—is closed. . . . The blunt and painful truth is that while we continue to emphasize the importance of electoral action to our party, year by year we are doing less of it. Our failure to do that which we continue to regard as our most important task is far more destructive of morale than the frank adoption of new tactics can possibly be. Even if we should make a heroic effort and place a national ticket in the field in 1952, without a near miracle the campaign would go almost unnoticed. I shall not run again.¹

With the support of Executive Secretary Harry Fleischman, Labor and Organization Secretary Bill Becker, and two of his surviving running mates, Maynard Krueger and Tucker Smith, Thomas's argument for suspending electoral activity was backed by a majority of the National Executive Committee.² But it had to be accepted by the national

convention in 1950, by no means a certainty. Darlington Hoopes, leader of the once-mighty Reading Socialists and Thomas's running mate in 1944, rallied the opposition, declaring the Democratic Party "a double-dealing, fraudulent gang who promised all kinds of liberal and social legislation and delivered very little of it."³

Two developments in the meantime exacerbated intraparty tensions. The first was a revolt by the most radical and absolute pacifist elements of the war years in the "Libertarian" caucus led by Virgil Vogel, a young Chicago firebrand and chairman of the YPSL in the later war years. In 1949, Vogel called for a split in a blistering indictment of the SP:

The Socialist Party is now striving to become a part of the left wing of the Democratic Party. . . . Unwilling to separate itself from the liberals and ex-Socialist trade union leaders who are following Truman, the Socialist Party is trailing in their wake. . . . Today, we are threatened with a war of extinction. No domestic program can be isolated from this enormous, overshadowing fact. Every domestic problem from wages to civil liberties is directly affected by the war economy and the war drive. . . . Some of us remember the late thirties when the Socialist Party courageously refused to follow the main body of liberals and Stalinists into the camp of "collective security" which was heading toward war. . . . Today, the Socialist Party gives critical support to the foreign policy of the United States.⁴

The Libertarian Socialist League was formed by Vogel and his Chicago collaborator Burton Rosen.⁵ They were joined by the anarchist circle in New York known as the Libertarian League, led by Jim Dinsmoor and Bob Auerbach. The League adopted Dinsmoor's newspaper, *The Libertarian Socialist*, and its most famous member was undoubtedly an adolescent Dave Van Ronk, who later emerged as the godfather of the 1960s folk and blues revival.⁶ The remnant of the IWW, led by Fred Thompson of Chicago, was close to the League, as were some UAW radicals in Detroit aligned with the tiny Proletarian Party.⁷ In short, the

Libertarian Socialist League represented the origin of the left wing of the Socialist Party at twilight.

But a far bigger headache for the SP came from very different quarters. Ever since his election in Bridgeport in 1933, Jasper McLevy had aspired to higher office and was repeatedly a candidate for governor of Connecticut. In his final run in 1950, McLevy accepted the nomination of the Independence Party, formed to support the U.S. Senate candidacy of Vivien Kellems, a successful cable grip manufacturer who became a minor celebrity for refusing to pay the federal withholding tax for her employees.⁸ The NEC voted to censure McLevy for campaigning with Kellems, who for her part was unbowed in defending what struck many as a dubious alliance of convenience: “The Connecticut Socialist Party is far to the right of both the Republican and Democratic Parties. . . . I am no Socialist, I am an American. Jasper McLevy is also an American, a truly great one. He and I stand for the same things—direct primaries, economy in government, lower taxes, and an active political role for women.”⁹

Kellems may well have had a point. A federal government limited to carrying out the immediate demands of the Socialist Party in its heyday (to say nothing of overturning *Marbury v. Madison*), and supported by the 7 percent income tax on only the wealthiest Americans first imposed by Woodrow Wilson, would have surely been denounced as black reaction by the ADA. Indeed, it is worth noting that by 1950, McLevy was one of the Socialist Party’s few remaining links to its history before the First World War. But American politics, and indeed the world, had simply changed too profoundly for any of that to matter. Perhaps most striking, in marked contrast to the conservative isolationist bloc led by Senator Robert Taft, Norman Thomas endorsed both the establishment of NATO and the initial action in Korea, out of a desperate hope for “universal and enforceable disarmament under a strengthened United Nations.”¹⁰

The 1950 national convention opened on June 2 in Detroit. Irving Barshop and Seymour Kopilow of New York proposed a middle way between abandoning electoral activity altogether and simply carrying

on as before.¹¹ But the latter stand won out after an impassioned speech by Raymond Hofses of Reading: "Either we are Socialists who believe in democracy, or we are not. To the best of our ability, we must offer a Socialist program to the American people in the electoral as in other arenas."¹² The resolution for continuing electoral activity passed by a vote of 64 to 42, after Norman Thomas's resolution lost by an even wider margin. Thomas then resigned the ceremonial post of national chairman that he had held since 1936.

As the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Party coincided with its terminal decline, the first wave of historical appreciations began. One of the earliest and most thoughtful came from Will Herberg, former editor of the newspaper of Jay Lovestone's Independent Labor League, in the October 1951 issue of *Commentary*:

Despite everything, American Socialism is not simply a failure. Its party organization is shattered, but the Socialist idea has survived and still retains surprising vitality. I do not refer to the blueprint for the "social ownership and operation of the means of production," itself no longer accepted unequivocally by any thinking Socialist. The Socialist idea, in a more basic sense, is something hard to define . . . yet that cannot be the whole story. It is not enough to record Socialism's positive achievement and ignore the fact that, with so much remaining to be done, not only is Socialism as an organized force broken and powerless, but it has left no successor. . . . Looking about the current scene, it is hard to discern where the high purposes, challenging ideas, and crusading ardor that Socialism once contributed to American political and social thinking are to come from.¹³

Herberg, who that same year published the widely praised *Judaism and Modern Man*, was greatly influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, now the revered "Christian realist" philosopher prince of Cold War liberalism with such works as *The Irony of American History*. Arthur Schlesinger, who may have been somewhat sympathetic to the Socialist critics of

ADA when the latter was founded, achieved similar stardom with his own major contribution to the literature of a new American consensus, *The Vital Center*. The ex-Communist Richard Hofstadter openly blasted the reactionary strain in the American radical tradition, particularly the Populist movement, in such histories as *The Age of Reform* and *The American Political Tradition*. And then there was Peter Viereck, the first of this school to openly identify as a conservative, whose uniting of Robert LaFollette and Joe McCarthy as Anglophobic demagogues transparently expressed personal trauma toward his father, George Sylvester Viereck, a leading German apologist of past generations and one-time frequent correspondent of Eugene Debs. Whatever the contributions of Niebuhr and Viereck to a positive conservatism, they came in spite of, rather than because of, their personal backgrounds and first principles.

The first major scholarly work on American Socialism came directly out of this milieu. Daniel Bell, now labor editor of *Fortune* magazine, contributed a long essay to a series on “Socialism and American Life” published by Princeton University in 1952, eventually taking book form as *Marxian Socialism in the United States*. Arguing against scholars who attributed the failure of the Socialist Party primarily to the American political system and that the white working class never had to struggle as in Europe for the vote, Bell relied heavily on trendy concepts from Niebuhr to indict the character of American Socialism as dogmatic and thus “in but not of the world.” *Marxian Socialism in the United States* became widely regarded as the standard work against which all future treatments were to be judged, yet oddly, most historians who came after have ignored or avoided important particulars of Bell’s argument.

Indeed, these largely ignored particulars used to illustrate Bell’s “in but not of the world” thesis were much more representative of something that by no means logically followed—what Bell called “the retrogressive, crabbed, narrow, and xenophobic nature of agrarian socialism come to its logical conclusions” in such places as North Dakota and Oklahoma. Bell had come to know some of the old survivors of agrarian socialism just a few years earlier when he was working for the National

Educational Committee for a New Party, yet he made gratuitous swipes at such figures as Tom Watson and “bitter isolationist and Roosevelt hater” Joseph Medill Patterson.¹⁴ Interestingly, this was nearly a decade before Bell became one of the major contributors to the early literature on the so-called radical right, apparently largely forgotten even then.

Moreover, with Bell barely even acknowledging the New Deal and Second World War and simply reading back that experience into the Wilson administration and the First World War, the resulting central thesis has virtually never been repeated or defended since—that opposition to U.S. entry into the First World War in and of itself destroyed the Socialist Party’s prospects. But the fundamental conceit of *Marxian Socialism in the United States* was most starkly illustrated in Bell’s explanation of how its thesis was more or less equally applicable to historic European Social Democracy:

In 1930, a Social Democratic government ruled in Germany, yet . . . followed orthodox deflationary policies, cutting spending and balancing budgets, thus extending the unemployment and deepening the crisis. In retrospect, it seems astonishing that the socialist economists, among them such gifted men as Rudolf Hilferding—whose work *Finanzkapital* served as the basis of the Marxian theory of imperialism, and who served as finance minister—should have been so shortsighted. . . . The thought that unorthodox fiscal policy could tap idle savings or that the state could intervene . . . was alien to the Marxist economists.¹⁵

Completely unmentioned were the reparation payments demanded by the vengeful peace of Versailles, implying that it was not Versailles that drove Germany into the arms of Hitler, but rather the refusal of the German Social Democrats to adopt the Keynesian economics of the New Deal. In this same connection Bell asserted, “It was only after World War II that the socialist parties of Europe took full responsibility for governing a society.”¹⁶ In a self-congratulatory pique, Daniel Bell

celebrated Cold War liberalism at its zenith by castigating American Socialism for feckless revolutionary zeal. He was oblivious to the far greater consequences of Woodrow Wilson being “in but not of the world” and that what he wrought for his country by entering the First World War was itself a revolutionary experience.

With less than two thousand dues-paying members remaining, a weary and diminished Socialist Party gathered for its national convention in Cleveland on June 10, 1952. Over the objection of Norman Thomas and others, Darlington Hoopes was nominated for president. “The ship may be sinking, and frankly it looks as though it is,” Hoopes wrote to a friend, “but so far as I am concerned, I would rather go down with the colors flying than stay up with the flag furled.”¹⁷ The vice presidential nomination went to Samuel Friedman, a mainstay at *The New Leader* when it was still Socialist and a frequent candidate for office in New York since the 1930s.¹⁸ Thomas was conveniently absent for most of the campaign, accompanied by A. Philip Randolph on a tour of Asia for the new American Committee for Cultural Freedom.¹⁹ Thomas spoke at the final campaign event with Hoopes and Friedman in Reading the Saturday before the election, but cast his ballot for Democrat Adlai Stevenson.²⁰

After both Norman Thomas and the Libertarian Socialist League lost interest in trying to chart the party’s future course, the character of the Socialist Party in its twilight was inordinately shaped by the distinct faction that gathered around Darlington Hoopes leading up to the 1952 campaign. Two figures, in particular, shaped the flinty remnant and set it on a course sharply at odds with the party’s historical legacy. The first was Samuel Friedman. After the national office moved to New York in 1940, the major constituency of the party at twilight inevitably became the mostly Jewish young radicals there. Friedman was their sole living link to the party’s heyday and as such wielded enormous influence, particularly after editing the widely popular collection of labor and Socialist songs, the *Rebel Song Book*.²¹ But Friedman was also an employee

of the United Jewish Appeal, whose mission was to direct all American Jewish philanthropy at the behest of the State of Israel and international Zionist movement. As early as the 1952 SP convention he made known his displeasure with the presence of the anti-Zionist Jewish Labor Bund.²²

The second figure was the YPSL national chairman during the 1948 campaign, Irwin Suall. Although he had the same New York Jewish background as most YPSL comrades, Suall was otherwise extremely atypical. Dropping out of college to join the Merchant Marine, he had working-class credentials almost unheard of for a young Socialist after the Second World War, including membership in the Seafarers International Union.²³ When most bright young men from Norman Thomas's last campaign moved on to jobs in liberal Democratic politics, or the labor movement, or the ideological Cold War apparatus, Suall remained in the world of the radical left. Paradoxically, this made Suall a more radical and militant anti-Communist than many former comrades, who were now dealing with an actual Communist enemy abroad rather than what they had known on campus. Already, such ex-Trotskyists as James Burnham and Sidney Hook were developing a militant creed of apocalyptic confrontation with the Soviet Union bearing the unmistakable influence of their former prophet.²⁴ Suall came to similar ideas independently and would play a consequential role in forging the disparate developing strands of this creed into neoconservatism.

On the ballot in only sixteen states, with write-in votes recorded in only another two, Darlington Hoopes and Samuel Friedman polled a pathetic 20,410 votes. The dying remnant of the Communist-led Progressive Party polled in third place with just over 140,000 votes, less than 0.25 percent of the total. For the first time since 1900, the Socialists were outpolled by the Prohibition Party, and for the first time ever, they were outpolled by the Socialist Labor Party. Having failed even in his modest goal of registering a respectable protest vote, after the election Hoopes said defiantly, with a flourish of the old-time religion, "We must and we shall build a political movement in this country in which we can march side by side with millions of our devoted comrades throughout the world to our glorious goal of the cooperative

commonwealth. We have kept the torch burning through a most difficult and trying period.”²⁵

Even before the 1952 election, Norman Thomas had begun laying plans for a new organization, anticipating the imminent collapse of the Socialist Party. He described the initial discussions thus: “Virtually all participants agreed that we did not want to start a political party nor any type of disciplined organization requiring conformity. Instead it was decided that a new Socialist association should be formed, both to re-examine Socialist policies and philosophy and to conduct activities to defend socialism—both at home and abroad—against outrageous attacks.”²⁶ The result was the founding conference in March 1953 of the Union for Democratic Socialism (UDS) with Norman Thomas as chairman. A. Philip Randolph, Sidney Hook, and Abraham Miller of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers were named vice chairmen, and other board members included Clarence Senior, August Claessens, Patrick Gorman, Maynard Krueger, journalist Murray Kempton, Louis Goldberg of the Social Democratic Federation, and Seymour Martin Lipset, one of the disaffected Shachtmanites who joined the SP in 1942. Bertram Wolfe gave the outstanding speech of the conference, in which former Lovestoneites, including Will Herberg, Louis Nelson, and Charles Zimmerman, were disproportionately represented.²⁷ Jay Lovestone himself reportedly sympathized with and gave money to the UDS.²⁸

The public positions of Norman Thomas by the time of the Eisenhower presidency, given wide publicity through his column syndicated by the *Denver Post* among other means, were a model of principled and circumspect radicalism. He gladly participated in such (not as yet openly) CIA-backed anti-Communist endeavors as the Congress for Cultural Freedom, but never with the uncritical enthusiasm of such old comrades as James T. Farrell, Sidney Hook, and even Dwight Macdonald. Thomas denounced Joe McCarthy for “discrediting our government to the puzzled and scornful mirth of our allies” while supporting aggressive efforts to root Communists out of the federal government and even from teaching in public schools, though he was equally opposed to the

Smith Act prosecutions of Communist Party members. He welcomed Eisenhower's withdrawal from Korea and committed himself to "controlled, multilateral disarmament" in pointed opposition to the calls of such long-time pacifist colleagues as A. J. Muste for unilateral disarmament by the United States. Thomas's campaign for disarmament became the overarching mission of the Postwar World Council, which was reduced to little more than a letterhead after 1948, but was still an effective vehicle for Thomas to be heard on world affairs.²⁹

However well he adjusted to the postwar world, Thomas remained firm in his original critique of Cold War liberalism, insisting, "With the single and important exception of the growth of a better conscience on race relations, the years through which I have lived have been years of moral retrogression."³⁰ He was quoted defending his opposition to entering the Second World War as late as 1963, but was subdued in re-litigating that era, unlike such old comrades as the severely maligned Harry Elmer Barnes.³¹ Yet Barnes was one of the few who resisted the siren song of McCarthyite vengeance against the old Communist enemy. John Flynn was undoubtedly the most conspicuous in so succumbing. When Flynn published his book on the case of Owen Lattimore, the State Department China hand accused of Soviet espionage, Thomas wrote his old friend:

I do not, however, believe that you give anything like due weight to a revolutionary situation far bigger than Lattimore and company, to the general approval in America of Roosevelt's approach to peace and, in short, to the external situation. I think you attribute too much to conspirators and I believe that mistakes in judgment were often made without evil conspiracy.³²

On at least one major international issue, Thomas was at odds with a growing number of Socialists: Israel and Zionism. He lamented the view that "Israel must become imperialist and greatly expand its borders in order that Jews, all of whom are exiles even in America, may have room to come home," adding, "I should hate to see Jewish youth generally

taught that an earthly Zion is their only true home. The effect will not be good on America or on American Jews.”³³ When Israel passed its Law of Return affirming this principle in 1952, Thomas wrote in the newsletter of the American Council for Judaism that “an Arab, without too much exaggeration, could complain that the Jews were practicing Hitlerism in reverse” and that he feared “the consequences of this new law in fanning the flames of Arab chauvinism and Muslim fanaticism.”³⁴

The remaining anti-Zionists on the Jewish left congregated around William Zukerman, a veteran Yiddish journalist who published the *Jewish Newsletter* with support from the American Council for Judaism. The supporters of Zukerman and his newsletter included the unbowed ILGWU radical Louis Nelson; Adolph Held, long-ago Socialist alderman in New York who now led the Jewish Labor Committee; and J. B. S. Hardman, who had first warned Eugene Debs about the specter of Zionism in 1918. Of Socialist veterans of the Depression decade, Jack Altman was active with the Council, and Anna Walling Mattson, daughter of William English and Anna Strunsky, for many years managed its philanthropic fund.³⁵ Even David Dubinsky, known to privately sympathize with the Council in the 1940s, personally gave money to the *Jewish Newsletter*.³⁶ But the most outspoken old Socialist supporter of the *Jewish Newsletter* was Jacob Panken, whom Zukerman effusively praised as “one of the few individuals that I know who has remained true to these ideals and principles of a past generation.”³⁷

The Union for Democratic Socialism did not persist beyond its first conference, existing on paper only until about 1957. John Flynn gave a radio address for his pro-McCarthy allies portraying Thomas’s pronouncements in connection to the 1953 conference and nominal break with the SP as a renunciation of socialism itself, but in truth Thomas was using the occasion to express his reconsiderations in a pamphlet titled *Democratic Socialism: A New Appraisal*.³⁸ Bernard Johnpoll argues that the ideas in this pamphlet were essentially anarchist, relying heavily on Peter Kropotkin’s theories of “mutual aid” as a counterpoint to doctrinaire Marxism.³⁹ As Thomas wrote a few years later in a long, soul-searching letter to Tucker Smith,

I think we Socialists are duty bound to suggest a workable alternative in the light of what we all are learning about bureaucracy and the difficulty of preserving individual freedom and initiative even under a collectivism short of totalitarianism. . . . There are, for example, abundant reasons for taking steps for controlled disarmament to avert World War III or to do the economic things that could be done steadily to diminish poverty and to increase abundance, but how do we make these reasons have the force of the simpler Socialist faith of earlier days? How in short can we combine discrimination and enthusiasm? Although I hope less than I once did, I am by no means crushed by my own beliefs and lack of dogmatic certainty.⁴⁰

Had Norman Thomas stuck to his original vision for the Union for Democratic Socialism—to provide a principled non-electoral alternative to the Cold War liberal consensus that could be built up to act politically once that consensus inevitably broke down—the twilight of American Socialism might have led to a more positive end than the ultimate tragedy of the new left. But the terms for the future were even then being set by a determined young man who was delivering, for all practical purposes, the final body blow to the historic Socialist Party.

Michael Harrington was born in 1928 to a comfortably middle-class and devoutly Catholic family in St. Louis. After entering and dropping out of Yale Law School before he was twenty, Harrington found himself working in Lower Manhattan for the Catholic Worker movement led by Dorothy Day. When he left that movement to join the Young People's Socialist League, he was allied in its leadership with a Croatian émigré named Bogdan Denitch, an open fellow traveler of Max Shachtman's organization, now known as the Independent Socialist League (ISL). When Harrington and Denitch won control of the YPSL in the spring of 1953, they immediately declared their intention to form a united front with the ISL. After Norman Thomas personally threatened their expulsion, Harrington simply led the YPSL wholesale out of the SP and

transformed it into the youth affiliate of the ISL, the new Young Socialist League (YSL).⁴¹

With this coup, Max Shachtman achieved a loose hegemony over the entire non-Communist radical left of the 1950s. The YSL had fewer than 100 members, but it was quick to build up a large sphere of influence. A. J. Muste addressed the first YSL convention, and many of Muste's younger followers in the War Resisters League became Shachtmanite fellow travelers.⁴² Among them was David McReynolds, who remained in the Socialist Party after briefly belonging to the Prohibition Party as a teenager in California. But the most important follower by far was Bayard Rustin, Muste's African American protégé who had belonged to the Young Communist League at City College in the 1930s before serving time as a conscientious objector during the Second World War.

For years, Rustin had been developing with fellow black pacifist James Farmer, who now led the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), the idea of applying the strategy of nonviolent resistance associated with Mahatma Gandhi to securing the civil rights of African Americans in the South. The chance to put their ideas into action came in 1955 when Rustin was dispatched to Montgomery, Alabama, to advise the bus boycott being led by a twenty-six-year old minister named Martin Luther King Jr.⁴³ Two devoted YSL cadre from Brooklyn College, Tom Kahn and Rachel Horowitz, became Rustin's assistants, organizing for the burgeoning civil rights movement in New York and other Northern cities. Rustin, openly and at times flamboyantly gay, even appointed his young lover Tom Kahn as director of the New York office of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference.⁴⁴ Shachtman came to regard Kahn and Horowitz as his "children," underscoring his highly personal and emotional leadership style.⁴⁵

The nature of Shachtman's loose hegemony was well illustrated by Irving Howe, who formally broke with him in 1953 before founding the magazine *Dissent*, which nevertheless remained very much a part of this larger radical milieu.⁴⁶ David Dellinger, a War Resisters League leader with a long history in the SP, launched *Liberation* in much the

same vein, and even the Libertarian Socialist League, after vigorously resisting numerous ISL takeover attempts, assented to the Shachtmanite-pacifist united front at a 1953 conference.⁴⁷ But this new style in leftism was greeted with foreboding by old survivors. As a severely ailing Devere Allen wrote to Norman Thomas,

I can't see why the official pacifist groups have to spend so much time on piffling projects like those temporary fasts, White House picketing, etc., when all it does, through its bad timing and psychology, is to impress upon the general public the terrible weakness of the pacifist groups. They insist on applying some of the minor Gandhi tactics in a situation where their chance of success is so infinitely smaller that it makes them look ridiculous . . . I am particularly concerned these days over the methods being used by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which seem to me too full of a tendency to whitewash Russia and to put the burden on the "imperfect democracies."⁴⁸

By 1955, a meager 691 dues-paying members remained in the Socialist Party of America, mostly concentrated in New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and California.⁴⁹ Two organizations historically aligned with the party endured. One was the Workers Defense League, an impeccably anti-Communist legal advocate for labor and civil liberties. The other was the League for Industrial Democracy, which revived in the 1950s under the steady leadership of Harry Laidler and with support from such ex-Socialist labor leaders as Walter Reuther, Joseph Schlossberg, and Andrew Biemiller; however, it served as little more than an excuse for periodic luncheons. The old survivors of the Jewish Socialist heyday in New York kept their own preserve for the occasional banquet, appropriately named the Reunion of Old Timers. The Socialist Party itself now had little other function than to publish the *Socialist Call*, which retained a respectable readership. It was decided at the 1954 convention that, except for one final presidential ticket, electoral campaigns would cease.⁵⁰

In yet more difficult straits was the Social Democratic Federation, now reduced to little more than a bimonthly four-page newsletter put

out by the proud but struggling Rand School. August Claessens, responsible for most of what life remained in the SDF and the most determined to bring about the formal reconciliation with the SP that had been a practical fact for some time, died suddenly in December 1954. James Oneal, who made a sincere effort to make amends with Thomas after the war, was the only one of the original SDF principals remaining to make reunification meaningful. But Oneal was living in California, frail and nearly blind. Louis Goldberg, a one-time Liberal Party member of the New York City Council, took charge of the SDF with an old *Forward* hand named James Glaser, making reunification his mission.

The year 1955 illustrated in more ways than one that the world that made American Socialism was fading into history. The AFL and CIO merged to form the AFL-CIO, completing the rise of a postwar labor movement characterized by C. Wright Mills as “the new men of power.” Its public face for a generation would be William Green’s successor in the AFL, George Meany, a spiritual son of Tammany Hall thrust into a peculiar position in the Cold War power elite. Walter Reuther led the CIO into the merger with unrealistic hopes of eventually leading the American labor movement with something like his youthful idealism. Also that year, what would remain the one comprehensive history of the Socialist Party, *The Socialist Party of America* by David Shannon, was published. A young general American historian, when Shannon was a teenager his family bought and moved into the former home of Eugene Debs in Terre Haute. Despite the most earnest effort, Shannon nevertheless erred greatly on the side of brevity and committed numerous factual errors.⁵¹ Still, Maurice Goldbloom praised the book in the *Socialist Call* as the best history yet published, with an eerily prophetic response to Shannon’s epitaph: “The American Socialist Party might be better off if it actually were a sect, as Professor Shannon believes it to be. But in that case it would really be dead.”⁵²

A group of remaining SP activists announced the formation of the Committee for a Socialist Program in 1955. Led by William Briggs in Los Angeles and David McReynolds in New York, the Committee quickly earned the support of locals ranging from San Francisco, Oakland, and

Berkeley to Chicago, Seattle, and Long Island; and were able to lure the foundering Libertarian Socialist League back into the fold.⁵³ Its members included important leaders of the Socialist Party's left wing in its final years such as Harry Siitonen in Berkeley, a son of Finnish Federation stalwarts in Massachusetts. The Committee for a Socialist Program put up the major resistance to reunification with the Social Democratic Federation, but in 1956 David McReynolds convinced his comrades to drop their opposition, to strengthen their credibility in advancing their plan to expand the Socialist Party by also merging with the Independent Socialist League and the Jewish Labor Bund.⁵⁴

In 1956, Darlington Hoopes and Samuel Friedman were once again nominated for president and vice president, but with no serious campaign effort to speak of; on the ballot in only four states with write-in votes recorded in another five, the final socialist presidential ticket polled all of 2,287 votes. Though having no intention to become an electoral party, the primary motivation for reunification may have been to enable the new organization to affiliate with the Socialist International, reorganized for the third time after the Second World War. After considering other names that might make its non-electoral nature more explicit, it was finally decided that the new entity would simply be called the Socialist Party-Social Democratic Federation (SP-SDF), as the SP was formally known until 1972.⁵⁵

The much heralded "unity convention," held in New York on January 19–20, 1957, was more a funeral than a wedding. Norman Thomas had to convince Frank Zeidler, who seldom intervened in party affairs during his unlikely tenure as mayor of Milwaukee, to accept the ceremonial national chairmanship.⁵⁶ James Oneal, whose great emotional investment in this gathering seems to have been a form of atonement for the 1930s in his old age, published a pamphlet for the occasion that enthusiastically announced "Socialism's New Beginning."⁵⁷ Yet there was probably no ghostlier presence than Jasper McLevy, who was narrowly defeated for reelection in Bridgeport later that year after the local labor movement backed repeated Democratic efforts to oust him.⁵⁸ McLevy

died in 1962, the same year as James Oneal, and with them went the last two living links to the founding of the Socialist Party.

But James Glaser of the SDF suddenly opposed the reunification. Bolt-
ing under his leadership were the New York local organization and
the overlapping Jewish Socialist Verband, a paper relic of 1920s fac-
tionalism controlled by *The Forward*. The official reason given was
absurd—“Opposition to the Socialist Party’s practice of running candi-
dates against those backed by the AFL-CIO”—which could have only
plausibly referred to the odd case of Jasper McLevy.⁵⁹ *The Forward* tipped
its hand when it editorialized against the unity convention because of
statements Norman Thomas made regarding the recent British, French,
and Israeli war for the Suez Canal. The dissenters, led by Alexander Kahn
and Sol Levitas, protested in a letter to the Socialist International:

Since 1936, the Socialist Party has consisted of Trotskyites, pacifists,
isolationists, and die-hard sectarians. . . . There is not one trade union,
cultural organization, fraternal organization, or any other which is
affiliated with it and follows it. It is financed by a few well-to-do spon-
sors, who have no connection with the American labor movement.⁶⁰

The result was the formation of the Democratic Socialist Federation
(DSF), for all practical purposes interchangeable with the Verband. Curio-
usly, its honorary chairman was the outspoken anti-Zionist Jacob Panken,
whose eightieth birthday gala with the Reunion of Old Timers was graced
by Clement Atlee as keynote speaker.⁶¹

Differences over the events in the Middle East cast a pall over the
unity convention. The British Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell, who
vigorously opposed his government’s folly in the Suez, was scheduled
to be the keynote speaker, but had to cancel due to other commitments
and so likely avoided howls of protest.⁶² Joseph Schlossberg, an active
Zionist with occasional binationalist sympathies, refused to attend the
convention in his anger at Thomas.⁶³ But no one was more vexed than
Louis Goldberg, who had made the unity convention his life’s mission,
composing an eleven-page letter defending the Israeli position to Thomas

as though he were Israel's lawyer.⁶⁴ Morris Polin, a loyalist of the Jewish Labor Bund who as an SDF stalwart was deeply involved in organizing the convention, urged Norman Thomas to make his case in a letter to *The Forward*.⁶⁵ But the editor of *The Forward*, Harry Rogoff, angrily replied that the substance of this letter had already been "delivered by Arab hatemongers," to which an incredulous William Zukerman responded, "I have never read anything more crude and contrary to the principles of the freedom of the press by any reactionary editor, let alone a socialist."⁶⁶

The brother of Judah Magnes, who had died in New York a broken man in 1948 after his pleas for reconciliation with the Arabs put his life in danger in Palestine, wrote sympathetically to Thomas, who replied, "I wish with all my heart that he were with us now."⁶⁷ But the most poignant tribute to Thomas came from Elmer Berger of the American Council for Judaism:

I think I shall never forget . . . your saying that your early suspicions of Zionism came as you saw its effect upon the Jewish labor movement. Mr. Rogoff's letter to you, if any is needed, is now a kind of tragic and final confirmation of what you expressed. . . . I am very much afraid that through a process of erosion of which most Jews today seem to reflect no consciousness whatsoever, Zionism is gradually "proving" most of the allegations which have, at one time or another, been used by the most vicious anti-Semites. . . . My own sentiments, even in these more recent years, were with the socialist groups among the Jews of the Central and Eastern European countries who rejected the escapism of Zionism, who saw their own particular problem in the context of the total problem of reactionary societies.⁶⁸

Norman Thomas largely retained the reputation of being a friend of the American Jewish community despite his anti-Zionist sympathies. Significantly, this reputation rested on extensive collaboration with the two major Jewish organizations whose position on Zionism remained most ambiguous through the 1950s, the American Jewish Committee

(AJC) and the Jewish Labor Committee; each of these groups, respectively, employed a loyal former protégé of Thomas, Harry Fleischman and Emanuel Muravchik. But the consolidation of what later became known as the “Israel lobby” was proceeding apace. Later that year, Thomas was accompanied on a tour of the Middle East by Don Peretz, a Jewish Peace Fellowship stalwart who worked as a Middle East expert at the AJC. Not long after, Peretz resigned from the AJC in protest of the new demand that all his statements had to be cleared by the Israeli Embassy.⁶⁹

After the unity convention, the Committee for a Socialist Program wasted no time proceeding to the core of its program: unification with the Independent Socialist League. This would amount to nothing less than the transubstantiation of the Socialist Party into a sect, as the hardiest old-timers left in the party had long feared. Led by David McReynolds, the advocates of unity with the Shachtmanites had a somewhat surprising ally in the new executive secretary of the SP, Irwin Suall, whose soon-to-be sister-in-law, Joan, was national secretary of the Young Socialist League.⁷⁰ Early in the 1930s, Shachtman had been the major proponent of the so-called French Turn, in which Trotsky saw the parties of social democracy as the prime targets to be seized in building a vanguard of global revolution; a position opposed by the majority of American Trotskyists. With considerable reluctance and never fully reconciled to that fact, Shachtman was increasingly aligning this vision of global democratic revolution with the less idealistic inverted “permanent revolution” doctrines of James Burnham and Sidney Hook.⁷¹

This gave Shachtman much in common with Irwin Suall. That the ISL was already a formidable political actor was made clear by its widespread infiltration of the youth arm of ADA, nearly wrecking it and netting the YSL such leading members as Joan Suall and Tom Kahn.⁷² If the Shachtmanites had ceased to be revolutionary socialists—and it was clear that at a minimum they no longer believed in establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat—they still functioned in the manner of a Leninist sect and certainly had the psychology of such a sect. One disaffected reader of the ISL paper *Labor Action* pointed out that “the word

Stalin and its derivatives and synonyms” could be counted a total of 114 times in a single issue.⁷³ In an early warning of Shachtmanism’s ultimate legacy in the presidency of George W. Bush, as Bogdan Denitch recalled a typical YSL bull session, if one insisted that “Socialists never engage in torture,” the inevitable riposte was, “You mean, if thousands of lives are at stake, and this White Guardist knows where the bombs are placed in the orphanage?”⁷⁴

With Irwin Suall now the architect of the Shachtmanite merger, several of McReynolds’s earlier allies in the Socialist Party’s new left wing became the leading opponents of the move, including Harry Siitonen in Berkeley and Brooklyn old-timer Bob Bloom, who would lead his local in resigning en masse. Even former executive secretary Travers Clement made a rare postwar intervention in party affairs to go on the record against the move.⁷⁵ Frank Zeidler resigned as national chairman after warning that any association by the party with a Leninist organization would be seized on by his political enemies in Milwaukee.⁷⁶ The majority was swayed by Norman Thomas; initially skeptical because of his vivid memories of Shachtman’s handiwork in the 1930s, but persuaded by the assurance the party would not become a formal caucus and would cease publication of *Labor Action*.⁷⁷ But such promises were superfluous—as Michael Harrington later recalled, “The SP was such a total shell that if you could breathe you would take it over. It was almost impossible not to take it over.”⁷⁸

The ISL merger represented the path chosen by the Socialist Party at a critical crossroads in the history of American politics, though the paths not taken require examination to understand the party’s full and multifaceted legacy. First was the path of the radical left, particularly after the Communist Party imploded right around this same time. There was much talk of outreach to the legions of disillusioned Communists, but it was generally understood that this was not a promising path to renewal.⁷⁹ Yet A. J. Muste would make a bold proposal to the contrary in 1957, when he launched the American Forum for Socialist Education (AFSE), mostly consisting of CP fellow travelers and curious onlookers from the Socialist

Workers Party.⁸⁰ Some SP left-wingers aligned with the Committee for a Socialist Program were also involved with this group. The most outspoken was George Stryker, the youthful leader of the Long Island local who was particularly loyal to Muste and deeply involved in the initial organizing of the AFSE. But even among his SP allies he became isolated, especially after openly identifying with the dissenting faction of the YSL then in the process of becoming the new youth arm of the SWP.⁸¹

Stryker protested before resigning, "I have every confidence in the AFSE and in its able chairman, A. J. Muste. It is a fully democratic organization which in no way is incompatible with the stated principles of the SP."⁸² But to the contrary, ex-Communists who sought a new consciously socialist politics in the AFSE generally considered the Communist Party not militant enough in defending the "actually existing Socialism" of the Communist bloc. The most extreme case was the Workers World Party, breaking from the SWP in support of the Soviet suppression of the 1956 Hungarian uprising and ultimately notorious for its pervasive yet widely scorned hegemony over the antiwar movement that followed the September 11 attacks. Even the SWP of the stoically orthodox James Cannon drifted in this direction when it endorsed the regime of Fidel Castro. Muste, whose absolute pacifism and nostalgia for the 1930s led him increasingly into this camp against the blandishments of Norman Thomas, perfectly personified how this abhorning milieu would dominate antiwar protest in future generations. In short, the events surrounding the American Forum for Socialist Education marked the birth of the sectarian revolutionary left that would feed off of, and ultimately outlive, the 1960s new left.

In another disruption of the paradigm in which the Socialist movement historically operated, the emergence of a new conservative movement in American politics was an accomplished fact by the late 1950s. When William F. Buckley launched *National Review* in 1955, under the strong influence of James Burnham he frankly endorsed "a totalitarian bureaucracy within our shores" to combat Communism. Among the earliest in this new right to be purged by Buckley was John Flynn, whose anti-militarist writings he firmly rejected. Another who had broken with

former allies in sympathy with Joe McCarthy but now had second thoughts was the publisher Henry Regnery, whose magazine *Human Events*, when first published in the 1940s, may have carried Norman Thomas more frequently than the more reliably left-isolationist *The Progressive*.⁸³ The two leading intellectuals associated with Regnery's new journal *Modern Age*, Russell Kirk and Robert Nisbet, were both nominal followers of Norman Thomas as young men, and Kirk became known for the frank and increasingly out-of-step position that conservatism had more in common with socialism than libertarianism. Will Herberg grew close to Kirk and Nisbet in his later years, and by the 1970s their positions would be echoed by such disillusioned new leftists as Christopher Lasch.

Yet by the second half of the 1950s, the last two relics of the progressivism that typified the Socialist Party's anti-interventionist allies of days gone by were Lawrence Dennis and Harry Elmer Barnes, frequent correspondents who were a distinct influence on such early prophets of the new left as sociologist C. Wright Mills and historian William Appleman Williams.⁸⁴ The rising star of the history department of the University of Wisconsin, Williams became one of the first revisionist historians of the Cold War. He developed a student following, all of whom were from a Communist background, ranging from James Weinstein, a bitterly disillusioned Young Communist of the Henry Wallace period, to Ron Radosh, a son of devout New York party members who himself belonged to the Communist Party as late as 1963.⁸⁵ In 1959, Weinstein founded the journal *Studies on the Left* to facilitate the same sort of rebuilding effort that was the goal of the AFSE, but was decidedly hostile to the Communist Party and its entire legacy.

The other editors of *Studies on the Left* came to include Williams, Radosh, and Gabriel Kolko, a disaffected YPSL leader from earlier in the decade. They quickly earned the wrath of the Communist Party on account of Williams's fondness for Charles Beard and the legacy of isolationism.⁸⁶ Premising their historical analysis on a theory of "corporate liberalism," Williams's disciples followed him in producing enduring scholarship of the Progressive Era in their effort to demolish inherited myths of the New Deal. Kolko published what ultimately became *The*

Triumph of Conservatism, and Weinstein published the groundbreaking research that critically remade the historiography of the Socialist Party for the better in his article, "Socialism's Hidden Heritage." Indeed, if there was any faint hope that something like the spirit of the historic Socialist Party could be resurrected in the aborning era of the new left, it was in the circle around *Studies on the Left*.

But they were fatally hobbled by an abiding commitment to an avowed revolutionary socialism. It is revealing that the embittered ex-Communist James Weinstein came to identify so deeply with the heyday of the Socialist Party and even with its leadership faction, while the embittered ex-Socialist Gabriel Kolko adopted the lingering Stalinist sympathies of Radosh. Contemptuous of 1930s radicalism, Weinstein in particular had no patience for the preoccupation of such radicals in the SP orbit as Irving Howe with developing "a theory of Stalinism."⁸⁷ When the new left took off on its self-destructive spiral by the mid-1960s, it brought out the worst tendencies of the initially promising perspective of the circle around *Studies on the Left*.

From roughly 1959 to 1964, the Shachtmanite-infused Socialist Party actually led the kind of popular activist movement of the left to which the ISL had aspired. The major catalyst for its rise, of course, was the civil rights movement, to which the SP was intimately tied through Bayard Rustin, as well as A. Philip Randolph. Randolph's Harlem office, from which he once published *The Messenger*, was now the site of regular strategy sessions. Randolph's undying if increasingly private radicalism allowed him to relate to both white and black young radicals, even earning him an unlikely tribute from Malcolm X: "All civil rights leaders are confused, but Randolph is less confused than the rest."⁸⁸ As early as the spring of 1959, the foundation of a formidable protest movement became unmistakable with the success of the Youth March for Integrated Schools, led by Randolph and Rustin in Washington, DC. But how far this new protest movement diverged from the example and even the memory of historic American Socialism was perhaps best illustrated in the recollection of Michael Harrington: "Whatever our attitudes toward

the Soviet Union or China, we all knew the same songs, so the buses would reverberate to 'This Land is Your Land' and the ballads of the Spanish Civil War."⁸⁹

The most momentous event as the 1950s drew to a close occurred when the Student League for Industrial Democracy, a ghost of an organization since the late 1930s, embraced the reigning mood of new beginnings and renamed itself Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). At the 1959 convention that effected the name change, SDS announced a conference for the following May at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on organizing Northern students for the growing civil rights movement in the South. In the meantime, on February 1, 1960, the first lunch counter sit-in occurred in Greensboro, North Carolina, through which was born the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Led by Rustin, Harrington, former SLID leader James Farmer, and Tom Hayden, editor of the student paper at Ann Arbor, the SDS conference thus grew to unanticipated proportions.⁹⁰

When the Shachtmanites first entered the Socialist Party, their position on electoral politics remained unclear. That they could now dictate the SP's position became evident in 1960 when Mike Harrington was named editor of the party's new biweekly paper, *New America*, replacing the *Socialist Call*.⁹¹ The majority group in the party, heavily dominated by Shachtmanites, easily prevailed with the position of "realignment" at the 1960 convention, arguing that the civil rights movement, in alliance with the AFL-CIO, would transform the Democratic Party into a labor party:

New and dynamic forces are at work within the old parties, especially the Democratic Party: the new Negro, labor's immensely powerful political machine, the liberal and peace organizations. Sooner or later these must burst through the stultifying restraints of their old ties and alliances. In the conflicts which they generate over genuine issues lies the hope and the promise of a new alignment in our political life. The Socialist Party is wholeheartedly dedicated to the fight for realignment. In that fight we are not alone. The United Automobile

Workers, Americans for Democratic Action, New York Liberal Party, and other outstanding progressive movements are on record for realignment. The SP-SDF is ideally suited to spearhead the drive for realignment in that it is an independent organization, free of any compromising ties with the old party machines. It can and it will play the role of the most courageous and intransigent force for realignment. This declaration, taken together with the party's decision not to enter a Presidential ticket in the 1960 campaign, represents a basic shift in tactics for American Socialism. Realignment, the party's convention felt, is an essential precondition for meaningful Socialist politics. In a new liberal-labor second party, democratic socialism will come into its own in the United States. Indeed, Socialists believe it must eventually become the program of the new second party.⁹²

The major focus of SP activity during the 1960 campaign was carrying out Bayard Rustin's plans for demonstrations at both major party conventions for the adoption of strong civil rights programs. But there were already dissenters from realignment. Darlington Hoopes vainly protested in a hollow flourish of old-time religion.⁹³ Hal Draper, who provided most of the day-to-day leadership of the ISL in the years before it entered the SP, also began to make his dissent heard. Draper, one of the few who had been with Shachtman from the beginning (and brother of the historian Theodore Draper), influenced many newer members of the YPSL who were skeptical of realignment; the following year this cohort elected Joel Geier at the University of Chicago as YPSL chairman.⁹⁴ Some veterans of the Libertarian Socialist League, led by Virgil Vogel and Bob Auerbach, formed an independent committee to support the Socialist Labor Party candidate, Eric Hass, who at an extremely distant third, with just over 47,000 votes, polled not even one third of the historically minuscule popular vote margin separating John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon.⁹⁵ Mike Harrington cast a write-in vote for Norman Thomas.⁹⁶

It is important to note that the embryonic new left in SDS was in no way opposed to the basic assumptions behind realignment, particularly

with its emphasis of protest over politics, and remained so long after the controversies that first erupted two years later. It was James Weinstein and his colleagues at *Studies on the Left* who pointedly criticized the priorities of SDS—issue-based activism and militant posturing for its own sake at the expense of developing a “revolutionary socialist consciousness.”⁹⁷ In their contempt for the legacy of the Popular Front, they may have recognized in Max Shachtman what few saw at the time. An adept master of Leninist organizational intrigue, Shachtman was also one of the shrewdest students of the American Communist movement, in awe of the genius of the Popular Front. Having captured the Socialist Party as the culmination of his diligent efforts in the 1950s, with the party’s close connection to the civil rights movement Shachtman succeeded in replicating the Popular Front model of organization in creating the new left. This transformation of the American left that began with the rise of the Popular Front in the 1930s amounted to the displacement of historic American Socialism by a deeply undemocratic approach to politics.

The first presidential election since the founding of the Socialist Party in which it did not field a candidate coincided with several other signposts in the passing away of historic American Socialism. Frank Zeidler stepped down after twelve years as mayor of Milwaukee, though an old-timer in Madison named William Osborne Hart soon began to be a frequent candidate for statewide office in Wisconsin.⁹⁸ The Rand School finally shut its doors after more than fifty years, with the former Meyer London Memorial Library becoming the foundational collection of the new Tamiment Library at New York University. Finally, Patrick Gorman, president of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters who had kept the flame of the old cause flickering in the postwar labor movement, established the Eugene V. Debs Foundation. Raising the money from various unions, the foundation purchased Debs’s former home in Terre Haute, thereafter maintaining it as a national historic site on the campus of Indiana State University.⁹⁹

It became evident by 1961 how profoundly the character of the Socialist movement was changing as a consequence of the Shachtman merger. In a pamphlet titled *The American Ultras*, Irwin Suall revealed the full implications of the realignment program. The impetus for this pamphlet was a scandal in 1961 in which several high-ranking military officials were found to be using indoctrination materials from the rightist sect known as the John Birch Society. With *The American Ultras*, Suall sought to enlist the Socialist Party as shock troops to extend the growing public hysteria about groups like the John Birch Society. The ironies of this pamphlet abound. It was mostly taken up with documenting the involvement of various military-industrial complex business interests in disseminating crude and paranoid anti-Communist propaganda. Yet in just another decade these very interests would enlist several Shachtmanites to employ far shrewder methods in the forging of neo-conservatism (indeed, the American Enterprise Institute itself, then called the American Enterprise Association, was named in the pamphlet).¹⁰⁰

Yet Suall's call to arms may have been the earliest articulation of Shachtmanite/new left idealism married to the inversion of Trotsky's "permanent revolution" by James Burnham and Sidney Hook; in other words, the doctrine of "global democratic revolution" in its earliest, purest iteration:

First and foremost, the democratic forces must develop a clear and forthright program for political struggle against Communism *and* for freedom. . . . In short, America will not act positively and radically abroad so long as its domestic life is dominated by the force of conservatism, reaction and the status quo. To get a democratic foreign policy, one must achieve a much more democratic domestic policy. . . . The response of the democratic left cannot simply be the urging and affirming of a democratic foreign policy. To give that program substance and meaning, there must be a *movement*, a powerful coalition growing out of the domestic reality. . . . Nothing less than a genuine second party, a democratic left movement, must be forged, regardless

of the party tag it bears. In this way the current for progressive, humanist and democratic change can not only outpace the right, but sweep it aside, as was done in the thirties in this land.¹⁰¹

This was too much for David Williams, a member of the ADA national office staff, who wrote to Suall after reading *The American Ultras*, “You seem to accept the two root illusions of the ultras: 1) that Communism is winning 2) that Communism is the result of American shortcomings (failure to root out Comsymps, as the ultras see it, failure to adopt your program, as you see it).”¹⁰²

The upheaval resulting from these changes at the SP grassroots, such as they were, was most vividly on display in Colorado. Alex Garber, a Trotskyist schismatic from the 1930s who became a popular sociology professor at the University of Colorado in Boulder, came into the Socialist Party with Shachtman and recruited a substantial student following there, where he was also the faculty advisor to the CIA-linked National Student Association. But one of the last SP locals with a substantial membership dating back to before 1948 was in Denver, where the secretary protested to Irwin Suall that there is “a definite ideological fight between the Shachtmanites and other class-conflict Socialists, and those who favor a more humanist community planning approach in which class our new able spokesman, Erich Fromm, seems to be.”¹⁰³ Suall had to be pressured into even recognizing the Denver local along with that in Boulder.¹⁰⁴ Yet throughout the 1960s, *Let Man Prevail*, the manifesto that the widely known Erich Fromm authored on behalf of the SP, was constantly in demand from the national office, while Max Shachtman’s tome on the development of Stalinism, *The Bureaucratic Revolution*, gathered dust on the shelves.¹⁰⁵ Similar shenanigans would keep the Jewish Labor Bund from merging into the SP, with the new leadership apparently wary of the Bund’s avowed anti-Zionism. When an informal agreement was reached in 1961, the matter was indefinitely tabled.¹⁰⁶

The contradictions in the new foreign policy program soon appeared in response to the disastrous CIA-backed attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro known as the Bay of Pigs. While the operation was ongoing, on

April 18, 1961, Max Shachtman spoke at a Socialist Party meeting in San Francisco and gave the invasion a somewhat qualified endorsement, noting that most participants on the ground were trade unionists who felt betrayed by Castro's drift toward the Soviets. The increasingly radicalized Berkeley YPSL was outraged and disinvited him from speaking the next night, replacing him with Hal Draper, who now lived in Berkeley.¹⁰⁷ Though Shachtman expressed misgivings about the role of the CIA, the Bay of Pigs and its "good, stout working class fighters," in Shachtman's words, represented exactly the sort of offensive movement against Communism by "progressive forces" that was at the heart of the "democratic foreign policy" of Irwin Suall.¹⁰⁸

It proved to be Shachtman's last public intervention in SP policy, as he became increasingly secluded in his modest home in the Long Island suburb of Floral Park. It is revealing that such a relatively minor incident set him off. Having succeeded in building up such a promising political movement, Shachtman was leaving it to the initiative of others to actually do something with it. He allowed the formidable Leninist cadre he built up to follow the lead of Irwin Suall, assenting to their ultimate employment by unforeseen powerful interests.

On June 11, 1962, SDS gathered for a national convention at the UAW retreat in Port Huron, Michigan, to adopt a formal manifesto. SDS now had more than eight hundred dues-paying members on ten campuses, and Norman Thomas frankly told young admirers they were better off joining SDS than the YPSL.¹⁰⁹ Mike Harrington came to Port Huron with his close comrades Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz, all agreeing that the draft manifesto prepared by Tom Hayden was seriously flawed in its elevation of student radicals above the labor movement and for its kneejerk impulse that they labeled "anti-anti-Communism." Hayden, who deeply identified with Harrington as a fellow Midwestern Irish Catholic turned aspiring revolutionary, was shocked to find him opposed to the manifesto. Also in the Shachtmanite cohort was Don Slaiman, an old comrade from the Buffalo UAW who now ran the new civil rights department of the AFL-CIO, described by SDS leader Richard Flacks

as both “a blustering old-line Marxist” and “a caricature of a labor bureaucrat.”¹¹⁰

After a stormy opening session debating the proposed manifesto, Harrington left Port Huron the next morning for other speaking engagements. Slaiman, Kahn, Horowitz, and former YPSL chairman Richard Roman led the charge against the seating of a Young Communist as a nonspeaking observer, who left before the convention voted to uphold his seating after hours of debate. This was followed by an equally acrimonious exchange on the question of whether the Soviet Union was “inherently expansionist and aggressive” or merely a “status quo power.” The Port Huron Statement could be faulted for many things; this was just the sort of academic question ill befitting a political program that plagued it throughout. But it declared forthrightly, “As democrats we are in basic opposition to the Communist system,” adding, “The Communist movement has failed, in every sense, to achieve its stated intentions of leading a worldwide movement for human emancipation.”¹¹¹

In at least one important respect, the Port Huron Statement signified a decrease in radicalism: it scrapped the SLID preamble that still referred to “the cooperative commonwealth” and did not even use the word “socialism,” only “democratic.”¹¹² At the same time, a clause barring membership to advocates of totalitarian doctrines, written decades before by Harry Laidler in plain English evoking the Bill of Rights, was replaced by a new one with the same intent but with deliberately vague language.¹¹³ The decided lack of what earlier generations of Socialists would recognize as substantive radicalism was striking. As Kirkpatrick Sale wrote in the definitive history of SDS,

It was unabashedly middle class, concerned with poverty of vision rather than poverty of life, with apathy rather than poverty, with the world of the white student rather than the world of the blacks, the poor, or the workers. It was set firmly in mainstream politics, seeking the reform of wayward institutions rather than their abolition, and it had no comprehension of the dynamics of capitalism, of imperialism, of class conflict, certainly no conception of revolution.¹¹⁴

Harrington went on the warpath against the SDS leadership. He convened several active board members of the League for Industrial Democracy, among them Harry Fleischman, to hold a formal hearing to consider the expulsion of Hayden and two of his colleagues. The LID elders were misled about the actual content of the Port Huron Statement, believing among other things that it contained an explicit condemnation of the parent organization.¹¹⁵ Harrington was acting as Shachtmanite commissar, probably on his own initiative if also to satisfy the embroiled passions of his older comrades.¹¹⁶ When Hayden pointed to what was actually in the Port Huron Statement, Harrington barked, “Documents shmocuments! Slaiman and I said this was antithetical to the LID and everything it’s stood for,” apparently forgetting that just five years earlier he and Slaiman were viewed by the LID as highly antithetical Trotskyists.¹¹⁷

The LID committee voted to take severe disciplinary measures against the three accused and against SDS as a whole, even changing the locks on the LID offices out of which Norman Thomas had operated since the early 1930s, where SDS had an annex. The SDS leaders retrieved their mailing lists and other possessions after a successful break-in. Norman Thomas intervened to effect a reconciliation, in which most of the punitive measures were overturned and Harrington offered profuse apologies.¹¹⁸ That same year, Harrington published *The Other America*, a widely read and reviewed book expanding on an earlier essay in *Commentary* on poverty in post-war America. Thomas, who had angrily booted him out of the YPSL ten years earlier, now had nothing but praise for Harrington.

During and after the momentous Port Huron convention and its after-shocks, however, most in the SP probably remained more aggravated by the growing influence of Hal Draper’s young admirers in the YPSL, who were committed to a revival of vintage Shachtmanite “third camp” Trotskyism and opposed to realignment. Alex Garber, the Boulder professor who was recruiting an astonishing number of his students into the YPSL, dispatched a recent graduate named Penn Kemble to reinforce the Shachtmanite regulars in New York. Joshua Muravchik, the sixteen-year-old son of Norman Thomas’s confidant at the Jewish Labor

Committee, recalled of the meeting at which Kemble first arrived, “The ideological disquisition that followed bore all the earmarks of close training at the knee of Penn’s own Marxist mentor, Alex Garber.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, Garber himself may have been orchestrating an infiltration of Shachtman’s following. As faculty advisor to the National Student Association on the Boulder campus, Garber was likely a party to its front activities for the CIA, and Kemble was one of many whom Garber recruited directly out of the NSA into the YPSL.¹²⁰

In January 1963, Bayard Rustin, Tom Kahn, and Norman Hill, a young SP member who worked for the Congress for Racial Equality, prepared a proposal for a two-day mass protest in Washington, DC that summer to demand federal legislation to secure the aims of the civil rights movement. A. Philip Randolph was quickly won over, and in tribute to his efforts during the 1940s the proposed event was named the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Randolph became its director, Rustin the deputy director, Tom Kahn their chief of staff, and Rachelle Horowitz in charge of transportation logistics.¹²¹ The original proposal implored: “The struggle against racism in all its forms may now be the catalyst which mobilized all workers behind demands for a broad and fundamental program of social justice.”¹²² But as more conservative civil rights groups such as the NAACP and National Urban League came on board, the protest was reduced to a single day and a narrow focus on ending legal discrimination. On August 28, 1963, a quarter-million marchers came to the National Mall, with Martin Luther King delivering his now immortal “I Have a Dream” speech.

With Martin Luther King now literally enshrined with his own gargantuan temple among those of the presidential demigods and garish war memorials on the National Mall—a means of including African Americans in the narrative of “national greatness”—the distinctly Socialist origins of the March on Washington have been largely forgotten. Norman Thomas was there, calling it “one of the happiest days of my political life.”¹²³ The Socialist Party held a conference in Washington over the two days immediately following the march, featuring Thomas, Randolph,

Rustin, James Farmer, and New York congressman William Ryan.¹²⁴ This unusually bright and hopeful moment in the twilight of American Socialism was best captured by the journalist I. F. Stone:

Amid the assorted young students and venerables like Norman Thomas, socialism took on fresh meaning and revived urgency. It was not accidental that so many of those who ran the March turned out to be members and fellow travelers of the Socialist Party. One saw that for the lower third of our society, white as well as black, the search for answers must lead them back—though Americans still start nervously at the very word—toward socialism.¹²⁵

Though built on a dubious foundation and seeking influence and power on different terms and by different means than historic American Socialism, a vibrant and dynamic democratic socialist movement had been rebuilt and appeared to have a bright future. But a foreign war on the horizon would be the undoing of it all. Even if the movement Max Shachtman and his disciples built up out of the refuse of the prewar non-Communist left could have continued to flourish whole, it may still have led to a distinctly illiberal end. Many of those who made the new left possible would turn on their creation with an unusually cruel vengeance and join the nervous mandarins of the American empire. The Shachtmanites were about to commence their own march on Washington.

16 Out with the Old, In with the New

(1964–1972)

In his first address to Congress after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, declared, “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill,” the impetus for the March on Washington several months earlier. Then, in his first State of the Union address, Johnson announced an “unconditional war on poverty in America.”¹ After introducing the legislation constituting this war on poverty, he would dramatically frame his ambitious legislative agenda later that year in a commencement address at the University of Michigan:

We have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society, resting on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice, to which we are totally committed in our time. But this is just the beginning . . . not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed.²

Never had an American president come so close to the spirit and even the substance of historic American Socialism. If the circumstances and available means of carrying out his program would have been problematic to many in the Socialist Party of generations past, that historic critique

of the American political system was now entirely forgotten, and any talk of other means than the corporate liberal state considered superfluous at best. More significantly, the outlining of Johnson's agenda neatly coincided with the rise of the Shachtmanite inner circle to the pinnacle of power in the labor movement, making them potential policy makers in the Johnson administration. From their base in the UAW, after Don Slaiman entered George Meany's circle of advisors, a UAW Shachtmanite named Sam Fishman was elected president of the Michigan AFL-CIO, and Tom Kahn became a speechwriter for Meany. Norman Hill went to work in the Industrial Union Department of the AFL-CIO, and Max Shachtman's wife Yetta became the secretary of Al Shanker, the incendiary young leader of the American Federation of Teachers in New York.³

After the AFL-CIO merger, A. Philip Randolph entered a long and bitter struggle with George Meany to end all segregationist practices in the trade union federation on par with their strict constitutional measures against Communism and organized crime.⁴ When several individual unions, most notably the UAW, prominently supported the March on Washington after the AFL-CIO refused to endorse it, Meany immediately regretted it. His penance was establishing a major patronage sinecure, the A. Philip Randolph Institute, with Bayard Rustin as executive director and Rachelle Horowitz as his secretary.⁵ This group in the top echelons of the AFL-CIO ultimately had a greater impact on American history and politics than Michael Harrington, but at the time nothing seemed more extraordinary than the ascent of Harrington as a consultant to the President's Task Force in the War Against Poverty. Yet his major proposal, to create full employment through large-scale public works projects, co-authored with an assistant secretary of labor named Daniel Patrick Moynihan, was hastily rejected by LBJ.⁶ In the words of Harrington's biographer Maurice Isserman, "Johnson's own ideas about how to combat poverty were a contradictory mixture of warm memories of the New Deal and a conviction that simply giving money to the poor was both morally and politically undesirable."⁷

As the Civil Rights Act made its way through Congress, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was on the ground in

Mississippi in its most daring campaign yet, registering black voters amid unsparing violence. Climaxing with the infamous murders of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, this campaign of violence was the last stand of legal white supremacy in the South. When the allies of SNCC in Mississippi were prevented from participating in the delegate selection process for the 1964 Democratic convention, they formed a parallel organization, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, to contest the seating of the white party regulars. Meanwhile, a police shooting of a black teenager in Harlem led to an outbreak of rioting that presaged the massive urban unrest to come. Combined with the events in Mississippi and the peaking influence of Malcolm X before his assassination the following winter, a mood of black nationalist militancy made itself known that was deeply anathema to the abiding Socialist convictions of Rustin and Randolph.⁸ There was a potent mixture of alarm over both black militancy and the earliest indications of a white backlash. Alabama Governor George Wallace polled remarkably well as a primary candidate against LBJ, with one of his earliest indications of Northern support a well-received visit in the former Socialist bastion of Milwaukee.

But the eventual Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater, a vocal opponent of the Civil Rights Act in the Senate, brought the greatest anxiety to the civil rights movement. His acceptance speech at the Republican convention, though it reiterated his criticisms of the Civil Rights Act, focused on a maximalist view of armed confrontation with Communism abroad, belying the libertarian reputation he later attained. Goldwater aroused determined support for LBJ from peace activists who might otherwise have been reticent because of his escalation of military operations in Vietnam. The rise of Goldwater and his supporters could not have been better scripted to satisfy the high drama of the SP “realignment” narrative. The youth group founded by William F. Buckley that was one of the major forces behind Goldwater, Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), had its major coming-out party in 1962 with a “World Liberation from Communism” rally at Madison Square Garden. A counter-rally was co-sponsored by ADA and SDS, which countered such

YAF slogans as “stamp out the ADA” with a roaring ovation for Michael Harrington as he called for a mass movement of militant confrontation with the new right along the lines laid out by Irwin Suall in *The American Ultras*.⁹

In 1960, there had been no love among the champions of realignment for John F. Kennedy, but in 1964 Lyndon Johnson earned more passionate support. Rallying to Johnson did not come naturally to many old Socialists. A. Philip Randolph, the most unyielding champion of the non-Communist new party movement just after the Second World War, confided to friends that he had cast write-ins for Norman Thomas ever since 1948 and that it was a struggle to come out actively for LBJ.¹⁰ The radicalized YPSL led by Joel Geier was adamantly opposed to the enthusiasm for Johnson, and thus the YPSL was summarily expelled as a body and reconstituted under the leadership of Penn Kemble.¹¹ Bayard Rustin spoke for the Socialist Party and the larger aborning new left:

I am going to vote for Johnson not because he is perfect, but because he is for civil rights, Medicare and the poverty program, and because he is for progress. Barry Goldwater is a reactionary and a danger to world peace. I secondly want Johnson to know that the Negroes, liberals, intellectuals, students, and the labor movement are giving him his majority—for I want him to be more dependent on us. I don't believe that Johnson is anything more than a shrewd politician—but that is a far cry from his opponent who is a war-happy reactionary who aids and abets racism.¹²

The climax of the civil rights movement came when the Democratic convention opened in Atlantic City on August 21, 1964. For months a potential explosion had been simmering over seating the Mississippi Freedom Democrats; this move was supported by much of the establishment press as both Martin Luther King and Bayard Rustin made clear to LBJ the grave consequences of ignoring these delegates. After the convention's credentials committee held dramatic hearings, it was announced that no future state delegation could be segregated—thereby

single-handedly shattering the one-party regime in the South—but that only two at-large seats would be given to the Freedom Democrats that year. Rustin, King, and James Farmer urged the Freedom Democrats to accept the deal for the victory that it was, but the militants of SNCC angrily denounced it as betrayal, and thus the era of “black power” began.¹³ Yet in the meantime, Lyndon Johnson was elected to a term of his own in a historic landslide.

On December 6, 1964, in New York, nearly two thousand people paid \$2.50 each to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Norman Thomas at the Hotel Astor. Congratulatory greetings came from President Johnson, George Meany, Vice President-elect Hubert Humphrey, and scores of members of Congress and world leaders; and earlier that year, Harry Fleischman had published his biography of Thomas to wide acclaim.¹⁴ Thomas was presented with a check for \$17,500 to distribute among his causes as he saw fit.¹⁵ The extraordinary nature of this tribute to a professional dissenter is well captured by his most sensitive biographer, W. A. Swanberg:

But the true wonder of Thomas, with all his faults, was that he appealed to the good in mankind. His hearers knew he appealed to the good in them. It elevated them. The world seemed better when one’s intelligence and nobler impulses were importuned. . . . But the tide was against Thomas. The United States, in its twin drives of fighting Communism and winning affluence, had opted for the morals of the Communists and the sharpers. There seemed no drawing back from the turns made at the Bay of Pigs and Tonkin Gulf, any more than there was repentance in the advertising boardrooms or the labor unions. In a sense—and some of them must have realized it—the nineteen hundred people at the Astor were honoring the last great American idealist.¹⁶

That the Thomas sensibility was indeed becoming a thing of the past became clear as the escalation of the war in Vietnam was met by an

equally dramatic escalation of the protest movement against that war in the United States. In February 1965, Bayard Rustin published in *Commentary* his essay, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement." The article recapitulated the realignment doctrine in light of the rise in power and influence of his comrades and himself. But the black power activists of SNCC and their radicalized white comrades were now rejecting the key realignment premise of the centrality of the labor movement and class politics generally.¹⁷ Abstractly, Rustin had the better of the argument, but the choice between protest and politics was a false one. That, after a century of legal segregation, protest became necessary because of the failure of politics was a tragedy. If the young radicals of the new left saw this violence as something to celebrate, Rustin and the Shachtmanites had no one to blame but themselves, having implemented the model of political activism adapted from the Popular Front in creating the new left.

In moving on from protest to where the path of politics was once again open, there was no reason the larger new left, having achieved extraordinary victories with the civil rights movement, should not have simply built on that strength without apology in mobilizing opposition to the Vietnam War. For a time, it even appeared that this was in fact happening. Initially, the Socialist Party joined most of the historic peace movement in the coalition "Negotiations Now," which advocated for a negotiated settlement between North and South Vietnam. Throughout the 1960s, most historic antiwar organizations, particularly the War Resisters League, remained deeply rooted in the tradition of the historic non-Communist left, as seen most clearly in the reading list distributed by the League.¹⁸ But Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was another matter entirely. As antiwar sentiment, especially opposition to the draft, reached a groundswell on the nation's campuses, SDS expressly invited the Communist Party and other Marxist-Leninist groups to participate in its national demonstration planned for the spring of 1965.¹⁹

In contrast to the ambiguous events at Port Huron, this invitation was a direct transgression of the abiding anti-Communism of their organizational elders. At Port Huron, the LID was still being run by judicious

survivors of the historic SP, and only because of the intervention of Mike Harrington were there significant repercussions at all. Now, however, the Shachtmanites fully controlled the LID, with Harrington as chairman, Tom Kahn as executive secretary, and the board stacked with such others as Bayard Rustin and Irving Howe, who wrote a withering attack on what he termed “new styles in leftism” that year in *Dissent*.²⁰ By the time SDS had its national antiwar demonstration in Washington, Vietcong flags were a common sight, civil rights anthems were reprised in homage to Ho Chi Minh, and David McReynolds openly complained that the War Resisters League had been ambushed into supporting them.²¹ The editors of *Studies on the Left*, sensing that SDS was moving in their direction, invited Tom Hayden to become a contributing editor. His first contribution declared that “anti-Communism is the moral equivalent of rape.”²²

An aging Norman Thomas went on a nationwide campus tour in support of the growing movement against the war in Vietnam, proclaiming his desire “not to burn the flag but to cleanse it” in a firm but gentle upbraiding of the growing militancy in SDS. Thomas was increasingly weak physically, but as powerful on the stump as ever. One of his largest and most enthusiastic crowds was at Berkeley, and at this campus that was virtually synonymous with the new left he shrewdly assessed the growing movement:

In the thirties the old left and, today, the new left among the students represent a significant revolt against what is now called the establishment and its mores, but there are significant differences. . . . Theirs is most definitely a revolt against what they regard as bourgeois values and they are more conscious of the infallibility of youth as against middle age. They are more inclined to find “the poor” as bearers of salvation rather than the working class, certainly as it expresses itself in the unions. . . . The new left is very amorphous in program, inclined to be nihilistic, anarchistic rather than Socialist. Freedom from dogmatism is a good thing but lack of program is not. I deeply regret the tendency of some rather conspicuous members of the new left

to appear more interested in a Communist victory in Vietnam than in a constructive peace.²³

After one final attempt at mediation by a superannuated Harry Laidler, the inevitable divorce between the LID and SDS came in the summer of 1965.²⁴ Some kind of split was inevitable with the rise of frank partisanship of the Vietcong, but the circumstances were not. Arriving at an odd blend of black nationalist and Vietcong partisanship as a logical extension of earlier doctrines while stopping well short of becoming Communist ideologues, the founding core of SDS, typified by Tom Hayden, was highly analogous to the SP Militants of the 1930s, complete with the ultimate endpoint of anodyne left-liberalism. But by the time SDS broke with the LID, it was moving past its founders. For a time, Carl Oglesby, who led the all-important mobilization against the draft, spoke for the new mainstream. An explicit rebellion against the intellectualism of SDS's roots led to identification with the 1960s counterculture (widely seen at the time as one and the same with the new left, but in reality a very different phenomenon) and to ties with the founders of the right-leaning modern libertarian movement. But there was also a growing contingent of Maoists, who within three years became the dominant force in SDS.

The enduring moderate majority of the new left continued to look to Michael Harrington for leadership. When Max Shachtman came out for the war at a small gathering, Harrington and Irving Howe confronted him, only to be denounced as "Gandhian pacifists."²⁵ In March 1966, Harrington collapsed as he was preparing to give a talk in San Diego. With his collapse attributed to a nervous breakdown, he entered four years of intensive psychotherapy, and for much of that time was almost completely disengaged from political activism. Harrington later attributed his personal crisis to a "conflict between his previous image of himself as selfless and marginal and the new realities of his life" as a minor political celebrity.²⁶ Harrington's distance from the antiwar movement and the scene generally was thus more a function of personal problems than political differences, yet his stated reason for his breakdown has political

significance. Harrington's admirers in these years generally did not appreciate that he remained a Shachtmanite ideologue. If a broad and anti-totalitarian new left was to ride sentiment against Vietnam to greater heights, it could not be led by an adherent of the vision of a new left that was enunciated by Irwin Suall in the early days of realignment.

The first major watershed in the trajectory of the Shachtmanites toward neoconservatism was the publication of an essay by Tom Kahn on "The Problem of the New Left" in the July 1966 issue of the still liberal *Commentary*. It was reprinted as a pamphlet by the League for Industrial Democracy, which was now the effective successor, for operational purposes, of the Independent Socialist League within and beyond the Socialist Party:

The abandonment of the traditional pro-labor perspective confronts a radical movement with a major problem. If not the labor movement, then what social force can be expected to lead the way in transforming society, and how are the students to relate to that force? . . . The class origins of the new left lie at the root of two characteristics of the movement: its anti-materialism and its anti-intellectualism. . . . Should today's new left disintegrate, as a consequence of sectarian or defeatist policies, debris from wrecked hopes would scatter far, and the cynical disillusionment which would follow would darken, not illuminate, the prospects for a Great Society.²⁷

As Vietnam increasingly took up the attention of both the Johnson administration and the public, the early champions of realignment made their major push to refocus on their domestic agenda with the "Freedom Budget," a proposal "to provide full employment . . . to develop a system of guaranteed annual incomes . . . to provide decent medical care and adequate educational opportunities to all Americans . . . to unite sustained full employment with sustained full production and high economic growth."²⁸ Developed by Bayard Rustin and labor economist Leon Keyserling, the Freedom Budget was announced by A. Philip

Randolph at an October 1966 press conference, calling for its implementation with funding of \$100 billion over ten years (roughly the amount, in inflation-adjusted dollars, spent on Medicare and Medicaid in 2012 alone).²⁹ The Socialist answer to the sputtering domestic agenda of LBJ, the Freedom Budget was endorsed by most unions, the ADA, and numerous religious social action groups.

The experience of the Shachtmanite-led SP in national politics in this period was in some ways analogous to that of the Communist Party at the height of the Popular Front. The brief heyday that saw more than a dozen CP-friendly congressmen was matched by the large number of domestic policy operatives in the Great Society, who achieved about the same level of policy success; only to see their advances completely undone once the political winds changed. Yet liberalism also was changing. ADA turned decisively against the Vietnam War, forcing the resignation of one long-time chairman, a 1930s Socialist veteran named John Roche. This is critical to understanding why most Cold War liberals did not in the end become neoconservatives. To dull the memory of their Depression decade radicalism, they imbibed heavily of the philosophical realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, himself highly critical of the war in his final years, taking his philosophy seriously enough to apply it to Vietnam. The Shachtmanites and other post-1930s radicals, by contrast, had not shared that experience and were therefore more predisposed to applying their revolutionary zeal against liberalism's perceived failure of nerve.

The widespread radicalization of American liberalism proceeded apace in 1967 with a series of revelations about direct CIA involvement in the Cold War ideological apparatus. It began with an expose in the new left magazine *Ramparts* of the CIA direction of the National Student Association. Then, the *New York Times* reported on the extensive CIA activities through the Kaplan Fund, which had funded much of Norman Thomas's international troubleshooting since the beginning of the Cold War. As Thomas wrote in a public statement,

I'm not ashamed of what we did. What we did was good work, and no one ever tried to tell us what to do. I am ashamed we swallowed this

CIA business, though. If I had a choice I would never have accepted CIA support. This would have let them crush the project at any minute or made us persona non grata in the countries we were working with.³⁰

The scandal made Thomas and his legacy increasingly suspect on the new left. Christopher Lasch published his widely praised work *The Agony of the American Left* around this time, capturing both the best of the critique of the new left associated with *Studies on the Left* (in embracing the legacy of the historic Socialist Party as opposed to that of its critics) and the worst of it, with a lengthy polemic against the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a worthy target to be sure but drifting perilously close to an apologia for American Communism.³¹ For all his overwrought zeal, Tom Kahn had diagnosed this malady with expert precision in “The Problem of the New Left”:

What actually operates here is a kind of reverse McCarthyism which refuses to differentiate between libertarian and rightist opposition to Communism. The new left, precisely by adopting as a cardinal tenet the thesis that the “Communist question” is irrelevant, raises the Communist question to a standard by which it will judge others. In actual practice, the standard works to the advantage of the pro-Communist and indifferentist, neither of whom has reason to raise the question.³²

Before the end of 1967, Norman Thomas was forced to close his Lower Manhattan office of nearly four decades due to declining health. Yet this may have been the moment when Thomas and his example were needed more than ever, and not only in connection to the ongoing struggle against the Vietnam War. The world event in 1967 of greatest consequence to the remnant of American Socialism was the Israeli war that June. In its immediate aftermath the party’s resolution still emphasized international mediation to resolve all outstanding issues in the Middle East conflict.³³ Even Bayard Rustin, an outspoken apologist for Israel in his final years, assured one correspondent, “You are probably right

to draw parallels between the Zionist and black power movements.”³⁴ But in a few short years, the Shachtmanites would play a critical role in elevating Israel and Zionism to a central place on the altar of American nationalism.

On Labor Day weekend in 1967, several thousand gathered in Chicago for the National Conference for New Politics, proposing to run a third-party ticket in 1968 of Martin Luther King for president and the widely known pediatrician and new left partisan Benjamin Spock for vice president. King had become an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War by the early months of 1967, increasingly aligning himself with the supporters of SDS with a proposed “Poor People’s Campaign.” The principal sponsor of the conference was Martin Peretz, publisher of the popular *Ramparts*. Many Socialists were hopeful about the New Politics conference, particularly in Milwaukee where a hardy remnant had not abandoned dreams of reviving past glory.³⁵ But the gathering quickly proved a disaster. A self-proclaimed “black caucus,” many of whose principals soon gained national notoriety as the Black Panther Party, dominated the proceedings, with several activists at the periphery openly chanting “Kill whitey!”³⁶ Horrified by the black caucus’s condemnation of Israel in the most lurid if not anti-Semitic terms, Peretz would go on to zealously man the barricades for Zionism to great notoriety as owner of *The New Republic*.

Paul Feldman, a loyal Shachtmanite going back to the ISL who succeeded Mike Harrington as editor of *New America*, was thus provoked to unsparing opposition to the new left in a private memorandum for his comrades:

When corporations provided most of the money for the recent Newark “black power” convention, business was not acting out of any social idealism. Buying off potential rioters was only a secondary consideration. It recognized that a movement whose primary objective was to take over ghetto candy stores and other small businesses from whites, was no threat to corporate interests or profits but provided a

convenient tool to split the Negro-liberal-labor coalition which was a threat. Also symptomatic of this movement's petit-bourgeois quality was its anti-Semitism. . . . Their anti-Semitism also reflects status frustration.³⁷

Feldman would publish a more muted pamphlet on the New Politics conference, taking a radical posture that less than two years later would be unthinkable:

The conference was a dismal failure but it was also tragic. . . . No matter what their reservation on this point or that, Socialists from every section would be inside such a movement with both shoulders if it came into being, and even deadheads of organized labor like Meany would have felt the pull of such a new force. . . . We must also admit that fundamental aspects of our analysis need rethinking. . . . This does not mean giving up our fundamental insistence on social revolution. In fact, this desire is shared with us by the new radicals and implied in their rejection of present frauds.³⁸

Despite the New Politics fiasco, opposition to the war in Vietnam was reaching a great enough critical mass that the sort of radical political action the conference envisioned was still a serious possibility. This became apparent at the end of 1967 when the drive to register enough voters to put a new Peace and Freedom Party on the ballot in California met with success. After this warning shot, a young ADA operative named Allard Lowenstein seized the initiative to form a more broadly appealing political option. With the blessing of the ailing Norman Thomas, who considered him a protégé, Lowenstein launched the Dump Johnson movement, whose aim was to draft a candidate to oppose LBJ in the Democratic primary.³⁹ The candidate who ultimately came forward was Minnesota senator Eugene McCarthy. First elected to the House in 1948, with an abiding grounding in Catholic social doctrine, he represented the finest political traditions of the state that had produced Charles Lindbergh Sr., Thomas Van Lear, and Ernest Lundeen.

His campaign should have been the ideal vehicle for a broad movement of the democratic left, rooted in the civil rights and antiwar movements, to bring about the original vision of realignment. Among active Socialists, Julius Bernstein, leader of the Boston local since early in the party's twilight, rallied to McCarthy with his following of Harvard undergraduates. But they were the exception that proved the rule and were reprimanded by the national leadership, who asserted in Leninist prose that "the mass social forces of the American left—the labor and major Negro organizations" were solidly behind LBJ.⁴⁰ The Shachtmanite core largely avoided the Democratic primary drama of 1968; most of their energies were taken up with the explosive teachers' strike in Brooklyn led by Shachtmanite fellow traveler Al Shanker.

With the Tet offensive in early 1968 destroying any prospect of an American victory in Vietnam, voices against the war grew louder. War supporters were not only driven out of the leadership of ADA but also resigned from the organization altogether; among them John Roche, Senator Paul Douglas, and Leon Keyserling. Yet Walter Reuther, still in the process of coming out against the war, blocked the ADA from throwing its full weight behind the McCarthy campaign. After McCarthy won a shocking 42 percent of the New Hampshire primary vote against Johnson, Robert F. Kennedy entered the race, attracting the support of such fence-sitters on the war as Reuther.⁴¹ The one-time aide to Joe McCarthy and bitter foe of the civil rights movement as his brother's attorney general reinvented himself as the man who would unite the white working class and black poor behind a new liberal dispensation. Surprising endorsers included Tom Hayden, SNCC leader (and future congressman) John Lewis, and Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers. Not least was Mike Harrington, who would play an indispensable role in perpetuating the Kennedy myth beyond the 1960s. After Kennedy was assassinated on the night he won the California primary, Harrington embraced a weeping Tom Hayden at his funeral.⁴²

The dissension that led to the final crackup of the Socialist Party had been stirring ever since the break with SDS, but until the spring and

summer of 1968 it was not obvious that a moderate, anti-totalitarian movement of the new left would not endure. The intentions of the Shachtmanites only began to be revealed at the SP national convention in July. Describing the coming showdown at the Democratic convention between Hubert Humphrey and Eugene McCarthy, the majority resolution written by Irwin Suall and Seymour Kopilow retreated into vague sloganeering:

Socialists, as loyal supporters of the labor, Negro, and peace movements, have been poignantly aware that the continued fragmentation of the democratic left forces precludes a new direction for America at home and abroad and opens the possibility of a resurgence of the right. At such a time of crisis, the first strategic priority for Democratic Socialists continues to be to work to bring together idealistic middle-class elements who have contributed so much to a meaningful debate on American foreign policy, and the labor and civil rights movements who remain the major bulwark of democratic progress.⁴³

A vigorous dissent recognized the realities of a nation in turmoil and the radical possibilities and imperatives these conditions presented. Its sponsors included not only such left-wingers as David McReynolds, Bill Briggs, and Harry Siitonen, but also such relative centrists as Frank Zeidler, Darlington Hoopes, Max Wohl of Cleveland, and two former members of the national office staff, Betty Elkin and George Woywood. Their statement read in part:

We have foisted on us by the convention majority document, that, in order to paper over the differences within the majority, simply does not tell the truth about this year's election. Their resolution is absolutely neutral as between Humphrey and McCarthy, criticizing them equally and symmetrically. This would be appropriate for Socialists who were in principle opposed to support of any old party candidate. But as a statement from people who work inside the Democratic Party,

it is merely preparation for an SP endorsement of Hubert Humphrey.⁴⁴

A long wave of resignations from the SP began immediately. Hal Draper, who remained after the expulsion of his young followers, wrote with his wife that the SP was “now under a leadership bent on reducing the organization to a sect buried in the right wing of the Democratic Party swamp. Such a sect has no future for socialism. As Independent Socialists we will continue to build alternatives to capitalist politics such as the Peace and Freedom Movement.”⁴⁵ Virgil Vogel resigned after *New America* refused to publish his letter to the editor, announcing he would once again vote for the Socialist Labor Party. As he wrote to his sympathizers, “Harrington has raised the specter of German CP policy 35 years ago when, despite the Hitler threat, they fought the Social Democrats. Their policy was of course stupid, but the analogy is not fitting, because Humphrey is not a Social Democrat and Nixon is not a Nazi.”⁴⁶

When Humphrey emerged as the Democratic nominee at their Chicago convention in late August, massive antiwar protests took place in a park outside the hall and were met by a merciless police crackdown. The crackup of the hopeful new left from earlier in the decade was most poignantly illustrated when Tom Hayden, David Dellinger, and five others were arrested and charged in an ill-conceived conspiracy trial for their role in the demonstrations, while Dellinger’s old pacifist comrade Bayard Rustin was inside the convention as a floor manager for Humphrey. Rustin did not renounce his pacifist convictions during Vietnam and was affiliated with the War Resisters League until his death. But based on his hysterical belief that Richard Nixon threatened a repeal of the new civil rights laws akin to the end of Reconstruction, Rustin declared the election of Humphrey “a moral test for American democracy . . . the threat of an American apartheid must repel you.”⁴⁷ His support for Humphrey, however, may have sprung less from genuine fear than familial attachment to the Shachtmanites, particularly to his lover Tom Kahn. As a sect, the Shachtmanites were emotionally attached

to the Humphrey of 1960, the liberal standard-bearer when realignment was first articulated.

The attempts to form an antiwar new party at the eleventh hour were considerable but ultimately went nowhere. On the ballot in only a handful of states, the Peace and Freedom Party was split between nominating Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver and comedian Dick Gregory, one of the more moderate black leaders at the ill-fated New Politics conference. Among those drawn to Gregory was Dwight Macdonald, aging but radical as ever.⁴⁸ Macdonald gave a well-received address on “the relevance of anarchism” at the first SDS convention in 1960 and was still hosting fundraisers for them at the height of the group’s notoriety during the Columbia student strike in 1968.⁴⁹ Most of his collaborators for a generation were appalled by his support for SDS, but Macdonald saved most of his recriminations for Michael Harrington and his fellow Shachtmanites. After they misled him into signing an open letter in support of Al Shanker, Macdonald attacked the “esoteric old left sect” in the *New York Review of Books*.⁵⁰

The myopia of this esoteric old left sect was perhaps best illustrated in a terse note from Julius Bernstein to new SP executive secretary Penn Kemble: “We had a few calls today from strangers asking—as a result of seeing the film clips of what went on in the streets of Chicago—who are the Socialist Party candidates this year ‘since I won’t vote for Humphrey and I can’t vote for Nixon.’ If any of the realignment types are intending to raise the issue of a Humphrey endorsement at the next national meeting, they’d better forget it.”⁵¹ Tom Kahn was the loyal soldier in the fall campaign, hired as an assistant to Walter Reuther in his capacity as an advisor to Humphrey. Kahn was particularly proud of a UAW pamphlet he authored blasting the record of George Wallace, whose third-party candidacy was attracting extensive white working-class support.⁵² In the end, with Wallace earning over 13 percent of the popular vote and forty-six electoral votes, Hubert Humphrey lost to Richard Nixon.

A couple of weeks after the election, Norman Thomas celebrated his eighty-fourth birthday in his sickbed surrounded by two of his five

children and a few select close friends, including Harry Fleischman and Mike Harrington. Only with the greatest reluctance had he cast his final presidential ballot for Humphrey over Nixon, but his joy in his final days came from the election of his promising protégé Allard Lowenstein to Congress from Long Island, in what proved to be only a single term.⁵³ He was relieved that death was coming fairly soon after he became incapacitated, but Thomas was haunted to the end by the crisis of personal faith that originally propelled him into the Socialist movement, expressing envy of Martin Luther King after his assassination with the lament, "I've never been to the mountaintop."⁵⁴ Norman Thomas died on December 19, 1968. In an editorial accompanying its eight-column obituary, the *New York Times* wrote,

Whether it was the plight of the sharecroppers in the South, or work relief for the unemployed, or free speech in Mayor Hague's Jersey City, or the noxious conduct of Senator Joseph McCarthy, or the evil of the Vietnam War, Mr. Thomas spoke rousinglly to America's moral sensibilities. His ardent views, often unpopular at the time, became a standard of decency in a remarkable number of instances. An undoc-trinaire Socialist, who put freedom ahead of any dogma, he lived to see much of his social philosophy become part of the fabric of American life.⁵⁵

It would be utterly unheard of in future generations for a frequent minor-party presidential candidate who averaged 0.675 percent of the vote in six elections (and only 0.27 percent in the latter four) to be widely acclaimed by so many of the nation's elite. This praise was, to a large extent, a function of Cold War imperatives. The noble dissenter who through faith in democracy yet made his impact felt in American politics, especially one labeled a Socialist, was a uniquely powerful weapon in the ideological Cold War. This fact can certainly distort Thomas's record; even at the height of the Cold War he had powerful enemies on issues ranging from disarmament to the Middle East. Nor can his status be ascribed totally to cynicism, since many of those responsible for it were,

after all, his youthful supporters in the 1930s. Indeed, in casting him as “America’s conscience,” many Cold War liberals placed him in much the same figurehead role that they had earlier as Socialist Party Militants, with more than a touch of cynicism in both cases.

No single item from Norman Thomas’s final year carries more pathos than his letter to Penn Kemble in September 1968 declaring, “After the debacle in Chicago, I look forward to even greater efforts by Socialists to end this obscene war.”⁵⁶ Under the control of the Shachtmanites, the remnant of the Socialist Party was dropping all pretense of being anything other than a sect—one devoted, in a warped extrapolation of Trotskyism, to the American military-industrial complex and allied leadership of the AFL-CIO in the name of leading a “global democratic revolution.” One could hardly imagine any greater insult and injury to the legacy of Norman Thomas, and indeed, of American Socialism itself. This strengthened the impression of Thomas as a “safe socialist” and committed Cold Warrior by much of the new left at the time of his death, which would only fade along with the memory of Thomas itself.

It was probably inevitable that Norman Thomas would not endure in American historical memory as well as Eugene Debs. But in a bitter irony, the very reasons that Thomas would be increasingly forgotten as the decades wore on are the very reasons his like is so sorely missed in twenty-first-century America. It is not merely democratic socialism that became irrelevant after the fall of Communism, but the basic standards of civil liberty and a free society by which America distinguished itself against Communism. In its militarized posture against the generally fictitious phantom of “Islamofascism,” the United States today is distinguished far less by political freedom than by materialist decadence and libertinism. This posture has been characterized by suppressions of civil liberties in some cases approaching those of the Soviet bloc, the refusal to prosecute criminal financial institutions deemed “too big to fail,” and a state of siege against Muslim Americans that at the height of the Cold War could have been a children’s parable about what America is not. In such a time and place, any humble yet forceful advocate for

peace and social justice such as Norman Thomas would be violently despised.

The new left effectively ceased to be in 1969 after the dramatic implosion of SDS at its Chicago convention that summer, torn apart by two different Maoist factions and an aspiring terrorist band that became known as the Weather Underground. Present at that convention, James Weinstein was overwhelmed by the thought of Louis Boudin, in that same city a half-century earlier to the month, denouncing the “party of lunatics” that was American Communism at its birth.⁵⁷ But the Shachtmanite leaders of the Socialist Party were in no mood to extend an olive branch to this mass of disillusioned radicals. In the spring of 1969, they dropped the last veil of ambiguity as to which side they were on in the crackup of American liberalism, announcing that Hubert Humphrey would be honored by the League for Industrial Democracy at its annual conference; the luncheon where Humphrey spoke was disrupted by antiwar protesters.⁵⁸ Mike Harrington and Irving Howe both boycotted the luncheon, with Howe angrily writing to Tom Kahn:

Let me begin with something that may seem strange to you. We are really against the war. It's not just a matter, with us, of covering our left flank, or responding to campus sentiments, or cursing the war because it interferes with domestic needs, and breaks up potential domestic alliances. We think it is a reactionary war. Exactly what you and some of your close friends think on this isn't after all these years clear to me. Are you really for the war but think it expedient not to say so? Are you against the war but think it inexpedient to say so?⁵⁹

The opposition coalition that formed at the 1968 SP convention was now organized as the Debs Caucus. The formation of a formal faction was initiated by Bill Briggs and Ann Rosenhaft in Los Angeles, with David McReynolds its best known figure in the antiwar movement. In New York, Seymour Steinsapir led a group of Debs Caucus supporters

out of the SP and, in apparent homage to Norman Thomas, formed a new organization called the Union for Democratic Socialism.⁶⁰ This group included a young member of the national office staff named Bruce Ballin who resigned to work for the Jewish Peace Fellowship, still led by Thomas's loyal rabbinical friend Isidor Hoffman and actively supporting and advising draft resisters. Other early supporters included Erich Fromm, Virgil Vogel, Harry Siitonen, Maurice Goldbloom, Abraham Bassford of Brooklyn, and Max Wohl of Cleveland.⁶¹ The Milwaukee organization led by Frank Zeidler was also on board, but as late as the end of 1969 still regarded Mike Harrington as representing its views, pleading with the national office to send him there to speak.⁶²

In 1970, the Milwaukee party launched a new national paper, *Socialist Tribune*, to counterbalance the rigidly Shachtmanite *New America* and to align with the antiwar movement. The youthful editor of the *Socialist Tribune* was Bill Munger, who made a vain but earnest effort to unite the Debs Caucus with Harrington and his embryonic faction. The Debs Caucus also found itself with a peculiar link to the historic left wing of the Socialist heyday. In 1971, when the tiny Proletarian Party finally passed out of existence, it still held title to the name and modest stock of the Charles Kerr Company, the publisher of *International Socialist Review* before the First World War, which was then taken over by Virgil Vogel and Burton Rosen a generation after they founded the Libertarian Socialist League. They revived the Kerr Company, reprinting many old classics and books by new left veterans (including a memoir by H. L. Mitchell), closely aligning it with the IWW remnant that was itself experiencing a significant infusion of life from young new left radicals.⁶³

The major statement of the Debs Caucus was authored by Robert Tucker, a Philadelphia old-timer and Quaker pacifist who in the early 1960s wrote the major SP pamphlet on socialized medicine:

The realignment strategy has to do with getting hold of power, and socialism has to do with the redistribution of power. Furthermore, "going where labor is" turned out to mean, in practice, toning down

everything. Thus in 1970 the official position of the SP on withdrawal from Vietnam is to the right of the *Wall Street Journal*. Thus at the riotous Democratic Party convention in 1968, Debs Caucus Socialists were on the streets with the demonstrators, but Realignment Socialists were in the convention, with Bayard Rustin acting in effect as black floor manager for Hubert Humphrey.⁶⁴

Tucker boldly proclaimed of the Debs Caucus, “That this is now the only organization standing four-square in the tradition of historic American radicalism and not an ideological sect is certainly a claim that can be readily defended.”⁶⁵

But by the end of the 1960s the penultimate change in the character of the Socialist Party was underway. In 1968, Irwin Suall stepped down as executive secretary of the SP after more than a decade to become the new director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). Presumably, with the specter of opposition to Israel (if not also overt anti-Semitism) taking root in the new left and particularly the black power movement, the ADL was eager for someone with Suall’s expertise in radical movements.⁶⁶ Yet as soon as he was in his new position, Suall dispatched an ADL junior staffer named Carl Gershman into the SP; by the end of 1969 Gershman was the vice chairman of the YPSL under Penn Kemble’s successor, Josh Muravchik.⁶⁷ It was then that YPSL formed a new front group, the Youth Committee for Peace in the Middle East, an Israeli propaganda outfit to combat potential opposition to Israel on America’s radicalized campuses. In an article for the newsletter of the Zionist Organization of America, Gershman argued, “American isolationism is probably the most serious problem facing Israel today, more serious than the Arab or Soviet threat.”⁶⁸

The extent to which this arrangement was orchestrated by Israeli foreign agents, perhaps conceived before the ADL even offered its directorship to Suall, is not known. But to be sure, the principle established by James Weinstein regarding the evidence of a Justice Department hand in splitting the Socialist Party in 1919 is applicable here: “It must be assumed

that in varying degrees these agents followed the custom of their profession.” There can be very little doubt that the Shachtmanites understood exactly what Gershman’s purpose was and that it was critically important that they prove useful to him. In the academic year of 1968–69, when he first entered the SP, Gershman took a graduate fellowship at Harvard, and the national office communicated to the Harvard YPSL not to recruit him into their organization. The Shachtmanites had good reason to fear that Gershman might find the Harvard YPSL more useful to him. These Jewish college boys who campaigned for Gene McCarthy were true-believing Zionists, some of whom even thought they might move to Israel after they graduated, whereas the Shachtmanites were only now coming to the cause opportunistically. Indeed, by 1970 the Harvard YPSL broke away from the national organization to increase its organizing prospects on campus free of the baggage of the national organization.⁶⁹

The final crackup began at the 1970 national convention. Michael Harrington, who became the ceremonial national chairman after the death of Norman Thomas, co-authored a resolution on Vietnam with Penn Kemble that deliberately papered over growing irreconcilable differences within the party: calling for a “cease-fire and speedy disengagement,” but with endless qualifications that made it meaningless. David McReynolds immediately resigned, writing frankly of the SP, “It would have been more decent had it been allowed to die a natural death.” The Shachtmanites soon began circulating a statement that effectively endorsed the stated Vietnam policy of the Nixon administration, which Harrington was compelled to attack while calling for a unilateral American withdrawal.⁷⁰ The Debs Caucus stalwart Harry Siitonen eventually wrote to Harrington lamenting,

It does little good to say “we told you so,” but all this might have been prevented as late as the 1970 convention, if the antiwar wing of the Realignment Caucus had taken its stand then and had not agreed to caucus discipline on the key issue of Vietnam. You yourself were the leading spokesman on the convention floor for the so-called

“compromise” on Vietnam, which allowed the ultra-rights to seal their grip of control on the party.⁷¹

Harrington’s biographer Maurice Isserman takes this view even further, arguing, “In his response to the central issue of the 1960s, Michael let pass the chance of a lifetime to make a democratic socialist perspective relevant to the hundreds of thousands of Americans who supported the antiwar movement.”⁷² But this claim seriously misunderstands both Harrington and the antiwar movement. The reason that opposition to the Vietnam War by America’s youth was a mass movement was the draft. The party that once authored the St. Louis Platform seemed stunningly oblivious in the 1960s to the simple heart of the matter—that conscription is slavery. Though he effectively burned his bridges to his long-time comrades after the 1970 convention, Michael Harrington would always remain a Shachtmanite at heart. Harrington ultimately constructed a narrative of the 1960s that served him well for the balance of his life, rooted in the original vision of realignment at the turbulent decade’s hopeful beginning. But this narrative was based on wishful thinking and duplicity about the nature of 1960s radicalism and, indeed, of historic American Socialism.

By 1970, Max Shachtman rarely ventured outside his home in Floral Park, but was visited regularly by his disciples. The most frequent visitors were Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz, who were often joined by Bayard Rustin, Norman Hill, and Paul Feldman. Shachtman was no longer the general commanding his followers, merely giving approval and moral support to what his loyal cadre did on their own initiative.⁷³ Apparently genuinely mystified by much of what was happening, Shachtman expressed bewilderment that anyone should view “not only me but also the party leadership to be supporters of reactionary anti-Communism and principled supporters of American foreign policy even at its worst.”⁷⁴ Spending much of his final years reliving the past, he began writing a history of the Comintern and even had a reunion with

the equally debilitated and isolated James Cannon.⁷⁵ Shachtman sincerely came to view the postwar labor movement as a progressive vanguard, as did his “children” Kahn and Horowitz. But Shachtman would not live, as they would, to see its betrayal by most of their comrades.

Indeed, the Shachtmanites’ behavior became more sectarian in direct correlation with their movement into the right wing of the Democratic Party and away from the broader new left and the early realignment period. An eight-page resolution on Vietnam written by Tom Milstein in 1971 contained a passage that would have given chills to any veteran of the non-Communist left of the 1930s and 1940s who read it:

The antiwar movement split the coalition, and the antiwar movement is responsible for most of the disruption and violence in recent American politics. Middle class liberals took advantage of their leadership position within the coalition to assert a veto right over foreign policy which the majority of their fellow coalition members supported. In this irresponsible behavior they carried on a tradition they established in the period prior to World War II, when their pacifism and isolationism led them to deny support to FDR in his effort to prepare the nation for collective resistance to fascism. FDR was forced to turn to Southern Dixiecrats for support for his utterly legitimate anti-fascist policy, but had to sacrifice the New Deal in the bargain. Did FDR split the New Deal coalition, or did the responsibility properly lie at the doorstep of those middle-class liberals and intellectuals who pronounced so morally their unwillingness to “fight for king and country,” who invented fantasies about “munitions makers” manipulating the country into war (the catch phrase today is “military industrial complex”), and who were so convinced of the purity of their purpose that they could justify to themselves cooperation with Stalinist and pro-fascist elements?⁷⁶

This sectarian mindset was also evident in how the character of the SP was now typically described in its literature, with *New America* often described not as the paper of the SP but as “a social democratic

newspaper in the tradition of Norman Thomas and A. Philip Randolph.”⁷⁷ And then there were their allies in combating the radical left. An odd Trotskyist faction of SDS known as the Labor Committees had attracted the interest of the YPSL ever since it took the side of Al Shanker in the 1968 strike. Led by an exile from the Socialist Workers Party named Lyndon LaRouche, this faction was praised as “one of the very few groups which has genuine contacts amongst militant ghetto groups, both black and Puerto Rican as well as on several campuses, and which continually attacks not only the extremist elements but also those ‘innocents’ who peddle the CP line.”⁷⁸ But LaRouche, who appears to have been schizophrenic, became infamous for employing severe mind-control techniques on his followers, and before long morphed from Trotskyism to a wildly conspiratorial doctrine of nominally progressive authoritarianism. The Shachtmanites also took part in such theatrics staged by the followers of the notorious Rev. Sun Myung Moon as a “rally against North Vietnamese imperialism.”⁷⁹

A new theoretical concept allowed the Shachtmanites to make sense of the enemy that destroyed their glorious vision of realignment: “the new class.” The theory was an adaptation of James Burnham’s views by the new left sociologist David Bazelon, arguing that “corporate capitalism has created a New Class of non-property owning managers, bureaucrats, and intellectuals whose life conditions are determined by their position within or in relations to the corporate order.” As explained by the scholar Gary Dorrien,

What was called “liberalism” in America was largely a rationalization of the interests of New Class managers, lawyers, bureaucrats, social workers, consultants, and academics. Liberalism rationalized the creation of an ever-expanding welfare state, providing meaningful employment and ego gratification for the hordes of newly educated consumers.⁸⁰

To a remarkable extent, both major factions of American politics in the post-Cold War era had their origins in the debate over this theory.

It was in 1970 that Norman Podhoretz placed *Commentary* magazine squarely in the camp of the Shachtmanites and die-hard Cold War liberal hawks, attacking the new class as the greatest threat to American interests and announcing that all his political positions would henceforth begin with the question, “Is it good for the Jews?”⁸¹ In *National Review*, William F. Buckley declared to *Commentary*, “Come on in, the water’s fine,” effectively proposing the political marriage that took another decade to fully consummate.⁸² Among those who linked the Shachtmanites to Podhoretz was a peripheral Harvard YPSL supporter named Elliott Abrams who would marry his stepdaughter.⁸³

In contrast, Michael Harrington celebrated the rise of the new class as a “conscience constituency.” In the words of Gary Dorrien, Harrington felt “the new generation’s experiences of the civil rights and antiwar movements predisposed them to an egalitarian, anti-imperialist politics” and that the new class was “presented with an opportunity to use their education to build a good society.”⁸⁴ From the rise of the “community organizing” model of social uplift to the emergence of a new “enlightened” white man’s burden after the fall of European colonialism to eradicate poverty, genocide, and general social backwardness among the great unwashed, Harrington’s frankly elitist valorization of the new class laid the foundation for the new liberalism that would emerge from the collapse of the new left. This can explain perhaps the greatest irony of postwar American history: how the generation that came of age protesting the Vietnam War left as its legacy the Iraq War and the larger crusade against “Islamofascism.”

The Shachtmanite plan to completely consolidate their control of the Socialist Party—a merger with the Democratic Socialist Federation (DSF)—had been in the works since the end of 1969. In November 1970, the SP and DSF jointly sponsored a “Rally for Israel” that featured an Israeli embassy official, Amos Eiran, along with Bayard Rustin, Carl Gershman, and DSF chairman James Glaser.⁸⁵ Never more than a paper organization, the DSF nonetheless attracted such Jewish labor leaders as Charles Zimmerman and Emanuel Muravchik.

The early date that unity negotiations began suggests that the transformation of the SP into an Israeli propaganda agency was to a great extent preconceived.⁸⁶ Zimmerman, one of relatively few avowedly Zionist Jewish labor leaders in the 1940s and 1950s, was the major patron of the League for Industrial Democracy after the break with SDS, welcoming it to the ILGWU building after Norman Thomas was forced to close the historic LID offices.⁸⁷ William Stern, the leader of the Workmen's Circle who in the 1950s supported the *Jewish Newsletter*, now set the tone for his organization as an ardent Zionist and virtual co-leader with James Glaser of the DSF.⁸⁸ Yet the oddest characterization of the DSF in the propaganda around the merger was that it was "identified with the tradition of Morris Hillquit," who was consistently at odds with the parochialism and opportunism of the *Forward* machine.

Emboldened by their reinforcements from the DSF, the Shachtmanites began cracking down on their enemies in the SP. Joan Suall, now executive secretary, attacked a rank-and-file member for submitting a review of a book by David McReynolds to *New America*.⁸⁹ Suall also sent a warning to Bill Munger, who was energetically building the Debs Caucus as "a party within a party" through the *Socialist Tribune*. After asking, "Does the Wisconsin state organization consider itself a rival organization to the Socialist Party," Munger replied frankly, "I have the feeling the national office doesn't care we exist. When we need service we are ignored."⁹⁰

Michael Harrington belatedly began organizing a faction of his own as the breakup of the Socialist Party fast approached. But his few sympathizers at this late stage were such fellow Shachtmanites of another era as Irving Howe, Bogdan Denitch, and Carl Shier of Chicago, the only one of the original UAW Shachtmanites who had not advanced into George Meany's inner circle. Still others, such as Boston stalwart Julius Bernstein, were entirely shaped by the influences of the early twilight of the SP.⁹¹ The maverick Harvard YPSL reentered the fray once given the private assurance that Harrington had every intention of splitting from the party, bringing a scattered group of sympathizers on mostly elite campuses into Harrington's camp.⁹² That this group remained substantially closer to the Shachtmanites than the Debs Caucus was perhaps

best illustrated by the founder of the Harvard YPSL, Steve Kelman, who followed up in *Commentary* on Tom Kahn's treatment of the new left in 1969.⁹³ Kelman later published a book-length account of the Harvard student strike, which the YPSL took credit for preventing from reaching the same proportions as Columbia.

As the 1972 elections approached, the increasingly confident Shachtmanites sensed a major opportunity for advancement. Their initial sympathies remained with Hubert Humphrey, but were won over to Washington senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson after an advisor to Jackson named Ben Wattenberg arranged a secretive meeting with a YPSL delegation led by Josh Muravchik. The journalists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak devoted a column to reports of this meeting, arguing that Jackson's "support from a young Socialist group suggests he is scarcely the reactionary he is currently portrayed as being."⁹⁴ The reality was that Jackson's Senate office was the locus of a circle of the most hawkish Pentagon policy hands, who even in the Johnson years frantically opposed any modest moves toward mutual disarmament with the Soviets. They included two of the original architects of the Cold War defense posture under Harry Truman, Paul Nitze and Albert Wohlstetter, and two young protégés of Wohlstetter named Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Perle.⁹⁵

But the liberal and antiwar favorite who quickly emerged in the 1972 Democratic primaries was South Dakota senator George McGovern. At almost any other time in the past, McGovern would have been seen as an ideal standard-bearer for the principles of historic American Socialism. A native of Mitchell, South Dakota, McGovern had written his doctoral dissertation in history on the 1914 Ludlow massacre. He had one of the best pro-labor voting records as tabulated by the AFL-CIO, and was calling for the withdrawal of all U.S. troops in Asia and a partial withdrawal in Europe. After securing the nomination, McGovern's running mate was Sargent Shriver, a one-time youth leader of the America First Committee who led the War on Poverty commission of the Johnson administration that Michael Harrington advised. Of the ways in which

McGovern was fated to be caricatured, the writer Bill Kauffman reflected thirty-five years after the campaign,

No Democrat could have defeated Nixon in 1972. The incumbent's popularity was buoyed by a fairly strong economy, détente with the USSR, the opening to China, and rumors of peace in Vietnam. But still, imagine George McGovern running not as an ultraliberal caricature but rather as the small-town Midwestern Methodist, a war hero too modest to boast of his bravery, a liberal with a sympathetic understanding of conservative rural America. . . . As for acid, amnesty, and abortion, McGovern's positions now seem positively temperate: he favored decriminalizing marijuana, he argued against "the intrusion of the federal government" into abortion law, which should be left to the states, and . . . could not favor amnesty as long as the war was in progress.⁹⁶

For all the likelihood of his losing to Nixon, the nomination of McGovern represented, to a great extent indeed, the culmination of the realignment of the two major parties. Yet even Mike Harrington, who now cast himself as the champion of the original realignment program against its betrayal by the Shachtmanites, only endorsed McGovern after first backing Edmund Muskie, Humphrey's running mate in 1968 who was the consensus candidate until actual voting began.⁹⁷

After Harrington failed in an attempt to table the move until after the election, the unification of the Socialist Party and the Democratic Socialist Federation was made official in March 1972; the merged party was formally known for the next nine months as the Socialist Party-Democratic Socialist Federation (SP-DSF). Of this marriage of the Shachtmanites with the fossilized remnant of the old *Forward* machine, Irwin Suall preposterously declared, "Prospects for growth are better today than at any time since the 1936 split in the Socialist movement."⁹⁸ The Debs Caucus, as far as the Shachtmanites were concerned, were nonpersons. As for Harrington, he was no longer even the ceremonial

national chairman, but one of three co-chairmen along with Bayard Rustin and Charles Zimmerman.

Harrington was sternly upbraided after announcing his endorsement of McGovern, but simply noted that Rustin had already endorsed Hubert Humphrey, who had entered the race in a late effort to stop McGovern.⁹⁹ The Democratic convention that nominated McGovern was a chaotic affair, dominated by a macabre array of wild-eyed radicals before McGovern finally gave his acceptance speech just before 3 A.M. An irreconcilable stand was assured when George Meany, whom the Shachtmanites increasingly revered, made clear his displeasure with McGovern. Though the SP ultimately passed a resolution stating its “preference” for McGovern over Nixon, *New America* was characterized throughout the fall campaign by such headlines as “McGovern Underestimates the Communists” and “Jewish Voters Disaffected from Democratic Ticket.”¹⁰⁰

Resignations from the party continued to pour in. David Selden, the president of the American Federation of Teachers soon to be deposed by Al Shanker, insisted, “George McGovern is the closest thing to a Socialist to run for President since Norman Thomas. Instead of trying to ape the inane official AFL-CIO policy, *New America* should fulfill its Socialist function by calling for a restructuring of the labor movement to make it more representative of the principles of progressive unionism.”¹⁰¹ Of SP rank and filers who had hung on this long, Joe Friedman of West Hempstead, New York no doubt spoke for many:

References to isolationism, anti-labor elements, middle class and suburban intellectuals, etc. are obvious, not subtle, implications of attacks on the McGovern campaign. There is no manifestation in *New America* of the analysis presented by Irving Howe when he says of McGovern that he has attempted to bring together those who “combine a desire for social reform, a vague but strongly felt populism, a wish for a more moderate or modest foreign policy, and a sense that the United States is in trouble to an extent requiring extraordinary measures.”¹⁰²

Several Debs Caucus members, particularly in California and including Frank Zeidler, supported the Peace and Freedom Party campaign that year, which got Benjamin Spock on the ballot in ten states but ultimately earned fewer votes than the Socialist Workers Party. Many, however, supported McGovern, including David McReynolds and Bill Munger.¹⁰³

On October 22, Michael Harrington resigned his chairmanship of the Socialist Party, lamenting, “The historic party of Eugene Victor Debs and Norman Thomas is today doing the work of Richard Nixon.”¹⁰⁴ The complete letter of resignation was published in *The Nation* just after the election:

In September the party’s national committee stated a preference for McGovern over Nixon that was so reluctant and backhanded—attacking McGovern’s foreign policy as “neo-isolationist and conservative” and his domestic proposals as “casual, vague and sometimes contradictory”—that it committed the party to the anti-Nixon struggle only in the most formal sense. Its press meanwhile continued to be largely devoted to an attack upon the forces around McGovern rather than to an attack upon Nixon. . . . And even this shamefaced position was attacked by some of the most prestigious leaders of the party majority who refuse any support whatsoever to McGovern and look with enthusiasm upon a Nixon victory.¹⁰⁵

The Shachtmanites replied forcefully in a formal press release:

Joan Suall, national secretary of the SP-DSF, said that “Harrington’s misinterpretation of the SP-DSF’s position as anti-McGovern will in fact be likely to hurt the Democratic candidate in the eyes of liberals and democratic radicals and makes Harrington’s motivations in doing so difficult to understand.” Paul Feldman, editor of the party’s publication, *New America*, said he believed that “Harrington’s action is similar to that of others who enthusiastically supported George McGovern before the Democratic Convention and are now looking

for scapegoats to explain the poor showing up to now of the candidate they helped to nominate.” In response to Harrington’s criticism of the SP-DSF for its relationship to the AFL-CIO, Mrs. Suall said “the organization was proud of its support to the mainstream of American labor and its advocacy of unity within the labor movement, for it sees this as an essential basis for socio-economic progress in the USA.” “In the political dispute between the affluent middle class New Politics movement and organized labor, the party,” Mr. Feldman said, “firmly believes that in expressing solidarity with labor it was acting in the tradition of Eugene Victor Debs, the noted trade union and Socialist leader.”¹⁰⁶

Shachtman himself encouraged this line of attack, declaring of McGovern, “His foreign policy is a monstrosity, not just as bad as Henry Wallace in 1948 but much worse.”¹⁰⁷ This pronouncement by the former confidant of Leon Trotsky—that a more principled and authentically American non-interventionism was “much worse” than crude Soviet propaganda—revealed the essence of what drove Shachtman and his disciples.¹⁰⁸ The emergence of a major-party nominee who reflected the spirit and substance of historic American Socialism as vividly as George McGovern brought forth all the bile and venom that Trotsky spewed at the historic Socialist Party during his American sojourn in early 1917. Attacks on the “isolationism” of McGovern were but an echo of Trotsky’s contempt for “vulgar speeches about the advantages of peace” and “the spirit of the Bryan campaign.” Attacks on the “new class” were but an echo of Trotsky’s pathological hatred of the “Babbitt of Babbitts,” Morris Hillquit, “the ideal Socialist leader for successful dentists.” Fifty-five years after he left New York to become the founder of the Red Army, Leon Trotsky was having his revenge on the American Socialism that had so revolted and offended him.

Max Shachtman died suddenly on November 4, 1972, the Saturday before the election. After Richard Nixon was reelected in a landslide, the Shachtmanites proceeded to their next move. Penn Kemble, who for the last few years had run an AFL-CIO youth auxiliary he helped

found, secured generous AFL-CIO funding to establish a new advocacy group for the grizzled supporters of Hubert Humphrey and Scoop Jackson. The Coalition for a Democratic Majority, a Shachtmanite front group organized in classic Leninist style, was built up by Kemble with the assistance of Ben Wattenberg and Midge Decter, the wife of Norman Podhoretz.¹⁰⁹ Many advisors to both Humphrey and Jackson joined the new group, and some grew close to the Shachtmanite core, including Max Kampelman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, John Roche, James T. Farrell, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, Leon Keyserling, and Norman Podhoretz.¹¹⁰ In December, the Socialist Party announced it would henceforth be known as Social Democrats USA. The Wisconsin Socialists passed a resolution that they interpreted this to mean the Socialist Party had ceased to exist and that they would thus proceed with a Debs Caucus-based re-founding.¹¹¹

Within a decade, the Shachtmanites would be the cruel victims of their own success, but in historical terms one must marvel at what they had achieved. Not only had they captured the Socialist Party of America, thus achieving the long-desired “French Turn.” Not only had they in so doing reached the commanding heights of the American labor movement. Not only had this brought them to the threshold of national power, with prospects of dominating a future presidential administration. They had done all this with the sponsorship, indeed out of the very offices of their oldest and bitterest enemies—the garment-union-based Jewish Socialist old guard, symbolized by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. Trotsky and his confederates of January 14, 1917 would never have dreamed.

17 Social Democrats USA and the Rise of Neoconservatism

If any one event constituted the birth of the neoconservative movement, it was the founding of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM) after the defeat of George McGovern. Its fundamental doctrine had originated four decades earlier, when Trotsky declared the parties of Social Democracy the necessary agent of global or “permanent” revolution in the so-called French Turn. Beginning with James Burnham, followed by Sidney Hook and Irving Kristol, this idea was applied to bourgeois democracy itself, identifying the fixed principle with the strength and posture of the American military against Communism. Norman Podhoretz paid homage to Burnham in describing the long twilight struggle against Communism as “the third world war.” But because Podhoretz, unlike Irving Kristol, was not yet a critic of historic Cold War liberalism, he forged a natural alliance with the Shachtmanites, the partisans of the original French Turn. It was also through this alliance that the fateful marriage of neoconservatism and Zionism began—in theoretical terms by Podhoretz in the pages of *Commentary*, in practice with the enlistment of the Shachtmanites by the rising Israel lobby by 1970.

The Shachtmanites were the first organized cadre committed to the set of ideas that became neoconservatism, and through the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, they gained extraordinary entrée to national power. Hubert Humphrey and Scoop Jackson both attended the founding

gala of CDM in May 1973, hosted by the widow of former secretary of state Dean Acheson at her home. Also present were the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland, and its political director Al Barkan.¹ Of active board members of CDM, Ben Wattenberg came out of Jackson's office, whereas two more consequential figures, Max Kampelman and Jeane Kirkpatrick, came out of Humphrey's office. Other board members included Midge Decter; John Roche, soon to be a columnist for *National Review*; and Washington congressman Tom Foley, a future Speaker of the House. Yet with Penn Kemble as executive director and Josh Muravchik as his assistant, CDM remained a front group for the Shachtmanite core that now went by the name Social Democrats USA (SDUSA).²

Carl Gershman served as executive director of the new SDUSA, with Paul Feldman remaining as editor of the highly sectarian *New America*. Michael Harrington's confidant Jack Clark described the paper around this time as "positively embarrassing," writing in the summer of 1973, "The McGovern campaign is over, but you'd never know it from reading *New America* with its unceasing attacks on the demon 'New Politics.'" ³ That SDUSA continued to operate with the habits and psychology of a doctrinaire Marxist sect was perhaps most stunningly illustrated when it released a whopping thirty-six-page polemic in response to the unsurprising resignation of Michael Harrington in June 1973:

Responding to a statement by Tom Kahn that the socialist movement is "fundamentally rooted in the organized working class and fundamentally rooted nowhere else," Harrington said that socialists must also address themselves to members of the "new, growing non-blue collar stratum," and second, while he acknowledged that the American labor movement is "a de facto social democratic movement in the United States," he cautioned against a tendency he perceived on the part of some comrades to identify the labor movement with socialism, and the future of socialism in America with the leadership of the AFL-CIO It was precisely this separation of socialism and laborism, of theory and praxis, that Shachtman, like Marx before

him, hoped to prevent and which Harrington, in a confused and not thoroughly formulated way, was beginning to assert.⁴

To the extent that SDUSA made the effort in its early years to place itself in the American Socialist tradition, its most significant claim was that it represented the healing of the historic breach between the Socialist and labor movements in the United States. Its closeness to George Meany and the top echelons of the AFL-CIO, which Mike Harrington damningly described in his letter of resignation as “playing Albania to Meany’s China,” was certainly unprecedented.⁵ With Al Shanker now president of the AFT, Rachele Horowitz was hired as the AFT’s political director, Penn Kemble’s sister as an administrative assistant to Shanker, and Paul Feldman’s sister Sandra succeeding Shanker at the head of the AFT in New York. Other union presidents who grew close to SDUSA included I. W. Abel of the Steelworkers, John Joyce of the Bricklayers, and Sol Chaikin of the ILGWU. Bayard Rustin remained at the A. Philip Randolph Institute, announcing in 1974 that he stood “with Senator Henry M. Jackson, the AFL-CIO, American Jewish organizations, and the brave Soviet dissidents who don’t believe that appeasement of totalitarians is the road to peace.”⁶ Finally, when an aging Jay Lovestone was forced to retire from the powerful international affairs department of the AFL-CIO, Tom Kahn became the assistant to Lovestone’s replacement, Irving Brown.⁷

Even more so than the CIO Communists in a bygone era, the Shachtmanites were concentrated all but exclusively in top union leadership and the educational and propaganda apparatus, with no meaningful relationship with the rank and file; thus, like the Communists, they were highly vulnerable to an ultimate methodical decapitation. Yet their legacy proved more far reaching. The CIO Communists had destroyed prospects for serious labor radicalism and played an indispensable supporting role in laying the foundation for a postwar labor movement tied to the military-industrial complex. But as the American economy began its postindustrial transformation in the 1970s, presenting a profound challenge to trade unionism, SDUSA provided an intellectual rationale for the worst instincts of men like George Meany and his successor Lane

Kirkland to double down, both rhetorically and in the allocation of resources, on the labor movement's usefulness not only to the military-industrial complex but to American foreign policy generally. Though significant good came of the consequent internationalism in some corners of the globe, it proved disastrous for the American labor movement, once the fall of Communism rendered it useless to the American power elite.

The limited utility of SDUSA to the Israel lobby was also evident early on. The Youth Committee for Peace in the Middle East persisted on paper as late as the early 1990s, but its mandate to oppose the new left and other campus opponents of Israel became obsolete by the mid-1970s. Bayard Rustin, in a transgression of pacifist conviction never matched by his ambivalence over Vietnam, spoke out in favor of generous U.S. military aid to Israel and personally organized an African American pro-Israel auxiliary.⁸ Yet Shachtmanite contact with the Israel lobby increasingly relied on the office of Scoop Jackson, particularly his chief of staff Richard Perle, a frequent speaker at SDUSA functions.⁹ Jackson was increasingly venerated by the American Jewish establishment, particularly for his proposal to make American-Soviet trade contingent on allowing the emigration of Soviet Jews.

The Soviet Jewry movement was a convenient nexus for SDUSA to seamlessly move from the predominantly pro-Israel posture of its origins into a more general anti-Communist posture that came more naturally. Agitation for a hawkish foreign policy was now commonplace, with Carl Gershman blasting Richard Nixon's "détente" policies and Norman Podhoretz asking, "Do we have the will to reverse the decline of American power?"¹⁰ The SD saw to it that the cause of Soviet dissidents became inseparable from the cause of rearmament by the United States. A most laudable example was the hosting by George Meany of Soviet exile and Nobel laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn after President Gerald Ford refused to meet him in the White House in 1975. But the passion for Soviet dissidents often led the SD to embrace more dubious characters such as Vladimir Bukovsky, one of many post-Soviet "oligarchs" aligned with the neoconservatives in the early twenty-first century.¹¹

A rising political star personified this fusion of the anti-détente and Israeli causes, to the point of even somewhat overshadowing Scoop Jackson. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the leading Labor Department official in the war on poverty, after turning critical of the LBJ domestic agenda went on to become a domestic policy advisor to Richard Nixon. In March 1975, he made his second appearance in *Commentary* with the article, “The United States in Opposition,” lamenting that the United Nations was now dominated by the new nations liberated from European colonialism that tended to align with the Soviet Union. “It is time that the American spokesman came to be feared in international forums for the truths he might tell,” Moynihan thundered in this article, and one month later President Ford appointed him ambassador to the UN. His most memorable act in his eight-month tenure was a militant speech against the General Assembly resolution that “Zionism is racism”—which, in the context given by pro-Soviet dictators of the third world became a lightning rod for righteous anti-Communism. In great measure thanks to this speech, written for him by Norman Podhoretz, Moynihan was elected the new Democratic senator from New York in 1976.¹²

The high point in the organizational life of Social Democrats USA was its July 1976 convention in New York. There yet remained at this date a few traces of a grassroots organization. Of Socialist veterans of the 1930s, Paul Porter was the most prominent to become involved with SDUSA and for a time led a local in Washington, DC, but his passion was now in domestic policy, particularly urban affairs, and was thus of little use to the SD.¹³ A small group in the Twin Cities, led by future Cold War historian John Haynes, applied to be chartered as the “Floyd Olson local of the Minnesota Social Democrats.”¹⁴ The New York local, organizationally continuous with the historic New York local of the Socialist Party from its founding, persisted into the 1980s under the leadership of Irwin Suall.¹⁵ And Max Polikoff of Miami Beach, who throughout the 1960s led the only trace of the Democratic Socialist Federation outside New York, faithfully led the Greater Miami local of SDUSA.¹⁶ Throughout the 1970s, SDUSA also boasted a respectable youth arm, only late in the

decade dropping the name Young People's Socialist League to become the Young Social Democrats.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Al Shanker, and John Roche were all featured speakers at the 1976 convention.¹⁷ The keynote address was delivered by Sidney Hook, who, flattered by young SD admirers in his old age, filled the void left by Max Shachtman as both guru and elder statesman. Hook enjoyed far greater respectability than Shachtman, not least in the right-wing circles that were beginning to court the SD, and his 1976 address effectively served as the de facto declaration of principles of Social Democrats USA:

When we say that social democracy puts freedom first, we mean that freedom becomes the touchstone of policy, a principle that cannot be compromised whether for the sale of machinery or oil or wheat for the benefit of any special economic vested interests that look longingly at the markets of the Soviet Union and China, as their similar once did during the thirties at the markets of Japan and Germany. When it comes to the principled defense of freedom, and opposition to all forms of totalitarianism, let it be said that to its eternal credit, the organized labor movement in the United States, in contradiction to all other sectors of American life, especially in industry, the academy and the churches, has never faltered, or trimmed its sails. Its dedication to the ideals of a free society has been unsullied. Its leaders have never been Munichmen of the spirit. The sober reality of the present moment is that the credibility of the United States as an active proponent of the principle of freedom first has come into question in important areas of the world. . . . I conceive it as the historic and continuous function of social democracy in international affairs to stress the centrality of the commitment to freedom first and its political relevance.¹⁸

Sidney Hook also made possible a consequential expansion of influence for SDUSA. Both Hook and Bayard Rustin were on the board of Freedom House, founded during the Second World War by Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie. A recent recruit named Arch Puddington

became its research director, and later, Adrian Karatnycky, who belonged to the SD core since before the breakup of the Socialist Party, became executive director in the 1980s.¹⁹ Through Freedom House, SDUSA wielded exceptional influence in determining who was and was not defined as “free” or “democratic” in American foreign policy. Yet this influence proved an early casualty of the backlash against neoconservatism in the aftermath of the Iraq War, when Freedom House largely rejoined the mainstream of the human rights community around that time.²⁰

The most surreal event at the 1976 convention, and perhaps in the entire history of Social Democrats USA, was the concluding luncheon, a commemoration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Socialist Party. A. Philip Randolph and David Dubinsky, the two octogenarian living legacies of the historic Socialist bloc in the labor movement, were the honorees, presented with copies of the autobiography of Samuel Gompers inscribed by George Meany.²¹ Dubinsky was beginning to enter senility by this time, but Randolph’s relation to the group was complex. SDUSA freely used his name, even until his death, as honorary chairman (succeeded by Sidney Hook), but he privately expressed wariness of the SD. In his final years, Randolph’s activism was basically limited to speaking at informal staff trainings of the AFT held in the apartment of his protégé Norman Hill.²² Randolph’s true sentiments were probably best captured when W. A. Swanberg interviewed him for his biography of Norman Thomas in 1973. “We never had differences,” Randolph insisted, and when Swanberg suggested that Thomas, being human, must have had faults, Randolph replied, “If he had any, I was not aware of them.”²³

SDUSA also made some awkward attempts in this period to develop a movement culture. In 1975 Samuel Friedman had been honored with a testimonial luncheon on the sixtieth anniversary of first becoming a dues-paying member of the Socialist Party. Yet Friedman was a relic of another time, at one public SD gathering awkwardly proposing the singing of “The Internationale.”²⁴ Roy Berkeley, an old ISL representative on the Greenwich Village folk scene, frequently entertained at such SD functions as the 1976 lunch honoring Randolph and Dubinsky.²⁵ That event

appears to have been the last time SDUSA publicly wore the mantle of the historic Socialist Party, though annual banquets were held in the name of the League for Industrial Democracy through the 1980s. Probably most memorable was a “YPSL Benefit and Variety Show” in December 1977 featuring Roy Berkeley, “nationally known folk singer and sometime civil rights leader” Bayard Rustin, a comedic monologue by the aging James T. Farrell, and Samuel Friedman “demonstrating how socialist songs should be (and used to be) sung.”²⁶

The presidential election of 1976 was the high point of prospects for SDUSA, with Scoop Jackson a contender for the Democratic nomination. Penn Kemble, Josh Muravchik, and other principals of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority served as advisors to his campaign, but grassroots involvement was mostly limited to Michigan, where there was still a legacy of the earlier Shachtmanite presence in the UAW.²⁷ Perhaps sensing Jackson’s limited chances to win the nomination, most efforts in 1976 were invested in the Senate candidacy and future national prospects of Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Elliott Abrams left his enviable position on Jackson’s staff to become Moynihan’s chief of staff and hired Kemble as an assistant.²⁸ But after the election, SDUSA, outwardly represented by the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, was rudely rebuffed in its efforts to establish a beachhead in the new administration of Jimmy Carter. When a CDM junior staffer named Peter Rosenblatt presented Carter’s foreign policy team with a list of potential appointees, only Rosenblatt himself would be chosen, as ambassador to Micronesia.²⁹

A long-lost Shachtmanite relative, Irving Kristol, began building bridges between SDUSA and the Republican Party establishment. Kristol had founded *The Public Interest* in 1965, a journal intended to critique the Great Society and the war on poverty; however, by the 1970s he was aligning with powerful business interests to promote both a more thoroughgoing opposition to the welfare state and an aggressive rearmament agenda after Vietnam. When this new direction alienated his original *Public Interest* collaborators such as Daniel Bell and Nathan Glazer, it was from the ranks of the CDM that Kristol recruited new

blood into the moribund business lobby he was in the process of taking over—the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).³⁰ Ben Wattenberg, Max Kampelman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Josh Muravchik, and Carl Gershman were among the erstwhile social democrats who took sinecures at AEI. In the most stunning example of how much the meaning of the term “neoconservative” would change from its original 1970s context, typified by *The Public Interest*, Nathan Glazer was an outspoken partisan of the Israeli peace movement throughout the 1970s.

That the rising neoconservative movement owed more to the Jacobin spirit of Lenin and Trotsky than any conservative persuasion was best illustrated by Midge Decter. In a 1977 *Commentary* symposium on the proper definitions of liberal and conservative, Decter threw down the gauntlet: “For people like me to relinquish ‘liberal,’ for us to hand the term over without a fight to the enemies and would-be usurpers of our revolution, is to risk not only acquiescing in the betrayal of that revolution but losing the sense of who we really are. . . . Consequently there is no way I can be relieved of my obligation to do battle with those who are seeking to undo my revolution and abscond with its good name.”³¹ That *Commentary* was summoning the darkest ideological spirits also became clear in 1977 with an essay by Norman Podhoretz on “The Culture of Appeasement.” Writing that the United States was in danger of complete acquiescence to Soviet foreign policy or “Finlandization,” Podhoretz argued that the decline of manly virtues enabled a “culture of appeasement” fostered by a homosexual conspiracy of such writers as Gore Vidal and James Baldwin, just as the foreign policy of interwar Britain, it turned out, could be attributed to such gay poets as W. H. Auden.³²

The priorities of SDUSA became clear with the formation of a new foreign-policy-focused front group on the same model as the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD). Taking its name from a similar group of the 1950s and even including some of its original principals such as Paul Nitze, the CPD took a hostile posture toward the Carter administration, especially after Carter referred in a major address to the “inordinate fear of Communism” of the United States. In addition to such SD regulars as Elliott Abrams, Richard Perle,

Norman Podhoretz, Max Kampelman, Jeane Kirkpatrick, and Lane Kirkland, the CPD also included such figures as Gerald Ford's secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Even as the Soviet Union was beginning its terminal decline, the CPD insisted, "The Soviet military buildup of all its armed forces over the past quarter century is, in part, reminiscent of Nazi Germany's rearmament in the 1930s."³³

Events were rapidly passing by those who remained committed to the domestic program of SDUSA that went back to the hopeful early 1960s. Even so committed and belligerent an old Shachtmanite as Paul Feldman could not adjust to the new reality in which an outlet like *New America* was obsolete. Before an incapacitating stroke, Feldman spent his last years editing the paper of the Steelworkers Union in Pittsburgh.³⁴ Stuart Elliott, a one-time Cornell YPSL who straddled the line separating the SD from Michael Harrington's following, defined the increasingly obvious contradiction at the heart of SDUSA:

Reading between the lines, we seem to be sending the message that business and neoconservatives are making a political mistake by joining in conservative attacks on the labor movement and, at the same time, telling labor that it should recognize that its real political enemies are in the "new class" and that it should therefore be open to making some kind of arrangement with business and neoconservatives. . . . I doubt that this implied line can be brought to culmination. For one thing, even many of the advocates of the implied version would recoil from the explicit version.³⁵

As the 1970s drew to a close, there was a highly poignant symbol of the passing away of any claim the organization could make to the cause of social justice in the United States. Asa Philip Randolph, the neglected father of the civil rights movement, who had he been white could have led American Socialism with unlimited potential, died on May 16, 1979. A man who sacrificed undying radical convictions for the simple yet vital cause of upward social mobility and political enfranchisement for

his long-suffering race, he died in his rent-subsidized Manhattan apartment with nothing to his name but a broken television and \$500 in the bank. As Bayard Rustin wrote in a moving tribute,

Just as Mr. Randolph so admirably integrated his radicalism with the realities and immediate problems of his time, he also harmonized his deeply radical and humanistic values with his own personal lifestyle. I say this based on my long years of friendship with Mr. Randolph, a friendship which I have always regarded as a singular blessing and privilege. Throughout those long years, I have never once heard Mr. Randolph utter an uncharitable word about anyone, even his most bitter enemies, nor have I ever once seen Mr. Randolph treat any human being with anything less than complete dignity and respect. Moreover, as a convinced believer in the equality of man, Mr. Randolph never once exalted himself at the expense of anyone. If there ever was a man who truly practiced what he preached, it certainly is Mr. Randolph.³⁶

The watershed in the neoconservative break from the Democratic Party came in 1979, when *Commentary* published Jeane Kirkpatrick's searing indictment of Jimmy Carter's foreign policy, "Dictatorships and Double Standards." Historian Jacob Heilbrunn assesses this famous essay and its impact as follows:

What gave her essay special force was its contention that Communist regimes, unlike authoritarian ones, were not susceptible to reform. As the rise of the Soviet reformist Mikhail Gorbachev later showed, this wasn't, to put it mildly, quite right. But Kirkpatrick's article became a rallying cry for Carter's opponents. It gave them a coherent theory, a basis of attack, one that Presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan, among others, quickly embraced.³⁷

Carter's posture toward the Soviets, in practice no different from the Nixon/Ford détente policy, most offended SDUSA and its allies, but Israel was also a large factor in their opposition. Few raised any serious

objection to the peace accord between Israel and Egypt negotiated that year, but the mood changed dramatically when Carter made clear he took seriously the provisions of the accord mandating negotiation with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). When Andrew Young, the former confidant of Martin Luther King who served as Carter's ambassador to the UN, was forced to resign after it became known that he had met with PLO representatives, Carl Gershman declared in high dudgeon, "Though the Young affair appeared to be about black-Jewish relations, it was actually about democracy and its enemies, and the determination to render America incapable of defending Israel or any other ally, or even itself."³⁸

Most of the SDUSA/CDM core hoped to see Daniel Patrick Moynihan challenge Jimmy Carter for the Democratic nomination in 1980. But Moynihan showed little interest in the prospect and in the decade to come became a sharp critic of the Reagan foreign policies his former allies helped shape. Norman Podhoretz was boldest in embracing Ronald Reagan during the campaign, writing a foreign policy manifesto titled *The Present Danger*. It was an open secret that SDUSA was behind Reagan, and the number of appointments given to principals of the Committee on the Present Danger was impressive. Jeane Kirkpatrick became Reagan's UN ambassador, and Carl Gershman her chief of staff. Elliott Abrams became an assistant secretary of state, and Max Kampelman held a series of State Department appointments. Richard Perle became an assistant secretary of defense.³⁹

The election of Ronald Reagan was, for Social Democrats USA, one of the most vivid cases in the history of American politics of a faction ending up the victim of its own success. The political landscape of 1972, in which the classical conservative realist Richard Nixon faced off against the left-wing prairie isolationist George McGovern, was now a distant memory. The situation in 1980 was precisely the Cold War liberal counter-revolution that was the aim of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, but it had been fulfilled by Ronald Reagan, the standard-bearer of the conservative movement; the domestic agenda of SDUSA was decidedly unwelcome in the Age of Reagan. Even the Israel lobby now had very

little use for SDUSA—as far as they were concerned, the Shachtmanites had long ago done their job.

The first response of SDUSA was to turn inward with familiar sectarian incantations, as Stuart Elliott reported of a conference just after the election:

The convention resolution on the elections made the analysis that Carter was the candidate of the New Politics movement, his defeat the defeat of “McGovernism.” Discussion of U.S. politics predicated on the assumption that the new right is not really a danger, but merely an unfortunate reaction to the excesses of the new left and New Politics. Tom Kahn’s keynote argued that the election results were a vindication of social democracy because exit polls showed that major concerns of voters were U.S. defense policy and the threat of Soviet expansionism and that Reagan’s victory was not a repudiation of the welfare state.⁴⁰

Left behind in the new dispensation were Max Shachtman’s “children,” Tom Kahn and Rachelle Horowitz, whose fidelity to the old man even in death assured their devotion to the labor movement that could not be undone by the advancement opportunities that beckoned most of their old comrades. Yet as a senior operative of the international affairs department of the AFL-CIO, Tom Kahn was presented with the opportunity to carry out his adolescent dreams of revolution in the Age of Reagan. When the shipyard workers of Gdansk went on strike against the Communist regime in Poland and the Solidarnosc movement was born, Kahn became in charge of the multifaceted campaign of both political and material support from the AFL-CIO. In the words of Rachelle Horowitz, “Tom’s political life had come full circle. His political awakening had taken place during the 1956–57 uprisings in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Then he had marched and protested. This time he was in a position to do something more, actually aid the revolution.”⁴¹

This critical juncture in the history of neoconservatism was perhaps best illustrated in a public debate in 1981 between Tom Kahn and Norman Podhoretz on the events in Poland. Podhoretz, who two years later

denounced Reagan's withdrawal from Lebanon as "appeasement by any other name," attacked Kahn's lack of realism with characteristically unrestrained chutzpah. Kahn replied forcefully:

In Poland you have something entirely different—workers who take to the factories, conduct sit-ins, and actually produce a movement, an institution, an organizational force, which has not existed in any of the other countries, and which has no precedent in the history of the Communist world since 1917 that I know of. . . . And at least at the AFL-CIO we are going to accept their definition of their needs, of their limits, and of their demands.⁴²

Almost immediately after Ronald Reagan was sworn in, Midge Decter announced the formation of her own organization on the model of the SDUSA front groups of the 1970s: the Committee for the Free World. Stating that its formation was urged on her by official Israeli contacts, Decter declared, "Our aim is to alter the climate of confusion and complacency, apathy and self-denigration, that has done so much to weaken the Western democracies in the face of a growing threat to their continued viability and even their existence as free societies."⁴³ The once and future secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld was among Decter's closest collaborators, her worshipful praise of the man a major embarrassment when Rumsfeld became the neocon scapegoat for the failure of the Iraq War at the end of his second tenure.⁴⁴ Irving Kristol joined the Committee and helped consummate the neoconservative marriage to its most important financial backers in the years to come. Other founding members included Sidney Hook, Bayard Rustin, Seymour Martin Lipset, Elie Wiesel, Al Shanker, Martin Peretz, and Max Lerner.⁴⁵

For all practical purposes, the Committee for the Free World was the full-fledged splinter group from Social Democrats USA that became the neoconservatism widely known and despised in the early twenty-first century—indeed, that became the post-Cold War American right. *National Review* would eventually proclaim Norman Podhoretz the co-equal of William F. Buckley and Irving Kristol as a founder of the

American right.⁴⁶ The organizational form was that which remained peculiar to neoconservatism, the Leninist front group with no rear behind the front. Shame over its roots in any branch of the American left would manifest in an extreme hostility to trade unionism, typified by the later careers of the two YPSL/SDUSA veterans who took domestic policy jobs in the Reagan White House, Linda Chavez and Max Green. Yet their heritage would always be with them. Throughout the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, it would always be 1972 and the battle against the demon New Politics, carrying on for a century Trotsky's angry rants against the Babbitts, the new class, American Jewish liberals—whoever offended their gloried visions of revolutionary violence.

SDUSA retained vestigial relevance so long as there was a need for a nominally “progressive” anti-Communist voice to support American foreign interventions. Its involvement in the highly controversial intervention in the civil war in Nicaragua was most illustrative. To many Americans, support for the “Contra” rebels against the authoritarian “Sandinista” regime brought an ominous sense of *déjà vu* from Vietnam. But to the heirs of Max Shachtman, because some of the Contras were trade unionists who were disillusioned early supporters of the Sandinistas, they were “good, stout working class fighters” just like those at the Bay of Pigs, fighting “against Communism and for freedom” as Irwin Suall had implored in that era. Tom Kahn led an elaborate campaign through the AFL-CIO to support trade union opposition to both the Sandinistas and to right-wing dictatorships in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chile.⁴⁷ Penn Kemble, meanwhile, established the Institute on Religion and Democracy to cement the growing SDUSA relationship with numerous Catholic leaders on Central American policy as well as in support of *Solidarnosc*.

A more enduring legacy of this period came when Ronald Reagan announced the establishment in 1983 of a U.S. government agency to openly promote and extend the reach of democratic governments across the world—the National Endowment for Democracy—with Carl Gershman given what became a lifetime appointment as its

president. In the post–Cold War era, this agency would effectively operate as an American Comintern. Josh Muravchik described its mission on the opinion page of the *New York Times*:

The method is to evangelize the democratic creed, train democratic leaders and build the “infrastructure” of democracy – a variety of independent civic and interest groups. The National Endowment for Democracy was launched earlier this year to carry out this program. The endowment’s mandate defies the pessimistic conventional wisdom about the prospects for democracy in the third world and about the ability of the United States to enhance those prospects.⁴⁸

The 1984 election demonstrated the obsolescence of Social Democrats USA once and for all. The Democratic nominee, Walter Mondale, might have been an ideal candidate for the Coalition for a Democratic Majority in years past. Lane Kirkland, as president of the AFL-CIO, was one of his most outspoken and active advisors, and as Carter’s vice president, Mondale made a desperate attempt to reconcile the CDM and the administration.⁴⁹ But most SDUSA principals were too invested in their ties to the Reagan administration. That these ties were perhaps as emotional as self-interested was illustrated when Jeane Kirkpatrick gave a widely televised speech denouncing her former party at the Republican convention in 1984. More importantly, the 1984 election results undid the entire premise behind SDUSA and CDM. A candidate who fit the CDM profile as well as Mondale lost in as dramatic a landslide as George McGovern. This was a severe blow for SDUSA, making its fetishized labor movement into the scapegoat that in years past it had made of the New Politics. Largely on this very basis, the Democratic Leadership Council promptly emerged after the 1984 election to displace CDM from its niche leading the right wing of the Democratic Party.

Yet CDM lingered on through the 1980s, largely sustained by the heiress Nina Rosenwald, who emerged as the leading benefactor of paranoid anti-Muslim propaganda a generation later.⁵⁰ Penn Kemble issued a manifesto with such tired incantations as “We can help to build

bridges between the labor movement and those . . . somewhat to the right of labor on economic issues but who also reject the social and foreign policy radicalism of the left,” and “The question of whether foreign policy matters in congressional races should have been settled by the 1980 massacre,” but this was whistling past the graveyard.⁵¹ Even those who ushered in the new dispensation did not quite grasp that an era had passed, with Norman Podhoretz expressing shock that anyone in SDUSA would want to dissociate the organization from *Commentary*.⁵² Finally, even invocations of the American Socialist past by SDUSA had ended by the middle of the 1980s. The last of any significance appears to have been a letter to the *New York Times* organized by Emanuel Muravchik and not officially sanctioned by SDUSA, protesting the invocation of Norman Thomas by the nuclear freeze movement. Other signers included Bayard Rustin, Max Kampelman, Samuel Friedman, and William Stern.⁵³

During the second half of the 1980s, however, SDUSA still remained on the scene, not yet at the point of complete irrelevance and terminal decline. More than a few eyebrows were raised when the keynote speaker at the 1985 SD convention was the Contra leader Alfonso Robelo. In a profile of SDUSA for *The New Republic*, Michael Massing noted, “Members address one another as ‘comrade,’ yet chide liberals for being soft on Communism,” adding the shrewd observation, “In the end, the Social Democrats have been less involved in policy-making than in what might be called political mobilization.”⁵⁴ Irwin Suall was now a controversial figure at the Anti-Defamation League for sharing intelligence on the American radical left with the apartheid regime in South Africa in what quickly proved to be the tip of an iceberg. And then there was Elliott Abrams, who as assistant secretary of state for Latin America was one of the principal organizers of the illegal funding of the Contras, which he defended, in impeccably Shachtmanite terms, as necessary for the advancement of democratic revolution.⁵⁵

An important milestone in the decline of Social Democrats USA was the death of Bayard Rustin in 1987. The best analogy for Rustin’s paradoxical career is to Samuel Gompers. Both began as sincere radicals

deeply committed to their adopted cause who, when faced with the unsparing full force of the power structure they were resisting, eagerly accepted the invitation to seek the ends of justice by working with and within the power elite, ultimately taking this approach to lengths far beyond what the immediate circumstances demanded. Even Gompers's fondness for Mussolini in his final years has its striking analog in the extent of Rustin's embrace of the Israeli right. In 1983, when Ariel Sharon filed a libel suit against *Time* magazine for reporting on his indictment for war crimes in Lebanon, Rustin appeared as a character witness for Sharon.⁵⁶ Even more shocking for a man so closely associated with the cause of gay rights were letters of mutual affection with Norman Podhoretz.⁵⁷

Rustin's last years were marked by an outspoken presence in the aborning gay rights movement, which helped lay the foundation for its dubious claim to be any kind of heir or successor to the civil rights movement. This gave him the opportunity to rebuild many relationships that had been broken by Vietnam, perhaps most notably with David McReynolds, who in a bygone era often joined Rustin and Tom Kahn on weekend getaways.⁵⁸ Given Rustin's appearances at War Resisters League events in the 1980s, McReynolds was even led to wonder if Rustin was "edging his way back to us at the end."⁵⁹ Indeed, it is a sobering testimony to how central the cause of the gay and lesbian community has become to the progressive persuasion in America that the reputation of Bayard Rustin has been so extensively rehabilitated. Still, it would be a mistake to place Rustin in the neoconservative pantheon. More than anything, Bayard Rustin was the earliest prophet of post-Cold War liberalism: viewing all identity politics as an extension of the civil rights movement, deeply distrustful of populist opposition to entrenched bureaucracy, moralist and interventionist if decidedly not militarist in foreign affairs, and sympathetic to but fundamentally not of the labor movement.

Tom Kahn became head of the AFL-CIO International Affairs department in 1986, with a biography uncannily resembling those of his two most distinguished predecessors, Jay Lovestone and William English Walling. In 1988, the Solidarnosc movement successfully led the general

strike that forced Communist Poland to hold elections, and it completely swept those elections in June 1989. Before the end of 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, the Eastern bloc dictators began falling like dominoes, and the Soviet Union itself soon followed. Nothing could have been more exhilarating for one who never ceased to be a Brooklyn College Trotskyist at heart than to have such a large and consequential role in bringing about the workers' revolution that overthrew Stalinism in Europe. Kahn would pay tribute to his late mentor at an SD conference in 1991:

Let me get a little sectarian for a moment. Max Shachtman, who played as much a role as anyone in shaping this movement, contended that the Soviet Union represented a form of bureaucratic collectivism, a new kind of society, one characterized by party ownership of the state and state ownership of the means of production. And since the state owned the means of production and the party owned the state, if you were to have a change in the political monopoly of power by the Communist Party, you would end up also having a change in the ownership of the means of production. I am giving you in very short hand the essence of a theory which held fundamentally that if there was to be a revolution in the Soviet Union and in the countries modeled on it, it would not be, as Trotsky thought, simply a political revolution. It would be a social revolution. I submit to you that this is the central issue that is now being debated by Sovietologists and policy experts in this country and around the world.⁶⁰

It proved a valedictory for Tom Kahn, who died the following year of complications from HIV. A hopeless romantic, he was fortunate in not living to see the name of his beloved mentor Max Shachtman become associated with the foreign policy of George W. Bush.

The majority of old stalwarts of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, including those such as Josh Muravchik who had drifted the furthest into Republican ranks, endorsed Bill Clinton in 1992 in an open letter in the *New York Times*.⁶¹ There were high hopes for a return to old glories with the new president closely aligned with the Democratic

Leadership Council. Penn Kemble became a director of the U.S. Information Agency; a far cry from serving as ambassador to Micronesia, but still the exception that proved the rule. SDUSA simply had no remaining relevance with the Cold War over and done with. It undoubtedly came as a rude shock that, with a Democrat in the White House, the SD's ties to the labor movement were if anything a liability. Clinton's major achievement in his first year in office was the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was vigorously opposed by the labor movement. Combined with the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994, the shock was great enough for Lane Kirkland to be forced out of the AFL-CIO presidency.

In short, the labor movement had outlived its usefulness to the state. Max Shachtman, who sat at Trotsky's right hand, might have had the political skill to adapt to this new situation, but those he unleashed on to the establishment were hopeless. Not even the ascent of Sandra Feldman to the AFT presidency after the death of Al Shanker could qualitatively change the situation. The aging Don Slaiman made an earnest and conscientious effort to rebuild and begin anew, but the last serious attempt of SDUSA to gain a new lease on life was a pathetic attempt to be taken on as a "labor arm" by the Democratic Leadership Council.⁶² After vacating the ILGWU building in New York in the 1980s, SDUSA maintained a national office in the AFT building in Washington, DC. But in 2001, this office was shut down, and its papers sent to join those of the historic Socialist Party at Duke University.

On September 11, 2001, it was anything but obvious how the horrific events of that day would give new relevance to the life and legacy of Max Shachtman. Yet the neocons and their Israeli fellow travelers were immediately able to push their narrative that the attacks marked the beginning of what Norman Podhoretz would call "World War IV" against "Islamofascism." Just nine days after the attacks, the Project for a New American Century, fated to become the most famous neocon front group without a rear, issued its open letter urging the Bush administration to invade Iraq. As the march toward that war ground on through 2002

and the beginning of 2003, the peculiar phenomenon of the neo-conservative movement and its exotic history burst into popular consciousness as never before. If any one individual could be credited for giving Max Shachtman and his disciples their due in this discussion, it was Justin Raimondo, who wrote extensively on the Shachtmanites as a polemicist for neocon opponents on the right:

The Trotskyists argued that the Communist revolution of 1917 could not and should not be contained within the borders of the Soviet Union. Today's neocons make the same argument about the need to spread the American system until the U.S. becomes a "global hegemon" as *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol puts it. Trotsky argued that socialism in one country was impossible, and doomed to failure: encircled by capitalism, surrounded by enemies constantly plotting its downfall, the "workers state" would not survive if it didn't expand. The neocons are making a similar argument when it comes to liberal democracy. . . . Devoted to spreading "global democracy," Shachtman's former followers soon coalesced into a potent intellectual force that had no trouble taking over the intellectual institutions of the right as they made their way from one end of the political spectrum to the other. The indelible imprint of their Trotskyist legacy is a principled bellicosity—combined with intellectual aggressiveness and a capacity for bureaucratic infighting, the neocons in power make formidable opponents.⁶³

On May 17, 2003, at the peak of triumphalism following the American conquest of Iraq, an SDUSA conference was held under the title, "Everything's Changed: What Now for Labor, Liberalism, and the Global Left?" Capping eighty years of insult and injury to American Socialism and its good name, the English *Forward* proclaimed in the headline of their article on the conference, "Debs' Heirs Reassemble to Seek Renewed Role as Hawks of Left."⁶⁴ Penn Kemble even wrote a new declaration of principles:

American social democrats believe unabashedly that the United States is a force for good in the world—a view most persuasively argued in recent times by the social democratic Prime Minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair. But our citizens and our government alike need continuous encouragement if our moral influence and our diplomatic and military power are to be used to assist those countries who share our commitment to democracy and human rights. . . . As in the conflicts with Communism waged by past generations of the democratic left, social democrats not only must distinguish ourselves from the false left—we must take the lead in exposing and combatting it. We know this enemy better than the conservatives. . . . A new global network is taking shape that encompasses Islamic extremists, remnants of the old Communist system and its friends, agents of thug governments, assorted third world liberation groups and a variety of other dissidents and anti-democratic malcontents.⁶⁵

The same old words, the same old incantations, all serving the same tired old masquerade of Shachtmanism as historic social democracy. In fact ironically, Tony Blair had been responsible for shepherding several former ruling parties of Eastern Europe, including and especially of Poland, into the Socialist International, laying the foundation for the vaunted “new Europe” of the period.⁶⁶ One can only wonder what Tom Kahn, the heroic American champion of Solidarnosc, would have made of this brazen transgression in the party line.

Yet there was no clearer indication that SDUSA was but an echo of the past than the paucity of media coverage for this conference at the very peak of public interest in the neoconservative phenomenon. Only the English *Forward*, Justin Raimondo, and the short-lived arch-neocon daily *New York Sun* gave it any press at all. Josh Muravchik published the definitive essay in *Commentary* arguing that the entire discussion of neoconservatism in connection to the Iraq War was but an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory. Trotsky was treated almost in passing, and Max Shachtman only in a footnote, with greater attention to discussions

of the influence of the philosophy professor Leo Strauss, a major influence on the movement to be sure. Muravchik asserted,

There is, however, one thing that Strauss and Trotsky did have in common, and the one thing that may get us closer to the real reason their names have been so readily invoked. Both were Jews. The neo-conservatives, it turns out, are also in large proportion Jewish—and this, to their detractors, constitutes evidence of the ulterior motives that lurk behind the policies they espouse.⁶⁷

If unfortunate echoes of classical anti-Semitism found their way into the study of neoconservatism, this was also the most enduring legacy of the era when Muravchik led the YPSL. The problem of Zionism and the American Jewish establishment bringing to life classical anti-Semitic images of Jewish power was of course much older, but it was the distinct legacy of the enlistment of the Shachtmanites by that establishment, at the end of the 1960s, that the doctrine of global democratic revolution became utterly inseparable from what was deemed “good for the Jews.” Zionism had not been the guiding principle for the core Shachtmanites themselves, but it was essential to the appeal by which they attracted a substantial following. The growing identification with, indeed idolatry, of Jewish nationalism by the neocon-led American right was, in very large measure, a distinct legacy of Social Democrats USA.

On November 6, 2003, President Bush gave an address to the National Endowment for Democracy on its twentieth anniversary, in which he transformed his original dubious rationale for the Iraq War into the cause of spreading democracy to the Islamic world. In unmistakable Shachtmanite prose, the president declared, “The resolve we show will shape the next stage of the world democratic movement. . . . The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.”⁶⁸ Justin Raimondo titled his column on the speech “George W. Bush, Trotskyite,” declaring, “George W. Bush’s conversion to Shachtmanism, as evidenced by his NED address, represents the apotheosis of neocon dominance in Washington.”⁶⁹

Indeed, it was the final, dramatic proof that Social Democrats USA had been the hapless victim of its own success.

The end became unmistakable in 2004 when Penn Kemble, who all but singlehandedly organized the 2003 conference, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. When given only a few months to live, Kemble asked for one last gathering of the comrades, and by the time it was held he was too far gone to personally attend and had to watch on a closed-circuit broadcast. Held on October 1, 2005, this final gathering of Social Democrats USA was strangely billed as a conference on the legacy of Sidney Hook. Few present likely knew or cared about the fact, but in the absolutely narrowest and most technical sense, it was the very last function of the organization founded at Masonic Hall in Indianapolis on July 29, 1901—the Socialist Party of America.⁷⁰

The greatest pathos of the day was probably the obligatory panel on the labor movement, that mostly defended the embattled John Sweeney and his allies after receiving the same humiliation SD members had, a decade earlier, suffered alongside Lane Kirkland at Sweeney's hands. No less striking was the vastness of the distance traveled from historic American Socialism. On the final panel with fellow gray eminences Ben Wattenberg and Jeane Kirkpatrick, not even Max Kampelman, the last surviving member of the Independent Committee for Norman Thomas in 1948, was moved to recall anything more ancient than Hubert Humphrey. Penn Kemble died ten days later; Carl Gershman then oversaw the liquidation of Social Democrats USA. To the very last, it held its post office box under the name League for Industrial Democracy.

18 Democratic Socialists of America and the Roots of Post–Cold War Liberalism

Michael Harrington submitted his resignation from Social Democrats USA on June 21, 1973, in a dramatic five-page letter. With the exception of references to Vietnam, Harrington's letter portrayed his break with the Shachtmanites as not over general perspective but tactics:

The broad framework of my analysis of Communism—as a bureaucratic collectivist system that is both anti-capitalist and anti-socialist—is the same as that of the present leadership of SDUSA. But, as a Socialist, I believe that Communism must be countered by democratic alternatives, not by the dictatorial regimes America has backed in Saigon. . . . Socialism in America as represented by the SD is completely isolated from the entire middle class reform movement as well as from the unions, representing well over five million workers and the most politically active sector of the labor movement, who broke with Meany over the war and McGovern. . . . In presenting this resignation, then, I do not abandon the tradition of Debs and Thomas. On the contrary I take a step that will permit me—and those who agree with me—to extend and deepen that tradition among workers, reformers, the minorities, the women's movement and other partisans of social change. In the name of the future of the American Socialist movement, I resign from Social Democrats USA.¹

Earlier that year, in February 1973, Harrington and his closest confidants such as Irving Howe, Bogdan Denitch, and Deborah Meier had laid plans to launch what they decided to call the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC). They hoped with this name to invoke both a sense of modesty and the “organizing committees” of the CIO in the 1930s. They immediately hired a full-time organizer, Jack Clark, a former YPSL member at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, who worked out of a spare room in Meier’s large Upper West Side townhouse.² A week before formally submitting his resignation from SDUSA, Harrington wrote to the Socialist International to inform them of the intention of DSOC to apply for membership.³ DSOC held its founding convention in New York on October 20 with more than four hundred in attendance. There Harrington earnestly announced, “Today we begin the work of building the seventies left.” Interpreted by some as a self-deprecating paraphrase of Lenin’s declaration, “We shall now build the socialist order,” it was more notably a clear indication that he still viewed politics through rigid and doctrinaire categories. Harrington announced his program bluntly: “We must go where the people are, which is the liberal wing of the Democratic Party.”⁴

In this ambitious effort to replicate a social democratic version of the 1930s Popular Front, Harrington began with an indispensable ally in the unions with which he collaborated in the Labor Leadership Assembly for Peace. Led by Emil Mazey, a veteran UAW left-winger going back to the 1930s, and Victor Gotbaum, who led the State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) of New York, this union base grew into the effective DSOC bloc in the AFL-CIO. After the tragic death of Walter Reuther in a plane crash in 1970, Leonard Woodcock, who once briefly served on the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Party, succeeded him as president of the UAW; Woodcock was succeeded in turn by loyal DSOC friend Doug Fraser. Victor Reuther joined the leadership of DSOC along with such survivors of the UAW Socialist bloc as Emil Mazey, Martin Gerber, and Irving Bluestone. AFSCME was led nationally by a 1930s YPSL member named Jerry Wurf, who declared his support for DSOC out of passionate resentment of the Shachtmanites in George

Meany's inner circle. Unmistakably resembling the historic Socialist bloc in the prewar labor movement, this DSOC bloc grew to include other labor leaders such as William Winpisinger of the Machinists, Ralph Helstein of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, and Jacob Sheinkman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers.⁵

Among veterans of the Thomas-era Socialist Party to declare for DSOC, the most prominent by far was Harry Fleischman, lending unparalleled historical legitimacy. The vice chairs of DSOC included Victor Reuther, Ralph Helstein, Julius Bernstein, Carl Shier, and Deborah Meier; other founding board members included Fleischman, Irving Howe, and former YPSL Harrington loyalists such as Steve Kelman and Ben Ross from Harvard and Alex Spinrad from Yale. But there was no denying that for all practical purposes, DSOC was Michael Harrington, who never lost the sense of celebrity he gained from writing *The Other America*; and was now a professor at Queens College and a board member of the proud but declining Americans for Democratic Action.⁶ Yet Harrington took a passive approach to wielding political influence, allowing the character of his promising new movement to be shaped by those who came into it. In a harbinger of things to come, when Deborah Meier hosted a reception to conclude the founding convention of DSOC, Harrington spent the entire evening under interrogation by several female delegates for his lack of feminist bona fides.⁷

During the founding convention, Harrington made an earnest plea for the quarrels of the 1960s to be laid to rest, and many aimless veterans of SDS and groups yet further left were present to give him a hearing. The most consequential was Ron Radosh, who wrote a generally favorable report on the conference for *Socialist Revolution*, a magazine that was the nominal successor to *Studies on the Left*. Radosh, still in transition from the new left to what DSOC proposed replacing it with, shrewdly and prophetically observed,

Ironically, one result of the DSOC might be the very united front with the Communists that Harrington's older associates have sought to avoid for so many years. Since the electoral strategy of working within

the Democratic Party is similar to that of the American Communists—except that the Communists persist in hiding their socialist views—the DSOC members might find the Communists their closest allies in the fight to liberalize the Democratic Party. Perhaps this was in the minds of some of those present. When the question of the political significance of Chile was raised in plenary session, Harrington noted that the DSOC might have to re-evaluate socialist views about Communist parties. In Chile, Harrington stated, the Communist Party “functioned like a social democratic party.” Harrington clearly supported the moderate and constitutionalist line of the Chilean CP, and was critical of both the MIR and the left wing of Allende’s Socialist Party. Realizing that the world has moved away from the 1930s, Harrington seemed open to some degree of unity with those Communists who are clearly liberal reformers.⁸

Radosh was ultimately won over by Harrington over lunch and an old-fashioned Greenwich Village bull session, the first new left veteran to be brought on to the national board of DSOC. Irving Howe and a few others loudly protested the move, but soon larger waves of new left refugees began entering DSOC.⁹ James Weinstein also became a supporter as he launched a new topical publication, *In These Times*.

DSOC would not intervene in the crowded Democratic presidential primaries of 1976, though Harrington personally endorsed Morris Udall of Arizona when he became the last liberal standing against Jimmy Carter. Unions close to DSOC such as the UAW and AFSCME endorsed Carter as he was swept to the nomination by liberals who feared Scoop Jackson and by Southerners who feared George Wallace.¹⁰ The major efforts of DSOC in 1976 focused on influencing the Democratic platform. In 1974, Harrington and a few others had been elected as delegates to the first of the “midterm” conventions mandated by the Democratic Party reforms that sprang from the debacle of 1968, but they were consigned to the margins.¹¹ In February 1976, DSOC launched a new broad-based front group, Democratic Agenda, with generous funding and support from

its labor movement allies. The founding convention was addressed by William Winpisinger of the Machinists and Congressman John Conyers of Michigan.¹² The major legislative campaign of Democratic Agenda was for the “Full Employment Bill” proposed by Hubert Humphrey and California congressman Gus Hawkins in 1975.

With liberal dissatisfaction with Jimmy Carter already rising, the Democratic Agenda conference in Washington in November 1977 indicated great growth potential. Four members of Congress now openly identified with DSOC: John Conyers, Bella Abzug, Ron Dellums of California (nephew of the West Coast leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), and Robert Kastenmeier of Wisconsin. Other speakers included Victor Reuther, Doug Fraser, William Winpisinger, Jerry Wurf, James Farmer, feminist icon Gloria Steinem, Joyce Miller and William Lucy from the AFL-CIO, and future congressman Barney Frank, then a Massachusetts state legislator who frequently appeared at local DSOC functions in Boston. A flyer promoting the conference openly blasted Carter, declaring “there is no alternative to full employment” and emphasizing that Carter was elected “on a full employment platform.”¹³ The official program for the conference boldly announced,

The Democratic Agenda is the beginning of a movement to make sure that President Carter and the Democratic Congress keep the promises contained in the 1976 Democratic Platform—like guaranteed jobs for all, eliminating billions of dollars of tax loopholes for the rich and the giant corporations, an end to discrimination by race and sex, national health insurance, and housing, health and environmental programs. A new lease on life for the major cities, and ending the rip-offs by the oil companies, electric utilities, big banks and defense contractors. The Democratic Agenda is a coalition to prevent a sellout of these promises.¹⁴

By 1978, John Judis of *In These Times* could boast, “DSOC’s 3,000 or so activists have managed to play a role in the Democratic Party roughly commensurate to that of the 300,000 strong American Conservative

Union within the Republican Party,” though Maurice Isserman hastens to add, “This was a measure both of DSOC’s success and of American liberalism’s disarray.”¹⁵ The peak of political influence came at the Democratic midterm convention that year in Memphis, when Democratic Agenda succeeded in getting the necessary signatures of a full quarter of the delegates for their four proposed floor resolutions, including an unambiguous condemnation of the entire record of the Carter administration:

The problems which confronted this nation in 1976 have not been solved, yet it appears that the fiscal year 1980 budget will cut many social programs below “current services” levels, while allowing the military budget to grow. The proposed reductions, together with current economic policies, may well result in a recession and a rising unemployment rate in 1980—in direct violation of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act.¹⁶

Among the floor whips who helped Carter avert an absolute calamity in Memphis was the ambitious First Lady of Arkansas, Hillary Rodham Clinton. The convention was widely seen as foreshadowing the expected primary challenge to Carter by Ted Kennedy, although Carter’s press secretary insisted, “The dispute is not between the President and Senator Kennedy, but between the administration and the Democratic Agenda.” Mike Harrington and Doug Fraser were now the acknowledged leaders of the movement organizing to deny renomination to Carter. When the *New York Times* wrote in an editorial that the Memphis convention was “a firm indication of the schism between the White House and the liberal wing of the party,” an exuberant Harrington was convinced that he was fulfilling the original vision of realignment of his comrades a generation earlier.¹⁷

Harrington launched a formal campaign to draft Ted Kennedy into the presidential race on April 5, 1979, at a rally before a large crowd and with much fanfare at Faneuil Hall in Boston.¹⁸ Though Kennedy was always the favorite to make the run against Carter, at least one meeting

Harrington attended saw such other names suggested as Morris Udall, George McGovern, and New York governor Hugh Carey.¹⁹ H. L. Mitchell, who remained an officer of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters, even suggested that Harrington himself throw his hat in the Democratic ring.²⁰ But Harrington's reasons for insisting on Kennedy were many. Not only was Harrington's moment of glory in national politics bound up with the Kennedy name, but the martyrdom of Robert Kennedy, and the myth surrounding his hypothetical presidency, was an important touchstone uniting the disparate fragments of both old left and new left that regrouped into DSOC. Moreover, it was generally assumed by the political class throughout the 1970s that the Democratic nomination, and even the presidency, was Ted Kennedy's for the asking whenever he wanted it. No small number of aspiring liberal policy makers in Washington were even joining DSOC, believing it would give them entrée to a future Ted Kennedy administration.

Yet Harrington felt a compelling pull to atone for both his real and imagined sins of the 1960s against the new left. Oddly occurring in parallel with the high hopes of the 1970s for DSOC was its prospective merger with an organization of new left veterans known as the New American Movement (NAM). Ron Radosh helped found the small NAM affiliate in New York and arranged its earliest public dialogue with DSOC.²¹ *In These Times* made a point of maintaining friendly relations with both organizations, and joint action was common by the late 1970s, particularly in the Midwest where NAM was most well organized.²² The eventual merger of DSOC and NAM essentially fulfilled the prediction Radosh made at the founding convention of DSOC—that replicating the Popular Front model of organization and activism would ultimately lead to an embrace of the spirit and legacy of the original Popular Front.

The story of NAM is, to a very large extent, the story of how the remnants of the new left were converted over the course of the 1970s to a markedly different program. When it was founded in 1971 by a large group of SDS veterans and the circle around *Studies on the Left*, it was

committed to a traditional new left perspective and to organizing a new third party. Michael Lerner, who wrote the first declaration of principles for NAM (he later became a rabbi and founder of *Tikkun* magazine), described the group's founding and his early disillusionment in what can easily serve as the whole story of the new left:

I wanted this organization to overcome the anti-intellectualism that had come into fashion in SDS around 1968 and cease romanticizing the anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles that had led to a fawning acceptance of anything that came from nonwhite sources no matter how immoral or self-destructive. During my time in Seattle, I found my own organizing undermined by these tendencies . . . my goal when creating NAM was gathering people who wanted precisely what I had started in Seattle—namely, an organization that spoke to the majority of Americans whose needs were being shortchanged by the government and society, and who were growing increasingly angry at a government that was spending their taxes for war and for the interests of the ruling elites of the society. I argued that NAM should appeal and speak to the interests of working people, that it should advocate a different kind of society, one no longer privileging the interests of capital, and that the movement advocating for such a society should be explicit in its democratic socialist vision as well as anti-imperialist and anti-racist in its analysis. But when talking about socialism, I insisted that the movement must explicitly reject the dictatorships that emerged in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern Europe. . . . As it turned out, a much wider variety of people attended that first conference. Apart from the anti-leadership types, there was another group heavily represented in Davenport: refugees from the Communist Party USA. They sought another home but insisted that NAM should not critique what they called “real existing socialism” in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, or what I called “the willful misuse of socialist ideals for the sake of maintaining power by a dictatorial elite.” Then there was a section of socialist feminist activists who resented

that this organization was pulled together by two males and a “male-identified” female (my partner Theirrie). We knew that these tendencies existed in new left members, but we imagined that their disagreements with us would lead them to ignore and denounce our efforts rather than cause them to show up and take over what we had started.²³

Leading these Communist Party refugees into NAM was Richard Healey, an SDS veteran who personally recruited his mother, a recently expelled CP leader.²⁴ Dorothy Healey was for many years the best known leader of the Communist Party in California, remaining in the party after the events of 1956. But after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Healey and a few other party leaders of her generation resigned.

In any other Communist Party among the western democracies, Dorothy Healey and her allies would have probably prevailed in steering it toward what was increasingly known as “Euro-Communism,” the adoption of reformist and parliamentary methods for only somewhat modified ends. There are a few likely reasons why the American Communist Party resisted the rise of Euro-Communism: the need of the Soviet Union to maintain a recruiting ground for espionage, the aura of martyrdom surrounding the leadership after the 1950s, and perhaps a distorted Soviet view of the Black Panthers and SDS, leading them to believe Maoism was their major competitor on the American scene. As it happened, by the late 1970s, NAM effectively became the American branch of the Euro-Communist phenomenon. How profound a change this was for the movement that began with the Port Huron Statement and *Studies on the Left* may have been best illustrated by the case of Jerry Rubin. Perhaps the most notorious wild man of 1960s radicalism, by the end of the 1970s Rubin wrote excitedly about the growing number of prominent aging ex-Communists recruited into NAM.²⁵

The causes of this change in the outlook of so many veterans of 1960s radicalism were many and complex. Several memoirs by ex-Communists who left the party after 1956 or 1968 were published just after the collapse of SDS, and the sympathy expressed in these memoirs for the youth of the new left was naturally returned in kind. The leading memoir,

indeed, was by Al Richmond, Dorothy Healey's collaborator in breaking with the CP. Many also sought to atone for sins of anti-Americanism and hostility to the labor movement. For aspiring new left historians looking for a "usable past" consistent with this aim, the Communists in the CIO appeared to be the irresistible choice—the constituency of the white backlash organized into "progressive" unions, the patriotic vanguard in the good war against fascism who were Cold War liberalism's first victims. During this period, Ron Radosh was researching a new history of the Rosenberg atomic espionage case and was shaken by the deep hostility he encountered to even a qualified belief in their guilt. As SDS veteran Mark Naison bluntly explained the romantic appeal of American Communism to new left survivors in a letter to Radosh, "The Rosenbergs knew how to die, they knew how to sacrifice for their comrades . . . it is no accident that people like this were the ones who fought the Scottsboro battles, built the unions, put their bodies on the line."²⁶

Probably no one was more alarmed by the emergence of this new romance for the Popular Front than the dean of the historians of American Communism, Theodore Draper. The phenomenon had probably already passed its peak when Draper published his lengthy two-part polemic against the new left historians in the *New York Review of Books* in 1985, skillfully dissembling what he termed a peculiar new leftist "cult of social history."²⁷ Significantly, of the ten published letters to the editor responding to Draper's polemic, the one to offer unqualified support came from Murray Bookchin, perhaps the leading anarchist of the new left, who recalled his own youth in the 1930s Communist Party with dread:

I have seen very little in the self-styled "social history" of American Communism . . . that address themselves to the steady diet of trials, debasing "self-criticism," and humiliating "confessions" that were demanded from members who were simply suspected of associating with politically suspect individuals on the independent left. . . . Far from reflecting the American radical tradition, American Communism poisoned the idealism of an entire generation of thirties radicals. The self-styled "social historians" of American Communism . . . legitimate

this moral debasement of a rich tradition by “personalizing” it and dressing it in the raiments of sweet nostalgia.²⁸

Draper overstated his case that the Popular Front was merely a “four-year interlude” in the history of American Communism; even in its most militant and sectarian periods after the Second World War, the Communist Party bore a far closer resemblance to the Popular Front than to the fanatical “third period” at the peak of the Great Depression. Indeed, the most profound consequence of the embrace of the Popular Front as a usable past, which Draper nevertheless recognized, was that because the Popular Front represented a de-radicalization from the historic American left, its embrace by a new generation of middle-aged radicals amounted to their assent to the rightward drift of American politics. As DSOC and NAM were negotiating their merger, there was little resistance in the latter group to Mike Harrington’s definition of what he called “the left wing of the possible,” which really meant the left wing of the Kennedy campaign.

For his part, Harrington made no effort to offer an alternative “usable past,” and indeed, his biases left him unable even if he wished to. The extent of Harrington’s salutary neglect in this department was best illustrated in his answer to the request of Ron Radosh for an endorsement of his book on the Rosenberg case: “I always knew they were guilty, but we’re trying to get former Communists who have left the party but are still pro-Soviet into our organization, and I can’t do anything to alienate them.”²⁹ Yet Radosh made a critical early contribution to ensuring that this lack of an alternative usable past would occur. In the early 1970s, before abandoning a traditional new left perspective, Radosh published *Prophets on the Right*, a study of the works of Charles Beard, Oswald Garrison Villard, John Flynn, and Lawrence Dennis. Because of the original fatal blinders of Radosh and *Studies on the Left* were these men categorized as being on “the right” at all—to one degree or another they were all fellow travelers of the Socialist Party. Writing in *Libertarian Review*, James J. Martin expressed his shock at this conceit while generally praising the book, adding:

It has yet to be proven that the system that has evolved in America in the last century can work without reliance upon war of some kind. We need more attention to the domestic dependence upon war as an unemployment blotter and engine of “prosperity” and less to florid raving about the necessity of putting down planetary political transgression. . . . Is it only a coincidence that the business collapse and mounting unemployment of the last year or so have come on the heels of the phasing out of the Vietnam War and the thawing of the Cold War?³⁰

This was exactly the sort of perspective verboten in the new Popular Front envisioned by Michael Harrington. Not a mere problematic isolated chapter in the story of American Socialism, the legacy of isolationism was only the most conspicuous example of the larger underlying problem. Harrington and his collaborators had little choice but to assent to the embrace of the legacy of the Popular Front because no other conceivable usable past—certainly not the 1930s Socialist Party and allied Farmer-Labor Party movement—was adaptable to their project of boring from within organized liberalism while not even identifying with its most radical wing. As even Irving Howe, no slouch assailing the baleful legacy of American Communism, was forced to conclude,

The irony of it all, a bitter enough irony, is that the most promising approach of the American left, one that apparently came closest to recognizing native realities, derives from the very movement that has done the most to discredit and besmirch the whole idea of the left. . . . If ever we are to see a resurgent democratic left in America, it will have more to learn tactically from the Popular Front initiated by the Stalinists than from those political ancestors whose integrity we admire.³¹

This argument was certainly debatable, but what it illustrated was the most fundamental victory achieved by the Communist Party and the Popular Front by marginalizing the Socialist Party in the 1930s: that any alternative means of organization would be all but inconceivable

to future generations of American radicals, no matter how different their politics.

It was not necessarily the determination of Harrington and DSOC to work within the Democratic Party that was at fault. Rather, Harrington insisted on identifying not with the left wing of the liberal establishment but with the liberal establishment itself. It is not clear exactly how much this disposition was due to mere opportunism and how much the result of long-standing Shachtmanite conceits. But what was lacking in any case was an abiding Socialist perspective to distinguish DSOC from organized liberalism and take a longer view than one or two election cycles. This had been the abiding goal, whatever their faults, of James Weinstein and his colleagues around *Studies on the Left*. But Michael Harrington could not look beyond the New Deal and the Kennedy myth. Of course, a mainstream liberal narrative would have been likely to prevail with post-Cold War liberalism in any event. But Harrington was presumed, not least by himself, to stand for something more distinct and transcendent, something that in the final accounting he never really even attempted to provide.

Late in 1979, a Committee Against the NAM Merger was organized by Ben Ross and Alex Spinrad, youthful 1960s acolytes of Harrington who were present at the creation of DSOC but now watched it drift in a direction they found unnerving. As if to accentuate the identity crisis bedeviling this new right wing of DSOC, the Committee named its newsletter “Mainstream.” It attracted substantial support throughout the ranks of DSOC. Harlan Baker, a DSOC member in the Maine legislature, wrote bluntly that as an elected official he could not abide an organization that prioritized “community organizing” over political action.³² Yet of DSOC’s most prominent political supporters and labor movement allies, only Jacob Sheinkman spoke out against the merger, describing NAM as “diametrically opposed to any concept of democracy, let alone socialism as I know it.”³³

But a majority of the young DSOC cadre who fought the merger probably had as their overriding concern that DSOC remain unfailingly partisan

to the State of Israel. A few outliers in NAM identified with pro-Palestinian activism, but the mostly Jewish aging ex-Communists in NAM identified with their old left-wing Zionist comrade Morris Schappes and his magazine *Jewish Currents*. The one substantial policy difference between DSOC and NAM was the latter's call for recognition of and negotiations with the PLO, a policy supported by the majority of parties in the Socialist International.³⁴ But the maximalist tone of the Committee Against the NAM Merger was largely set by a Zionist ideologue named Eric Lee, who published a bibliography in his vanity journal giving inordinate space to "the national question" to promote Zionist authors, that included an attack on Karl Kautsky's anti-Nazi pamphlet "Are the Jews a Race?" for "condemning Social Democracy to an anti-Zionist position for decades."³⁵

Irving Howe, who earlier in the decade had achieved considerable celebrity as author of the definitive popular history of the Jews of the Lower East Side, *World of Our Fathers*, emerged as the elder statesman of the opponents of the NAM merger, retaining a deep distrust of anyone who embraced the legacy of the Communist movement he bitterly opposed in his youth. Howe no doubt felt somewhat uneasy about the militancy for Israel among his youthful admirers. After co-editing a volume of pro-Israel essays with Carl Gershman early in the 1970s, by the 1980s Howe was slowly but surely backing away from this posture and could be withering in his attacks on the American Jewish establishment.³⁶ But more disturbing to Howe, at heart a 1930s YPSL Trotskyist to the end, was the fascination that some of those who fought against the merger developed with the Socialist Old Guard of the 1930s and its struggles. Alex Spinrad even paid a visit to a superannuated Louis Waldman in his law office, who was amused to hear of the antics of his young friend.³⁷

The position ultimately adopted in the merger was support for negotiations with the PLO with an explicit commitment to supporting American military aid to Israel.³⁸ Yet DSOC demanded no such explicit commitment in any other case. If Michael Harrington could be credited for reuniting the old left and the new left, an explicit commitment to American military aid anywhere conclusively demonstrated that a condition of

that reunification was acceptance of American power as a potential force for good. The recriminations of Zionist ideologues in DSOC notwithstanding, a romance for the Jewish old left as directed into Zionist channels typified new left survivors in DSOC and NAM. This could lead to exaggerated notions in American historical memory of just how largely Jewish the American left was. Like the Socialist Party of the 1920s and late 1930s onward (as well as the Communist Party after 1945), Jews dominated the diminished left of the 1970s as they had not in the 1960s. As Judah Drob, the memoirist of the 1930s YPSL, mused, this was “due more to their stiff-neckedness, remarked already in biblical times.”³⁹

Yet the consequences of this abiding fealty to Israel were profound and far-reaching. An unshakable commitment to American military aid to Israel precluded DSOC from ever making a serious critique of the military-industrial complex. This not only severely constrained any critique of American foreign policy; it also meant that this entire generation of progressives would not offer any kind of coherent opposition to the deindustrialization of America, which, for all of the political forces arrayed against the labor movement, was the single largest factor in the decline of trade unionism in the late twentieth century. Israel was certainly not the sole cause of this development—increasingly prominent feminist and gay liberationist concerns were also major contributors to shaping the character of post-Cold War liberalism to the neglect of the traditional concerns of the American left and labor movement. But these three shibboleths proved the irresistible combination leading to the most important feature of post-Cold War liberalism: assent to the “global war” against “Islamofascism.” Especially when seen in light of his frankly elitist valorization of the “new class” as a force for global uplift, this may yet prove to have been the most enduring legacy of Michael Harrington.

The presidential campaign of Ted Kennedy in 1980 proved to gravely disappoint the high expectations held for nearly a decade. Kennedy badly stumbled in the first weeks of the campaign, often unable to articulate

a reason for running other than the family name.⁴⁰ He won a handful of primaries, most notably an upset in New York largely on the strength of dissatisfaction with Carter's real and imagined slights toward Israel. Many DSOC members ran as delegate candidates for Kennedy, including Harrington himself among several in New York.⁴¹ But once it was clear Carter would be renominated, a greatly dejected Harrington remained aloof from the general election, his hopes of a return to the center of American political power once and for all ended. So great was Harrington's ambivalence that he even put in a kind word for the third-party candidacy of Barry Commoner. Still flush with past euphoria, Harrington insisted, "If Carter wins, he will be a lame duck President in 1982. . . . If Carter loses, the internal structure of the Democratic Party will be wide open."⁴²

The interlude between the election and inauguration of Ronald Reagan was marked by a peculiar final tribute to the lofty aspirations that characterized DSOC's most hopeful days. In December 1980, a conference was held in Washington, DC, attended by several European leaders in the Socialist International. Willy Brandt, the former West German chancellor, was the unrivaled force behind making the Socialist International an active and relevant organization as its member parties increasingly formed governments in Western Europe, and he fought for the admission of DSOC into the International over the vehement objection of Social Democrats USA. As parties of the third world were increasingly recruited into the International, many of highly dubious democratic credentials, Harrington served an indispensable role in Brandt's ambitions. Not being burdened with high office, Harrington was entrusted to do most of the International's busy work, namely the drafting of resolutions, programs, and manifestos.⁴³ Guided by the vision of Brandt and Harrington, the Socialist International played a significant and positive role in the extension of democracy to many parts of the world, particularly Latin America, but foundered into irrelevance after the fall of Communism.

Harrington, Ron Dellums, and William Winpisinger were the featured American speakers at the conference, with the more impressive European participants including Brandt, Francois Mitterand just a few

months before his election as president of France; Tony Benn, the titular leader of the left wing of the British Labour Party; and Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme.⁴⁴ From his perch at the AFL-CIO, Tom Kahn attempted to sabotage the conference and attacked it as a front for the Euro-Communist movement.⁴⁵ Indeed, Brandt may well have conceived the conference as his way of sending a message to SDUSA and its allies in the American foreign policy establishment that the Socialist International was determined to pursue its own independent policies. The formal sponsor of the conference was the Institute for Democratic Socialism, set up by DSOC and run by Nancy Lieber, who with her husband Robert, a Georgetown University professor, were typical of the aspiring Washington policy makers who saw DSOC as useful to advancing their careers in the 1970s. But all that had changed with the election of Ronald Reagan, with Robert Lieber becoming an outspoken neocon hawk.

The merger of DSOC and NAM was formally agreed to in the spring of 1981, with a unity convention scheduled for the following year. Ben Ross, who devotedly ran the Committee Against the NAM Merger, lamented in a circular to the delegates at that 1981 convention, “Our national office has seen fit, at a time of devastating budget cuts and rising right-wing reaction, to give priority to the NAM issue.”⁴⁶ But more than anything, this plea reflected the crashing of illusions about DSOC. Harrington’s commitment to the Democratic Party and organized liberalism was mostly the means to his personal ambitions; a more principled and long-view grounded approach to working within the Democratic Party would likely have alienated Harrington’s early YPSL followers much sooner. In short, the collapse of the Kennedy campaign and the closely related NAM merger represented the passing of an illusion—that Democratic Party liberalism and historic American Socialism could be made one and the same, and on the former’s terms.

The unity convention of DSOC and NAM was held March 20–21, 1982, in Detroit, with the new organization named Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). John Judis, in his report on the convention for *In These Times*, optimistically compared it to the 1901 convention that formed

the Socialist Party.⁴⁷ Mike Harrington remained national chairman, with new national board members from NAM including feminist authors Barbara Ehrenreich and Roberta Lynch, black historian Manning Marable, and Richard Healey. Among the DSOC holdovers on the board were Irving Howe; William Winpisinger; Santa Cruz, California mayor Mike Rotkin; and Harry Britt, a gay member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.⁴⁸ In a sign that the early prediction of Ron Radosh of where DSOC was ultimately headed was being fulfilled, the keynote symposium was led by George Crockett, a black congressman from Detroit who openly allied with the Communist Party.⁴⁹

In These Times editorialized, “The hope of the DSOC-NAM merger is in renewed focus on elections.”⁵⁰ Yet DSA took the very opposite tack. In the years just after the merger, almost all of its energies were devoted to organizing around opposition to American intervention in Central America. In a curious twist, the war in Nicaragua prompted Ron Radosh, who made the first scouting mission ahead of the wave of new left refugees into DSOC, to renounce the left altogether.⁵¹ With a startlingly large cohort of long-time comrades, Radosh would eventually inhabit the most fanatical quarters of the post-Cold War right, becoming their expert on the American left in elaborating the hidden “radical” and “socialist” agenda of Barack Obama. Yet ironically, this return of focus to opposing American foreign policy only accelerated the drift away from the fundamentals of new left radicalism. The libertarian author Murray Rothbard, who in years past had frequently collaborated with the scholars at *Studies on the Left*, lamented that “the left argued vehemently for continuing economic aid to the leftist regime in Nicaragua,” decrying DSA as “the new Browderism,” committed to “egalitarian welfare imperialism in behalf of third world governments . . . shades of Henry Wallace and the liberal imperialism of the 1940s!”⁵²

Despite the nominal antiwar posture of the left regarding Central America, the transition to the foreign policy of Clinton-era liberalism was well underway. But the problem for DSA was far more fundamental

than the particulars of the war in Nicaragua. As Ben Ross wrote in an open letter after the furor over the NAM merger subsided,

If we are simply advocates for the different agendas of all the single issue groups, without a distinctive point of view of our own, this problem will only get worse. DSA may turn into a Baskin-Robbins of the left, with a flavor for every taste and a special-of-the-month in response to each new fad. If this is what we are to become, why indeed should anyone make DSA their priority instead of concentrating on whatever single issue is closest to their heart? We need to re-emphasize what makes us distinctive as democratic socialists: our understanding that inequalities of economic power are at the root of oppression in our society, and that a majority coalition organized around economic issues is needed to overcome those inequalities.⁵³

Indeed, the assets that led to such hope for DSOC in the 1970s vanished almost in an instant after the merger. The major blow came with the discontinuation of the Democratic midterm convention after 1982, causing Democratic Agenda to be quietly liquidated by the end of that year.⁵⁴ The aging labor leaders whose generous funding, given largely out of nostalgia for their own Socialist youths, had made Democratic Agenda and its wide influence possible were rapidly passing from the scene. Both extremes from the earlier DSOC and NAM were also not long to fade away. Alex Spinrad relocated to Israel and once stood as a parliamentary candidate for the left-wing Meretz Party, and Ben Ross published a newsletter, *Socialist Standard*, providing a voice for the right wing of DSA for a few more years. Richard Healey resigned from the national board within a few years out of frustration with the limits of DSA support for the Sandinistas.⁵⁵

The 1984 election made clear that American politics was passing DSA by. Much of the left was aroused to excitement by the Democratic primary candidacy of Jesse Jackson that year and again in 1988. Jackson unsuccessfully appealed to Mike Harrington for an endorsement and even asked him to write speeches for him.⁵⁶ Jackson's own Rainbow

Coalition was not only overshadowing DSA as the major force in the left wing of the Democratic Party but also showing greater commitment to a long-term struggle inside the Democratic Party than DSOC ever had. *Socialist Standard* showed its fighting spirit behind Walter Mondale as the candidate of the labor movement against “New Democrat” Gary Hart, with a frequent contributor being none other than Ernest Erber, the 1930s YPSL chairman who led the momentous Trotskyist exodus of 1937.⁵⁷ But in the words of Michael Harrington, “The Mondale campaign united all of the class and social forces we had deemed essential, and went down to ignominious defeat.”⁵⁸

The last hurrah of DSA as a serious force in the Democratic Party was a “New Directions Conference” in Washington, held the first weekend of May 1986. Harrington, Jesse Jackson, and Barbara Ehrenreich were the conveners, with other keynoters including Gloria Steinem, Communication Workers president Morton Bahr, and ADA executive director Ann Lewis.⁵⁹ The conference explicitly targeted growing voices of “centrism” in the Democratic Party such as the Democratic Leadership Council. Ann Lewis was particularly outspoken, arguing, “In their rush to the right, or the center, or wherever they think the political terrain is safest, these modern day neo-Democrats deceive themselves.”⁶⁰ But Lewis was almost perfectly representative of the generation of movement liberal operatives in the orbit of DSOC and DSA, going on to serve in Bill Clinton’s White House and then as a top advisor to Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign in 2008. In no small irony, for all the heated rhetoric about the “socialism” of Barack Obama, most aging veterans of the heyday of DSOC, including Gloria Steinem and Barney Frank, were committed supporters of Hillary Clinton in 2008.

But the bottom line was that DSA was Michael Harrington, and once Harrington passed from the scene, the organization would be reduced to a shell. Harrington’s celebrity from writing *The Other America* wore thin by the 1980s, and his long succession of books on socialist theory and history received scant attention even from his own followers. Interestingly, Harrington’s books exhibited a thoughtfulness sorely lacking

in his political activism, containing surprising overlap with both anarchist and Catholic social thought. As Gary Dorrien wrote a decade after Harrington's death, his concept of socialism "had almost nothing to do with economic nationalization and everything to do with economic democracy."⁶¹ But Harrington was himself largely responsible for this disconnect. With a stunning lack of self-reflection, he confessed his greatest fear was to be seen like Norman Thomas as "a socialist who threatened no one and nothing."⁶² This was a clear case of projection for a man who spent nearly a decade husbanding the image of a safe socialist to the Ted Kennedy administration-in-waiting on to a man of God who put everything on the line for his principles.

Harrington was diagnosed with throat cancer in 1985. After successful early treatment, in late 1987 the cancer returned and he was given one or two years to live. The following summer, a gala testimonial dinner was held on his sixtieth birthday. Paying tribute to Harrington that night were Gloria Steinem, Cesar Chavez, William Winpisinger, and Ted Kennedy, who placed Harrington squarely within the myth of his brothers: "In our lifetime, it is Mike Harrington who has come the closest to fulfilling the vision of America that my brother Robert Kennedy had, when he said 'some men see things as they are and ask why, but I dream things that never were and say why not.' Some call it socialism, I call it the Sermon on the Mount."⁶³ Michael Harrington died on July 31, 1989, in the home he shared with his wife and two sons in Larchmont, New York. His biographer Maurice Isserman expressed the conceit of his admirers: "In the years since Michael's death, no claimant has emerged to pick up the mantle of Debs and Thomas and Harrington."⁶⁴

A more revealing comparison, however, could be made between Harrington and William Z. Foster. Like Harrington, Foster entered national prominence occupying the left-most edge of the clique of ideologues surrounding the top leadership of the American labor movement. Both played a destructive role at a critical moment of radical upsurge in America—Harrington's Port Huron antics might well be compared to Foster's shadowy role in the Farmer-Labor Party movement of the 1920s both before and after becoming a Communist. In vastly different

contexts and circumstances to be sure, both men took a sharp left turn in a desperate move to recapture the perceived moment of glory they squandered, and when finally, after interminable slights, they reached the summit of leadership of their respective movements, all that was left was to preside over its effective dissolution. Additionally for Harrington, he remained the creature of a very different movement from what most who joined believed they were supporting. Very few in DSOC or DSA had any understanding of it, but the key to Harrington's politics was that he was, and to the very end remained, a Shachtmanite.

Yet ideology was not the key to understanding Mike Harrington. Even as he continued to promote in full sincerity the original vision of "realignment," his entire political posture was based on a contradiction. Harrington consistently sought both entrée to the liberal establishment and thereby to national power, and at the same time to be seen as the credible leader of a radical movement. Both poles kept Harrington from ever wandering too far toward the opposite shore, but this stance was still untenable so long as it demanded he be all things to all people left of center. Like Charles Foster Kane, he entered politics out of the desire to be loved, and his downfall was that he demanded that love on his own terms. However dubious the claim of Harrington to the succession of Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas, it was taken seriously enough that it carried a burden of responsibility. When he staked this entire noble heritage on the presidential prospects of Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, Michael Harrington ensured that not even the memory of historic American Socialism would have a meaningful place in the politics of the post-Cold War era.

DSA remained a formidable local presence in a few cities into the 1990s, most notably Chicago, largely due to the labors and legacy of Carl Shier, the veteran Shachtmanite going back to the 1940s among the founders of DSOC. Among those who sought and received the endorsement of Chicago DSA in his first attempts at political office in these years was a recent Harvard Law graduate named Barack Obama.⁶⁵ Throughout the 1990s, DSA persisted as something akin on the left to the debating

societies that once set much of the intellectual tone for the conservative movement, with a highly impressive list of names on a letterhead and very little besides. Barbara Ehrenreich and Cornell West were the best known popular left-wing authors of the 1990s to lend their names to DSA, with such labor leaders lingering on the scene as William Winpisinger and Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers. During the “centrist” presidency of Bill Clinton, the new craze of the left wing of the Democratic Party was the creation of an explicit “party within a party” such as the New Party, launched by the vintage new left “community organizing” outfit ACORN, or the Labor Party, the creation of the most militantly left-wing unions then on the scene.⁶⁶ But with the exception proving the rule in Chicago, DSA had no serious influence on these movements.

It was within the labor movement itself that the legacy of DSA, and the larger change in the character of the democratic left that led up to the merger creating it, was most conspicuously felt. An insurgency emerged against the leadership of Lane Kirkland in the AFL-CIO after shocking defeats for the labor movement in the early Clinton years; the leader who ultimately took charge of this insurgency, Service Employees (SEIU) president John Sweeney, had long been an ally of Kirkland’s leadership and even nominally associated with Social Democrats USA. But all that was necessary for Sweeney to have the left wing of the labor movement in his pocket was to take out a token membership in DSA. Though this nominal membership in DSA was largely forgotten after he ascended to the AFL-CIO presidency, Sweeney sent greetings to its conferences throughout his tenure.⁶⁷ Among the new left academics whose rise was the subject of Theodore Draper’s withering attack in the *New York Review of Books*, a cottage industry emerged to celebrate the new “social movement unionism” and its toppling of the succession from Samuel Gompers that dominated the labor movement for more than a century.

But in practice, this “social movement unionism” merely amounted to accommodation with the drift of the Democratic Party away from traditional trade union concerns, largely at the altar of identity politics. In many ways, the DSOC bloc of the 1970s had prevailed in the

AFL-CIO, but was extremely ill suited to the challenges of the post-Cold War era. The fundamental crisis that has faced the American labor movement for the last generation, and has scarcely ever been acknowledged, is the simple fact that after the Cold War, it outlived its usefulness to the state. The only answer given to this development by the labor movement has been a doubling down on its marriage to the Democratic Party. This became evident in 2005, when Sweeney's successor at the SEIU, Andy Stern, led an opposition bloc against Sweeney that included the Teamsters, Carpenters, United Food and Commercial Workers, Hotel and Restaurant Employees, and the remnant of the old garment unions, ultimately bolting from the AFL-CIO.

The new old guard of the AFL-CIO, based in the public sector unions and such old-line industrial unions as the UAW and Machinists, had unmistakable roots in the old DSOC bloc. So, too, did the narrative of the split repeated by virtually the entire self-identified left—far left cynicism accompanied by a vehement insistence that this could not possibly be compared to the founding of the CIO, a genuine “people’s movement.” But the depressing truth was that it was exactly like the founding of the CIO. The dissenting unions, many wanting by good progressive standards, made impressive organizing gains in a transforming economy while the national labor leadership remained stagnant and in both cases, in large measure, with the self-interested cooperation of captains of industry. Andy Stern proved highly analogous to John L. Lewis, a brilliant and effective but reckless operator who blew his tremendous opportunity in the space of just a few years. Only the circumstances of the wartime economy in the 1940s make the CIO seem such a spectacularly greater success in retrospect. That no other narrative than “people’s movement” myopia was even conceivable to all but a few, amounting to nothing less than an assault on the historical memory of American Socialism, may be the most enduring legacy of DSA and its two predecessors.

By the time of the 2005 split in the labor movement, however, DSA was no longer even the glorified debating society it could make the appearance of being in the 1990s. Only one labor movement supporter of any

importance, Eliseo Medina of the SEIU, remained. The national board has been reduced to a cohort of aging cadre from the 1970s. Still, a national convention in Los Angeles in 2008 managed to attract more than one hundred voting delegates, and a crowd of four hundred gathered for a keynote address by Congresswoman Hilda Solis, soon to become Barack Obama's secretary of labor.⁶⁸ Some organizational vitality has remained by virtue of the DSA youth arm, Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), which has consistently been able to boast campus chapters in the several dozens. Much of their appeal has rested in being formally affiliated with the International Union of Socialist Youth, with such fraternal relations as the youth wing of the African National Congress.

The most memorable impact of YDS on the post-Cold War radical scene undoubtedly stemmed from its participation in the unlikely revival of Students for a Democratic Society in 2006.⁶⁹ Two high school students who frequented antiwar protests had the idea to revive SDS and before long elicited a groundswell response.⁷⁰ But the group was increasingly influenced by a group of aging SDS originals who called themselves the "Movement for a Democratic Society," described by Maurice Isserman in a letter to *The Nation* as "a cohort of radical elders enamored of the worst moment in the original SDS's history."⁷¹ Indeed, quite like DSOC and DSA, the new SDS was only a touchstone of nostalgia for a historic radical organization, as defined by its dubious claimant at the time of its demise, who was in great measure responsible for it. Still, it would be difficult to overstate the irony that this should be the fate of the organization founded by Michael Harrington, nearly as great as that of the journey from the St. Louis Platform to the Coalition for a Democratic Majority.

19 Socialist Party USA and the Radical Left since 1973

The Socialist Parties of Wisconsin, Illinois, and California, and the New York-based Union for Democratic Socialism, sponsored a “Conference on Democratic Socialism” held May 26–27, 1973, in Milwaukee. Forty-five delegates representing no fewer than 152 dues-paying members of the Socialist Party as of 1972 came from California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia.¹ The conference participants were divided between those who wanted to immediately reconstitute the Socialist Party and those who favored a more cautious approach, as indicated by the use of the name Union for Democratic Socialism in New York and New Jersey. Yet the advocates of a new socialist party premised their stand on the belief that it would be a mere stepping-stone to merging with the Peace and Freedom Party, now known nationally as the People’s Party, and such other closely aligned fragments of the new left as the New American Movement. In California, Harry Siitonen helped organize a new coalition—the San Francisco Socialist Coalition—from these three groups along exactly these lines for independent electoral action.²

Were it not for the assumption that this coalition would be replicated nationally, it is unlikely that the Socialist Party USA (SPUSA) would have ever been formed. Some younger members were wary of retaining the name “Socialist Party” because of its association with the Shachtmanites, but Frank Zeidler, elected national chairman of the new party

after the conference resolved to form it, gave an impassioned speech for retaining the name. A generally sympathetic Samuel Friedman was present as an observer to plead that they continue as an opposition within Social Democrats USA, but Zeidler noted that a few members of the Wisconsin party actually attempted to be seated as duly elected delegates at the convention that officially inaugurated SDUSA and were refused their seats. The national office of the Socialist Party USA was to be located in Milwaukee, with the *Socialist Tribune* and its editor Bill Munger continuing in their roles.³ Zeidler upheld the Wisconsin party as the “bridge between east and west” with its proposed middle path for political action. But Milwaukee stalwarts hoping to reach a comradely accord with Michael Harrington and DSOC were rudely rebuffed.⁴

Attending the conference, in addition to the voting delegates, were five observers from the People’s Party and three from NAM. Chuck Avery, national secretary of the People’s Party, held out the prospect of future unity, assuring the convention that the People’s Party was a “non-centralist, non-totalitarian democratic socialist group,” that he was an admirer of Norman Thomas, and that the People’s Party needed “the older elements of the movement as represented by the delegates participating in this conference, for the sake of their historical knowledge and tradition.”⁵ The convention issued a forthright declaration of principles:

Democratic social ownership is not totalitarian Communist nationalization. We oppose any government which is oriented toward the power of a bureaucratic ruling class, at the expense of the welfare and even human dignity of its people. Nor do we propose simple government ownership with political democracy, for under such a system, people participate only at election time in decisions that control their lives. We propose, rather, a society of free, continuing, democratic participation—through political parties in the determination of basic economic, social, and political policy of nations, through shop councils, consumer cooperatives, neighborhood associations, and all other organs of community in the decisions of daily life,

through decentralized agencies for the management of each industry by those most affected by it, through the encouragement of the maximum expression of individual creativity. Socialists propose a society in which democratic participation in economic and political life will set us free to undertake to eliminate war, racial antagonism, hunger, disease, poverty, oppression, and environmental despoliation. Socialists work for a world of peace and freedom, for a world in which the exploitation and enslavement of people is unknown, for a world in which the development of the human personality is the basis for the fruitful development of humankind. Socialists appeal to the solidarity of all people in the struggle for these great aims.⁶

Almost as soon as SPUSA got off the ground, however, most of the assumptions behind the re-founding began to fall apart. Particularly among moderate members typified by the Milwaukee organization, there was even a futile hope that it would be able to affiliate with the Socialist International.⁷ Yet many founders of SPUSA did not share this hope, with Harry Siitonen attacking the Socialist Party of Portugal during the upheavals of that country's transition to democracy:

It is the political stalking horse of the bourgeois military leaders of Portugal, replacing the CP in that role, and is an enemy, as well as the CP is, of the autonomous revolutionary movement of the rank-and-file workers of Portugal. Like the Stalinists, the SP of Portugal is a strikebreaking agency, and it is out to dissolve any revolutionary gains the Portuguese working class has so heroically carved out for itself, to enhance its own power elitist ambitions.⁸

Another illustration of how unsettling a changing world was to older stalwarts of the Debs Caucus came when Bruce Ballin of the Jewish Peace Fellowship proposed a stand on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict inspired by the legacy of Judah Magnes—Virgil Vogel replied, “Some of the Mid-East stuff you sent me could be endorsed by at least one virulent Jew-hater I know.”⁹ Both the extremely abrasive Vogel and Siitonen were

unnerved to find that the energetic young blood in SPUSA such as Ballin and Bill Munger were more old-fashioned social democrats than revolutionary libertarian socialists of their type. But rather than confront this difference honestly, Vogel wrote a letter to Munger accusing him of having “used the *Tribune* and its mailing lists, and I suspect also its funds, to build a personal political machine,” complete with the flourish, “For the good of the party, I call on you to resign at once.”¹⁰

When SPUSA gathered for its first nominating convention in the fall of 1975, it was not certain that it would even nominate a presidential ticket. The idea behind holding presidential nominating conventions a full year before the election was to ease the challenge of getting on the ballot in the face of increasingly complex legal barriers to ballot access. Yet not only would the chronically cash-poor party fail to ever get on the ballot in more than a small handful of states, but this practice would also serve in future elections to preclude it from ever entering the sort of coalition candidacy, to say nothing of a larger new party, that was taken for granted when the SPUSA was launched. Frank Zeidler was nominated for president in 1976 with apparent hopes he would also be nominated by the People’s Party. His running mate was J. Quinn Brisben, a local AFT official and long-time loyalist in Chicago. In his nominating speech Zeidler drew a stark picture of where the United States was headed in the aftermath of Vietnam and the upheavals of the 1960s:

The major parties of the United States have moved toward an undemocratic society under the influence of Governor Reagan. The tone of his campaign has influenced the tone of the major parties. Governor Reagan is the advocate of a nation armed to the teeth which has no other function than to be a military power on behalf of the large corporations and multinational conglomerates which already dominate this nation. . . . The dreadful consequences of the alienation of our national wealth have already begun to appear. Long ago for example, Wisconsin corporations had been bought up by conglomerates owned elsewhere, some being foreign owned. Now our land and

property and farms are being bought up. The more subtle control of the nation's banks, stocks, and bonds, as well as ownership of U.S. securities is now evident. At the same time, inflation has reached an all-time high and unemployment is around eight or nine percent. What the nation needs is someone who will tell the people the economic facts of life and who will call for the swift actions needed to stop the reducing of this nation to a colony and its people to a lower caste in our economic system.¹¹

Long-time Socialists who served on Zeidler's campaign committee included Darlington Hoopes, Bill Briggs, H. L. Mitchell, David McReynolds, Bob Bloom, and Max Wohl. As one campaign mailer declared, "It's too late for anything but fundamental answers, and almost too late for them . . . we Socialists may not win this election, but it's high time we started organizing and recreating a political threat from the left."¹²

There remained significant hope for a new and formidable third party of the left during the 1976 campaign. The Vermont affiliate of the People's Party, the Liberty Union Party, had averaged between 5 percent and 7 percent of the vote in forty-three local and statewide races in 1974. A significant number of unions in the state had endorsed the fledgling party, and in 1976 Brooklyn native Bernie Sanders, a one-time YPSL follower of Hal Draper at the University of Chicago, earned more than eleven thousand votes for governor.¹³ But the Liberty Union Party was already drifting apart from the fractious People's Party and even declined to nominate its presidential ticket in 1976. Margaret Wright, a black welfare rights activist in Los Angeles, was on the ballot in only six states. Though the People's Party had such other whimsically named affiliates as the Michigan Human Rights Party and the Washington Bicentennial Party, its only three substantial affiliates were Peace and Freedom in California, Liberty Union in Vermont, and the New York Working People's Party. This last was dominated by a Leninist sect known as the International Workers Party, a recent splinter group from the infamous

Lyndon LaRouche, with allies in both Wright and People's Party elder statesman Benjamin Spock.¹⁴

Harry Siitonen resigned from SPUSA during the 1976 campaign, declaring himself disillusioned in favor of the rejuvenated IWW. He resented "an element in the SP that does not support the campaign itself, but only as a means of horse trading with the People's Party to get a common slate. It is doubtful whether the People's Party is even interested enough in us to consider this—they consider us too anti-Communist!" Siitonen also lamented "a fair-sized, although not majority element sympathetic to playing footsie with people like the CP."¹⁵ In an earlier letter to Virgil Vogel, he specifically named the embattled national secretary of SPUSA, Abraham Bassford, as well as David McReynolds.¹⁶ Largely out of deep regret for his role in bringing the Shachtmanites into the Socialist Party, McReynolds would long chase after nominally disillusioned Communists, such as those who eventually took over NAM, as the key to reviving the democratic left. This delusion was a distinct manifestation of the trauma he shared with other once-close comrades of the Shachtmanites. Bayard Rustin remained a comrade to the end, whereas Mike Harrington acted out his trauma through his uneven leadership of DSOC and DSA. But McReynolds, the devoted antiwar leader, was the most traumatized of all, in thrall to the worst serial abusers of the American left: the Communist Party and other heirs of the Popular Front.

The most prominent third-party candidate in 1976 was Eugene McCarthy, at the beginning of his long unsung campaign against the corrosive dominance of the two-party system. Distinguished by such campaign planks as the elimination of the vice presidency and the replacement of the White House Rose Garden with a cabbage patch, McCarthy insisted on running as an independent candidate rather than form a new party. Though some credit McCarthy for establishing the very concept and legality of an independent presidential candidacy in 1976, his refusal to commit himself to the formation of a new national party was catastrophic to both his own goals and the struggle to form such a party in the 1970s. On the ballot in only twenty-nine states,

McCarthy came in third that year with over 740,000 votes, followed by the new Libertarian Party with over 170,000 votes. On the ballot in only seven states with write-ins recorded in another two, Frank Zeidler received 6,013 votes, two-thirds coming from Wisconsin, and less than the Socialist Labor Party in its final presidential campaign of an eighty-four-year streak. The People's Party polled 49,013 votes, fewer than the Communist Party and barely half as many as the Socialist Workers Party.

Yet at the 1977 convention of the Socialist Party USA, there seemed to still be progress toward a broad and unified democratic socialist party. Fraternal greetings came not only from the People's Party, New York Working People's Party, and NAM, but also from the New Democratic Party of Canada, the Jewish Labor Bund, and, curiously, from Mike Harrington on behalf of DSOC.¹⁷ But each of the component parts of the new party envisioned at the founding of SPUSA was falling apart. The three largest locals of NAM defected to Maoist sects, accelerating their embrace of Euro-Communism and ultimate merger with DSOC.¹⁸ When the sect controlling the New York Working People's Party verged on taking over the People's Party, the founders simply imploded it. The New York party, led by a philosophy professor-turned self-styled "revolutionary psychotherapist" named Fred Newman, organized nationally as the New Alliance Party in 1979, a bizarre phenomenon that was nevertheless a significant factor in virtually all third-party activity on the left for the next twenty-five years. The Liberty Union Party survived in Vermont, but it too was rent asunder by Leninists, with its highest vote getter, Bernie Sanders, resigning before the end of 1977.¹⁹

SPUSA itself was not immune from such shenanigans. Its new national secretary, Tom Spiro, announced the formation of a "Revolutionary Marxist Tendency" that openly advocated the party's transformation into a Leninist party. It was able to force a showdown at the next national convention, which it lost, and was soon forgotten.²⁰ Several founders of SPUSA, including Bill Munger and Max Wohl, defected to DSOC around this time, though a few old-timers such as H. L. Mitchell retained dual membership. In December 1975, fire struck the SPUSA national office in Milwaukee, destroying a priceless archive spanning

the entire lifetime of the historic Socialist Party. The party relocated to another office in Milwaukee for a few years, and then briefly to Chicago until moving by the early 1980s into the War Resisters League offices in New York, where the Socialist Party USA has remained ever since. By this time also, the *Socialist Tribune* had been reduced to an infrequent newsletter, *The Socialist*.²¹

There was serious potential to form a new and formidable third party of the left in the 1970s. Had it been led from the beginning by such established politicians as Eugene McCarthy, it might have even grown to achieve the strength of the New Democrats in Canada. But it was not to be, and the fragments that earnestly strove to build such a party all spectacularly imploded after the 1976 election. A critical factor in this failure, of course, was the age-old revolutionary socialist conceit of so many involved. If one takes as a point of comparison the emergence of the laissez-faire Libertarian Party, it could also be argued that the zeitgeist of the 1970s was a factor. But the most fundamental reason why such a party did not emerge was that opposition to the two-party system contradicted the core doctrines of the new left, deeply rooted in the vision of realignment first articulated by the Shachtmanites in 1960. The broad-based radicalism of the movement against the Vietnam War ultimately had very different goals and concerns from those of the doctrinaire new left originating in the early years of SDS. This difference would be thrown into stark relief when a formidable third party of the left finally emerged a generation later.

Yet in the meantime, survivors of the People's Party joined a small group of liberals disaffected by Jimmy Carter to organize the Citizens Party in 1979. Their presidential candidate was environmentalist author Barry Commoner. Joe Schwartz, a DSOC youth leader who attended the Citizens Party nominating convention, observed that as an organization of white middle-class activists "the convention looked much like a DSOC convention," adding that it would have a shot at achieving its short-term goals were it not for the odd centrist candidacy of John Anderson.²² Several youthful activists who went on to distinguished movement liberal careers were active in the Commoner campaign, including historian

Michael Kazin and Bob Master, later a founder of the New York Working Families Party.²³ Lee Hubert, the observer for SPUSA, described the new party as “generally a social democratic party but on non-economic issues much more radical than most social democratic parties.”²⁴ But in a sobering indication that the lessons of the 1960s were not being learned, the amorphous following of self-styled “new Communist” Arthur Kinoy formed a hard-left faction that charged the Citizens Party with racism when black members of the faction were not elected to high party posts, and staged a walkout.²⁵

David McReynolds was nominated for president by the Socialist Party USA in 1980, with the vice presidential nomination going to Diane Drufenbrock, a Franciscan nun in Wisconsin. Interestingly, with the Citizens Party in many ways representing the future of the American radical left, a more distinguished core from the 1960s antiwar movement came out for the SPUSA campaign. Among those who endorsed McReynolds were the poet Allen Ginsberg, historian Paul Buhle, Rabbi Everett Gendler of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, and, just two years before his death, Dwight Macdonald.²⁶ In a guest column for *The Progressive*, McReynolds boldly defended his quixotic campaign:

If even I, as the Presidential candidate, concede I cannot win, why go through the genuine agony of running? . . . First, we want to legitimize the discussion of socialism. . . . In plain, simple terms, we believe democratic socialism is as American as apple pie, and that it has roots in our history that go back before the John Birch Society and before Lenin. We propose to talk about socialism—democratic, decentralized, genuine social ownership of the basic means of production—socialism. Capitalism is a deepening socio-economic disaster which cannot provide full employment, cannot house all of us decently, cannot assure us of adequate medical care, cannot reverse urban decay. . . . Second, we want to focus attention on the danger of nuclear war. The Socialist Party has a far more radical policy on the matter of arms than the Citizens Party. We call, clearly, concretely, for the unconditional dismantling of all nuclear weapons—and we want

America to begin doing this now, whether or not it secures Chinese and Soviet agreement to join the process.²⁷

In California, the Peace and Freedom Party carried on after the collapse of the People's Party, and 1980 marked the first of several elections in which the SPUSA would chaotically compete with a variety of Leninist parties for the Peace and Freedom ballot line, never once getting the prize. In 1980, the showdown was with the Communist Party, with Gus Hall running the third of four token presidential campaigns. Hall's running mate was Angela Davis, a widely known former Black Panther. In her speech to the Peace and Freedom convention, Davis called for the legal banning of parties of the right. David McReynolds eloquently denounced Davis, assuring his audience that such a law could not be written without also threatening the left.²⁸ The Peace and Freedom Party would not give its ballot line to a national candidate in 1980 or in most elections thereafter. On the ballot in nine states with write-ins recorded in another three, McReynolds and Drufenbrock earned 6,775 votes. In the year that the Libertarian Party was the first minor party on the ballot in every state in the union since the Socialist Party in 1916, the Citizens Party was only on in thirty states, earning a disappointing 233,052 votes.

On April 6, 1981, Bernie Sanders was elected mayor of Burlington, Vermont by a margin of just ten votes. An avowedly socialist independent since resigning from the Liberty Union Party, Sanders was propelled into office by a revolt against the city's inventory tax and the support of a handful of unions, most notably the local police union.²⁹ When Socialist Francois Mitterand was elected president of France just one month later, a popular button read, "As goes Burlington so goes France."³⁰ A Citizens Party candidate, Terry Bouricious, was also elected to the Burlington Board of Aldermen, along with two more the following year. There was much cause for excitement and optimism in the Citizens Party, buoyed by the endorsement of Petra Kelly, the leader of the rising German Green Party, who declared on the eve of first entering the West German Bundestag that she considered the Citizens Party the *de facto* American Green Party.³¹ (An actual Green Party was just beginning to be organized

in numerous scattered locals. Its leading theorist was Burlington resident Murray Bookchin, who vainly urged Bernie Sanders to implement his proposed system of “neighborhood planning assemblies.”³²

Among those increasingly disenchanted with SPUSA by the beginning of the 1980s and drawn by the allure of the Citizens Party was Virgil Vogel, alarmed by the growing Communist-sympathizing tendencies in the party. Vogel was active in the Citizens Party campaign of Sidney Lens, a leading new left author who began as a 1930s Trotskyist schismatic, for the U.S. Senate in Illinois in 1980.³³ Vogel was also distraught by militant support for abortion rights in SPUSA and had at least one ally in the Citizens Party agitating for a strong pro-life stance.³⁴ But Vogel’s plight was much like that of the 1930s Old Guardsmen, who brought down their wrath on the Socialist Party for the mere suggestion of a united front with the Communists only to find themselves in one in the American Labor Party. Not only was it soon apparent that the Citizens Party would be squarely in the militant feminist zeitgeist, but also that veterans of the Henry Wallace campaign were its most prominent spokesmen.

With momentum appearing to be on the side of the Citizens Party, the national secretary of SPUSA, Rick Kissell, sent out an informal survey in early 1983 to see if sentiment favored running its own presidential ticket in 1984 or seeking a coalition with the Citizens Party.³⁵ The latter course was agreed to at the 1983 national convention, but this was based on high expectations for the Citizens Party, with former attorney general Ramsey Clark believed to be its likely nominee in 1984.³⁶ Yet the unraveling of the Citizens Party first became apparent when Barry Commoner came out for the Democratic primary campaign of Jesse Jackson and was joined by the followers of Arthur Kinoy.³⁷ The Citizens Party’s elected officials in Burlington also abandoned the party once its implosion was imminent.³⁸ Bernie Sanders remained an independent, but never took part in a national challenge to the two-party system; as an independent he was elected in Vermont to the U.S. House in 1990 and to the Senate in 2006. Inconsistent in continuing to identify as a socialist, Sanders followed a trajectory that was essentially the same as the Citizens Party activists who became mainstream progressives.

In the end, the Citizens Party presidential nominee was Sonia Johnson, a minor celebrity after being excommunicated by the Mormon Church as a campaigner for the Equal Rights Amendment—a cause highly emblematic of the identity politics now prioritized by the left that proved a perfect foil for demagoguery by the right. She was endorsed by the Peace and Freedom Party in California and the Consumer Party of Pennsylvania (a formidable third party in Philadelphia founded by an ex-Communist named Max Weiner), but the SPUSA never formally endorsed Johnson after she pointedly refused to affirm democratic socialism.³⁹ The third-party picture on the left was further complicated by the first presidential campaign of the New Alliance Party, on the ballot in thirty-three states against only eighteen for Sonia Johnson. With one foot already in the grave, the Citizens Party polled a pathetic 72,161 votes.

After the collapse of the Citizens Party, the hope for a nationally organized third party of the left, essential to the founding and long-term outlook of the Socialist Party USA, was dead and buried. That SPUSA would not stand apart from the new orthodoxies of the organized radical left became apparent when the 1985 national convention explicitly defined the party as “feminist socialist.” In practice, this meant that no less than 50 percent of the nationally elected leadership had to be female and that each female delegate vote would count as one and one-half for every male delegate vote.⁴⁰ A few oases of substantive political action survived. In Iowa City, Iowa, in 1988, SPUSA member Karen Kubby prevailed in a nonpartisan city council election against a controversial local real estate developer.⁴¹ There was a formidable campaign to elect another Iowa City Socialist to the state legislature two years later, but the party organization disappeared soon after.⁴² In Wisconsin, a ballot-qualified Labor-Farm Party was left after the final statewide campaign of old Socialist stalwart William Osborne Hart. In Madison, a few Labor-Farm candidates were elected to the Common Council in alliance with the independent “red mayor” Paul Soglin.⁴³ The SPUSA nominees for president and vice president in 1988 were Willa Kenoyer, a feminist publisher in Michigan who had been a top campaign advisor to Sonia Johnson, and Ron Ehrenreich,

a social worker in Syracuse, New York. On the ballot in seven states with write-ins recorded in another four, they received 3,878 votes.

Eugene McCarthy was nominated by the Consumer Party of Pennsylvania and, on the ballot in three additional states, earned 30,905 votes. The New Alliance Party pulled off the stunning feat of being on the ballot in all fifty states, earning 217,221 votes—about half as many as the Libertarian Party’s Ron Paul. In anticipation of the 1991 SPUSA national convention, Frank Zeidler prepared a pamphlet celebrating “Ninety Years of Democratic Socialism” that gave a very brief sketch of the history of the Socialist Party, concluding with this confident assurance: “The basic concept of socialism as found in the 1820s still remains and illuminates a dark world. That concept is of a world of commonwealths cooperating with each other for the betterment of all peoples.”⁴⁴ The myopia of most who remained in SPUSA was best illustrated by the palpable excitement of David McReynolds that the Communist Party USA, as the Soviet Union lay dying, would be successfully taken over by a reformist faction.⁴⁵ It ultimately was not, though the Communist Party lingered into the post–Cold War era, in many ways resembling the Socialist Party as it morphed into Social Democrats USA: a pathetic shadow of its former self, dogmatically identifying with the labor/progressive wing of the Democratic Party from Leninist assumptions to be sure.

The Chicago stalwart J. Quinn Brisben was the SPUSA nominee for president in 1992. The vice presidential nomination initially went to William Edwards, an African American retired maritime union official in San Francisco, but after his untimely death he was replaced by Barbara Garson, a playwright who had achieved some distinction in the 1960s antiwar movement.⁴⁶ On the ballot in only four states with write-in votes recorded in another nine, the 1992 SPUSA ticket turned in the worst performance since the re-founding, with a paltry 3,071 votes. This was the year Ross Perot presented the most fearsome challenge to the two-party system since before the Second World War, earning 19 percent of the national popular vote for president. To a Socialist of the historic party’s long-gone heyday, Perot would have been recognizable as a populist in the mold of William Randolph Hearst.

Although Perot ran a personality-centered campaign bearing all the marks of a manic-depressive episode, his platform nonetheless echoed Frank Zeidler in 1976, warning of the de-industrialization and general corrosion of the American economy for the benefit of the military-industrial complex. The years immediately following were marked by a “radical right” upsurge that bore a striking resemblance to the Old Southwest movement of the Socialist heyday, complete with armed militias and a fringe faction seeking to establish an independent Republic of Texas. The parallels pervade James Green’s excellent history of the Old Southwest Socialists, written in the 1970s and thus predating the 1990s radical right, much as Daniel Bell’s *Marxian Socialism in the United States* missed a very similar mark by several years.

After the amorphous “new Communist” followers of Arthur Kinoy became the dominant ultra-left force in Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition, after its breakup in 1992 this cadre formed a new umbrella group, the Independent Progressive Politics Network (IPPN), which the minuscule Socialist Party USA joined. It remained little more than a paper organization, providing only the barest appearance of movement toward broad-based unity for the emotional satisfaction of those participating.⁴⁷ But also maintaining ties to IPPN was the Green Party, which had just begun to organize nationally. In 1996, it nominated Ralph Nader, a self-styled “consumer advocate” who had been a household name in the 1970s, as its presidential candidate. Though not on the ballot in enough states to theoretically be elected, Nader polled an impressive 685,297 votes. The SPUSA nominee that year was Mary Cal Hollis, a long-time party activist from Colorado, with Eric Chester, a 1970s People’s Party survivor and avowed revolutionary socialist, as her running mate. On the ballot in five states with write-ins recorded in another seven, they received 4,765 votes.

It is reasonable to ask exactly what, by the 1990s, the Socialist Party USA even was anymore. After its embrace of extreme feminism and fashionable identity politics, it had clearly become a sect, if an amorphous and permeable one. The assumption that it would only be part of building a larger new party, which had been central to the rationale

for even founding it, was completely forgotten. The entire substance of its appeal was the historical gravitas of its name. But the appeal of the memory of the Socialist Party to the radical left after the 1960s was based on an extremely misleading picture of the historic party in its heyday as more or less synonymous with its left wing, symbolized by the IWW. This was the image most historians presented beginning in the 1970s, yet the available evidence shows that the left wing of the 1910s never represented more than 10 percent of the national party membership.⁴⁸ Ironically, the embrace of the legacy of the historic left wing began with the “old guard” of SPUSA, namely Virgil Vogel and Harry Siitonen, who were driven out of the party by the end of the 1970s for remaining serious anarcho-syndicalists. A less sophisticated revolutionary socialism, often based on Communist romance and at times being simply mindless, characterized the SPUSA ever after.

An aging David McReynolds was once again honored with the SPUSA presidential nomination in 2000, with Mary Cal Hollis as his running mate. On the ballot in seven states with write-in votes recorded in another eight, they earned 5,612 votes. But the major third-party story in 2000 was the candidacy of Ralph Nader, on the ballot in forty-five states as the Green Party nominee. Nader benefited from the collapse of Ross Perot’s Reform Party under Pat Buchanan, both of whom were courted by the UAW, Teamsters, and Steelworkers in protest of the Democratic embrace of free trade.⁴⁹ Borrowing a trick from Eugene Debs, Nader funded the campaign by charging admission to speeches attracting tens of thousands, especially young people drawn by musicians who endorsed the campaign.⁵⁰ Nader earned nearly three million votes in 2000, with some polls on the eve of the election suggesting he could receive twice that number.

David McReynolds paid tribute to Nader and the Green Party in his election night remarks, hopefully remarking, “As we find ourselves deep in the season of autumn, it is appropriate to remember, as we watch the leaves, how green can turn to red.”⁵¹ Of graying veterans of the historic SP active in the Green Party, most notable was Bob Auerbach, one-time

Libertarian Socialist League comrade of Virgil Vogel. By 2002, the Greens claimed more than one hundred elected officeholders, including several California mayors and dozens of aldermen in large college towns, and in 2003 they came painfully close to electing the mayor of San Francisco. This was easily the most impressive record of local electoral success for a nationally organized minor party since the Socialist Party in its heyday, and may well be seen as the fulfillment of the concluding words of David Shannon's history of the Socialist Party:

The ideals of social democracy will remain part of the American tradition as long as American soil produces rebels, and there may develop some day, under the impact of fundamental social change, another social democratic political movement of significance. But should there again be a vigorous political organization with democratic and socialist principles in the United States, it is most unlikely that the party of Debs, Hillquit, and Thomas will provide its impetus.⁵²

But Ralph Nader was a very different type of iconoclast from what characterized the American Socialist tradition. Awkward and curmudgeonly, a loner and a pessimist by nature, he made his name championing the regulatory state against the panacea of corporate power in the era when Michael Harrington popularly defined what it meant to be a socialist. He was more Lincoln Steffens than Eugene Debs, more Upton Sinclair than Norman Thomas.

Whatever their respective failings, Debs and Thomas could never be accused of entering politics for their personal gratification, rather than out of dedication to building the Socialist movement. Nader, however, was extremely vulnerable to this charge. He also became an intense hate object of liberal Democrats after he was credited with throwing the 2000 election to George W. Bush, with no parallel since the Prohibition Party's John P. St. John was burned in effigy by Republicans in 1884. Yet there was a deeper pathology at work among Nader's liberal critics, rooted in the era of DSOC and NAM. Writing in *The Nation* during the 2000 campaign, Eric Alterman opined, "Nader and company are building a

nonblack, non-Latino, non-Asian, nonfeminist, nonenvironmentalist, nongay, non-working people's left—now that really would be quite an achievement.”⁵³ Evidently believing that history began around 1970, Alterman had apparently never heard of the Socialist Party of America.

Against the backdrop of the dramatic rise of the Green Party, the abrasive revolutionary socialist Eric Chester appeared to be the favorite to win the SPUSA presidential nomination in 2004, possibly leading to a neat cleavage between democratic socialists in the Green Party and revolutionary socialists in SPUSA. But in a surprise, the nomination went to a wily seventy-eight-year old named Walter F. Brown. A youth organizer on the West Coast for Norman Thomas in 1948, Brown served as a Democrat in the Oregon legislature from 1975 to 1987, yet maintained his ties and loyalties to SPUSA. His running mate was Mary Alice Herbert, an activist with the Vermont Liberty Union Party. When it became known that Brown had expressed pro-life views in the past, there was a concerted effort to rescind his nomination. Though this ultimately failed, it left Brown without discernible support from the party organization, such as it was, exposing the contempt for electoral politics of most of the membership. Indeed, the circumstances of Walt Brown's campaign illustrated that SPUSA had wandered every bit as far from historic American Socialism as the other two groups born of the 1972 breakup of the Socialist Party.⁵⁴

The Green Party debated whether it should even field a presidential candidate in 2004. An intense, if largely manufactured hysteria about defeating George W. Bush at all costs was palpable in 2004, manifestly less about the wars and civil liberties suppressions—however skillfully sentiment against these things was manipulated—than who would appoint the next new justices to the Supreme Court, reflecting the modern liberal obsession with abortion. The initially most militant advocate of fielding a candidate, David Cobb, suddenly advocated a “nuanced” strategy of running while effectively campaigning for the Democrats—a jarring echo of Earl Browder in 1936. When Ralph Nader announced his candidacy, insisting on running as an independent and that he would only accept the “endorsement” of the Green Party, he played right into the

hands of the Democratic plants who delivered the nomination to Cobb. The Democratic Party also aggressively intervened wherever it could, to an unprecedented degree, to arbitrarily keep Nader off the ballot.

Yet there were a few curious tributes to historic American Socialism at the 2004 Green convention. In unmistakable protest of the farce playing out, one delegate cast a vote on the first ballot for Eugene V. Debs.⁵⁵ Held in Milwaukee, the convention was treated to an address by a ninety-one-year old Frank Zeidler—by then, apart from a dwindling handful, probably half of whom had become Scoop Jackson Democrats, the last living link to American Socialism as a serious political movement and not merely a chimera of historical memory. With the apparent collapse of the Green Party, it appeared that Walt Brown and SPUSA had a tremendous opportunity. Among those upset by both Nader and Cobb who rallied to Brown was Darcy Richardson, a top advisor to Gene McCarthy in his later campaigns and prolific historian of American third parties. Richardson secured ballot access for Brown in Florida and took him around the state, which gave him his best vote, in the last week of the campaign. In Wisconsin, where whatever wasting organization was left in Milwaukee could trace its origins all the way back to the Greenback-Labor Party, Brown only got on the ballot thanks to a veteran of third parties of the right named Steve Hauser. Both Hauser and Richardson had voted for Pat Buchanan in 2000.

On the ballot in only thirty-four states, Ralph Nader polled a disappointing 463,655 votes, whereas the noncampaign of the Green Party, on the ballot in only twenty-eight states, received 119,859 votes. Walt Brown, on the ballot in eight states with write-ins recorded in another eight, polled 10,822 votes, the best showing ever since the re-founding. But SPUSA was indifferent to any opportunity to fill the void left by the Greens. Most party activity was dominated by a “direct action tendency” whose manifesto bore such slogans as “from protest to resistance” and “property is theft—abolition now!”⁵⁶ This prompted an incredulous SPUSA sympathizer named Melvin Little to conclude, “One school of extreme Trotskyism turned into ugly neoconservatism, the other school of extreme Trotskyism looks more like the silly shenanigans of the Spartacist League.

Max Shachtman or Eric Chester? Who needs either one of them.”⁵⁷ David McReynolds was even preparing to resign from the party in anticipation of Eric Chester getting the presidential nomination in 2008.⁵⁸

But Chester wound up narrowly defeated by Brian Moore, who had managed the Nader campaign in Florida in 2004. With running mate Stewart Alexander, a black activist in the California Peace and Freedom Party, they were on the ballot in eight states, with write-ins recorded in another nine, earning 6,528 votes. The high point was an appearance on *The Colbert Report* after the stock market crash, with Stephen Colbert asking in characteristic feint, “Is Barack Obama the socialist candidate for President? Here to answer is the Socialist candidate for President, Brian Moore.”⁵⁹ Moore responded awkwardly to the humor of the show and could hardly be taken seriously by the ironical yet optimistic audience whose sensibility Colbert personified. It was the perfect metaphor for how, when the long-term viability of capitalism was once again coming into question, what remained of the self-identified American left could give only the most tired rote answers. It also vividly illustrated the arrival of the first generation of progressives for whom the inheritance of the American left was completely foreign.

20 After Exceptionalism

In his last published essay before his death, commemorating the demise of *The Public Interest* in 2006, Irving Kristol wrote of his experiences in London in the 1950s. At a time when public discourse on neoconservatism was active and highly contentious, this essay revealed much about the origins and essence of the neoconservative project:

Our NATO allies were turning in on themselves. . . . When it came to budgeting priorities, they were all social democrats now. World War I had ended with the famous promise of returning soldiers to “a world fit for heroes.” It is only a slight exaggeration to say that World War II ended with a commitment to “a world fit for victims.” I knew there was an important lesson for the United States in this development. There was clearly a growing American opinion that believed a European-type welfare state was the correct and inevitable model for the United States. . . . Could there not be another option, a welfare state that could be reconciled with a world role for the United States? It was with this question in mind that, in 1958, I returned home.¹

Thus, even to the extent that the beginnings of neoconservatism can be associated with *The Public Interest*, the movement was always primarily concerned with the advancement of American military supremacy and not principally with domestic affairs. Furthermore, Kristol’s essay demonstrates that the abandonment of a nominal social democratic

commitment by the neoconservatives derives directly from their Trotskyite and Shachtmanite principles; that is, the overriding concern with what would best serve to advance the “global democratic revolution.”

In the early twenty-first century, the libertarian concept of the “welfare-warfare state” would be popularized by the followers of Ron Paul, perhaps the most charismatic iconoclast in the history of American politics since Eugene Debs. But experience goes contrary to that thesis: the modern welfare state has grown and prospered only at the expense of large militaries and goals of empire. It has been a self-evident axiom of historic social democracy that if the political economy should serve the interest of the working class, the limited resources of the state and society must be directed toward internal improvement, rather than adventurism and profit-seeking abroad by the privileged classes. And it has been no less clear that this has usually been well understood by those privileged interests. The history of postwar Europe, especially of Great Britain, that Irving Kristol alluded to in his lament makes this plain, forming a core principle of neoconservatism.

It was for this reason that an unusually intense hysteria overtook the neocon-led American right in response to the national health care legislation passed in 2010—that is, to even the slightest suggestion that the United States should become more like a European welfare state. Indeed, the neocons argue openly that the welfare state should be gutted to preserve the global posture of the American colossus. After a generation of indoctrination by the neocons and their allies, the lack of a national health care system—the one remaining feature distinguishing the United States from the European welfare states by the twenty-first century—apparently had become a sacred principle of American nationalism. Whereas a majority of liberals were content to reduce the phenomenon of opposition to “Obamacare” to racial anxieties, the overwrought and historically illiterate rhetoric about “socialism” points instead to abiding loyalty to empire.

This became evident with the emergence of the phrase “American exceptionalism” as the essential totem of this new right. Originally Stalin’s

term of derision for the independent course of Jay Lovestone during his ill-fated tenure leading the American Communist Party, this term was then used by Seymour Martin Lipset beginning in the 1950s to signify the lack of a major social democratic party in American politics. Since then, “American exceptionalism” has come to simply mean a belief in the inherent virtue and entitlement in the world of the United States. Yet since the end of the Cold War, American exceptionalism has not on the whole signified political liberty and representative government, but instead a decadent American “way of life” accentuating clichéd comparisons to Ancient Rome. With the rise of seriously flawed democracies in Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and more recently in the Arab world, the trend since the fall of Communism has been toward an equilibrium of standards and norms, illustrated by a studied ambivalence toward torture, a surveillance state more ambitious if not yet more menacing than any in the Soviet bloc, and other flagrant offenses to the Bill of Rights.

This development represents the apotheosis of the essentially Marxian theories of late capitalism manifesting as imperialism followed by the managerial revolution, extrapolated by such authors as Charles Beard, Lawrence Dennis, and James Burnham. For the United States specifically, it is the final comeuppance of the American system’s perpetual dependence on commercial and military expansion first articulated as the “frontier thesis” of Frederick Jackson Turner.

The Socialist Party of America was the principal movement, in the half-century from the closing of the continental frontier to the triumph of the American colossus during and after the Second World War, that strove in vain for the United States to remain a republic and not an empire. That at the critical turning point within this period, the Socialist Party was the most prominent opponent of U.S. participation in the First World War, and was made to mercilessly suffer for it, alone gives it major significance in American and indeed world history. As the Socialist parties of Europe failed to stand in the way of the march to war, it was American

Socialism that stood in vigorous and brutally repressed opposition to the emergence of the American colossus built on the ruins of the European empires. But the great and cruel irony of this history was the long, strange journey that followed, culminating in the creation of the revanchist neoconservative movement.

The root of this massive contradiction in the legacy of the Socialist Party can be traced squarely to Leon Trotsky; specifically to the meeting he led in the Brooklyn apartment of Ludwig Lore on January 14, 1917, which set in motion the fracturing of the Socialist Party that created the Communist Party. The movements that sprang from American Socialism—American Communism, the Socialist Party Militants who founded Cold War liberalism, and by way of American Trotskyism, neoconservatism—transgressing its spirit as they greatly influenced American politics, could trace their origin to the personal prejudices of Trotsky and his desire for a more pure “revolutionary” movement. It is true, of course, that dissent within the Socialist movement had deeper roots in the historic American left wing; it can also be argued that a more authentic predecessor to the neoconservative movement existed in the First World War-era Social Democratic League. But for those left-wingers who did not exit the party as war supporters, it was Trotsky, during his brief but fateful American sojourn, who most bluntly articulated the prejudices of the left wing and who gave them the narrative and program that allowed them to have an impact on the Socialist Party and far beyond.

Here also lies the answer to the question that has so fascinated and perplexed the scholars of the Socialist Party heyday who came out of the new left. As Nick Salvatore writes in his excellent biography of Eugene V. Debs,

The faith of Debs and his followers in the redemptive power of the ballot is, from a current perspective, simply staggering. They took the republican tradition seriously and stressed the individual dignity and power inherent in the concept of citizenship. While frequently vague over exactly how to transform their society, these men and

women had no doubt but that, if the people united, the vitality of that tradition would point the way.²

What especially staggered the new left historians was the question of how and why this quality—this essentially Jeffersonian passion and faith—of American radicalism changed so profoundly. The short answer is the Popular Front, specifically for making virtues of mass mobilization and the intrigue of its leaders at the expense of the ballot. This fixed the association of radicalism in American historical memory with a politics that was reformist and opportunist at its core, a fateful development with extraordinarily wide ramifications. The elevation of protest over politics, which was ambivalent at best about democratic and civil libertarian values and methods, completely remade the organizational style and the underlying assumptions of both mainstream liberalism and radicalism, especially following the later experience of the civil rights movement. Beginning in the 1960s, this American example would be adopted by, and profoundly transform, the European social democratic left, completely turning on its head the Cold War-era concept of “American exceptionalism.”

In large and indispensable part, the victories of the Popular Front ensured that the Socialists and other non-Communist radicals of the 1930s would generally be inaccessible to future generations of radicals seeking a usable past. Born of a sympathy for and identification with the victims of McCarthyism, in no small irony, the effort to rehabilitate the legacy of the Popular Front has ensured that the real reason American Communism matters in twentieth-century U.S. history remains obscure. The Communist Party and the respective responses to it profoundly shaped the emergence of both American liberalism and American conservatism in the postwar era. In particular, its model of political activism, mobilization, and influence-seeking became the norm with both liberalism and conservatism, particularly with the consolidation of the two-party system. Irving Kristol stated openly in the 1970s that he was applying the tactics of Leninism to the peculiar circumstances of modern American politics, underscoring the essential

nature of both neoconservatism and the larger political climate in which it has thrived.

What, then, of any living legacy of American Socialism? The three groups born of the Socialist Party's ultimate demise in 1972—SDUSA, DSOC/DSEA, and SPUSA—cast their lot with three wildly disparate emerging forces in American politics, respectively—neoconservatism, mainstream liberalism or progressivism, and the radical left. Yet all three groups followed remarkably parallel trajectories in their respective spheres: each was an essential influence on its sphere throughout the 1970s, and toward the end of the decade each seemed to have promising future prospects. But then just as suddenly, very largely as a consequence of circumstances in the election of 1980, each outlived its usefulness and relevance. Significantly, all three were fundamentally shaped by revolutionary socialist legacies, specifically of Trotsky's American sojourn. For both Social Democrats USA and the organizations formed by Michael Harrington, the astonishingly pervasive influence and legacy of Max Shachtman was determinative. And in the main, the Socialist Party USA completely identified itself with the legacy of the historic left wing.

The question then becomes what historical memory has survived broadly speaking within each of the persuasions affected by the disparate legacies of the Socialist Party. Within neoconservatism and the larger American right it took over, that historical memory has almost completely vanished. By the time Emanuel Muravchik, one of the more vocal torch bearers among old Scoop Jackson Democrats, died in 2007, his obituary in the *Washington Jewish Week* merely noted "a world that no longer exists," with no elaboration or reflection.³ Yet among the British loyalists of Tony Blair, at almost exactly the same time as the formal passing away of Social Democrats USA, there emerged a veritable cult of Max Shachtman and the history of his followers. Led by Alan Johnson and his short-lived, extremely dense journal *Democratiya*, its narrative stood in splendid isolation from the larger history of socialism. Johnson was a co-author in 2006 of the Euston Manifesto, a mostly British attempt

to articulate a “socialist” affirmation of the “war against Islamofascism.” As the writer Geoffrey Wheatcroft bluntly advised, “There is a plausible slogan to be added to their manifesto—‘progressive, democratic, imperialist, and proud of it.’”⁴

But the Euston Manifesto was the exception proving the rule among neoconservatives after the September 11 attacks. As the generation shaped by SDUSA and historic controversies of the left passes from the scene, a younger generation, startlingly ignorant of this past, has increasingly set the tone of the neoconservative movement. The new generation, particularly as represented at *Commentary* magazine, is mostly made up of Modern Orthodox Jews, who in notable contrast to their Shachtmanite elders are plainly and openly motivated first and foremost by a belligerent and doctrinaire Jewish nationalism. Much of the sophistication of earlier neoconservative generations has been lost, with the old saws about “democracy and its enemies” reduced to hollow sloganeering. Having become so deeply grounded in this retrograde and self-destructive foreign nationalism, neoconservatism has entered its bitter terminal stage, its roots consigned to a superfluous memory.

The conscious Socialist legacy in mainstream liberalism or progressivism is more complex, but only slightly less faint. The organizational legacy of DSOC and DSA has been substantial; probably most notable are Harold Meyerson (a son of historic SP stalwarts in Los Angeles) and Robert Kuttner, two DSOC veterans who founded *The American Prospect*, arguably the most influential left-of-center political magazine for much of the early twenty-first century. But the historical memory of American Socialism in contemporary liberalism is another matter entirely. Throughout the Cold War, it was commonplace for the Socialist and labor movements to be cast as heroic forerunners of the New Deal and the organized liberalism that followed. But this has been almost entirely forgotten by contemporary liberalism. Typical of its more current historical narrative is that best displayed by the films of Ric and Ken Burns—valorizing the most elitist figures and forces leading to positive social change, putting race rather than politics or class at the center of

the American story, and unreservedly celebrating “national greatness” and martial glories.

It is not that this narrative does an injustice to the story of American liberalism; indeed, quite the contrary. But it has profoundly shaped the character of contemporary liberalism for the worse, making liberals inclined to see activist government not as a means to the ends of social justice but as an end in itself. They simply do not consider the critique of the American political system—of its concentration of power in undemocratic institutions perpetuating vested interests—that defined historic American Socialism. Contemporary liberalism offers little more than knee-jerk defenses of Keynesian economics and opposition to such odd phantom concepts and panaceas as “corporate personhood.” The historical romance for the Popular Front, among the most significant legacies of the era of DSOC and NAM, fits in neatly with this zeitgeist. As the generation of scholars who came out of the new left begins to pass from the scene, the most extreme apologetics for American Communism are largely forgotten, but the end result has proven pernicious. The celebration of the Popular Front has been awkwardly jammed into a new consensus history of the liberal left, typified by Ric and Ken Burns, and such books as Michael Kazin’s *American Dreamers* and Peter Dreier’s *100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century*.

Most works of “radical history” since the 1970s have also been beholden to Popular Front mythology. The most widely read by far, the book that practically defined the genre, is *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn. Although a member of the Communist Party in the early postwar era, to his credit Zinn did not adhere to a party line and challenged much that was sacred in the Popular Front narrative, particularly American righteousness in the Civil War and the Second World War.⁵ But he nevertheless remained true to the central Popular Front myth of the “people’s movement” of the 1930s, and that myth has been well served by the massive franchise that eventually grew out of his book. With far less redeeming value has been the school of conspiracy theory, most famously represented by Oliver Stone, which

allows acknowledgment of the military-industrial complex while maintaining on their pedestals its most vigorous champions such as Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

In a highly poignant metaphor for how completely these narratives have triumphed with the self-identified left, *The Progressive*—the magazine once called home by Norman Thomas, Oscar Ameringer, Harry Elmer Barnes, and Oswald Garrison Villard—in 2013 ran a fawning interview of Oliver Stone, in praise of his ambitious hagiography of Henry Wallace. Indeed, even on the radical left, the American Socialist legacy has not fared much better. Perhaps the one group to even pay it much mind is the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which traces its roots to the orthodox Trotskyist YPSL exodus of the early 1960s, whose leader, Joel Geier, remains the elder statesman of the group. With its publishing arm, Haymarket Books, a leading leftist commercial publisher, they reissued the works of Ira Kipnis and Ray Ginger in a transparently deliberate effort to promote only the crudest left-wing version of the story of American Socialism.

Since the election of Barack Obama, the most prominent phenomenon of the radical left has been the “Occupy Wall Street” movement. The Occupy movement deserves credit for reasserting the imperatives of accountability for major financial institutions and addressing economic injustice in the wake of the financial crisis that began in 2008. But in the main it was a vivid apotheosis of all the pathologies characterizing the history of American radicalism. The “general strike” romance extending all the way back to the founding of the IWW typified the most devoted Occupy partisans. Indeed, the folly of antiwar protest that Devere Allen so pithily lamented to Norman Thomas—“applying some of the minor Gandhi tactics in a situation where their chance of success is so infinitely smaller that it makes them look ridiculous”—has now been embraced in general protest against capitalism. And yet, the Occupy movement consigned the sectarian left to the margins, and there was notable overlap with the followers of Ron Paul. In the coinciding struggles of the labor movement that largely embraced Occupy, against the hollow pleas of the far left to embrace the “general strike,” the labor movement has mostly pursued the available means of direct

democracy—the initiative, referendum, and recall. With mixed success in various states, this would surely have gladdened the hearts of the stalwarts of the heyday of the Socialist Party.

If even the chimera of memory of American Socialism has so largely faded into the past, there may yet remain the individual standard-bearer of social democracy in American intellectual life, a role played in the postwar era by figures as disparate as Michael Harrington, Sidney Hook, James Weinstein, Irving Howe, and Christopher Lasch. Two possible claimants representing diametrically opposite stands on the great questions of the post–Cold War era—Paul Berman and Tony Judt—emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century, but each seems to represent the end of the line. Paul Berman emerged on the road to the American misadventure in Iraq as the last neocon to still call himself a socialist, and in the first of his rambling manifestoes he channeled the intoxicated spirit of Irwin Suall in *The American Ultras*:

The panorama of the Terror War cried out for . . . a Third Force, different from the conservatives and the foreign policy cynics who could only think of striking up alliances with friendly tyrants, and different from the anti-imperialists of the left, the left-wing isolationists . . . devoted to a politics of human rights and especially women's rights, across the Muslim World, a politics of ethnic and religious tolerance, a politics against racism and anti-Semitism . . . a politics of authentic solidarity for the Muslim world, instead of the demagog of cosmic hatreds.⁶

Naturally, Berman was an honored speaker at the final two conferences of Social Democrats USA, where he was even allowed to invoke his inspiration from the European new left in elaborating his militant stance.⁷ Berman achieved his greatest notoriety a decade later for his crusade against the reputation of the liberal Islamic philosopher Tariq Ramadan. As Lee Siegel devastatingly wrote of Berman's later manifesto specifically targeting Ramadan,

Unlike riven Europe in the 1930s—Mr. Berman’s own personal golden age—there is no furious debate in this country between Americans who side with the fanatics and terrorists and those who don’t. . . . But Mr. Berman, now in his sixties, has the puerile fervor of an undergraduate pouring his sexual and emotional frustration into a dormitory screaming match over capital punishment. He spends page after page defining “the left,” “fascism,” and “liberalism,” when in fact accurate definition is beside the point. (Not to mention the fact that social and political life have moved on to other realities, other paradigms). Yet these are the concepts that ruled Mr. Berman’s radical youth, and you feel that Mr. Berman refuses to give up his erstwhile relevance. He argues his weirdly outdated concepts with such fury because he is really trying to make a case for his own importance.⁸

Berman trafficked in the paranoid style of American politics with what was essentially a bizarre high-brow version of the crude right-wing paranoia about the threat of sharia law in the United States. By conflating Tariq Ramadan and the Muslim Brotherhood with its dreaded militant heresy, al-Qaeda, this self-styled “democrat of the left” repeated the very pattern that characterized the original “American ultras” who insisted that Social Democracy and Communism were one and the same.

Berman’s opposite was Tony Judt, an English-born European historian and distant relative of Meyer London. Judt first gained notoriety with a 2003 essay in the *New York Review of Books* foreseeing the demise of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the controversy over which unfortunately often overshadowed his larger concerns about the post-Cold War era. With a 2006 essay in the *London Review of Books*, “Bush’s Useful Idiots,” Judt stood courageously alone proclaiming the authentic social democratic view of his time—that neoconservatism, not Islam, is the heir and successor of twentieth-century totalitarianism:

Long nostalgic for the comforting verities of a simpler time, today’s liberal intellectuals have at last discovered a sense of purpose: they

are at war with “Islamofascism.” . . . It is particularly ironic that the “Clinton generation” of American liberals take special pride in their “tough-mindedness,” in their success in casting aside the myths and illusions of the old left, for these same “tough” new liberals reproduce some of that old left’s worst characteristics. They may see themselves as having migrated to the opposite shore, but they display precisely the same mixture of dogmatic faith and cultural provincialism, not to mention the exuberant enthusiasm for violent political transformation at other people’s expense, that marked their fellow-traveling predecessors across the Cold War ideological divide. The use value of such persons to ambitious, radical regimes is indeed an old story. Indeed, intellectual camp followers of this kind were first identified by Lenin himself, who coined the term that still describes them best. Today, America’s liberal armchair warriors are the “useful idiots” of the war on terror.⁹

Not since George Orwell had such a thunderbolt of forthright social democratic truth-telling come to illuminate the shadows shrouding an intellectual world in illusion. But like Orwell, Tony Judt was fated to a premature death at the peak of his creativity. His last, posthumously published book, *Thinking the Twentieth Century*, elaborated his bold call to reclaim the social democratic cause: “The choice we face in the next generation is not capitalism versus communism, or the end of history versus the return of history, but the politics of social cohesion based around collective purposes versus the erosion of society by the politics of fear.”¹⁰

To this last elegy for historic Social Democracy, the consensus liberals at *The American Prospect* could only gripe that Judt had “fallen into anti-intellectualism . . . as when he dismisses social history, women’s history, labor history, cultural studies, and the study of race, as . . . mediocrity defended by political correctness.”¹¹ Yet the priesthood of overly verbose identity politics in the universities, which is somehow the most enduring legacy of the new left, was not his only obstacle to seriously pursuing the resurrection of Social Democracy in the United

States. Judt's European grounding was both his strength and his weakness: his strength because it girded him against the idolatry afflicting American liberalism, and his weakness because it effectively precluded him from engaging the American Socialist past.

Tony Judt recapitulated the social democratic ethic by which the Socialist Party of America distinguished itself once the meaning of the Russian Revolution and the American Communist split became clear. This ethic may be seen, both in its original context and in the present day, as a kind of conservative temperament. For like the widely reputed founder of the modern conservative idea, Edmund Burke, that American Socialist ethic was and is fundamentally grounded in a radical critique of the existing order, of which the rejection of revolutionary means and reverence for permanent things are indispensable parts. Indeed, as radical voices in the wilderness who warned against their own country pursuing the path of empire at the same time they forcefully rejected the blood-soaked revolutionary alternative abroad, Karl Kautsky and Morris Hillquit may have been the truest heirs of Edmund Burke in the twentieth century.

The history of American politics in the last half-century lends itself to the deepest pessimism about the prospect for any kind of positive radical change, much less organizing to that end. But a longer view tells a very different story. In the early 1960s, two heavily militarized empires dominated the globe, and the specter haunting men and women of conscience was nothing less than the end of all life on earth resulting from a nuclear war. But within a generation, a bloodless popular uprising toppled the more tyrannical of the two empires, and the whole specter of totalitarianism that defined the twentieth century was no more. Barely two decades later, the days of the American empire appear numbered, which may mean nothing less than the repeal of the twentieth century—the century of horror, the century of mass destruction and genocide.

Whatever may follow, the place of the Socialist Party of America in the longer arc of that history is clear. To the kings and nobles of the

court historians, the imperial presidents and their elite and enlightened courtesans, they were the prophets, who warned of the folly in which the country and its leaders were setting out and who offered the alternative path of peace and justice. They were, indeed, an exceptional party in an exceptional nation.

APPENDIX A

National Officers of the Socialist Party

National Chairman

Oscar Ameringer (1870–1943), 1913–1921
Eugene V. Debs (1855–1926), 1921–1926
Victor Berger (1860–1929), 1926–1929
Morris Hillquit (1869–1933), 1929–1933
Leo Krzycki (1882–1966), 1933–1936
Norman Thomas (1884–1968), 1936–1950, 1958–1968
Darlington Hoopes (1896–1989), 1950–1957
Frank Zeidler (1912–2006), 1957–1958
Michael Harrington (1928–1989), 1968–1972

Executive Secretary

Leon Greenbaum, 1901–1903
William Mailly (1871–1912), 1903–1905
J. Mahlon Barnes (1866–1934), 1905–1911
John M. Work (1869–1961), 1911–1913
Walter Lanfersiek, 1913–1916
Adolph Germer (1881–1966), 1916–1919
Otto Branstetter (1877–1924), 1919–1924
Bertha Hale White, 1924–1925
George Kirkpatrick (1867–1937), 1925–1926
William H. Henry, 1926–1929
Clarence Senior (1903–1974), 1929–1936

Roy Burt (1890–1967), 1936–1939
Travers Clement (1900–1977), 1939–1942
Harry Fleischman (1914–2004), 1942–1950
Robin Myers, 1950–1954
Herman Singer, 1954–1957
Irwin Suall (1925–1998), 1957–1968
Penn Kemble (1941–2005), 1968–1970
Joan Suall (1932–1999), 1970–1972

National Executive Committee Members, 1903–1948

Victor Berger—Wisconsin (1860–1929), 1903–1920, 1922–1926
Barney Berlyn—Illinois (1843–1928), 1903–1907
Charles Dobbs—Kentucky, 1903–1904
Stephen M. Reynolds—Indiana, 1903–1907
John M. Work—Iowa (1869–1961), 1903–1910, 1916–1920
Charles Towner—Kentucky, 1904–1907
Robert Bandlow—Ohio, 1905–1907
William Mailly—Missouri (1871–1912), 1905–1907
Henry Slobodin—New York (1866–1951), 1905–1907
Ben Hanford—New York (1861–1910), 1907–1908
Morris Hillquit—New York (1869–1933), 1907–1914, 1916–1920,
1922–1929
Joseph Medill Patterson—Illinois (1879–1946), 1907–1908
Algie M. Simons—Illinois (1870–1950), 1907–1910
Ernest Untermann—Idaho (1864–1956), 1907–1908
A.H. Floaten—Colorado, 1908–1910
J.G. Phelps Stokes—New York (1872–1960), 1908–1910
Carl D. Thompson—Wisconsin (1870–1949), 1908–1910
James F. Carey—Massachusetts (1867–1938), 1910–1912
George Goebel—New Jersey (1876–1943), 1910–1914
Robert Hunter—New York (1874–1942), 1910–1912
Lena Morrow Lewis—California (1862–1950), 1910–1912
John Spargo—Vermont (1876–1966), 1910–1914, 1916–1917
Job Harriman—California (1861–1925), 1912–1914

William D. Haywood—Illinois (1869–1928), 1912–1913
 Alexander Irvine—California (1863–1941), 1912–1914
 Kate Richards O’Hare—Missouri (1877–1948), 1912–1914
 Lewis J. Duncan—Montana (1858–1936), 1914–1915
 Adolph Germer—Illinois (1881–1966), 1914–1916
 James Maurer—Pennsylvania (1864–1944), 1914–1916, 1921–1922,
 1924–1926, 1928–1932
 J. Stitt Wilson—California (1868–1942), 1914–1915
 Arthur Le Sueur—North Dakota (1867–1950), 1915–1916
 Emil Seidel—Wisconsin (1864–1947), 1915–1916
 Anna Maley—New York (1872–1918), 1916–1918
 Stanley J. Clark—Texas, 1918–1920
 Emil Herman—Washington (1879–1928), 1918–1920
 Dan Hogan—Arkansas, 1918–1920
 Fred Holt—Arkansas, 1918–1920
 Ludwig Katterfeld—Washington (1881–1974), 1918–1919
 Frederick Krafft—New Jersey (1860–1933), 1918–1920
 Walter Thomas Mills—Washington (1856–1942), 1918–1920
 James Oneal—New York (1875–1962), 1918–1922, 1926–1932, 1934–1936
 Abraham Shiplacoff—New York (1877–1934), 1918–1920
 Seymour Stedman—Illinois (1871–1948), 1918–1920
 Alfred Wagenknecht—Ohio (1881–1956), 1918–1919
 William M. Brandt—Missouri, 1919–1922, 1923–1924
 John Hagel—Oklahoma, 1919–1921
 William H. Henry—Indiana, 1919–1924
 Edmund T. Melms—Wisconsin (1874–1933), 1919–1924
 George E. Roewer—Massachusetts, 1919–1921, 1922–1928
 Oliver Wilson—Illinois, 1919–1921
 Bertha H. Mailly—New York (1869–1960), 1920–1921
 Julius Gerber—New York (1872–1956), 1921–1922
 Lilith Martin Wilson—Pennsylvania (1886–1937), 1921–1922,
 1928–1934
 B. Charney Vladeck—New York (1886–1938), 1922–1923
 Birch Wilson—Pennsylvania (1883–1970?), 1922–1924

Leo M. Harkins—Pennsylvania, 1923–1926
William R. Snow—Illinois, 1923–1924, 1926–1928
John M. Collins—Illinois, 1924–1928
Joseph W. Sharts—Ohio, 1924–1932
James Graham—Montana (1873–1951), 1926–1930, 1932–1936
William Van Essen—Pennsylvania, 1926–1928
Daniel Hoan—Wisconsin (1881–1961), 1928–1938
Alfred Baker Lewis—Massachusetts (1897–1978), 1928–1934
Jasper McLevy—Connecticut (1878–1962), 1928–1934
Meta Berger—Wisconsin (1873–1944), 1929–1932
Albert Sprague Coolidge—Massachusetts (1894–1977), 1932–1944
Powers Hapgood—Indiana (1899–1949), 1932–1940
Darlington Hoopes—Pennsylvania (1896–1989), 1932–1948
John C. Packard—California, 1932–1934
Norman Thomas—New York (1884–1968), 1932–1936
Franz Daniel—Pennsylvania, 1934–1938
Maynard Krueger—Illinois (1906–1991), 1934–1948
Michael Shadid—Oklahoma (1882–1966), 1934–1936
Max Delson—New York (1903–1988), 1936–1944
Max Raskin—Wisconsin, 1936–1944
George Rhodes—Pennsylvania (1898–1978), 1936–1938
Devere Allen—Connecticut (1891–1955), 1938–1944
Murray Baron—New York, 1938–1944
David H. Felix—Pennsylvania, 1938–1944
John Fisher—Illinois, 1938–1944
Howard Kester—Tennessee (1904–1977), 1938–1944
Harry Laidler—New York (1884–1970), 1938–1944
Frank McAllister—Florida, 1938–1944
Paul Porter—Wisconsin (1908–2002), 1938–1941
Walter Polakowski—Wisconsin, 1938–1940
Roy Reuther—Michigan (1909–1968), 1938–1940
Ward Rodgers—Tennessee, 1938–1940
Frank Trager—New York (1905–1984), 1938–1941
Gus Tyler—New York (1911–2011), 1938–1940

Jeffrey Campbell—Massachusetts, 1940–1944
Aaron Levenstein—New York, 1940–1948
Leonard Woodcock—Michigan (1911–2001), 1940–1941
Al Hamilton—New Jersey, 1944–1948
Ben Horowitz—New York, 1944–1948
Robin Myers—New York, 1944–1948
Lawrence Piercey—Michigan, 1944–1948
Walter Uphoff—Wisconsin, 1944–1948
Carle Whitehead—Colorado, 1944–1948
Milton Zatinsky—Missouri, 1944–1948

Other National Officers

George Herron (1862–1925), International Secretary, 1903–1905
Morris Hillquit (1869–1933), International Secretary, 1906–1910,
1914–1920, 1922–1933
Victor Berger (1860–1929), International Secretary, 1910–1912
Kate Richards O’Hare (1877–1948), International Secretary, 1912–1914
Algernon Lee (1873–1954), International Secretary, 1920–1922
Winnie Branstetter (1879–1960), Women’s Secretary, 1910–1915
Ralph Korngold (1882–1964), Literature Secretary, 1914–1917
Irwin St. John Tucker, Literature Secretary, 1917–1919
Carl D. Thompson (1870–1949), Information Secretary, 1914–1916
J. Louis Engdahl (1891–1933), Information Secretary, 1916–1919
Oscar Ameringer (1870–1943), Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
S. John Block (1880–1955), Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
O.G. Crawford, Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
Daniel Hoan (1881–1961), Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
William F. Kruse (1893–1952), Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
Jacob Panken (1879–1968), Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
Eugene Wood, Board of Appeals, 1920–1921
Paul Porter (1908–2002), Labor and Organization Secretary,
1933–1936
Frank Trager (1905–1984), Labor and Organization Secretary,
1936–1938

Arthur G. McDowell, Labor and Organization Secretary, 1938–1941
William Becker, Labor and Organization Secretary, 1941–1950
Darlington Hoopes (1896–1989), Honorary Chairman, 1968–1972
A. Philip Randolph (1889–1979), Honorary Chairman, 1968–1972
Julius Bernstein (1919–1977), Vice Chairman, 1968–1972
Samuel Friedman (1897–1990), Vice Chairman, 1968–1972

Chairman, Young People's Socialist League

J.A. Rogers Jr., 1913–1915
William F. Kruse (1893–1952), 1915–1919
Oliver Carlson (1899–1989?), 1919–1922
Albert Weisbord (1900–1977), 1922–1924
Aarne J. Parker, 1924–1929
Julius Umansky, 1929–1932
Arthur G. McDowell, 1932–1934
Ernest Erber (1913–2009), 1934–1937
Al Hamilton, 1937–1940
Judah Drob (1916–1991), 1940–1942
Robin Myers, 1942–1944
Virgil Vogel (1918–1994), 1944–1946
Irwin Suall (1925–1998), 1946–1948
Thomas Brooks, 1948–1950
Vern Davidson, 1950–1952
Michael Harrington (1926–1989), 1952–1954
Gabriel Kolko (1932–2014), 1954–1957
Richard Roman, 1957–1961
Joel Geier (b. 1938), 1961–1964
Penn Kemble (1941–2005), 1964–1968
Joshua Muravchik (b. 1947), 1968–1972

APPENDIX B

Socialist Elected Officeholders, 1897–1960

The author is indebted to Darcy Richardson of Jacksonville, Florida, for much of the information appearing in this Appendix—in particular, for his firsthand knowledge of the errors and omissions of the table provided by James Weinstein in *The Decline of Socialism in America: 1912–1925*. The latter, which is limited to the 1910s decade and does not include the names of individuals, has been the standard source for historians since it was first published. Special thanks are also due to the many libraries, town clerks, and historical societies across the United States, too numerous to mention, which assisted in compiling this appendix.

Alabama

J. F. Johnston, Mayor, Fairhope, 1912–1914

Arlie K. Barber, Commissioner, Birmingham, 1915–1917

Arkansas

Charles F. Stauffer, Mayor, Winslow, 1909–1917

Peter Stewart, Mayor, Hartford, 1912–1914

Lucien Koch, Alderman, Mena, 1911–1913

California

C.W. Kingsley, State Assemblyman (Los Angeles), 1913–1915

George W. Downing, State Assemblyman (Los Angeles), 1915–1917

Witten Harris, State Assemblyman (Bakersfield), 1915–1917

Lewis Spangler, State Assemblyman (Los Angeles), 1915–1917

J. Stitt Wilson (1868–1942), Mayor, Berkeley, 1911–1913

William Thum, Mayor, Pasadena, 1911–1913
B. C. Ross, Mayor, Daly City, 1912–1916
Elijah Falk, Mayor, Eureka, 1915–1919
John A. Wilson, Commissioner, Berkeley, 1911–1915
J. P. Jones, Commissioner, Santa Cruz, 1911–1919
W. H. Colwell, Superintendent of Streets, Eureka, 1915–1919
Fred Wheeler, Councilman, Los Angeles, 1907–1913
G. M. McDaniel, Councilman, Eureka, 1911–1915
Joseph Bredsteen, Councilman, Eureka, 1915–1919
Chauncey W. Smith, Councilman, San Bernadino, 1911–1913

Colorado

Thomas Todd, Mayor, Grand Junction, 1909–1914
J. B. Bitterly, Mayor, Victor, 1911–1915
J. M. Haley, Mayor, Paonia, 1912–1916
H. J. Brown, Mayor, Buena Vista, 1913–1914
Seth Wood, Mayor, Lafayette, 1913–1914
Eugene Bootz, Mayor, Edgewater, 1914–1915

Connecticut

Albert Eccles, State Senator (Bridgeport), 1935–1937
Audubon J. Secor, State Senator (Bridgeport), 1935–1941
John M. Taft (1899–1937), State Senator (Bridgeport), 1935–1937
James Tait, State Senator (Bridgeport), 1939–1941
Jack C. Bergen, State Representative (Bridgeport), 1935–1937
Harry Bender, State Representative (Bridgeport), 1935–1937
Sadie Griffin, State Representative (Bridgeport), 1939–1941
William S. Neil, State Representative (Bridgeport), 1939–1941
Howard B. Tuttle, Mayor, Naugatuck, 1914–1918
Jasper McLevy (1878–1962), Mayor, Bridgeport, 1933–1957
Irving Freese (1903–1964), Mayor, Norwalk, 1947–1955, 1957–1959*
Fred Schwarzkopf (1895–1966), Clerk, Bridgeport, 1933–1955
John Shenton, Clerk, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
John Shenton, Treasurer, Bridgeport, 1933–1955

Louis Snow, Treasurer, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
 Fred Cederholm, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1911–1913
 Fred Schwarzkopf (1895–1966), Councilman, Bridgeport, 1931–1933
 Andrew K. Auth, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Angelo Canevari, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Henry Costello, Councilman Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 William Hutton, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 James E. Kane, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Charles Mottram, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1941
 William S. Neil, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Everett N. Perry (1868–1951), Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1935
 John M. Sheerin, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1935**
 John M. Taft (1899–1937), Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1935
 Clifford A. Thompson, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Harry Williamson, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1933–1947
 Mickey Gratt, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1935–1941
 Sadie Griffin, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1935–1939
 George C. Rosenbeck (1877–1955), Councilman, Bridgeport,
 1935–1937
 John J. Schiller, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1935–1957
 Philip J. Schnee, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1935–1937
 William Abraham, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1937–1945
 Douglas Binns, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1937–1945
 John J. Durkin, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1937–1945
 Max Frankel, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1937–1945
 Jacob Burstein, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1957
 Simpson Crowe, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Louis E. Hafele, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Andrew C. Lindmark, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Frederick Miller, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Harry L. Miller, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1957
 Hubert O’Neill, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Matthew Robb, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955
 Fred W. Sachs, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1947–1955

Spencer H. Anderson, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
Samuel Barker, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1959
Paul G. Belles, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1959
Constantine G. Demas, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1959
Joseph J. Gabriel, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1959
Russell J. Matthews, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
Lorenzo McTiernan, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
Francis K. Sarbent, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
William H. Taft, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1957
Charles Vangel, Councilman, Bridgeport, 1955–1959
Conrad Andrews, Alderman, Rockville, 1911–1913

*Elected as an independent in each election after 1951

**Ran for reelection as a Republican and lost

Florida

Andrew Jackson Pettigrew, State Representative (Manatee County),
1907–1909
C. C. Allen, State Representative (Pinellas County), 1909–1911
John Dobler, Mayor, Gulfport, 1912–1921
James Love, Mayor, Lake Worth, 1914–1916

Idaho

Earl Bowman, State Senator (Coeur d'Alene), 1915–1917
John T. Wood, Mayor, Coeur d'Alene, 1911–1913
S. Burgher, Clerk, Minidoka County, 1915–1917
S. Gregory, Sherriff, Rupert, 1915–1917

Illinois

Joseph Ambroz, State Representative (Chicago), 1905–1907
Andrew Olson, State Representative (Chicago), 1905–1907
H. W. Harris, State Representative (Chicago), 1913–1915
Joseph Mason, State Representative (Chicago), 1913–1917
Christian Madsen, State Representative (Chicago), 1913–1915

Seymour Stedman (1871–1948), State Representative (Chicago),
 1913–1917

J. J. Cleveland, Mayor, Davis, 1911–1913

W. M. Lawson, Mayor, Des Plaines, 1911–1913

Marshall Kirkpatrick, Mayor, Granite City, 1911–1915, 1917–1919

D. L. Thomas, Mayor, O’Fallon, 1911–1913

John Mainwaring, Mayor, Thayer, 1911–1915

J. E. Lee, Mayor, Venice, 1911–1913

A. C. Robb, Mayor, Jerseyville, 1913–1917

R. M. Kingsland, Mayor, Canton, 1914–1915

Herman Reetz, Mayor, Lincoln, 1915–1917

C. Henry Bloom, Mayor, Rockford, 1933–1937*

Eugene Armstrong, Clerk, Maryville, 1911–1913

J. E. Tilley, Marshall, O’Fallon, 1911–1913

Nick Lorenz, Superintendent of Streets, O’Fallon, 1911–1913

Hy Schoettie, Assessor, Collinsville, 1912–1914

Oscar Ogren, Alderman, Rockford, 1909–1913, 1918–1919

John Hallden, Alderman, Rockford, 1911–1915

Charles F. Johnson, Alderman, Rockford, 1913–1919, 1931–1935**

August Swensen, Alderman, Rockford, 1915–1919

Ernest Beck, Alderman, Rockford, 1917–1929

C. Henry Bloom, Alderman, Rockford, 1917–1919, 1921–1933**

Oscar Wahlstrom, Alderman, Rockford, 1917–1919

Tuoy Bollette, Trustee, Davis, 1911–1913

J. C. Mainwaring, Trustee, Davis, 1911–1913

Evan Watkins, Trustee, Davis, 1911–1913

Burnell Williamson, Trustee, Davis, 1911–1913

T. A. Lindsley, Alderman, Granite City, 1911–1913

Emerson Taylor, Alderman, Granite City, 1911–1913

Harry Halpin, Alderman, La Salle, 1911–1913

Leonard Argus, Trustee, Maryville, 1911–1913

Alexander Campbell, Alderman, O’Fallon, 1911–1913

Henry Shoemaker, Alderman, O’Fallon, 1911–1913

Tony Bolletto, Trustee, Thayer, 1911–1915
 Evan Watkins, Trustee, Thayer, 1911–1915
 Bernal Williamson, Trustee, Thayer, 1911–1915
 Thomas Blair, Supervisor, Blair, 1912–1916
 Frank Huber, Supervisor, Carlisle, 1912–1916
 Julius Weison, Alderman, Nashville, 1912–1914
 Henry D. Rosendale, Alderman, Quincy, 1912–1916
 John Osterknap, Alderman, Taylorsville, 1912–1914
 Thomas Hitchings, Councilman, Belleville, 1914–1916
 R. C. Delaney, Alderman, Collinsville, 1915–1919
 H. P. Wallace, Trustee, Maryville, 1917–1919
 Louis Fickert, Alderman, Staunton, 1917–1919
 John C. Kennedy, Alderman, Chicago, 1918–1920
 William Rodriguez, Alderman, Chicago, 1918–1920

*Elected on a “Progressive” ticket that bolted from the Rockford Labor Legion

**Reelected after 1920 as members of the Rockford Labor Legion

Indiana

M. J. Tucker, Mayor, Clinton, 1911–1917
 Tyler Lawton, Mayor, Bicknell, 1913–1917
 Thomas Bridwell, Mayor, Hymera, 1915–1919
 John G. Lewis, Mayor, Elwood, 1917–1921
 Frank Leminaux, Mayor, Gas City, 1917–1921
 Irving Huffman, Mayor, Jasonville, 1921–1925
 William James, Marshal, Spencer, 1911–1913
 George Lanning, Councilman, Marion, 1913–1917
 Burr Sutton, Councilman, Marion, 1913–1917
 Ora Wylie, Councilman, Marion, 1913–1917
 George F. Ring, Councilman, Marion, 1917–1925
 Charles B. Scott, Councilman, Marion, 1917–1921
 Bert Scott, Councilman, Marion, 1921–1925
 Brice P. McIntosh, Alderman, Fort Wayne, 1917–1921
 Sam Skufakiss, Alderman, Hammond, 1918–1922

Iowa

C. L. Wilder, Mayor, Boone, 1909–1911
C. J. Cederquist, Mayor, Madrid, 1912–1914
D. C. Ohler, Mayor, Hopkinton, 1912–1914
Charles Barewald (d. 1932), Mayor, Davenport, 1920–1922
U.A. Screechfield, City Attorney, Davenport, 1920–1922
Harold Metcalf, Police Magistrate, Davenport, 1920–1924
E. L. Swinny, Alderman, Belle Plain, 1911–1913
Frank L. Evans, Councilman, Colfax, 1911–1913
William J. Montgomery, Councilman, Muscatine, 1911–1913
Oliver C. Wilson, Councilman, Muscatine, 1911–1913
Lee Rainbow, Councilman, Muscatine, 1912–1914
Walter Bracher (d. 1947), Councilman, Davenport, 1918–1922
George Peck, Councilman, Davenport, 1918–1922
Fred Feuchter, Councilman, Davenport, 1920–1922
George Koepke, Councilman, Davenport, 1920–1922
Chester Stout, Councilman, Davenport, 1920–1922

Kansas

Frederick W. Stanton, State Senator (Crawford County), 1913–1915
Everett Miller, State Representative (Crawford County), 1913–1915
Ben Wilson, State Representative (Crawford County), 1913–1915
George Brewer, State Representative (Crawford County), 1915–1919
Elmer B. Barnes, State Representative (Scott County), 1917–1919
J. S. Keller, State Representative (Thomas County), 1917–1919
Evan Morgan, Mayor, Arma, 1911–1915
James Perkins, Mayor, Curransville, 1911–1915
H. P. Houghton, Mayor, Girard, 1911–1915
H. Bruning, Mayor, Hillsboro, 1916–1922
John Schildknecht, Mayor, Frontenac, 1917–1921
A. T. Woodward, City Attorney, Fort Scott, 1911–1915
E. W. Cantrell, County Attorney, Crawford County, 1912–1914
John Turkington, Sherriff, Crawford County, 1912–1916

J. O. Dudd, Treasurer, Crawford County, 1912–1914
Guy E. Turner, Clerk, Crawford County, 1912–1914
J. E. Reeder, Assessor, Crawford County, 1912–1914
John Dowd, Probate Judge, Crawford County, 1912–1916
A. C. Lewis, Surveyor, Crawford County, 1912–1914
D. C. Flint, Registrar, Crawford County, 1912–1914
George W. Reed, Coroner, Crawford County, 1912–1914

Kentucky

Leonard Bauer, Commissioner, Newport, 1911–1915

Louisiana

E. F. Presley, Mayor, Winnfield, 1912–1914

Maine

E. L. Charles, Selectman, Mechanic Falls, 1912–1913
Odell F. Welch, Selectman, Mechanic Falls, 1912–1913

Massachusetts

James F. Carey (1867–1938), State Representative (Haverhill),
1899–1904
Louis Scates, State Representative (Haverhill), 1899–1900
Frederic MacCartney, State Representative (Brockton), 1900–1901,
1902–1903
Charles Morrill, State Representative (Haverhill), 1909–1911, 1913–1921
John Chase (1870–1939), Mayor, Haverhill, 1898–1900
Parkman B. Flanders, Mayor, Haverhill, 1920–1923
Charles Coulter, Mayor, Brockton, 1899–1901
James F. Carey (1867–1938), Councilman, Haverhill, 1897–1899
Albert Gillen, Councilman, Haverhill, 1899–1901
Thomas F. Lee, Councilman, Brockton, 1905–1907*
James H. Turner, Alderman, Salem, 1911–1913

*Reelected as a Democrat in 1906

Michigan

John Menton (1866–1947), Mayor, Flint, 1911–1913
J. F. Hofstetier, Mayor, Frankfort, 1911–1913
Albert B. Thomas, Mayor, Greenville, 1911–1913
Joseph Warnock, Mayor, Harbor Springs, 1913–1915
Edward Lautner, Mayor, Traverse City, 1917–1919
Frank Fuller, Treasurer, Greenville, 1911–1913
John Coon, Constable, Greenville, 1911–1913
W. J. Rushton, Constable, Greenville, 1911–1913
A. E. Savage, Supervisor, Greenville, 1911–1913
J. B. Taylor, Supervisor, Greenville, 1911–1913
Leonard DeWitt, Constable, Holland, 1911–1913
C. A. Jackson, Alderman, Battle Creek, 1902–1904
F. A. Kulp, Alderman, Battle Creek, 1902–1904
Orrin H. Castle, Alderman, Flint, 1911–1913
George Norwood, Alderman, Flint, 1911–1913
J. M. Wood, Alderman, Flint, 1911–1913
W. H. Dietz, Alderman, Greenville, 1911–1913
O. S. Peterson, Alderman, Greenville, 1911–1913
Vernon F. King, Alderman, Holland, 1911–1913
Guy Lockwood, Councilman, Kalamazoo, 1912–1914
Byron Van Blarcom, Councilman, Kalamazoo, 1912–1914
Byron Wells (1853–1936), Alderman, Muskegon, 1912–1914
Amos Langworthy, Alderman, Traverse City, 1912–1914

Minnesota

Andrew Olaf Devold (1881–1940), State Senator (Hennepin County),
1919–1927, 1931–1940*
Nels Hillman, State Representative (Lake and Cook Counties),
1911–1915
John Boyd, State Representative (Polk County), 1915–1917, 1919–1921
Andrew Olaf Devold (1881–1940), State Representative (Hennepin
County), 1915–1919

George Gardner (1881–1925), State Representative (Crow Wing and Morrison Counties), 1915–1919

James W. Woodfill, State Representative (Lake and Cook Counties), 1915–1917

Ernst G. Strand, State Representative (Lake and Cook Counties), 1917–1923

Michael Boylan, State Representative (St. Louis County), 1919–1927*

A. Ousdahl, Mayor, Brainerd, 1909–1911, 1913–1915

J. C. Dahl, Mayor, St. Hilaire, 1911–1913

James Sturdevant, Mayor, Tenstrike, 1911–1913

Ernst G. Strand, Mayor, Two Harbors, 1911–1913, 1916–1917

Fred Malzhan, Mayor, Bemidji, 1912–1914

H. L. Larson, Mayor, Crookston, 1912–1914

Thomas Van Lear (1864–1931), Mayor, Minneapolis, 1917–1919

William Jackson, Mayor, Dawson, 1919–1924

Theodore Welte, Commissioner, Clearwater County, 1912–1914

W. A. Swanstrom, Commissioner, St. Louis County (Duluth), 1917–1919

Charles M. Floathe, Register of Deeds, Two Harbors, 1905–1907

John Pearson, Coroner, Two Harbors, 1905–1907

Isaac Biteman, Assessor, Swanville, 1912–1914

A. G. Anderson, Alderman, Brainerd, 1911–1913

N. W. Olsen, Alderman, Brainerd, 1911–1913

R. A. Rennings, Alderman, Brainerd, 1911–1913

Frank Yetka, Alderman, Cloquet, 1911–1919

S. W. Hannah, Alderman, Bemidji, 1912–1914

P. J. Phillips, Alderman, Duluth, 1912–1914

Charles Johnson, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1913–1917

Alfred Voelker, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1913–1925

Albert Bastis, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1915–1947*

Charles F. Dight, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1915–1919

Theodore Jenson, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1917–1925

A. R. Gisslen, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1919–1939*

Peter J. Pryts, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1919–1927*

Charles Rudsdl, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1919–1927*
Irving G. Scott, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1919–1927, 1931–1937*
Lewis Beneke, Councilman, Minneapolis, 1921–1925

*Elected as Farmer–Labor Party candidates starting in 1924

Mississippi

J. A. Ryan, Supervisor, Forest County, 1915–1919
Sumner Rose, Alderman, Biloxi, 1911–1913

Missouri

P. A. Fitzgerald, Mayor, Cardwell, 1911–1913
Fred Swain, Mayor, Mindenmines, 1911–1913
M. M. Jones, Mayor, Liberal, 1912–1914
J. W. Jacob, Trustee, Edna, 1908–1910
J. R. Shultz, Trustee, Edna, 1908–1912
R. E. Sibley, Trustee, Edna, 1908–1912
D. A. Parker, Alderman, Cardwell, 1911–1913
G. W. Boswell, Alderman, Maplewood, 1911–1913
John Bryant, Alderman, Morehouse, 1911–1913

Montana

Charles H. Connor, State Representative (Lincoln County),
1913–1917
Alexander Mackel, State Representative (Silver Bow County),
1915–1917
Leslie Bechtel, State Representative (Silver Bow County), 1915–1917
John Frinke, Mayor, Anaconda, 1903–1907
Ray Austin, Mayor, Red Lodge, 1906–1908
Lewis J. Duncan (1858–1936), Mayor, Butte, 1911–1914
Clarence Smith, Mayor, Butte, 1914–1915
Andrew M. Gretchell, Mayor, Missoula, 1914–1916
Michael Tobin, Treasurer, Anaconda, 1903–1907
Patrick McHugh, Police Judge, Anaconda, 1903–1907
Joseph Lawrence, Constable, Aldridge, 1904–1906

A. Miller, Constable, Clyde Park, 1904–1906
M. H. Lucas, Police Judge, Red Lodge, 1906–1908
Edwin M. Lamb, City Attorney, Butte, 1911–1913
Dan Shovlin, Treasurer, Butte, 1911–1913
T. J. Hopher, Police Judge, Butte, 1911–1913
Timothy Driscoll, Sherriff, Butte, 1911–1914
Dennis Sullivan, Police Magistrate, Great Falls, 1912–1914
Dale Hodson, Commissioner, Missoula, 1914–1916
George Ambrose, Alderman, Butte, 1903–1905
Si Winscott, Alderman, Butte, 1903–1905
Andrew Bissell, Alderman, Butte, 1911–1915
Arthur C. Cox, Alderman, Butte, 1911–1913
Frank Curran, Alderman, Butte, 1911–1915
Henry Davis, Alderman, Butte, 1911–1915
Hugh McManus, Alderman, Butte, 1911–1915
Edmund Ladendorff, Alderman, Butte, 1912–1916
Mike Allen, Alderman, Butte, 1914–1916
Anton Obermeyer, Alderman, Butte, 1914–1916
Charles Simpson, Alderman, Livingston, 1906–1908
William Haworth, Alderman, Red Lodge, 1906–1908
Fred Inaholt, Alderman, Billings, 1911–1913
M. W. Russell, Alderman, Billings, 1911–1913
P. Wallender, Alderman, Havre, 1911–1913
Herman Luehman, Alderman, Helena, 1911–1913
Joseph Heaney, Alderman, Lewistown, 1911–1913
John Fliecheck, Alderman, Miles City, 1911–1913
J. A. Weaver, Alderman, Miles City, 1911–1913
E. F. Farmer, Alderman, Great Falls, 1912–1914
G. A. Brinkman, Alderman, Kalispell, 1913–1915
Stephen Jones, Alderman, Kalispell, 1913–1915

Nebraska

W. C. Rodgers, University Board of Regents, 1907–1908*
W. E. Griffin, Mayor, Beatrice, 1911–1913

Edward Foe, Mayor, Red Cloud, 1911–1913
Edward Mauck, Mayor, Wymore, 1911–1913
J. J. Painter, Alderman, Broken Bow, 1911–1915
C. F. Tracy, Councilman, North Platte, 1911–1913

*The only statewide election ever won on a Socialist ballot line

Nevada

Martin Scanlan, State Senator (Nye County), 1913–1917
J. F. Davis, State Representative (Nye County), 1913–1917

New Jersey

William A. Matthews, Mayor, Rockaway, 1911–1913
William Brueckmann, Mayor, Haledon, 1913–1915, 1917–1918
James Furber (1868–1930), Mayor, Rahway, 1922–1924

New Mexico

W. C. Tharp, State Representative (Curry County), 1915–1917

New York

Meyer London (1871–1926), U.S. Representative (Manhattan—Lower East Side), 1915–1919, 1921–1923
Herbert Merrill (1871–1956), State Assemblyman (Schenectady), 1912–1914
Abraham Shiplacoff (1877–1934), State Assemblyman (Brooklyn—Brownsville), 1915–1919
Joseph Whitehorn, State Assemblyman (Brooklyn—Williamsburg), 1916–1919
August Claessens (1885–1954), State Assemblyman (Manhattan—Lower East Side), 1918–1921*, (Bronx) 1922–1923
William Feigenbaum (1886–1949), State Assemblyman (Brooklyn—Flatbush), 1918–1919
Charles Garfinkel, State Assemblyman (Bronx), 1918–1919
Benjamin Gitlow (1891–1965), State Assemblyman (Bronx), 1918–1919

William Karlin, State Assemblyman (Manhattan—Lower East Side),
1918–1919

Samuel Orr (1890–1981), State Assemblyman (Bronx), 1918–1921*

Elmer Rosenberg, State Assemblyman (Manhattan—Harlem),
1918–1919

Louis Waldman (1892–1982), State Assemblyman (Manhattan—Lower
East Side), 1918–1921*

Samuel De Witt (1891–1963), State Assemblyman (Bronx), 1920–1921*

Charles Solomon (1889–1963), State Assemblyman (Brooklyn—East
New York), 1920–1921*

Henry Jager, State Assemblyman (Brooklyn—Williamsburg),
1921–1922

George R. Lunn (1873–1948), Mayor, Schenectady, 1911–1923**

John H. Gibbons, Mayor, Lackawanna, 1919–1923

Philip Andres, Treasurer, Schenectady, 1911–1915

Louis Welch, Sherriff, Schenectady, 1913–1917

Frank C. Perkins, Councilman–at–large, Buffalo, 1920–1923

Jacob J. Levin, Supervisor, Rochester, 1918–1920

John Schidakowitz, Supervisor, Rochester, 1918–1920

Jacob Panken (1879–1968), Municipal Court Judge, New York
County, 1918–1928

Timothy Burns, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1915

William C. Chandler, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1915

Matthew A. Dancy, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1913

Thomas Fahey, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1913

Thomas Folan, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1913

Charles W. Noonan, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1913

Harvey Simmons, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1915

William Turnbull, Alderman, Schenectady, 1911–1915

Theodore Neidlinger, Alderman, Schenectady, 1915–1917

Charles Steinmetz (1865–1923), Alderman, Schenectady, 1915–1917

Henry O. Williams, Alderman, Schenectady, 1915–1917

George A. Claudius, Alderman, Auburn, 1912–1914

Hyman Lurie, Alderman, New York, 1914–1916

Abraham Beckerman, Alderman, New York, 1918–1922
Alexander Braunstein, Alderman, New York, 1918–1920
Adolph Held (1879–1968), Alderman, New York, 1918–1920
Maurice Kalman, Alderman, New York, 1918–1920
Algernon Lee (1873–1954), Alderman, New York, 1918–1922***
B. Charney Vladeck (1886–1938), Alderman, New York, 1918–1920
Barnet Wolff, Alderman, New York, 1918–1920
Edward F. Cassidy, Alderman, New York, 1920–1922***
Charles Messinger, Alderman, Rochester, 1918–1920
George A. Stahley, Alderman, Rochester, 1918–1920

*Denied seat in the Assembly in 1920

**Reelected to his third term in 1919 as a Democrat

***Denied seat in the City Council in 1920

North Dakota

Wesley Fassett, State Representative (Rolette County), 1911–1913
O. H. Hoveland, Mayor, Des Lacs, 1911–1913
Erick Dale (1868–1945), Mayor, Rugby, 1912–1914
Arthur Le Sueur (1867–1950), Mayor, Minot, 1913–1915
Carl Erickson, Sherriff, Williams County, 1912–1916
Axel Strom, Sherriff, Williams County, 1916–1918
Dewey Dorman, Commissioner, Minot, 1913–1915
William Mills, Alderman, Fargo, 1904–1906
P. W. Miller, Alderman, Devils Lake, 1911–1913
N. Davis, Alderman, Minot, 1913–1915

Ohio

Harry Schilling, Mayor, Canton, 1911–1913*
Samuel M. Gaylord, Mayor, Cuyahoga Falls, 1911–1913
William Ralston, Mayor, Fostoria, 1911–1913
Corbin Shook, Mayor, Lima, 1911–1913
Thomas Pape, Mayor, Lorain, 1911–1913
Newton Wycoff, Mayor, Martin's Ferry, 1911–1915
E. E. Robinson, Mayor, Mineral Ridge, 1911–1913

Alfred Perrine, Mayor, Mount Vernon, 1911–1915**
Robert Dier, Mayor, Osnaburg, 1911–1913
Scott Wilkins, Mayor, St. Mary's, 1911–1913
John S. McKay, Mayor, Salem, 1911–1913
Robert Murray, Mayor, Toronto, 1911–1915
Lindsay Williams, Mayor, Canal Dover, 1913–1915
D. S. Brace, Mayor, Conneaut, 1913–1917
Lloyd N. Staats, Mayor, Coshocton, 1913–1915
Frederick Hinckle, Mayor, Hamilton, 1913–1915
Daniel Howe, Mayor, Shelby, 1913–1915
W. B. McClure, Mayor, Warsaw, 1913–1915
J. S. Davis, Mayor, New Boston, 1914–1916
D. L. Davis, Mayor, Byesville, 1917–1919
D. E. Hull, Mayor, Jenera, 1917–1921
Frank B. Hamilton, Mayor, Piqua, 1917–1919
William Kunhell, Mayor, Silvertown, 1917–1919
W. M. Higley, Mayor, Albany, 1918–1920
H. L. Kattman, Mayor, New Knoxville, 1918–1920
Henry H. Vogt, Mayor, Massillon, 1919–1921
Walter Hinkle, Vice Mayor, Hamilton, 1911–1913
Clarence Rodgers, Assessor, Hamilton, 1911–1915
Joseph Suttor, Assessor, Hamilton, 1911–1915
Charles Norris, Councilman–at–large, Hamilton, 1911–1913
Edward Brown, Treasurer, Martin's Ferry, 1911–1915
William Morris, Auditor, Martin's Ferry, 1911–1915
C. E. Wolfe, Assessor, Mount Vernon, 1913–1915
James Sweeney, Councilman–at–large, Martin's Ferry, 1911–1915
Ernest Gosney, Councilman–at–large, Martin's Ferry, 1911–1915
Willard Barringer, Commissioner, Dayton, 1915–1919
Theodore Miller, Commissioner, Sandusky, 1917–1919
E. C. Jones, Clerk, Brink Haven, 1918–1920
Charles Harp, Treasurer, Palestine, 1918–1920
W. Smith, Councilman, Canton, 1911–1913
John P. Bohnert, Councilman, Columbus, 1911–1915

C. Warren, Councilman, Columbus, 1911–1915
 W. P. Wilson, Councilman, Columbus, 1911–1915
 Fred Zimpfer, Councilman, Columbus, 1911–1919
 Charles E. Geisler, Councilman, Dayton, 1911–1913
 Gus Happel, Councilman, Dayton, 1911–1913
 Henry Wentz, Councilman, Fostoria, 1911–1913
 Fred A. Keer, Councilman, Hamilton, 1911–1913
 Joseph B. Meyers, Councilman, Hamilton, 1911–1913
 Joseph Smith, Councilman, Hamilton, 1911–1913
 Robert T. Haworth, Councilman, Toledo, 1911–1912
 Walter Starner, Councilman, Toledo, 1911–1913
 Thomas Devine, Councilman, Toledo, 1917–1919
 Bruce T. Smith, Councilman, Toledo, 1917–1919
 J. Flinchbaugh, Councilman, Lima, 1911–1913
 W. S. Shook, Councilman, Lima, 1911–1913
 Joseph Hazard, Councilman, Lorain, 1911–1913
 Frank Kremenowski, Councilman, Lorain, 1911–1913
 John Mulen, Councilman, Martin’s Ferry, 1911–1915
 Claude Peoples, Councilman, Martin’s Ferry, 1911–1915
 Charles Whittington, Councilman, Mount Vernon, 1913–1915
 Herman Hoppe, Councilman, Mansfield, 1914–1916
 Robert W. Earlywine, Councilman, Ashtabula, 1915–1917
 F. G. Dean, Councilman, Adamsville, 1917–1919
 John Glass, Councilman, Byesville, 1917–1919
 L. H. Hickle, Councilman, Byesville, 1917–1919
 George Milton, Councilman, Byesville, 1917–1919
 William Minto, Councilman, Byesville, 1917–1919
 Noah Mandelkorn, Alderman, Cleveland, 1917–1919***
 John G. Willert, Alderman, Cleveland, 1917–1919***
 Oliver Arras, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921
 Ollie Bormuth, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921
 Ed Grossman, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921
 Am Traught, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921
 Carl Winkler, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921

Otto Winkler, Councilman, Jenera, 1917–1921
 Fred Beck, Councilman, Montpelier, 1917–1919
 Warren Thorne, Councilman, Montpelier, 1917–1919
 S. H. Kenyon, Councilman, Piqua, 1917–1919
 L. H. Neff, Councilman, Piqua, 1917–1919
 William Hunter, Councilman, Brink Haven, 1918–1920
 Frank Talley, Councilman, Burbank, 1918–1920
 J. Steiner, Councilman, Deer Park, 1918–1920
 Fred Weldon, Councilman, Deer Park, 1918–1920
 Gar Armacost, Councilman, Hollansburg, 1918–1920
 C. H. Brown, Councilman, Hollansburg, 1918–1920
 O. F. Beikman, Councilman, New Knoxville, 1918–1920
 W. J. Hinzie, Councilman, New Knoxville, 1918–1920
 Harry Kuck, Councilman, New Knoxville, 1918–1920
 Herman Sundermann, Councilman, New Knoxville, 1918–1920
 John Ruby, Councilman, North Bend, 1918–1920
 Charles Coy, Councilman, Osnaburg, 1918–1920
 John Dugan, Councilman, Patterson, 1918–1920

*Expelled by his Socialist Party local after demanding a recount in his election and prevailing

**Reelected as an independent in 1913

***Expelled by the Board of Aldermen in March 1918

Oklahoma

George E. Wilson, State Senator (Mayes, Rogers, and Delaware Counties), 1915–1919
 Thomas McElmore, State Representative (Beckham County), 1915–1917
 David Kirkpatrick, State Representative (Dewey County), 1915–1917
 N. D. Pritchett, State Representative (Kiowa County), 1915–1917
 Charles H. Ingham, State Representative (Major County), 1915–1917
 Sidney W. Hill, State Representative (Roger Mills County), 1915–1917
 John Ingram, Mayor, Coalgate, 1904–1905
 Tom Johnson, Mayor, Antlers, 1911–1913

J. A. Nixon, Mayor, Krebs, 1915–1917
S. Rogers, Commissioner, Dewey County, 1915–1917
D. T. White, Commissioner, Dewey County, 1915–1917
J. L. Porter, Commissioner, Major County, 1915–1917
W. L. Laird, Commissioner, Marshall County, 1915–1917
J. W. Price, Commissioner, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
J. R. Robins, Commissioner, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
N. C. Rowley, Commissioner, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
Mark Reader, Sheriff, McLain County, 1915–1917
A. A. Hill, Treasurer, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
William Hamnawalt, Assessor, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
J. W. Miller, Judge, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
F. M. Ogle, Weigher, Roger Mills County, 1915–1917
C. R. Moncrief, Councilman, Krebs, 1913–1915
W. T. Williams, Councilman, Krebs, 1913–1915
R. H. Shelton, Alderman, Durant, 1914–1916

Oregon

J. E. Quick, Mayor, Coquille, 1911–1913
George H. Millar, Mayor, Medford, 1912–1914
A. W. Vincent, Mayor, St. John, 1914–1916
George P. Jester, Treasurer, Grants Pass, 1912–1914
George H. Millar, Councilman, Medford, 1909–1912
G. L. Perrine, Councilman, St. John, 1911–1913
G. M. Caldwell, Councilman, Grants Pass, 1912–1914
W. E. Everton, Councilman, Grants Pass, 1912–1914

Pennsylvania

James Maurer (1864–1944), State Representative (Reading), 1911–1913,
1915–1919
Darlington Hoopes (1896–1989), State Representative (Reading),
1931–1937
Lilith Martin Wilson (1886–1937), State Representative (Reading),
1931–1937

Samuel Lee, Mayor, South Connellsville, 1911–1915
 Walter Tyler, Mayor, New Castle, 1912–1916
 Robert Reed, Mayor, Turtle Creek, 1913–1915
 James A. Crump, Mayor, Pitcairn, 1916–1920
 A. F. Young, Mayor, Union City, 1918–1920
 J. Henry Stump (1880–1949), Mayor, Reading, 1928–1932, 1936–1940,
 1944–1948
 George K. Harris, County Commissioner, Lycoming (Williamsport),
 1916–1920
 Amos Leshner, County Commissioner, Berks (Reading), 1936–1940
 H. A. Bierer, Constable, West Brownsville, 1912–1914
 Albert Kunze, Controller, McKeesport, 1918–1922
 Walter Hollinger, Controller, Reading, 1928–1932, 1936–1940
 William C. Hoverter, Treasurer, Reading, 1936–1940
 John H. Lewis, Councilman, Reading, 1910–1912
 Milton Bortz, Councilman, Reading, 1912–1920
 Walter S. Frees, Councilman, Reading, 1912–1916
 William B. Helder, Councilman, Reading, 1912–1916
 Charles R. Shirk, Councilman, Reading, 1912–1914
 Elias Wagner, Councilman, Reading, 1912–1914
 James Maurer (1864–1944), Councilman, Reading, 1928–1932
 George Snyder (1868–1958), Councilman, Reading, 1928–1934
 Jesse E. George, Councilman, Reading, 1930–1932
 William C. Hoverter, Councilman, Reading, 1930–1934
 Howard McDonough, Councilman, Reading, 1936–1940
 Charles F. Sands, Councilman, Reading, 1936–1938
 Stewart Tomlinson, Councilman, Reading, 1936–1940
 R. C. Hartman, Councilman, South Connellsville, 1911–1915
 J. Tressler, Councilman, South Connellsville, 1911–1915
 Lewis Knabe, Councilman, Turtle Creek, 1911–1915
 Alfred A. McMullen, Councilman, Turtle Creek, 1911–1915
 Charles Allen, Councilman, Turtle Creek, 1913–1915
 Samuel Ferguson, Councilman, Turtle Creek, 1913–1915
 Singleton Neisser, Councilman, McKeesport, 1914–1916

L. J. Wallace, Councilman, Pitcairn, 1912–1920
R. H. Norman, Councilman, West Brownsville, 1912–1916
George K. Harris, Councilman, Williamsport, 1912–1916
Robert J. Wheeler, Councilman, Allentown, 1914–1916, 1918–1922
Frank Rooney, Councilman, Altoona, 1914–1916

Rhode Island

Joseph M. Coldwell (1869–1949), State Representative (Providence),
1912–1914

South Dakota

Robert Haire (1845–1916), Mayor, Sisseton, 1913–1915
J. A. Rakestraw, Alderman, Deadwood, 1911–1915

Texas

A. S. Bradford, Supervisor, Stonewall County, 1910–1912
S. D. Clark, Supervisor, Stonewall County, 1910–1911

Utah

J. Alex Bevan, State Representative (Tooele County), 1915–1919
Anton Christenson, Mayor, Bingham, 1906–1908
Daniel T. Leigh, Mayor, Cedar City, 1906–1907
George Urie, Mayor, Cedar City, 1911–1913
Andrew Mitchell, Mayor, Eureka, 1908–1913
Major Church, Mayor, Eureka, 1917–1921
N. J. Harrison, Mayor, Mammoth, 1911–1913
Gus Anderson, Mayor, Stockton, 1912–1914
George Huscher (1865–1944), Mayor, Murray, 1912–1915
Alfred Neilson, Treasurer, Mammoth, 1911–1913
Al Larson, Recorder, Mammoth, 1911–1913
Theresa Viertal, Treasurer, Eureka, 1917–1925
Gus Gabrielson, Trustee, Bingham, 1906–1908, 1912–1914
John G. Hocking, Trustee, Bingham, 1906–1908
Ely Mitchell, Trustee, Bingham, 1906–1908

R. R. Green, Trustee, Bingham, 1912–1914
Gottlieb Berger, Commissioner, Murray, 1911–1932
Henry W. Lawrence, Commissioner, Salt Lake City, 1912–1916
August Erickson, Councilman, Salina, 1902–1906
Wilford W. Freckleton, Councilman, Eurkea, 1907–1911, 1917–1921
O. H. Coleman, Councilman, Mammoth, 1911–1912

Vermont

James Lawson, State Representative (Barre), 1917–1919
Robert Gordon (1865–1921), Mayor, Barre, 1917–1919
Fred Suitor (1879–1934), Mayor, Barre, 1929–1931
Ernest Barber, City Attorney, Bennington, 1911–1915

Virginia

B. F. Ginther, Mayor, Brookneal, 1916–1918

Washington

Peter Jensen, State Senator (Tacoma), 1911–1913*
William H. Kingery, State Representative (Mason County), 1913–1915
Allen M. Yost (d. 1915) Mayor, Edmonds, 1903–1905
Hale E. Dewey, Mayor, Edmonds, 1911–1912
Jacob Guntert, Mayor, Tukwila, 1912–1913
Neal Munro, Mayor, Burlington, 1913–1915
Jared Herdlick, Mayor, Hilyard, 1913–1914**
D. L. Clay, Mayor, Bremerton, 1914–1916
Andrew M. Johnson, Mayor, Pasco, 1914
W. E. Farr, Mayor, Camas, 1918–1920
R. B. McFarland, Treasurer, Pasco, 1914–1916
David Coates, Commissioner, Spokane, 1911–1915
James M. Salter, Commissioner, Everett, 1914–1915
E. J. Carlson, Councilman, Edmonds, 1911–1912
O. C. Garrett, Councilman, Edmonds, 1911–1912
E. B. Hubbard, Councilman, Edmonds, 1911–1912
W. H. Schumacher, Councilman, Edmonds, 1911–1912

Guilford W. Carr, Councilman, Everett, 1911–1912
F. A. Miller, Councilman, Everett, 1911–1912
Hans J. Solie, Councilman, Everett, 1911–1912
Gust Dober, Alderman, Anacortes, 1912–1914
D. O'Brien, Councilman, Port Angeles, 1912–1914
J. R. Gilliland, Councilman, Tukwila, 1912–1913
Eugene Lutz, Councilman, Tukwila, 1912–1913
Eugene Sandahl, Councilman, Tukwila, 1912–1913
Walter L. Massey, Councilman, Bellingham, 1913–1915
C. H. Shepardson, Councilman, Bellingham, 1913–1915
J. J. Kost, Councilman, Bremerton, 1914–1916
Steve Adams, Councilman, Pasco, 1914–1916
Andrew Greame, Councilman, Pasco, 1914–1916
S. N. Kenoyer, Councilman, Pasco, 1914–1916
C. W. Leasure, Councilman, Pasco, 1914–1916
Emma Blackburn, Councilman, Woodland, 1914–1915
Anton Pista, Councilman, Aberdeen, 1915–1917

*Elected as a Democrat before defecting to the Socialist Party

**Removed from office after a nervous breakdown

West Virginia

William Shay, Mayor, Star City, 1911–1917
Henry M. Schutte, Mayor, Adamston, 1912–1916
J. W. Shepherd, Mayor, Ridgeley, 1912–1919
J. C. Chase, Mayor, Ridgeley, 1919–1921
R. S. Dayton, Mayor, Hendricks, 1913–1915
Matthew Holt (1851–1937?), Mayor, Weston, 1913–1915, 1933–1935
H. A. Higgins, Recorder, Star City, 1911–1912
James Russell, Recorder, Star City, 1912–1916
John Bezner, Councilman, Star City, 1911–1916
J. W. Kennedy, Councilman, Star City, 1911–1913
Frank McShaffery, Councilman, Star City, 1911–1913
G. B. Stansberry, Councilman, Star City, 1911–1912, 1913–1916
Harry Jones, Councilman, Star City, 1912–1913

Benjamin Harris, Councilman, Star City, 1913–1916

William Kramer, Councilman, Star City, 1913–1916

R. C. Maurer, Councilman, Star City, 1913–1916

Wisconsin

Victor Berger (1860–1929), U.S. Representative (Milwaukee—North Side), 1911–1913, 1919–1921*, 1923–1929

Jacob Rummel, State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1905–1909

Winfield Gaylord (1870–1943), State Senator (Milwaukee—South Side), 1909–1913

Gabriel Zophy (1869–1947), State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1911–1915

Louis A. Arnold, State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1915–1923

Rudolf Beyer, State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1917–1925

Frank Raguse, State Senator (Milwaukee—South Side), 1917–1919**

William C. Zumach (1887–1921), State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1917–1921

Henry Kleist (1860–1929), State Senator (Manitowoc), 1919–1923

Joshua Joseph Hirsch, State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1921–1925

Walter Polakowski, State Senator (Milwaukee—South Side), 1923–1935

William Quick (1885–1966), State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1923–1927

Joseph Padway (1891–1947), State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1925–1926

Alex C. Ruffing, State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1926–1929

Thomas M. Duncan (1893–1959), State Senator (Milwaukee—North Side), 1929–1933

William Aldridge, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side), 1905–1909

Edmund J. Berner, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side), 1905–1913

Fred Brockhausen, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1905–1911

August Strehlow, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1905–1907

Carl D. Thompson (1870–1949), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—
North Side), 1907–1909

Frank J. Weber (1849–1943), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South
Side), 1907–1913, 1915–1917, 1923–1927

Max Binner, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1911–1913

William J. Gilboy, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1911–1913

Jacob Hahn, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1911–1913

Arthur Kahn, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1911–1913

Michael Katzban (1878–1962), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1911–1913

Edward H. Kiefer (1874–1951), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South
Side), 1911–1915, 1931–1937

Geroge E. Klenzendorff, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1911–1913

Frank Metcalfe, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side), 1911–
1913, 1915–1921

Martin Gorecki (1871–1928), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South
Side), 1913–1915

Carl Minkley (1866–1937), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1913–1917

William L. Smith, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1913–1919

James Vint, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side), 1913–1917

Edward H. Zinn (1877–1920), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1913–1917

Herman Kent, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1915–1919

William E. Jordan, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1917–1923

Henry Ohl (1873–1940), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1917–1919

G. H. Poor, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1917–1919

G. P. Turner, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1917–1919

Herman Marth (1880–1970), State Assemblyman (Marathon),
1918–1921

Frank X. Bauer, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1919–1921

Charles Burhop, State Assemblyman (Sheboygan), 1919–1921

Albert C. Ehlman, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1919–1921

Julius Kiesner, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1919–1929

Joseph Klein, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1919–1921

Edwin Knappe, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1919–1921

Otto Lerche, State Assemblyman (Calumet), 1919–1921

John Masiakowski, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1919–1921

Herman Roethel (1882–1956), State Assemblyman (Manitowoc),
1919–1921

Alex C. Ruffing, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1919–1926

John M. Sell, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1919–1921

Henry Sievers, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1919–1921

Charles Zarnke (1868–1931), State Assemblyman (Marathon),
1919–1921

Fred Hasley, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1921–1923

Walter Polakowski, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1921–1923

Steven Stolowski, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1921–1923

Thomas M. Duncan (1893–1959), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—
North Side), 1923–1929

Richard Elsner (1859–1938), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1923–1925

George Gauer (1892–1992), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1923–1925, 1927–1929

Olaf C. Olsen, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1923–1927

John Polakowski, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1923–1925

Herman G. Tucker (1879–1936), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—
South Side), 1923–1925

Albert F. Woller, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side), 1923–
1925, 1927–1931

Frank Cieszynski, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1925–1927

William Coleman, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1925–1929

Elmer H. Baumann, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1927–1929

George Nelson (1873–1962), State Assemblyman (Polk County),
1927–1929

Philip Wenz, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1927–1933

Otto Kehrein (1873–1948), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North
Side), 1929–1933

John Ermenc, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1931–1933

George Hampel (1885–1954), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South
Side), 1931–1933

Emil Meyer, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1931–1933

Marshall H. Reckard (1901–1957), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—
North Side), 1931–1933

Ben Rubin (1886–1942), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—South Side),
1931–1933

Arthur Koegel, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1933–1937

Herman B. Wegner, State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—North Side),
1933–1937

Andrew Biemiller (1906–1982), State Assemblyman (Milwaukee—
North Side), 1937–1943***

Henry Stolze Jr. (1859–1925), Mayor, Manitowoc, 1905–1907, 1911–1917

Martin Georgenson (1875–1965?), Mayor, Manitowoc, 1921–1927, 1929–
1935, 1938–1947

Emil Seidel (1864–1947), Mayor, Milwaukee, 1910–1912

Daniel Hoan (1881–1961), Mayor, Milwaukee, 1916–1940

Frank Zeidler (1912–2006), Mayor, Milwaukee, 1948–1960

James Larson, Mayor, Marinette, 1911–1913

David Love, Mayor, West Allis, 1916–1920****

Marvin Baxter, Mayor, West Allis, 1932–1936

Rae Weaver, Mayor, Beaver Dam, 1928–1932

R. I. Anderson, Mayor, Iola, 1928–1932

William J. Swoboda (1897–1964), Mayor, Racine, 1931–1937*****

Daniel Hoan (1881–1961), City Attorney, Milwaukee, 1910–1916

Max Raskin, City Attorney, Milwaukee, 1932–1936

Charles V. Schmidt, Treasurer, Milwaukee, 1910–1914

William Arnold, Sherriff, Milwaukee County, 1910–1914

Edmund T. Melms (1874–1933), Sherriff, Milwaukee County,
1914–1918

Bob Buech, Sherriff, Milwaukee County, 1918–1922
 Frank Boness, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1912
 A. E. Gumz, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1912
 Otto Harbicht, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1928
 Frederic Heath (1864–1954), Supervisor, Milwaukee County,
 1910–1948
 Martin Mies, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1912
 George Moerschell, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1928
 Emil Ruhnke, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1912
 Arthur Urbanek, Supervisor, Milwaukee County, 1910–1912
 Joseph Verchotta, Supervisor, La Crosse County, 1911–1919
 William Aldridge, Alderman–at–large, Milwaukee, 1911–1914
 Benjamin P. Churchill, Alderman–at–large, Milwaukee, 1911–1914
 Joseph Sultaire, Alderman–at–large, Milwaukee, 1911–1914
 Albert J. Welch, Alderman–at–large, Milwaukee, 1911–1914
 Emil Seidel (1864–1947), Alderman, Milwaukee, 1904–1908, 1916–1920,
 1932–1936
 Edmund T. Melms (1874–1933), Alderman, Milwaukee, 1904–1912
 Frederic Heath (1864–1954), Alderman, Milwaukee, 1905–1907,
 1909–1910
 John Hassman, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1908–1913
 A. F. Giese, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1908–1913
 Max Grass, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1908–1913
 Henry Ries, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1908–1913
 Victor Berger (1860–1929), Alderman, Milwaukee, 1910
 Leo Krzycki (1882–1966), Alderman, Milwaukee, 1910–1916
 Carl Minkley, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1910–1911
 William Coleman, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
 Martin Gorecki, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
 William Koch, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1915
 Martin Mikkelson, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
 G. H. Poor, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
 Frederick W. Rehfeld, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
 John L. Reisse, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913

Jacob Rummel, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
Charles A. Wiley, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1911–1913
Casimir Kowalski, Alderman, Milwaukee, 1918–1922
William J. Kosterman, Alderman, Racine, 1907–1909
N. P. Nielson, Alderman, Racine, 1911–1915
John Meyer, Alderman, Sheboygan, 1911–1913
Alexander Le Fleur, Alderman, Two Rivers, 1912–1913*****
Thomas Wight, Alderman, Rhinelander, 1916–1920
J. Boloun, Councilman, West Allis, 1916–1920
Vern Rogers, Councilman, West Allis, 1916–1920

*Denied his seat in Congress

**Expelled from the State Senate

***Reelected as a Progressive in 1938 and 1940

****Resigned from the Socialist Party as a supporter of U.S. entry into the First World War

*****Expelled by his Socialist Party local after being charged with organized crime connections

*****Unanimously impeached by the Board of Aldermen for moral turpitude

APPENDIX C

Presidential Vote Totals

All election returns and statistics appearing in this Appendix and throughout this book are taken from Dave Leip's "Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections" (<http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS>) and from supplementary statistics compiled by Richard Winger of San Francisco. Where the national total for a given year differs from that given by Leip, it is due to the addition of write-in votes tabulated and compiled by Richard Winger.

Votes for the Socialist Party still had to be cast on privately printed ballots in North Carolina through 1928 and in South Carolina through 1948. Where either state appears as "not on the ballot" corresponding to those dates, it means that no privately printed ballots were cast.

An asterisk beside a state listed as "not on the ballot" indicates that write-in votes were recorded in that state.

1900—88,011 (0.63%)

For President: Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, IN (1855–1926)

For Vice President: Job Harriman of Los Angeles, CA (1861–1925)

Also in Contention—For President: Job Harriman of Los Angeles, CA. For Vice President: Max Hayes of Cleveland, OH.

Top Five States

California—2.50%

Massachusetts—2.34%

Washington—1.87%

Oregon—1.77%

Wisconsin—1.59%

Top Percentile of Counties

De Soto County, Florida—12.53%
Plymouth County, Massachusetts—11.44%
Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—8.38%
Whatcom County, Washington—8.00%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—7.71%
Polk County, Florida—6.96%
Lassen County, California—6.77%
Essex County, Massachusetts—5.74%
Crenshaw County, Alabama—5.72%
Dale County, Alabama—5.71%
Monroe County, Iowa—5.22%
Clark County, Washington—5.10%
Island County, Washington—5.00%
Somerset County, Maine—4.80%
Scott County, Iowa—4.80%
Lincoln County, Oregon—4.57%
Chelan County, Washington—4.45%
Skagit County, Washington—4.38%
Wahkiakum County, Washington—4.37%
Logan County, Kansas—4.36%
San Diego County, California—4.18%

Not on the ballot in Arkansas*, Georgia, Idaho, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont*, Wyoming

1904—402,810 (2.98%)

For President: Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, IN (1855–1926)
For Vice President: Ben Hanford of Brooklyn, NY (1861–1910)

Top Five States

California—8.90%
Montana—8.81%

Oregon—8.45%
Nevada—7.64%
Washington—6.91%

Top Percentile of Counties

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—26.10%
Lee County, Florida—24.75%
Esmeralda County, Nevada—23.45%
Lake County, Minnesota—22.60%
Piute County, Utah—21.23%
Rains County, Texas—20.73%
Crawford County, Kansas—19.48%
Rock Island County, Illinois—19.45%
San Diego County, California—19.02%
Skamania County, Washington—16.13%
Carbon County, Montana—16.10%
Shasta County, California—15.81%
Park County, Montana—15.47%
St. Johns County, Florida—15.27%
Silver Bow County, Montana—14.74%
Racine County, Wisconsin—14.56%
Cherokee County, Kansas—14.51%
Manatee County, Florida—14.50%
Kitsap County, Washington—14.31%
Dallam County, Texas—14.22%
Douglas County, Nebraska—14.18%
Hillsborough County, Florida—14.00%
Josephine County, Oregon—13.82%
Ravalli County, Montana—13.42%
Shoshone County, Idaho—13.39%
Jefferson County, Montana—13.26%
Riverside County, California—13.19%
Lincoln County, Oregon—13.19%

1908—420,852 (2.83%)

For President: Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, IN (1855–1926)

For Vice President: Ben Hanford of Brooklyn, NY (1861–1910)

Also in Contention—For President: James F. Carey of Haverhill, MA,

Algie M. Simons of Chicago, IL, and Carl D. Thompson of Milwaukee,

WI. For Vice President: Seymour Stedman of Chicago, IL.

Top Five States

Nevada—8.57%

Oklahoma—8.52%

Washington—7.71%

Florida—7.59%

California—7.41%

Top Percentile of Counties

Lake County, Minnesota—31.75%

Johnston County, Oklahoma—24.39%

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—23.90%

Coal County, Oklahoma—23.80%

Marshall County, Oklahoma—23.40%

Winn Parish, Louisiana—23.25%

Vernon Parish, Louisiana—21.14%

Suwanee County, Florida—20.89%

Monroe County, Florida—20.50%

Lee County, Florida—20.45%

Roseau County, Minnesota—20.42%

Stephens County, Oklahoma—20.31%

Lawrence County, South Dakota—19.27%

West Carroll Parish, Louisiana—18.70%

Seminole County, Oklahoma—18.36%

Wayne County, Utah—17.27%

Pontotoc County, Oklahoma—17.22%

Major County, Oklahoma—16.99%

Love County, Oklahoma—16.96%

Roger Mills County, Oklahoma—16.93%
Piute County, Utah—16.67%
Scurry County, Texas—16.63%
Mahnommen County, Minnesota—16.40%
Scott County, Missouri—16.28%
Van Zandt County, Texas—16.21%
Okfuskee County, Oklahoma—16.08%

In territorial elections for U.S. House Delegate in 1908, the Socialist Party received 31.84% of the vote in Northwest Alaska, 25.47% of the vote in Southcentral Alaska, and 17.42% of the vote in Gila County, Arizona. Not on the ballot in Vermont.

1912—901,551 (5.99%)

For President: Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, IN (1855–1926)
For Vice President: Emil Seidel of Milwaukee, WI (1864–1947)
Also in Contention—For President: Charles Edward Russell of New York, NY and Emil Seidel of Milwaukee, WI. For Vice President: Dan Hogan of Huntington, AR and John W. Slayton of New Castle, PA.

Top Five States

Nevada—16.47%
Oklahoma—16.42%
Montana—13.64%
Arizona—13.33%
Washington—12.43%

Top Percentile of Counties

Lake County, Minnesota—37.44%*
Crawford County, Kansas—35.28%
Winn Parish, Louisiana—35.13%
Marshall County, Oklahoma—34.64%
Vernon Parish, Louisiana—34.12%
McCurtain County, Oklahoma—31.55%
West Carroll Parish, Louisiana—30.92%

Jefferson County, Oklahoma—30.81%
Okfuskee County, Oklahoma—30.80%
Rains County, Texas—30.60%
Nye County, Nevada—30.44%
Beltrami County, Minnesota—30.15%
Love County, Oklahoma—29.80%
Murray County, Oklahoma—29.40%
Van Zandt County, Texas—29.28%
Grant Parish, Louisiana—29.05%
Johnston County, Oklahoma—28.75%
Burke County, North Dakota—28.57%
Pushmataha County, Oklahoma—28.17%
Beckham County, Oklahoma—28.08%
Seminole County, Oklahoma—28.00%
Silver Bow County, Montana—27.91%
Stephens County, Oklahoma—27.60%
La Salle Parish, Louisiana—27.36%
Somervell County, Texas—27.30%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—27.10%
Garvin County, Oklahoma—26.84%
Pontotoc County, Oklahoma—26.80%
Cherokee County, Kansas—26.70%

*Excluding the election of 1924, Lake County, Minnesota, in 1912 was the only instance in the entire history of the Socialist Party that it won a plurality of votes in a county.

1916—590,524 (3.19%)

For President: Allan L. Benson of Yonkers, NY (1871–1940)

For Vice President: George Kirkpatrick of Ripon, WI (1867–1937)

Also in Contention—For President: Arthur Le Sueur of Minot, ND
and James Maurer of Reading, PA. For Vice President: Kate Richards
O’Hare of Kansas City, MO.

Top Five States

Oklahoma—15.55%
Nevada—9.20%
Florida—6.63%
Wisconsin—6.18%
Idaho—5.99%

Top Percentile of Counties

Rains County, Texas—33.26%
Dewey County, Oklahoma—32.86%
Seminole County, Oklahoma—28.37%
Lake County, Minnesota—27.88%
Beckham County, Oklahoma—27.13%
Major County, Oklahoma—26.70%
Stephens County, Oklahoma—26.59%
Marshall County, Oklahoma—25.41%
Roger Mills County, Oklahoma—24.99%
Kiowa County, Oklahoma—24.89%
Ellis County, Oklahoma—22.90%
Haskell County, Texas—22.15%
Garvin County, Oklahoma—22.15%
Van Zandt County, Texas—22.11%
Somervell County, Oklahoma—21.99%
Pontotoc County, Oklahoma—21.81%
Jefferson County, Oklahoma—21.67%
Harper County, Oklahoma—21.61%
Jackson County, Oklahoma—21.30%
Johnston County, Oklahoma—21.20%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—21.18%
Woodward County, Oklahoma—21.07%
Pushmataha County, Oklahoma—20.81%
Blaine County, Oklahoma—20.72%
Love County, Oklahoma—20.66%

Okfuskee County, Oklahoma—20.41%
Minidoka County, Idaho—20.31%
Coal County, Oklahoma—20.02%
McCurtain County, Oklahoma—20.01%
Roseau County, Minnesota—19.14%

1920—913,917 (3.41%)

For President: Eugene V. Debs of Terre Haute, IN (1855–1926)
For Vice President: Seymour Stedman of Chicago, IL (1871–1948)
Also in Contention—For Vice President: Kate Richards O’Hare of
Kansas City, MO.

Top Five States

Wisconsin—11.50%
Minnesota—7.62%
New York—7.01%
Nevada—6.85%
California—6.79%

Top Percentile of Counties

Lake County, Minnesota—32.10%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—30.13%
Manitowoc County, Wisconsin—22.95%
Reagan County, Texas—22.45%
Marathon County, Wisconsin—21.38%
Roseau County, Minnesota—20.00%
Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—19.61%
Flagler County, Florida—19.51%
Shawano County, Wisconsin—18.89%
Dewey County, Oklahoma—18.60%
Taylor County, Wisconsin—18.39%
Beltrami County, Minnesota—18.09%
Bronx County, New York—17.78%

Wood County, Wisconsin—17.12%
Roger Mills County, Oklahoma—16.79%
Pennington County, Minnesota—16.70%
Koochiching County, Minnesota—16.62%
Scott County, Iowa—15.88%
Major County, Oklahoma—15.49%
Schenectady County, New York—15.10%
Churchill County, Nevada—14.67%
Carleton County, Minnesota—14.38%
Mille Lacs County, Minnesota—14.18%
Wahkiakum County, Washington—14.10%
Marion County, Arkansas—14.03%
Wheeler County, Nebraska—13.89%
Hennepin County, Minnesota—13.87%
Crow Wing County, Minnesota—13.62%

Not on the ballot in Arizona*, Georgia, Idaho*, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico*, South Dakota, and Vermont.

1924—4,831,706 (16.61%) (Endorsed the Progressive Party Nominees)

For President: Robert M. LaFollette of Primrose, WI (1855–1925)

For Vice President: Burton K. Wheeler of Butte, MT (1882–1975)

*States Listed on Socialist Party Ballot Line**

California—33.13%
New York—8.23% (14.45%)
Pennsylvania—4.35% (14.34%)
Missouri—4.34% (6.43%)
West Virginia—2.56% (6.29%)
Connecticut—2.45% (10.60%)
Oklahoma—0.99% (7.79%)
Montana—0.14% (37.91%)

*California Counties Carried for the LaFollette-Wheeler Ticket
on the Socialist Ballot Line*

El Dorado County—58.48%
Plumas County—55.81%
Placer County—54.98%
Sacramento County—50.80%
Sierra County—49.37%
Siskiyou County—47.36%
Nevada County—46.94%
Trinity County—44.95%
Tuolumne County—44.37%
Lassen County—44.28%
Butte County—44.18%
Calaveras County—44.10%
Shasta County—44.06%
Amador County—42.61%
Madera County—42.55%

Top Ten Counties Outside California on the Socialist Ballot Line

Monroe County, New York—16.63%
Erie County, New York—15.01%
Bronx County, New York—14.85%
Schenectady County, New York—11.67%
Berks County, Pennsylvania—11.62%
St. Louis City, Missouri—10.98%
Westchester County, New York—10.43%
Chautauqua County, New York—9.24%
Cattaraugus County, New York—8.73%
Niagara County, New York—8.59%

*Figures outside parentheses are for the total cast on the Socialist ballot line; figures in parentheses are the total votes of their respective states. California was the only state where LaFollette and Wheeler appeared only on the Socialist ballot line and was one of the twelve states where they came in second.

1928—267,478 (0.73%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: James Maurer of Reading, PA (1864–1944)

Also in contention—For President: Freda Hogan of Oklahoma City,
OK, Cameron King of San Francisco, CA, James Maurer of Read-
ing, PA, and Joseph W. Sharts of Dayton, OH.

Top Five States

New York—2.44%

Wisconsin—1.79%

Florida—1.59%

California—1.09%

Wyoming—0.95%

Top Percentile of Counties

Alachua County, Florida—32.15%*

Berks County, Pennsylvania—10.04%

Hamilton County, Florida—7.36%

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—6.32%

Mineral County, Colorado—5.43%

Livingston County, New York—5.36%

Sanders County, Montana—5.11%

Orleans County, New York—4.62%

Niagara County, New York—4.41%

Steuben County, New York—4.26%

Roseau County, Minnesota—4.15%

Suffolk County, New York—4.09%

Genesee County, New York—3.91%

Kings County, New York—3.90%

Trinity County, California—3.82%

Roger Mills County, Oklahoma—3.72%

Erie County, New York—3.68%

Norman County, Minnesota—3.64%

Platte County, Wyoming—3.62%
Schoharie County, New York—3.60%
Ontario County, New York—3.52%
Cherokee County, Kansas—3.33%
Orange County, New York—3.16%
Allegany County, New York—3.09%
Dolores County, Colorado—3.04%
New York County, New York—3.02%
Beltrami County, Minnesota—2.99%
Lake of The Woods County, Minnesota—2.98%

Not on the ballot in Arizona, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

*In Florida in 1928, neither party labels nor candidate's names appeared on the ballot—only the names of the presidential electors. In Alachua County, a printer's error placed the Socialist electors second on the ballot, where the Republican electors normally appeared. Florida was among the southern states that voted Republican for the first time since the Civil War as part of the anti-Catholic backlash against Democrat Al Smith, and thus an inordinate number of intended Republican votes went to both the Socialist and Communist parties in Alachua County.

1932—884,885 (2.23%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: James Maurer of Reading, PA (1864–1944)

Top Five States

Wisconsin—4.79%
Oregon—4.19%
New York—3.78%
Montana—3.65%
Connecticut—3.45%

Top Percentile of Counties

Berks County, Pennsylvania—21.90%
Lake County, Minnesota—19.40%

Mineral County, Colorado—14.50%
McCone County, Montana—13.41%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—12.69%
Mineral County, Montana—12.25%
Lake of The Woods County, Minnesota—11.18%
Lane County, Oregon—10.25%
Taylor County, Wisconsin—9.86%
Bowman County, Montana—9.79%
Sanders County, Montana—9.56%
Flathead County, Montana—8.53%
Phillips County, Montana—8.39%
Kenosha County, Wisconsin—8.29%
Bronx County, New York—8.28%
Platte County, Wyoming—8.16%
Teller County, Colorado—7.95%
Curry County, New Mexico—7.89%
Kalkaska County, Michigan—7.48%
Baca County, Colorado—7.37%
Carleton County, Minnesota—7.32%
Deschutes County, Oregon—7.18%
Delta County, Colorado—7.13%
Hardin County, Iowa—7.11%
Navajo County, Arizona—7.09%
Lebanon County, Pennsylvania—7.07%
Josephine County, Oregon—7.06%
Kings County, New York—6.90%

Not on the ballot in Florida*, Idaho*, Louisiana, Nevada, and Oklahoma.

1936—188,072 (0.41%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: George Nelson of Milltown, WI (1873–1962)

Also in contention—For President: Jasper McLevy of Bridgeport, CT

Top Five States

New York—1.55%

Wisconsin—0.84%

Connecticut—0.82%

Oregon—0.52%

Washington—0.50%

Top Percentile of Counties

Polk County, Wisconsin—3.25%

Niagara County, New York—3.20%

Berks County, Pennsylvania—3.05%

Rensselaer County, New York—2.95%

Genesee County, New York—2.90%

Livingston County, New York—2.65%

Orleans County, New York—2.65%

Schoharie County, New York—2.63%

Suffolk County, New York—2.60%

Cayuga County, New York—2.48%

Schenectady County, New York—2.29%

Albany County, New York—2.22%

Ontario County, New York—2.21%

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—2.19%

Chautauqua County, New York—2.05%

Fentress County, Tennessee—2.04%

Wayne County, New York—2.02%

Fairfield County, Connecticut—2.02%

Orange County, New York—2.01%

Steuben County, New York—2.01%

Fulton County, New York—1.97%

Allegany County, New York—1.92%

Nassau County, New York—1.91%

Sherman County, Kansas—1.88%

Not on the ballot in Florida*, Idaho, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina*, Ohio*, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Vermont.

1940—117,326 (0.23%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: Maynard Krueger of Chicago, IL (1906–1991)

Top Five States

Wisconsin—1.07%

Maryland—0.62%

Washington—0.58%

Montana—0.58%

California—0.50%

Top Percentile of Counties

Taylor County, Wisconsin—2.58%

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—2.55%

Boundary County, Idaho—2.49%

McLean County, North Dakota—2.40%

Burke County, North Dakota—2.36%

Lincoln County, Wisconsin—1.92%

Renville County, North Dakota—1.88%

Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—1.80%

Polk County, Wisconsin—1.79%

Williams County, North Dakota—1.68%

Berks County, Pennsylvania—1.66%

Ozaukee County, Wisconsin—1.58%

Phillips County, Colorado—1.58%

Sanders County, Montana—1.54%

Marathon County, Wisconsin—1.46%

Mussellshell County, Montana—1.42%

Eddy County, North Dakota—1.36%
Montgomery County, Maryland—1.35%
Ramsey County, Minnesota—1.32%
Washington County, Wisconsin—1.32%
Buffalo County, Wisconsin—1.32%

Not on the ballot in Arizona, Connecticut, Florida*, Georgia*, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio*, Oklahoma, Oregon*, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and West Virginia.

1944—81,738 (0.16%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: Darlington Hoopes of Reading, PA (1896–1989)

Also in Contention—For Vice President: A. Philip Randolph of New
York, NY.

Top Five States

Wisconsin—0.99%
Oregon—0.79%
Montana—0.63%
Connecticut—0.61%
Minnesota—0.45%

Top Percentile of Counties

Grant County, Oregon—5.49%
Taylor County, Wisconsin—3.20%
Berks County, Pennsylvania—2.66%
McLean County, North Dakota—2.46%
Burke County, North Dakota—2.05%
McCone County, Montana—2.04%
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—2.00%
Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—1.89%
Boundary County, Idaho—1.76%

Marathon County, Wisconsin—1.70%
Sheridan County, Montana—1.49%
Ramsey County, Minnesota—1.45%
Williams County, North Dakota—1.43%
Lake County, Minnesota—1.42%
Mineral County, Montana—1.39%
San Juan County, Washington—1.37%
Polk County, Wisconsin—1.28%
Isanti County, Minnesota—1.27%
Musselshell County, Montana—1.22%
Pike County, Alabama—1.21%

Not on the ballot in Arizona, California*, Florida*, Georgia*, Illinois*, Louisiana*, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio*, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

1948—143,297 (0.29%)

For President: Norman Thomas of Cold Spring Harbor, NY
(1884–1968)

For Vice President: Tucker P. Smith of Olivet, MI (1898–1970)

Top Five States

Wisconsin—0.98%
Oregon—0.96%
Connecticut—0.79%
New York—0.66%
New Jersey—0.54%

Top Percentile of Counties

Berks County, Pennsylvania—2.66%
Taylor County, Wisconsin—2.63%
Baxter County, Arkansas—2.55%
Isanti County, Minnesota—2.20%
Lafayette County, Arkansas—2.17%

Milwaukee County, Wisconsin—2.01%
Middlesex County, New Jersey—1.74%
Saline County, Arkansas—1.71%
Tompkins County, New York—1.70%
McLean County, North Dakota—1.69%
Fairfield County, Connecticut—1.62%
Sheboygan County, Wisconsin—1.56%
Sauk County, Wisconsin—1.55%
Grant County, Arkansas—1.54%
Dane County, Wisconsin—1.49%
Montgomery County, Maryland—1.33%
Polk County, Arkansas—1.31%
New York County, New York—1.31%
Lane County, Kansas—1.28%

Not on the ballot in Alabama, Arizona*, California*, Florida*, Georgia*, Louisiana*, Massachusetts*, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire*, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah*, and West Virginia.

1952—20,410 (0.03%)

For President: Darlington Hoopes of Reading, PA (1896–1989)
For Vice President: Samuel Friedman of New York, NY (1897–1990)
On the ballot in Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Write-ins were recorded in California and Florida.

1956—2,287 (0.003%)

For President: Darlington Hoopes of Reading, PA (1896–1989)
For Vice President: Samuel Friedman of New York, NY (1897–1990)
On the ballot in Colorado, Iowa, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Write-ins were recorded in California, Connecticut, Georgia, New York, and Rhode Island.

Addendum: Socialist Party USA Totals

1976—6,013

For President: Frank P. Zeidler of Milwaukee, WI (1912–2006)

For Vice President: J. Quinn Brisben of Chicago, IL (1934–2011)

On the ballot in Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Washington, and Wisconsin. Write-ins recorded in Florida and New York.

1980—6,774

For President: David McReynolds of New York, NY (b. 1929)

For Vice President: Diane Drufenbrock of Greenfield, WI (1930–2013)

On the ballot in Alabama, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Washington, and Wisconsin. Write-ins recorded in Florida, Massachusetts, and New York.

1988—3,878

For President: Willa Kenoyer of Ann Arbor, MI

For Vice President: Ron Ehrenreich of Syracuse, NY

On the ballot in Iowa, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, and the District of Columbia. Write-ins recorded in Florida, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas.

1992—3,071

For President: J. Quinn Brisben of Chicago, IL (1934–2011)

For Vice President: William Edwards of San Francisco, CA (1921–1992) died in the course of the campaign, replaced by Barbara Garson of Brooklyn, NY

On the ballot in Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia. Write-ins recorded in Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Texas.

1996—4,765

For President: Mary Cal Hollis of Lakewood, CO

For Vice President: Eric Chester of Cambridge, MA (b. 1943)

On the ballot in Arkansas, Colorado, Oregon, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Write-ins recorded in Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Montana, Texas, and Utah.

2000—5,612

For President: David McReynolds of New York, NY (b. 1929)

For Vice President: Mary Cal Hollis of Lakewood, CO

On the ballot in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Washington. Write-ins recorded in California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, and Texas.

2004—10,822

For President: Walter F. Brown of Lake Oswego, OR (b. 1926)

For Vice President: Mary Alice Herbert of Putney, VT

On the ballot in Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Louisiana, Michigan, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. Write-ins recorded in Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

2008—6,528

For President: Brian Moore of Tampa, FL

For Vice President: Stewart Alexander of Los Angeles, CA

On the ballot in Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Jersey, Ohio, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wisconsin. Write-ins recorded in Connecticut, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, and Texas.

2012—4,430

For President: Stewart Alexander of Los Angeles, CA

For Vice President: Alejandro Mendoza of Dallas, TX

On the ballot in Colorado, Florida, and Ohio. Write-ins recorded in Alabama, California, Indiana, Michigan, Montana, and Texas.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*.
2. Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*.

1. THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN SOCIALISM

1. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 187.
2. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 129.
3. See Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*.
4. On Martin, an early abolitionist, first attorney general of Maryland, and defense counsel for Aaron Burr, see Kauffman, *Forgotten Founder, Drunken Prophet*.
5. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 153–66.
6. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 331–37.
7. Shecter, *The Devil's Own Work*, 336–37.
8. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 182–83.
9. Brecher, *Strike!*, 17–18.
10. Brecher, *Strike!*, 13–14.
11. Brecher, *Strike!*, 20–21.
12. Brecher, *Strike!*, 23–26.
13. Brecher, *Strike!*, 31–32.
14. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 203.
15. Brecher, *Strike!*, 30–31.
16. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 328.
17. Brecher, *Strike!*, 32.
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19. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 103–4.
20. Richardson, *Others I*, 493–94.
21. Richardson, *Others I*, 478–79.
22. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 118–19.

23. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 122–24.
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25. Richardson, *Others I*, 515–16.
26. Richardson, *Others I*, 517.
27. Richardson, *Others I*, 536.
28. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 206–9.
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30. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 519.
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35. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 83.
36. Commons, “Karl Marx and Samuel Gompers.”
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39. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 571–72.
40. Richardson, *Others I*, 619.
41. Brecher, *Strike!*, 53–54.
42. Brecher, *Strike!*, 60.
43. Brecher, *Strike!*, 43.
44. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 2, 175.
45. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 2, 175.
46. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 362.
47. Samuel Gompers to Frank Green, March 14, 1889. *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 2, 196.
48. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 292.
49. Brecher, *Strike!*, 56.
50. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 293.
51. Brecher, *Strike!*, 56.
52. Brecher, *Strike!*, 64.
53. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 113.
54. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 313–14.
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56. Richardson, *Others II*, 5–6.
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59. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 9–10.
60. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 17.
61. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 23–28.
62. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 29.
63. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 32–35.
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66. Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 21.
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69. Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 35–36.
70. Richardson, *Others II*, 22–23.
71. Richardson, *Others II*, 30–32.
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73. Richardson, *Others II*, 38.
74. Richardson, *Others II*, 78–82.
75. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 24.
76. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 99–100.
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78. Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment*, 118–23.
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82. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 129.
83. Richardson, *Others II*, 113–14.
84. Richardson, *Others II*, 108.
85. Richardson, *Others II*, 138–39.
86. Richardson, *Others II*, 143–44.

2. POPULISM AND BEYOND

1. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 8–11.
2. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 48–49.
3. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 73–82.
4. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 403–6.
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6. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 120–25.
7. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 115–16.
8. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 102–3.
9. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 142–43.
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13. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 144.
14. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 109–10.
15. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 117.
16. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 118.
17. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 123.
18. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 124.
19. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 126.
20. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 133.
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23. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 413.
24. Samuel Gompers to Eugene V. Debs, August 16, 1894, EVD.
25. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 135–36.
26. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 134.
27. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 3.
28. Richardson, *Others II*, 144–48.
29. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 222.
30. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 147–48.
31. *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches*, 501–2.
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35. Johnson, *They Are All Red Out Here*, 33.
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37. Richardson, *Others II*, 166.
38. Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, 61–62.
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41. Richardson, *Others II*, 173.
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46. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 299–300.
47. Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, 65.
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54. Richardson, *Others II*, 221, 226–27.
55. Ruff, “We Called Each Other Comrade,” 84–85.
56. Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, xiv.
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58. Richardson, *Others II*, 246.
59. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 329.
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61. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 161.
62. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 191.
63. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 161–62.
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65. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 198.
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70. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 26–27.
71. Pratt, *Morris Hillquit*, 30; Ernest Bohm to all affiliated bodies, November 19, 1897, SLP.
72. Pratt, *Morris Hillquit*, 29.
73. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 19–20.
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82. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 31.
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89. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 84–86.

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95. Kazin, *A Godly Hero*, 97–98.
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98. Richardson, *Others II*, 308–32. On Park see Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 21–23.
99. Samuel Jones to Eugene V. Debs, September 25, 1900, EVD; Richardson, *Others II*, 282.
100. Richardson, *Others II*, 300.
101. Richardson, *Others II*, 299.
102. Richardson, *Others II*, 335–37.
103. Richardson, *Others II*, 337–38.
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105. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 187–89.
106. William Butscher to Morris Hillquit, December 11, 1900, MH.

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3. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*.
4. Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 309.
5. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 3.
6. Ruotsila, *John Spargo*, 31–33.
7. Ruotsila, *John Spargo*, 24–28.
8. Ruotsila, *John Spargo*, 30–31.
9. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 61.
10. Janega, “Ira Kipnis, 81—Real Estate Lawyer, Professor, Raconteur.”
11. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 190–98. For a debunking of Kipnis see Weinstein, “Socialism’s Hidden Heritage.”
12. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 40.
13. “Socialism and The Negro Race,” SPPE.
14. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 52.
15. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 95.
16. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 133.
17. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 94.
18. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 220–22, 370–80, 456.
19. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 104–5.

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21. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 131–32.
22. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 110–13.
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24. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 141–42.
25. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here*, 174.
26. Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, 113–18.
27. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 146.
28. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here*, 174–75.
29. Job Harriman to Morris Hillquit, November 6, 1902, MH.
30. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 246.
31. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 146–48.
32. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 397.
33. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 149.
34. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here*, 99.
35. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 139–40.
36. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 203–04.
37. Johnson, *They Are All Red Out Here*, 52.
38. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 204.
39. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 278.
40. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 144.
41. Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, vol. 1, 415–18.
42. Shore, *Talkin’ Socialism*, 115–23.
43. Shore, *Talkin’ Socialism*, 119.
44. Kautsky, Karl “Marxism and Bolshevism—Democracy and Dictatorship,” in *Socialism, Fascism, Communism*, 181.
45. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here*, 32–34.
46. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 117–18.
47. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 197–98.
48. Shore, *Talkin’ Socialism*, 121–22.
49. Ruff, “We Called Each Other Comrade,” 88–90, 102–3.
50. “Socialist National Platform, 1904—Original Office Copy,” SPA.
51. Richardson, *Others II*, 345.
52. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 158–59.
53. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 252–53.
54. Richardson, *Others II*, 345.
55. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 355.
56. See especially Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 19: “I have imagined enemies where there were none: been tortured by indignities which were the creatures of my own fancy. Had these lines, and those that follow, been a deathbed reverie instead of the immature reflections of a young man of twenty-six upon the

threshold of a long and varied career, one might credit their author with a retrospective perspicacity given to few men.”

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58. Richardson, *Others II*, 373; Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 360–64.
59. Richardson, *Others II*, 358–63.
60. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 355.
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64. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 22.
65. “The Socialist Party and the Working Class,” in *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches*, 357–73.
66. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 231.
67. Richardson, *Others II*, 388.
68. Johnson, *They Are All Red Out Here*, 45–46.
69. Richardson, *Others II*, 388.
70. Richardson, *Others II*, 373.
71. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 232.
72. Richardson, *Others II*, 383.

4. THE FATE OF AMERICAN LABOR

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2. Victor Berger to Morris Hillquit, March 27, 1905, MH.
3. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 190.
4. Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 190–91.
5. “Preamble to the IWW Constitution.” Retrieved at <http://www.iww.org/en/culture/official/preamble.shtml>.
6. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 239–41.
7. Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 37.
8. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 9.
9. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 38.
10. Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, 138.
11. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 116–17.
12. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 56–57.
13. Kershaw, *Jack London*, 96–100.
14. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 89–92.
15. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 78–79.
16. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 64.
17. Richardson, *Others II*, 418–20.
18. Richardson, *Others II*, 419.
19. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 112–13.

20. Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 363–64; Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 56–58. In his memoirs, Hillquit appears to have mistakenly remembered the two conferences as one and the same. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 6.
21. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 9.
22. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 5.
23. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 4.
24. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 11–12.
25. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 56.
26. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 58–59.
27. “Arouse, Ye Slaves,” *Appeal to Reason*, March 10, 1906, in *Debs: His Life, Writings and Speeches*, 309–11.
28. Richardson, *Others II*, 442–43.
29. Richardson, *Others II*, 443.
30. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 18–21.
31. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 251.
32. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 252.
33. Richardson, *Others II*, 444–45.
34. Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 68.
35. Pratt, *Morris Hillquit*, 65.
36. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 123.
37. Richardson, *Others II*, 434–45; Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 109–10.
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42. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 66–67.
43. Hillquit, *Loose Leaves*, 67.
44. Ruotsila, *John Spargo*, 46.
45. Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs*, 214–15.
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70. Charles Sherman to Morris Hillquit, February 2, 1907, MH.
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72. Johnson, *They Are All Red Out Here*, 61–62.
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106. Rogoff, *An East Side Epic*, 27–28.
107. Kagan, “Final Conflict,” 50–51.
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113. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 210.
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115. Reynolds, “The Millionaire Socialists,” 213.
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119. Victor Berger to Morris Hillquit, December 6, 1909, MH.
120. John Spargo to J. G. Phelps Stokes, December 3, 1909, JS.
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23. Mattson, *Upton Sinclair*, 110.
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32. Maurer, *It Can Be Done*, 224–26.
33. Wheeler, *Yankee from the West*, 136–37.
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117. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 373–74.
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122. Jacob Salutsky to Eugene V. Debs, May 31, 1918, EVD.
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15. Miller, *Victor Berger*, 214–15.
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18. Frank Dusey to Victor Berger, November 20, 1919, VLB.
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22. Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 387–88.
23. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 7.

24. George Herron to Woodrow Wilson, September 26, 1919, JS.
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26. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism*, 171–72.
27. “Spargo Clique Scored by British Labor M.P.,” Press Clipping, AMS.
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32. Adolph Germer to David Shannon, July 14, 1950, AG.
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78. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 160.
79. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 134.
80. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 180.
81. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 147–48.
82. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 182–83.
83. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 151–52.
84. “Socialist Leaders Map 30-Hour Drive, War on Sales Tax,” *Socialist Call* March 30, 1935. Quoted at <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/socialist-party.html>.
85. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 189.
86. Johnpoll, *Norman Thomas*, 139.
87. “Minutes of the Conference on the Formation of a New Party, July 5-6, 1935,” SPA.
88. “Minutes of the Conference on the Formation of a New Party, July 5-6, 1935,” SPA.
89. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 289.
90. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 180–82.
91. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 186–88.
92. Mattson, *Upton Sinclair*, 206–7.
93. Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 230–33.

94. Lee, Algernon "Not Fascism, but Lack Of Thinking Is the Danger," *The New Leader* March 16, 1935. Quoted in *New Leader* research notes of Markku Ruotsila, shared with the author.
95. Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 239.
96. Richard Babb Whitten to Norman Thomas, January 12, 1935, NMT. On Whitten's factional alignment see Whitten to Thomas, November 25, 1934, NMT.
97. Clarence Senior to Norman Thomas, July 6, 1935, NMT.
98. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 204–5, 289–90.
99. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 143.
100. Charles Coughlin to Norman Thomas, May 31, 1935, NMT.
101. Thomas to Coughlin, June 10, 1935, NMT.
102. Norman Thomas to Clarence Senior, August 4, 1935, NMT.
103. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 197–98.
104. Ralph Bigony to Norman Thomas, September 6, 1935, NMT.
105. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 187.
106. William Feigenbaum to Norman Thomas, September 13, 1935, NMT.
107. William Feigenbaum to Norman Thomas, September 13, 1935, NMT.
108. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 132, 165.
109. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 134.
110. Pratt, "Jimmie Higgins' and the Reading Socialist Community," 147.
111. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 91–94.
112. All membership statistics are taken from "Socialist Party of America Annual Membership Figures." Retrieved from <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/spamembership.html>.
113. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 91, 135, 365–67.
114. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 218–19.
115. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 210–12.
116. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 219–23.
117. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 231.
118. Davin, "The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea," 131.
119. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 227.
120. Davin, "The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea," 130.
121. Adolph Germer to George Roewer, July 22, 1935, AG.
122. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 215–16.
123. Adolph Germer to Sol Levitas, October 8, 1935, AG.
124. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 228–29.
125. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 224–28.
126. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 229.
127. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 160–61.
128. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 161–62.
129. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 190.

130. Davin, "The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea," 125.
131. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 165–67.
132. Retrieved from <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/socialistparty.html>.
133. "Selected Writings of Judah Drob," 43.
134. "Selected Writings of Judah Drob," 42.
135. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 50–51.
136. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 54–55.
137. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 56.
138. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 785.
139. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 193.
140. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 786–87.
141. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 167.
142. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 170.
143. "An Appeal to All Socialists," DB.
144. Jack Herling to Norman Thomas, March 25, 1936, NMT.
145. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 194.
146. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 195.
147. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 243–44.
148. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 195.
149. Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 512.
150. Frederic Heath to James Oneal, June 4, 1936, JO.
151. "Mrs. Berger Hits at Hoan," *Milwaukee Leader* March 16, 1936. Press clipping, VLB.
152. "Minutes of the City Executive Committee Meeting—June 3, 1936," SPA.
153. William Plampin to Emil Limbach, June 7, 1936, SPA.
154. Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, 285–86.
155. Davin, "The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea," 141–42, 168–69.
156. Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 360–64.
157. "Address by Louis Waldman over Station WEVD on Thursday, August 27," LW.
158. Seymour Stedman to Algernon Lee, July 3, 1936, AL.
159. Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, 289–90.
160. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 189.
161. "The Crisis in the Socialist Party by William Z. Foster," JB.
162. Davin, "The Defeat of the Labor Party Idea," 132–35. This highly misleading article is based on the conceit of identifying with the Popular Front-aligned Farmer-Labor Party movement while ignoring its very nature; that is, a Communist Party front to ensure the broader movement's demise and assent to the New Deal.
163. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 190–91.

164. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 61.
165. Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, 255.
166. Shearer, *Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party*, Part XIII, 4.
167. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 173–74.
168. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 246; Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 58–59.
169. Mary Hillyer to Tucker Smith, August 5, 1936, BLC.
170. Moser, *Right Turn*, 92.
171. “Delivered by Norman Thomas May 28, 1936,” SPPE.
172. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 204–5.
173. “Radio Address, Madison Square Garden, November 1, 1936,” SPA.
174. Clarence Senior to Local and Branch Secretaries, November 4, 1936, SPA.
175. Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, 130–33.
176. The author is here indebted to Richard Winger of San Francisco, who has prepared a complete summary of the history of ballot access laws for Darcy Richardson's seven-volume history *Others*, with the portion pertaining to the 1930s yet to be published in the relevant volume.
177. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 250–51.

13. AMERICAN CATALONIA

1. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 789–90.
2. Vincent Dunne to Norman Thomas, January 17, 1937; Thomas to Dunne, January 19, 1937, NMT.
3. Shearer, *Minnesota's Farmer-Labor Party*, Part XIII, 5–6.
4. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 181; Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 790–91.
5. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 217.
6. Lillian Symes to Norman Thomas, (Undated) 1937, NMT.
7. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 181.
8. “National Convention Convenes March 26,” *Socialist Call* March 20, 1937. Quoted at <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/socialistparty.html>.
9. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 787.
10. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 788.
11. Felix Morrow to Norman Thomas, January 16, 1937, NMT.
12. Shachtman, Max “Footnote for Historians,” *New International* December 1938. Retrieved from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/shachtma/1938/12/footnote.htm>.
13. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 211.
14. “Appeal to the Editor, *Socialist Call*, January 10, 1937,” NMT.
15. Louis Mann to Norman Thomas, January 21, 1937, NMT.
16. Devere Allen to Norman Thomas, January 5, 1937, DA.
17. Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 172–77.

18. Norman Thomas to John Haynes Holmes, January 19, 1937, NMT.
19. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 184–85.
20. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 215–16.
21. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 213.
22. Frank Trager to Norman Thomas, March 5, 1937, NMT.
23. Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, 289–91.
24. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 193.
25. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 792–93.
26. “Selected Writings of Judah Drob,” 70–71.
27. “Selected Writings of Judah Drob,” 66–68.
28. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 319.
29. “Selected Writings of Judah Drob,” 69–71.
30. Doenecke, “The Keep America Out of War Congress,” 222–23.
31. Wreszin, *Oswald Garrison Villard*, 252–53.
32. “War and *The Nation*—Letters to the Editors, January 22, 1938.” Press clipping, DM.
33. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 221–24.
34. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 234–37.
35. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 239.
36. Radosh, “The Myth of the New Deal,” 176–79.
37. Radosh, “The Myth of the New Deal,” 159.
38. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 57.
39. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 94–96.
40. Klehr, “American Communism and the UAW.”
41. Klehr, “American Communism and the UAW.”
42. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 124–25.
43. “National Convention, April 21–23, 1938: Labor Party Resolution,” SPA.
44. “LaGuardia Sees Farmers Backing New Liberal Lineup.” Press Clipping, PFL; LaFollette and Young, *Adventure in Politics*, 255.
45. “Labor Party is urged by Hoan.” Press Clipping, PFL.
46. LaFollette and Young, *Adventure in Politics*, 253–54.
47. “Statement by Frederic Heath,” SPA.
48. Daniel Hoan to Norman Thomas, February 11, 1938, NMT.
49. LaFollette and Young, *Adventure in Politics*, 254.
50. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 428–30.
51. In 2003, Reuther biographer Nelson Lichtenstein debated the meaning of a document identifying Reuther as a member of the Communist Party in February 1939 with historian Victor Devinatz. Though Lichtenstein’s arguments against the document’s veracity are unconvincing, Reuther’s dues-paying status in this period is of secondary significance. Neither author recognizes the significance that the document in question is of minutes of a meeting led by

William Z. Foster and William Weinstone, whose view of Reuther's level of comradeship would have been colored by his importance to their power struggle within the Communist Party. This suggests that in the late stage of the UAW drama, Reuther and the UAW Communists each cynically saw the other as an ally in their own ambitions. Devinatz, "Reassessing the Historical UAW;" Lichtenstein, "Reuther the Red?"; Devinatz, "Nelson Lichtenstein and the Politics of Reuther Scholarship."

52. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 123.
53. Ben Fischer to Gerry Allard, February 25, 1938, DB.
54. Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther*, 126–27.
55. Frank Trager to Gerry Allard, June 28, 1938, DB.
56. Morgan, *A Covert Life*, 128–30.
57. Roy Reuther to Comrades, August 30, 1938, MCK.
58. Klehr, "American Communism and the UAW."
59. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 58–62.
60. "Minutes of Enlarged Executive Conference, Social Democratic Federation, September 17, 1938," SPA.
61. Florence Kirkpatrick to Algernon Lee, December 20, 1939, LW.
62. "Political Unity in state will swell local Socialist vote," *Reading Labor Advocate* November 4, 1938. Press clipping, LW.
63. Norman Thomas to Louis Waldman, September 28, 1938, LW.
64. Waltzer, "The American Labor Party," 223–25.
65. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 49–51, 54–56.
66. Roy Burt to Members of the National Executive Committee, September 8, 1938, DA.
67. Bertram Wolfe to Norman Thomas, November 18, 1938; Thomas to Wolfe, December 1, 1938, BDW; Nash, "Forgotten Godfathers."
68. Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*, 229–34. Anderson falsely states that "Randolph's position on the war in 1940 was, of course, the direct opposite of the doctrinaire one he had taken during World War I." (238). Randolph remained with the KAOWC through the end of 1940, only resigning to lead his March on Washington movement in early 1941, taking no public position on intervention before Pearl Harbor. The 1940s, in fact, were probably the period Randolph was closest to the Socialist Party.
69. Doenecke, "The Keep America Out of War Congress," 224.
70. "Declaration on War Dangers—September 27, 1939," LW.
71. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 101.
72. "America's Duty Today by Algernon Lee," AL.
73. Ruotsila, "Communism as Anarchism," 516.
74. Thomas Mann to August Claessens, December 11, 1938; Leo Meltzer to Savele Syrjala, December 27, 1939, AL.

75. James Oneal to Adolph Germer, April 24, 1940, JO.
76. Ruotsila, "Leftward Ramparts."
77. Theodore Debs to James Oneal, November 9, 1942 and September 13, 1944, JO.
78. Ruotsila, "Communism as Anarchism," 513.
79. Green, *Grassroots Socialism*, 434.
80. Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, xviii.
81. Oswald Garrison Villard to Oscar Ameringer, June 12, 1940, OA.
82. Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, 459.
83. "Mrs. Berger and 4 Other Socialists Face Ouster Move," *Milwaukee Sentinel* September 15, 1938. Press clipping, VLB.
84. Frank Zeidler to Meta Berger, April 29, 1940, VLB.
85. Dennis, Peggy "Meta Berger—Grand Old Lady," *Daily Worker* July 9, 1944. Press clipping, VLB.
86. One comprehensive list is of signers of a letter initiated by Meta Berger urging the expulsion of the Trotskyists from the SP in 1937—"Leading Socialists Sign Plea To Oust Trotskyites," SPPE.
87. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 192–94.
88. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 111–12.
89. "We Take Our Stand! 1940 Socialist Platform," SPPE.
90. "We Take Our Stand! 1940 Socialist Platform," SPPE.
91. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 271.
92. Alice Dodge to Dorothy Detzer, June 28, 1940, KAOWC.
93. Though Wolfe later gained the reputation of a conservative Cold Warrior, his foreign policy views remained largely consistent throughout his life. See Bertram Wolfe to Justus Doenecke, March 2, 1970, BDW.
94. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 132–33.
95. Waltzer, "The American Labor Party," 227–30.
96. Waltzer, "The American Labor Party," 239–41; "Statement by the American Labor Party on its Anti-Communist Resolution," DB.
97. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 341.
98. Wheeler, *Yankee from the West*, 21–26.
99. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 161–62.
100. Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 353.
101. Leonard Woodcock to Norman Thomas, August 29, 1940, NMT. The report on the UAW convention attached to this letter directly contradicts its portrayal by Nelson Lichtenstein, who claimed sentiment for Lewis was isolated among the Communists.
102. John Flynn to Officers of Affiliated and Cooperating Organizations, March 12, 1940; "Statement on the 'Emergency Peace Mobilization,'" KAOWC.
103. Norman Thomas to James Graham, August 16, 1940, NMT.
104. Thomas to Jeanette Rankin, August 16, 1940, NMT.

105. Lola Maverick Lloyd to Norman Thomas, October 22, 1940, NMT.
106. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 206–7; Doenecke, “The Keep America Out of War Congress,” 226–27.
107. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 195–97.
108. “The Election and the War by Judah Drob,” *Socialist Review*, Spring 1940, JB.

14. NOT TO THE SWIFT

1. Franklin D. Roosevelt to Norman Thomas, November 9, 1940, NMT.
2. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 168.
3. Harry Elmer Barnes to Thomas, January 22, 1941, NMT.
4. J.A.H. Hopkins to Thomas, January 25, 1941, NMT.
5. Moser, *Right Turn*, 116–17.
6. “To Members of the NEC—January 18, 1941,” SPPE.
7. Moser, *Right Turn*, 125.
8. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 165.
9. Moser, *Right Turn*, 118.
10. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 246–47.
11. James Loeb to Norman Thomas, September 18, 1941, HF.
12. Loeb to Thomas, May 11, 1941, NMT.
13. Thomas to Loeb, May 12, 1941, NMT.
14. Frank Trager to Norman Thomas, June 6, 1941, NMT.
15. Norman Thomas to J. W. Shearer, October 1, 1941; Thomas to S. C. Tabb, June 12, 1941, NMT. In 2008, Utley’s son learned for the first time that his father was executed after leading a hunger strike in the gulag.
16. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 170–71.
17. Frank Zeidler to Norman Thomas, June 18, 1941, NMT.
18. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 173–75.
19. Jacob Panken to Burton Wheeler, June 13, 1940, JP-T.
20. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 249.
21. Morris Milgram to Norman Thomas, May 26, 1941, NMT.
22. Norman Thomas to Robert Wood, May 12, 1941, NMT.
23. Bertha Mailly to Thomas, May 23, 1941, NMT.
24. “Social Democrats Repudiate Norman Thomas—June 2, 1941,” JO.
25. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 199.
26. “National Antiwar Congress: For Democracy—Against All Dictatorships,” KAOWC.
27. Moser, *Right Turn*, 133–37.
28. Norman Thomas to Burton Wheeler, August 25, 1941, NMT.
29. Wheeler to Thomas, August 27, 1941, NMT.
30. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 267–69; Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 205.
31. W. A. Domingo to Norman Thomas, March 15, 1941, NMT.

32. Moser, *Right Turn*, 138–40.
33. “For Release Sunday, September 21,” KAOWC.
34. Norman Thomas to Rose M. Stein, September 16, 1941, NMT.
35. “The N.R.’s Inverted Racism,” *Socialist Call* August 16, 1941. Press Clipping, NMT.
36. Irving Barshop to Norman Thomas, September 19, 1941, NMT.
37. Doenecke, “The Keep America Out of War Congress,” 233.
38. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 202.
39. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 260.
40. Miriam and Emanuel Muravchik to John Flynn, September 9, 1941; Emanuel Muravchik to Norman Thomas, September 9, 1941, NMT.
41. Emanuel Muravchik to Rita Freedman, July 25, 1993, SDUSA.
42. Johnpoll, *Pacifist’s Progress*, 225–26.
43. Johnpoll, *Pacifist’s Progress*, 233–34.
44. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 260.
45. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 270–71.
46. Drucker, *Max Shachtman*, 145, 149–53.
47. Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 823–24.
48. Kristol, *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, xx.
49. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 263–65.
50. “Press Release, March on Washington Movement, August 19, 1943,” APR.
51. Wreszin, *Dwight Macdonald*, 115–16.
52. Interview with Morris Weisz, December 6, 2008.
53. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 265–66.
54. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 265.
55. Johnpoll, *Pacifist’s Progress*, 236.
56. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 263.
57. Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*, 418–19.
58. George Hartmann and Dorothy Hutchinson to Oscar Ameringer, September 23, 1943, OA.
59. “Pilgrimage to a Shrine by Milton Mayer,” *The Progressive* July 26, 1943. Press clipping, OA.
60. Judah Drob to Freda Ameringer, November 9, 1943; Oswald Garrison Villard to Freda Ameringer, November 7, 1943, OA.
61. Grigg, William Norman, “Sedition’ Purges—Past, Present, and Future,” *LewRockwell.com* April 14, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.lewrockwell.com/grigg/grigg-wl140.html>.
62. Raimondo, Justin, “Tales of a ‘Seditionist’—The Lawrence Dennis Story,” *Antiwar.com* April 28, 2000. Retrieved from <http://original.antiwar.com/justin/2000/04/28/tale-of-a-seditionist-the-lawrence-dennis-story>.
63. On Dennis’s career in the 1930s see Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 6–7, 55–60.

64. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 238, 266–67.
65. Norman Thomas to Lawrence Dennis, January 6, 1944, NMT.
66. Dennis to Thomas, February 4, 1944, NMT.
67. Thomas to Dennis, February 16, 1944, NMT.
68. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 244.
69. "Minutes of the 24th National Convention," DB.
70. "Minutes of the 24th National Convention," DB.
71. "1944 Socialist Platform—Freedom For All!," SPPE.
72. Macdonald, *Henry Wallace*, 63–64.
73. Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, 180.
74. Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, 181.
75. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 247.
76. Warren, *An Alternative Vision*, 186–87.
77. Moser, *Right Turn*, 168.
78. Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, 203, 278–80.
79. Waldman, *Labor Lawyer*, 267.
80. "Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Postwar World Council—November 28, 1944," SPA.
81. "You Can Win The Peace Now," SPA.
82. Drucker, *Max Shachtman*, 153–55.
83. See, for example, Heilbrunn, *They Knew They Were Right*, 43–48.
84. "Gross Betrayal in Poland by Lillian Symes," MW.
85. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 293.
86. Dwight Macdonald to Norman Thomas, March 20, 1946, DM.
87. Thomas to Macdonald, March 22, 1946, DM.
88. Nash, "Forgotten Godfathers."
89. Untitled, JP-W.
90. Johnpoll, *Pacifist's Progress*, 253.
91. Doenecke, *Not To The Swift*, 46–47.
92. "It Can Be Done—New Party News, Trenton, North Dakota," SPA.
93. "Suggested to Receive Conference Call," DB.
94. "A Call to American Progressives," DB.
95. "Minutes of the National Educational Committee for a New Party, October 5, 1946," DB.
96. "Articles of Faith of the People's Party," APR.
97. Daniel Bell to Dwight Macdonald, (undated 1946), DM.
98. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue*, 214–25.
99. "Statement of the National Educational Committee for a New Party on the ADA—May 24, 1947," APR.
100. Bill Gausmann to Bill Becker, January 2, 1947, SPA.
101. "NEC Minutes—February 4, 1947," SPA.

102. Bill Gausmann to Harry Fleischman, February 1, 1947, SPA.
103. "Report and Recommendations to the NEC on Socialist Party relations to other organizations related to the field of electoral action," SPPE.
104. "Notes for a Speech—April 11, 1942"; Algernon Lee to James Oneal, January 10, 1945, AL. On reunification prospects at this time see "Minutes of the Joint Unity Committee—January 18, 1947 and February 16, 1947," SPA.
105. August Claessens to Adolph Kazler, April 21, 1948, SPA.
106. Interview with Walter Morse, March 19, 2010.
107. August Claessens to James Oneal, March 9, 1948, SPA.
108. "For Release Monday, October 27, 1947," JP-W.
109. Morgan, *A Covert Life*, 158–68.
110. Morgan, *A Covert Life*, 168.
111. "Release for Friday, August 15, 1952," LW.
112. "Platform for Milwaukee's Future adopted December 6, 1947," FPZ.
113. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 306.
114. Norman Thomas to A. Philip Randolph, November 10, 1947, NMT.
115. "For Immediate Release—Thomas Demand Conscription Be Repealed," SPPE.
116. Regnery, *A Few Reasonable Words*, 160–61.
117. Thomas, "Who Are The Liberals?"
118. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 225.
119. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 225.
120. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 131–40.
121. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 157.
122. "National Platform of the Socialist Party—1948," SPPE.
123. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 226–27.
124. "Socialism or Atomic War—Workers Party Campaign Committee," DM.
125. "Resolution on Palestine," SPA.
126. Dwight Macdonald to James Loeb, March 11, 1948; Loeb to Macdonald, March 20, 1948, DM.
127. Al Shanker to Dwight Macdonald, March 17, 1948, DM.
128. Schlesinger, "The Perspective Now."
129. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 225–26.
130. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 227.
131. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 229–30.
132. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism*, 164–70.
133. Fleischman, Harry, "From Gideon's Convention," *Socialist Call* July 30, 1948. Press clipping, HF.
134. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 227.
135. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 235–36.
136. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 235.
137. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 227.

138. "Why I am for Thomas by A. Philip Randolph," *Socialist Call* October 29, 1948—Press clipping, HF; "Campaign Rally—City Center," SPPE.
139. Mencken, H. L., "Rare Political Hullabaloo by Really Intelligent Man," *Baltimore Sun* October 13, 1948. Press clipping, HF.
140. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 237.
141. A. Philip Randolph to Herbert Holdridge, December 16, 1948, APR.
142. Dwight Macdonald to Irving Howe, December 19, 1948, DM.
143. Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 338–39.
144. Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 85.
145. Wreszin, *Oswald Garrison Villard*, 270–71.

15. THE TWILIGHT OF AMERICAN SOCIALISM

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2. Fleischman, *Norman Thomas*, 239.
3. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 125.
4. "Why We Are Leaving the Socialist Party by the Chicago Left Wing—June 1949," VJV.
5. Owen Fleischman to Virgil Vogel et al., May 5, 1949, VJV.
6. Van Ronk and Wald, *MacDougal Street*, 69.
7. Fred Thompson to Virgil Vogel, June 16, 1950; Frank Marquart to Vogel, May 15, 1950, VJV.
8. On Kellems, see McElroy, "Vivien Kellems: Giving the Taxman Hell," *The Freeman Online* January 3, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreemanonline.org/headline/vivien-kellems-giving-the-taxman-hell/>.
9. Stave, "Bridgeport Chooses Socialism," 172.
10. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 336–38.
11. "The Third Position," MW.
12. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 127.
13. Herberg, "What Happened to American Socialism?"
14. Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 84–93.
15. Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, xl.
16. Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 201.
17. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 134.
18. "Socialist Party of Massachusetts—For Release Sunday, September 28, 1952," SPA.
19. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 352–55.
20. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 136; Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 356–57.
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28. Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 133.
29. Johnpoll, *Pacifist’s Progress*, 261–69.
30. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 345.
31. Johnpoll, *Pacifist’s Progress*, 251. Barnes was a principal target of author Deborah Lipstadt in her treatment of the phenomenon known as “Holocaust denial,” equating all efforts at Second World War revisionism with Nazi apologetics. For a defense of Barnes see Regnery, *A Few Reasonable Words*, 202–9.
32. Norman Thomas to John Flynn, April 10, 1953, NMT.
33. Norman Thomas to Maurice Spector, May 5, 1950, NMT.
34. Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 105.
35. Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 67, 132.
36. William Zukerman to Jacob Panken, January 27, 1958, JP-W.
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41. Isserman, *The Other American*, 122–24.
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43. D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 223–28.
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65. Norman Thomas to Morris Polin, January 23, 1957, NMT.
66. Ross, *Rabbi Outcast*, 123–24.
67. Norman Thomas to Isaac D. Magnes, February 26, 1957, NMT.
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77. Isserman, *The Other American*, 166.
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82. “Statement of George Stryker, June 17, 1957,” DEM.
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85. Radosh, *Commies*, 76–79.
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87. Weinstein, "Socialism's Hidden Heritage."
88. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 13.
89. Isserman, *The Other American*, 161.
90. Sale, *SDS*, 22–25.
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92. "A Way Forward: Political Realignment in America," SPPE.
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97. Radosh, *Commies*, 75.
98. Irwin Suall to William Osborne Hart, November 2, 1962, SPA.
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102. David C. Williams to Irwin Suall, February 3, 1962, SPA.
103. Philip Isely to Irwin Suall, June 30, 1960, SPA.
104. Suall to Isely, June 27, 1960, SPA.
105. Interview with Bruce Ballin, January 14, 2012.
106. Henderson, *Darlington Hoopes*, 154–55.
107. Drucker, *Max Shachtman*, 279–81.
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109. Sale, *SDS*, 46–47.
110. Harrington, *The Other American*, 236–37.
111. Sale, *SDS*, 54–55.
112. Sale, *SDS*, 55–56.
113. Sale, *SDS*, 56–57.
114. Sale, *SDS*, 50.
115. Isserman, *The Other American*, 239.
116. Maurice Isserman describes suspicions of a YPSL takeover attempt of SDS (Isserman, *The Other American*, 411), but SDS was a Shachtmanite creation to begin with. Shachtman biographer Peter Drucker relates that Harrington solicited Shachtman's approval of his intended actions against SDS (Drucker, *Max Shachtman*, 282).
117. Sale, *SDS*, 62–63.
118. Isserman, *The Other American*, 241.
119. Muravchik, "Comrades."
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121. Horowitz, "Tom Kahn," 15–16.
122. Horowitz, "Tom Kahn," 16.

123. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas*, 490–91.
124. “Conference—The Civil Rights Revolution,” FPZ.
125. Isserman, *The Other American*, 225.

16. OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW

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2. D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 377.
3. Drucker, *Max Shachtman*, 291; D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 397.
4. Anderson, A. *Philip Randolph*, 296–312.
5. D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 396–97.
6. Isserman, *The Other American*, 211–13.
7. Isserman, *The Other American*, 213.
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12. D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 393–94.
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48. Wreszin, *Dwight Macdonald*, 459.
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3. Michael Harrington to Hans Janitschek, June 14, 1973, SDUSA.
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INDEX

- Aaltonen, Frank, 150, 152
Abbott, Leonard, 86, 91, 441
Abrams, Elliott, 512, 527, 528, 531, 536
Abt, John, 366
Adams, Allen, 175
Addams, Jane, 172, 241, 278, 323
Addes, George, 392, 432
Adler, Friedrich, 290, 351
Adler, Victor, 177
AFL-CIO, 444, 467, 469, 476–77,
 481–82, 487, 514, 516, 518, 519, 521,
 522, 532–33, 534, 535, 537, 539, 545,
 548, 560, 566–67
Alexander, Robert, 435
Allen, Devere, 301, 311, 332, 347, 348,
 379, 380, 413, 466, 596
Allen, William, 41, 42, 75
Alterman, Eric, 584–85
Altgeld, John, 19, 36, 38, 41, 42,
 44, 46
Altman, Jack, 357, 370, 379, 382,
 383–84, 400, 410, 463
Amalgamated Clothing Workers, 187,
 254, 263, 265, 283, 325, 332, 365, 366,
 371, 373, 461, 546
America First Committee, 404,
 407–9, 411, 412–17, 514
American Civil Liberties Union
 (ACLU), 323, 423
American Commonwealth Federa-
 tion, 344, 359
American Council for Judaism, 253,
 439, 463, 470
American Enterprise Institute, 479,
 528
American Federation of Labor (AFL),
 12–17, 19, 28, 29, 32, 33–34, 36, 37, 44,
 49, 51, 60, 64–68, 69, 73, 80, 81, 82,
 84, 88, 94, 99, 100, 102, 107, 109–10,
 113–14, 116, 123, 126–27, 130, 142–44,
 148, 150, 155–56, 167, 194, 203, 214,
 219, 222, 224, 234–35, 249, 261, 262,
 264, 265–66, 268, 270, 271, 282–83,
 293, 300, 306–7, 322, 330, 337,
 364–65, 392, 394, 404, 418, 421,
 428, 435, 444, 445, 467
American Federation of Teachers
 (AFT), 274, 283, 303, 322, 330, 332,
 362–63, 516, 522, 526, 539, 572
American Forum for Socialist
 Education (AFSE), 472–73, 474
American Guardian, 331, 341, 398,
 420, 421
American Jewish Committee,
 470–71
American Labor Party, 372–74,
 383–84, 395, 402–3, 425, 430,
 438, 579

- American Labor Union, 69, 73, 79.
See also Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)
- American Legion, 219, 248, 249, 250, 257, 405
- American Mercury*, 251, 422, 437
- The American Prospect*, 594, 599
- American Railway Union (ARU), 31, 33, 34–36, 37, 44, 47, 48, 63, 68, 94, 104, 144, 284, 443
- Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), 312, 385, 432–34, 437, 440, 447, 455, 457, 471, 477, 480, 488–89, 495, 498–99, 546, 563
- American Student Union, 368–69, 385–86
- American Workers Party, 339–41, 355, 369
- Ameringer, Oscar, 93–97, 101, 123, 132, 141, 149, 151, 153, 154, 156, 171, 195–96, 214, 215, 258–59, 297, 315, 317, 318, 330–31, 341, 398–400, 413, 420–21, 449, 596
- Amlie, Thomas, 332, 344, 359, 360, 370, 391
- Amter, Israel, 419–20
- Anderson, Juls J., 175
- Andrews, Reddin, 142
- Anti-Defamation League, 507, 536
- Anti-Imperialist League, 55–56
- Appeal to Reason*, 47, 70, 71, 83, 88, 89, 92–93, 103, 134, 141, 146, 168–69, 173, 186, 210, 308
- Atlee, Clement, 430, 435, 469
- Auden, W. H., 418, 528
- Auerbach, Bob, 454, 477, 583–84
- Avery, Chuck, 570
- Avery, Martha Moore, 125
- Baker, Harlan, 556
- Baldwin, James, 528
- Baldwin, Roger, 323
- Ballin, Bruce, 506, 571–72
- Barewald, Charles, 243
- Barker, Wharton, 55, 56, 57
- Barnes, Harry Elmer, 300, 323–24, 404, 407, 413, 420, 422, 428, 462, 474, 596
- Barnes, J. Mahlon, 49, 81, 107–8, 124–25, 138–39, 169, 223–24
- Barondess, Joseph, 78, 212
- Barshop, Irving, 417, 455
- Bass, Charlotta, 419
- Bassford, Abraham, 506, 574
- Batt, Dennis, 231
- Bazelon, David, 511
- Beard, Charles, 5, 30, 71, 83, 151, 168, 300, 323, 422, 436, 474, 554, 590
- Becker, Bill, 434, 453
- Bell, Daniel, 94, 106, 126, 143, 144–45, 190, 191, 255, 342, 382, 431–32, 441, 457–59, 519, 527–28, 582
- Bellamy, Edward, 29, 39, 47, 49, 56, 59, 353
- Ben-Gurion, David, 287
- Benson, Allan L., 168–70, 172–73, 174, 185
- Benson, Elmer, 379, 393
- Ben-Zvi, Isaac, 212
- Berchtold, Leopold, 177
- Berger, Elmer, 470
- Berger, Meta (Schlichtling), 54, 118, 318, 372, 400
- Berger, Victor, 20, 39–42, 47, 48, 53–54, 57–60, 63, 66, 70–71, 78, 79–80, 81, 86, 87, 90, 93, 114–15, 116, 117–18, 120–21, 124, 130–31, 132, 133, 136–37, 141, 148, 149, 155, 156, 158, 162, 171, 185, 186, 187–88, 194–95, 198, 203–4, 214, 216, 217, 220, 233–34, 243, 254, 258, 270, 277, 280, 298, 302, 303–4, 318, 330, 372, 400, 421, 446, 448

- Berkeley, Roy, 526–27
- Berle, Adolf, 390
- Berman, Paul, 597–98
- Bernstein, Eduard, 70–71
- Bernstein, Julius, 499, 502, 513, 546
- Beveridge, Albert, 172
- Bevin, Ernest, 434
- Biemiller, Andrew, 333, 347–48, 359,
371–72, 410, 428, 441, 444, 466
- Bigelow, Herbert, 254
- Bilbo, Theodore, 125–26
- Bingham, Alfred, 360, 374, 386, 408
- Black Panther Party, 497, 502, 552, 578
- Blair, Tony, 541, 593
- Bland, Richard, 41
- Blanshard, Paul, 311, 318, 325
- Blase, Al, 122–23
- Bliven, Bruce, 323
- Bloom, Bob, 472, 573
- Bohn, Frank, 127, 148, 185
- Bolshevik Party, 163, 202, 205, 207,
208, 217, 218, 234, 239, 380
- Bone, Homer, 345, 408
- Bookchin, Murray, 553–54, 579
- Borah, William, 89, 223, 255, 344
- Boudin, Louis, 101, 148, 153, 177,
178–79, 183, 185, 231, 505
- Boulton, Alfred, 75, 86
- Bourricious, Terry, 578
- Bower, Andrew, 307
- Boyce, Ed, 68–69
- Brandeis, Louis, 112, 129–30, 137, 274
- Brandt, Willy, 559–60
- Branstetter, Otto, 94, 101, 153, 230, 241,
249, 254, 275
- Brav, Stanley, 404, 413, 441
- Brewer, George, 141, 159, 173
- Brewery Workers Union, 65, 79, 94,
142–43, 302, 365
- Briggs, William, 467, 500, 505, 573
- Brisbane, Arthur, 86
- Brisben, J. Quinn, 572, 581
- Brookins, A. B., 358
- Brookwood Labor College, 283, 300,
301, 306–7, 317, 323, 333, 340, 369,
438
- Brophy, John, 366
- Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters,
284–85, 396, 419, 424, 431, 440, 548
- Browder, Earl, 259–60, 310, 366–67,
374–75, 377–78, 388–89, 438, 585
- Brown, Irving, 340, 388, 434, 522
- Brown, Walter F., 585–86
- Brueckmann, William, 175
- Bryan, William Jennings, 41–42, 43,
44, 45–46, 55–56, 57, 65, 67, 74, 75,
106–7, 108–9, 172, 179, 275, 328, 518
- Buchanan, Pat, 583, 586
- Buckley, William F., 473, 488, 512, 533
- Buech, Bob, 243
- Bukharin, Nikolai, 164, 177–78, 181,
226, 264, 303, 380
- Burdick, Usher, 330
- Burkitt, Frank, 43
- Burleson, Albert, 188–89, 194–95
- Burnham, James, 339, 422, 460, 471,
473, 479, 511, 520, 590
- Burnquist, Joseph, 192
- Burns, Ken, 594–95
- Burns, Ric, 594–95
- Burt, Roy, 379, 394, 431
- Bush, George W., 472, 534, 538,
539–40, 542, 584, 585, 598
- Butler, Benjamin, 15, 19
- Butler, Marion, 41, 55, 135
- Butscher, William, 54, 57, 58
- Cahan, Abraham, 22, 23, 49, 264,
286–88, 307, 313, 314–15, 319, 325–26,
335, 346, 350, 351, 355, 372, 394, 400
- Cannon, James P., 226, 259–60, 292,
303, 355, 369, 379–80, 473, 510

- Cannon, Joseph, 175, 187
 Carey, James F., 50, 54, 102, 103, 350
 Carpenter, C. T., 358
 Carpenters Union, 4, 13, 18, 44, 65, 113, 271, 567
 Castro, Fidel, 473, 480–81
 Chambers, Barzillai, 11–12
 Charles Kerr Company, 45, 104, 506
 Chase, John, 50
 Chavez, Cesar, 499, 564
 Cheney, Coleman, 352, 417
 Chester, Eric, 582, 585, 587
Chicago Tribune, 40, 86, 107, 128, 228, 408, 414
 Christensen, Parley P., 235, 241–42, 243, 244, 260, 328
 Christian Socialist Fellowship, 60, 91, 121
 Cigar Makers Union, 4, 13, 49, 143
 Citizens Party, 576–80
 Claessens, August, 151–52, 175, 202, 236, 257, 277–78, 280, 285, 291, 293, 299, 363, 372, 397, 434, 461, 467
 Clark, Bennett, 404
 Clark, Jack, 521, 545
 Clark, Ramsey, 579
Class Struggle, 178, 219
 Clement, Travers, 400, 414, 417, 472
 Cleveland, Grover, 21, 26, 28, 29, 32, 33, 36, 38, 40
 Clifford, Tom, 149
 Clinton, Bill, 538–39, 561, 563, 566, 599
 Clinton, Hillary, 549, 563
 Cloakmakers Union, 22, 78, 101, 152–53
 Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), 519, 520–21, 527, 528, 531, 535, 538, 568
 Cobb, David, 585
 Cohen, Morris, 357, 375
 Coldwell, Joseph, 229
 Coleman, McAlister, 299, 310
 Comintern, 231, 234, 238–39, 259, 260, 270, 272, 310, 356, 359, 394, 509. *See also* Third International
Commentary, 324, 456, 483, 491, 494, 512, 514, 520, 524, 528, 530, 536, 541–42, 594
 Commission on Industrial Relations, 155–56, 189
 Committee of 48, 235, 237, 240, 241, 267, 305
 Committee on Public Information, 186, 194, 222
 Commoner, Barry, 559, 576–77, 579
 Commons, John, 119, 283
 Commonwealth College, 283, 391
 Communist Party USA, 60, 81, 110, 112, 143, 150, 153, 162–63, 178, 182, 202, 203, 218, 230–31, 259–64, 266–71, 272, 278, 279, 280, 289, 291–92, 293–94, 296–97, 300, 303, 309–10, 312–13, 314, 324, 327, 328, 329, 331–32, 333, 337, 338–41, 350, 356, 359–61, 362–63, 364–67, 368–69, 370, 371, 373–74, 376–78, 379, 382, 384–85, 386–90, 391–94, 395, 396–97, 400, 403, 404, 413, 415, 417, 419–20, 421, 422, 425, 428, 432–33, 437–38, 439, 447–48, 460, 461–62, 472–73, 474, 491, 495, 522, 546–47, 551–55, 558, 561, 564, 574, 575, 578, 579, 581, 590, 591–92, 595
 Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA), 283, 301, 303, 317
 Conference for Progressive Political Action (CPPA), 253–55, 257, 260–62, 266–68, 269, 271, 272–79, 281–82, 283
 Congress for Cultural Freedom, 461, 496
 Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), 81, 283, 326, 335, 365–66, 369,

- 373, 374, 377, 378, 383, 386–89, 391, 393–94, 397, 403–4, 419, 425, 428, 429, 448, 467, 522, 545, 553, 567
- Connolly, James, 59, 188
- Continental Congress (1933), 329–33, 359
- Coolidge, Albert Sprague, 320, 349, 358
- Coolidge, Calvin, 274, 276, 279
- Cooper Union, 4, 13, 17, 19, 38–39, 44, 75, 111, 123–24, 131, 151, 181, 265
- Coughlin, Charles, 360–62, 375
- Crane, Charles, 129, 137
- Creel, George, 186, 203, 353
- Crosswaith, Frank, 252, 283, 307, 327, 338–39, 410, 428
- Cumbie, Tad, 133, 141, 153, 190
- Curry, Mabel, 206
- Daily Worker*, 270, 276, 300, 338, 437, 441
- Dallinger, Frederick, 220
- Daniel, Franz, 349
- Darrow, Clarence, 42, 44, 46, 75, 83, 89, 127
- Daugherty, Harry, 248, 250
- Davies, Joseph, 203–4
- Davis, Angela, 578
- Dawes, Charles, 278
- Day, Dorothy, 396, 464
- Debs, Eugene V., 48, 50, 52, 59, 63, 68–69, 75, 78, 84, 97–98, 109, 110, 115–16, 121, 127, 131, 135, 148, 163, 165, 167, 169, 175, 181, 187, 205, 212, 216, 217, 227, 235, 247–48, 256–57, 264, 272, 280, 293, 303, 305, 318, 321, 327, 328, 349, 351, 357, 376, 382, 403, 421, 443, 444, 448, 457, 463, 467, 478, 504, 517, 518, 540, 544, 564, 565, 583, 584, 586, 589, 591; 1900 campaign of, 54–57; 1904 campaign of, 73–74, 76–77; 1908 campaign of, 102–8; 1912 campaign of, 134, 138–41; 1918 Canton speech of, 206–8; 1920 campaign of, 237–39, 241–44; conversion to socialism, 39–40, 47; death and legacy, 290–92; early life of, 31–32; final years of, 265, 281–82, 285; First World War prosecution and conviction of, 208–10, 220; imprisonment, 221–22, 239, 241–42; involvements after 1912, 154, 173–74; IWW and, 79–81, 88–90, 92, 100, 133–34, 147; leading Pullman strike, 35–37; Populists and, 37–47; release from prison, 248–50; on Russian Revolution, 207, 219, 239, 275; trade union career of, 32–34
- Debs, Theodore, 36, 138, 206, 250, 334, 398, 421
- Debs Caucus, 505–7, 508, 513, 515, 517, 519, 571
- Decter, Midge, 519, 521, 528, 533
- De Leon, Daniel, 20–21, 29, 34, 44, 48–49, 50, 52, 53, 59, 61, 69, 80–81, 90, 100, 101, 174
- Dellinger, David, 417, 465, 501
- Dellums, C. L., 284
- Dellums, Ron, 548, 559
- Democratic Agenda, 547–49, 562
- Democratic Leadership Council, 535, 538–39, 563
- Democratic Socialist Federation (DSF), 469, 512–13, 515, 524
- Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC), 545–50, 554, 556–60, 562, 563, 565, 566–67, 568, 570, 574, 575, 576, 584, 593, 594, 595. *See also* Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)
- Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), 560–68, 574, 593, 594. *See also* Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC)

- Dempster, Millen, 327, 353, 354
 Denitch, Bogdan, 464, 472, 513, 545
 Dennis, Lawrence, 422–23, 427, 474,
 554, 590
 Dewey, John, 304, 315, 323, 380, 386,
 404, 431
 Dewey, Thomas, 429, 435, 441, 442–43
 De Witt, Samuel, 236
 Dickstein, Samuel, 258
 Dinsmoor, Jim, 454
Dissent, 465, 492
 Dodge, Mabel, 147
 Domingo, W. A., 252, 414
 Donnelly, Ignatius, 28, 41, 43
 Dorrien, Gary, 511–12, 564
 Dos Passos, John, 324, 428
 Douglas, Paul, 301, 316, 323, 344, 374,
 410, 444, 499
 Douglas, William O., 440
 Draper, Hal, 384, 477, 481, 483, 501, 573
 Draper, Theodore, 158, 178, 259, 261,
 263, 477, 553–54, 566
 Drob, Judah, 342–43, 357, 368–69, 385,
 405, 421, 558
 Drufenbrock, Diane, 577, 578
 Dubinsky, David, 294, 303, 330, 338,
 355, 363, 365, 373, 383, 388, 389, 394,
 430, 432, 463, 526
 DuBois, W. E. B., 113, 151, 200, 201,
 252, 301, 323, 360
 Duncan, Lewis, 122, 133, 142, 152
 Dunne, Edward F., 85, 86
 Dunne, Finley Peter, 86

 Eastman, Max, 147, 148, 187, 380
 Eby, Alvah C., 122
 Ehrenreich, Barbara, 561, 563, 566
 Elkin, Betty, 500
 Elliott, Stuart, 529, 532
 Enfield, Orville, 214, 354
 Engdahl, J. Louis, 204, 238

 Engels, Friedrich, 34, 70, 410
 Erber, Ernest, 384, 563
 Ettor, Joseph, 146
 Evans, Edwin, 269

 Farley, James, 372, 374
 Farmer, James, 396, 413, 419, 465, 476,
 485, 490, 548
 Farmer-Labor Party (1920s), 240–44,
 254–56, 258, 261–64, 265–67, 269,
 272, 310, 345, 564
 Farmer-Labor Political Federation,
 359, 361, 370, 374–75, 389
 Farmers Alliance, 23, 25–26, 27–28, 43
 Farrell, James T., 380, 410, 441–42,
 461, 519, 527
 Feigenbaum, William, 166, 175, 202,
 288, 290, 317, 362–63
 Feldman, Paul, 497–98, 509, 517–18,
 521, 522, 529
 Feldman, Sandra, 522, 539
 Fellowship of Reconciliation, 248, 283,
 386, 466
 Ferguson, Jim, 154, 240
 Fey, Harold, 301, 375
 Field, James, 28
 Fine, Nathan, 293, 344, 359
 Finnish Federation, 120, 150, 152, 218,
 372, 397, 468
 Fischer, Ben, 392
 Fish, Hamilton, 304, 404, 422
 Fitzpatrick, John, 234, 261, 262–64, 271
 Flacks, Richard, 481–82
 Fleischman, Harry, 303, 309, 342, 416,
 417, 428, 431, 434, 440, 441, 443, 453,
 471, 483, 490, 503, 546
 Flynn, Elizabeth Gurley, 110
 Flynn, John T., 343, 368, 375, 386, 396,
 408–9, 412, 414, 416, 422, 423,
 427–28, 430, 437, 447, 462, 463,
 473, 554

- Foley, Tom, 521
- Folk, Joseph, 86
- Ford, Henry, 167–68, 186
- Ford, James, 324, 328, 378
- The Forward*. See *Jewish Daily Forward*
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson, 323, 396
- Foster, William Z., 219, 240, 259, 261, 263–64, 270, 272, 275, 279, 292, 310, 323, 324, 328, 374, 388, 394, 438, 564–65
- Fourth International, 381–82
- Fraina, Louis, 163, 164, 177, 181, 183, 216, 218–19, 225, 226–27, 259
- Frank, Barney, 548, 563
- Frankenstein, Richard, 389, 392
- Fraser, Doug, 545, 548, 549
- Frazier, Lynn, 162, 193, 241, 255, 309
- Freedheim, H. H., 330
- Freedom House, 525–26
- Freese, Arnold, 354
- Freese, Irving, 436
- Friedman, Samuel, 351, 353, 370, 459–60, 468, 526–27, 536, 570
- Friends of Negro Freedom, 252, 274
- Frinke, John, 78
- Fromm, Erich, 441, 480, 506
- Gaitskell, Hugh, 469
- Garber, Alex, 480, 483–84
- Garland, Charles, 264–65
- Garland Fund, 313, 355
- Garner, Elmer, 421–22
- Garson, Barbara, 581
- Garvey, Marcus, 251–53
- Gausmann, Bill, 433–34
- Gaylord, Winfield, 120, 133, 141, 185–86
- Geier, Joel, 474, 489, 596
- Geltman, Emanuel, 439
- George, Henry, 19–20, 21, 26, 29, 49
- Gerber, Julius, 228, 239, 298, 314, 352, 367
- Gerber, Martin, 431, 545
- Germer, Adolph, 148–49, 170, 174, 204, 206, 224, 227–29, 230, 330, 359, 366, 397
- Gershman, Carl, 507–8, 512, 521, 523, 528, 531, 534–35, 543, 557
- Ghent, William J., 91, 131, 185, 398
- Gillen, Albert, 57
- Ginger, Ray, 47, 596
- Giovanitti, Arturo, 146
- Gitlow, Benjamin, 202, 218, 226, 228, 272, 279, 303, 356, 381
- Glaser, James, 467, 469, 512, 513
- Glazer, Nathan, 527–28
- Goebel, George, 117, 149, 228, 350
- Goldberg, Louis, 461, 467, 469
- Goldbloom, Maurice, 467, 506
- Goldfogle, Henry, 90, 141, 160, 211, 243
- Goldman, Albert, 370
- Goldman, Emma, 48, 147, 310
- Goldstein, David, 125
- Gompers, Samuel, 13–14, 17–18, 19, 21, 29, 32, 33–34, 36–37, 51–52, 56, 65, 66–68, 69, 73, 107, 108, 116, 125, 130, 132, 142, 143, 150, 155–56, 160, 167, 194, 216, 222, 249, 264, 266, 268, 269, 271, 282, 313, 526, 536–37, 566
- Gordon, Robert, 175
- Gore, Thomas, 154, 315–16
- Gorky, Maxim, 89, 90
- Gorman, Frank, 365, 374, 387
- Gorman, Patrick, 392, 431, 461, 478
- Gotbaum, Victor, 545
- Gould, Jay, 16, 25, 35, 50
- Graham, James, 100, 283, 298, 320, 349, 368, 404, 421, 431
- Green, James, 189, 582
- Green, William, 254, 255, 262, 283, 300, 365, 467

- Greenback-Labor Party, 4, 10–12, 15, 20, 26, 28, 29, 43, 586
- Greenback Party. *See* Greenback-Labor Party
- Greenbaum, Leon, 58, 65, 66, 68, 69
- Green Corn Rebellion, 189–91, 210
- Green Party, 578–79, 582, 583–86
- Gregory, Dick, 502
- Gresham, Walter Q., 28
- Gronlund, Lawrence, 47
- Hagel, John, 258
- Hagerty, Thomas, 79, 153
- Hague, Frank, 387, 503
- Hall, Covington, 101
- Hall, Gus, 578
- Hamilton, Al, 385, 413
- Hanford, Ben, 73–74, 91, 103, 108, 134
- Hanna, Mark, 45, 51, 61, 67, 128
- Hapgood, Powers, 320, 333, 348, 349, 366
- Hardie, Keir, 40, 59, 113, 114, 148–49, 157
- Harding, Warren, 240, 242, 243, 248–49, 250–51, 274
- Hardman, J. B. S., 212, 283, 332, 463
- Harriman, Job, 49, 53, 54, 57, 66, 91, 113, 126–28, 133, 210, 283
- Harrington, Michael, 464–65, 472, 475–76, 477, 481–83, 487, 489, 492, 493–94, 497, 499, 501–3, 505, 506, 508–9, 512–14, 515–18, 521–22, 529, 544–47, 549–50, 554–65, 568, 570, 574, 575, 584, 593, 597
- Harrison, Hubert, 200, 252
- Hart, William Osborne, 478, 580
- Hartmann, George, 404, 413, 420
- Harvey, William “Coin,” 328, 330
- Hathaway, Clarence, 266, 338
- Hauser, Otto, 354
- Hauser, Steve, 586
- Hayden, Tom, 476, 481–83, 492, 493, 499, 501
- Hayes, Max, 49, 53, 65, 73, 81, 102, 142, 143, 234–35, 240–41, 397, 421
- Haynes, John, 524
- Haywood, Bill, 69, 79, 80, 82, 88–89, 90, 99, 103, 106, 127, 128, 131, 132–33, 139, 143, 144, 146–49, 155, 205, 247
- Hazlett, Ida Crouch, 89, 100
- Healey, Dorothy, 552–53
- Healey, Richard, 552, 561, 562
- Hearst, William Randolph, 74, 77, 84–85, 86, 87, 90, 95, 106, 107, 108–9, 135, 160, 172, 272, 374, 581
- Heath, Frederic, 81, 118, 138, 350, 371–72, 391, 421
- Held, Adolph, 463
- Henderson, Donald, 391
- Henry, Emma, 302, 350
- Henry, William, 275, 293, 298, 302
- Henson, Francis, 388
- Herberg, Will, 402, 456, 461, 474
- Herling, Jack, 357–58
- Herron, George, 59, 71, 91, 99, 158–59
- Hertzberg, Sidney, 409, 428
- Hickey, Tom, 97, 101, 133, 155, 175, 188–89
- Hill, Norman, 484, 487, 509, 526
- Hillman, Sidney, 254, 255, 263, 304, 313, 336–37, 355, 365–66, 371, 372–73, 387, 389, 394, 403, 425, 435
- Hillquit, Morris, 49, 50, 52–53, 54, 57, 58, 60, 63, 79–80, 91–92, 96, 101, 102, 109, 110, 114–15, 117, 119–20, 121, 122, 124, 127, 131, 133, 137, 138–39, 151, 153, 167, 168, 171, 175, 179, 183, 184–85, 203, 211, 213, 214, 216, 219, 233, 241, 243, 279, 290, 294, 296–98, 310, 316–20, 329, 336, 355, 359, 448, 513, 518, 584, 600; 1906 congressional campaign of, 90–91; 1914 debate

- with Gompers, 155–56; 1917 mayoral campaign of, 196–98, 199, 201, 235; 1932 mayoral campaign of, 324–28; on Communist split, 225, 229–30, 238–39; CPPA and, 253–55, 257, 262, 266–68, 273, 274, 281–82; death and legacy, 333–35; early life of, 21–22; early socialist organizing of, 22–23; “millionaire socialists” and, 85–87; opposition to First World War, 157–59, 165–66, 176, 181, 186–87, 192–94, 237–38; Socialist International and, 99–100, 257; views on Zionism, 212, 288
- Hillyer, Mary, 311, 413
- Hoan, Daniel, 173, 254, 302, 317–19, 320, 329, 334, 336, 347, 349, 372, 390, 391, 400
- Hobson, John, 30, 422
- Hochman, Julius, 375
- Hoffman, Isidor, 396, 404, 441, 506
- Hofsers, Raymond, 327, 354, 359, 364, 456
- Hofstadter, Richard, 457
- Hogan, Dan, 134, 258, 297
- Holdridge, Herbert, 431, 433–34, 443
- Hollis, Mary Cal, 582, 583
- Holmes, John Haynes, 301, 304, 338, 382, 396, 428, 441
- Holt, Fred, 141, 153
- Holt, Rush, 345, 408
- Hook, Sidney, 312, 313, 324, 339, 340–41, 369, 404, 435, 460, 461, 471, 479, 520, 525, 526, 533, 543, 597
- Hoopes, Darlington, 307, 320, 349, 363–64, 368, 394, 397, 424, 454, 459, 460–61, 468, 477, 500, 573
- Hoover, Herbert, 241, 301, 315, 322, 323, 326, 377, 411
- Hopkins, J. A. H., 172, 197, 214, 235, 267, 305, 407
- Horowitz, Rachele, 465, 481–82, 484, 487, 509–10, 522, 532
- Hourwich, Isaac, 49, 152–53, 218
- Hourwich, Nicholas, 218, 225, 226–27
- Howard, Milford, 41, 42, 43, 46, 106, 135
- Howe, Irving, 384, 443–44, 465, 475, 492, 493, 505, 513, 516, 545, 546, 547, 555, 557, 561, 597
- Hughan, Jessie Wallace, 370, 382
- Hughes, Charles Evans, 90, 171–72, 173, 174, 192, 236–37
- Humphrey, Hubert, 441, 444, 490, 500–502, 503, 505, 507, 514–16, 519, 520–21, 543, 548
- Hunter, Robert, 75, 83, 85–86, 92, 99, 105, 114–15, 117, 185
- Hutcheson, William, 271, 282, 365
- Hyndman, H. M., 59, 157, 194
- Ickes, Harold, 172, 412
- Independent Socialist League (ISL), 464–66, 471–72, 475, 477, 494, 526
- Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), 61, 69, 79–83, 88–90, 92, 99–100, 101, 102, 110, 112, 115, 122, 130–31, 133–34, 139, 142–44, 145, 146–48, 150, 152, 153, 155, 188, 205, 216, 220, 226, 230, 235, 247, 257, 308, 320, 350, 355, 378, 397, 454, 506, 574, 583, 596
- Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS), 83–84, 122, 151, 186, 251. *See also* League for Industrial Democracy (LID)
- International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU), 110–12, 152–53, 187, 265, 293–94, 303, 306, 325, 335, 355, 356, 365, 370, 375, 392, 394, 401, 402, 415, 442, 463, 513, 519, 539

- International Socialist Review (ISR)*,
45, 59, 62, 69, 71, 80, 100, 114, 115,
118, 124, 138–39, 153, 158, 163, 164,
178, 183, 185, 200, 233, 247, 292, 506
In These Times, 547, 548–49, 560–61
Irons, Martin, 50
Isserman, Maurice, 487, 509, 549, 564,
568
Italian Socialist Federation, 130, 265
- Jackson, Henry “Scoop,” 514, 519,
520–21, 522, 523–24, 527, 547, 586,
593
Jackson, Jesse, 562–63, 579, 582
Jaures, Jean, 98–99, 157
The Jeffersonian, 190–91
Jewish Daily Forward, 49, 81, 160, 202,
286–89, 291, 306–7, 314, 317, 319,
325–26, 337, 346, 348, 350, 351, 354,
355, 358, 363, 394–95, 397, 401, 419,
434, 442, 467, 469, 470, 513, 515, 540,
541
Jewish Labor Bund, 434, 441, 460,
468, 470, 480, 575
Jewish Labor Committee, 463, 471,
483–84
Jewish Newsletter, 463, 513
Jewish Peace Fellowship, 404, 471,
506, 571, 577
Jewish Socialist Bund, 62–63, 111, 212,
213, 356
Jewish Socialist Verband, 264, 469
Johnpoll, Bernard, 300, 310, 314, 317,
349, 427, 463
Johnson, Hiram, 135, 161–62, 172, 223
Johnson, Lyndon, 486–90, 495,
498–99, 514, 524
Johnson, Magnus, 256, 269
Johnson, Sonia, 580
Johnston, William, 142, 253, 254–55,
262, 269, 273, 282
- Jones, Mary Harris “Mother,” 79, 93,
97, 124
Jones, Samuel “Golden Rule,” 55–56
Judis, John, 548–59, 560
Judd, Tony, 597, 598–600
- Kahn, Alexander, 264, 288, 346, 469
Kahn, Tom, 465, 471, 481–82, 484, 487,
492, 494, 496, 501, 502, 505, 509–10,
521, 522, 532–33, 534, 537–38, 541,
560
Kampelman, Max, 519, 521, 528, 529,
531, 536, 543
Kantorovich, Haim, 356
Karatnycky, Adrian, 526
Karsner, David, 265
Katterfeld, Ludwig, 162–63, 170, 225,
228, 272
Kautsky, Karl, 70, 238, 346, 557, 600
Kazin, Michael, 45, 577, 595
Keep America Out of War Congress
(KAOWC), 386, 396, 402–4, 408–9,
410, 413–16, 419, 421, 428
Kellems, Vivien, 455
Kelly, Petra, 578
Kelman, Steve, 514, 546
Kemble, Penn, 483–84, 489, 502, 504,
507, 508, 518–19, 521, 522, 527, 534,
535–36, 539, 540–41, 543
Kennedy, Edward M., 549–50, 554,
558–59, 560, 564, 565
Kennedy, John C., 235, 264, 266
Kennedy, Robert F., 499, 550, 564
Kenoyer, Willa, 580–81
Kent, Herman, 327
Keracher, John, 231
Kerr, Charles H., 45, 71, 100
Kester, Howard, 341, 357–58
Keyserling, Leon, 494, 499, 519
King, Martin Luther, 292, 465, 484,
489–90, 497, 503, 531

- Kinoy, Arthur, 577, 579, 582
- Kipnis, Ira, 60–61, 114, 142–44, 335, 446, 596
- Kirchwey, Freda, 301, 386
- Kirkland, Lane, 521, 522–23, 529, 535, 539, 543, 566
- Kirkpatrick, George, 169–70, 174, 292–93, 348, 395
- Kirkpatrick, Jeane, 519, 521, 528, 529, 530–31, 535, 543
- Kirkpatrick, Marshall, 359
- Knights of Labor, 10–11, 12, 15–16, 25, 32, 48, 121
- Kolko, Gabriel, 135, 474–75
- Kollontai, Alexandra, 164, 173, 177, 181
- Kopilow, Seymour, 455, 500
- Kristol, Irving, 418, 520, 527, 533, 588–89, 592
- Krueger, Maynard, 311, 349, 359, 390, 401, 404, 405, 413, 431, 453, 461
- Kruse, William, 204
- Krzycki, Leo, 214, 280, 320, 336–37, 348, 352, 371–72, 400
- Kubby, Karen, 580
- Ku Klux Klan, 219, 252, 258, 261, 268, 277–78, 280, 301, 421, 448
- Kyle, James, 28
- Labadie, Joseph, 17
- Labor Action*, 380, 418, 471–72
- Labor Party (1919), 231, 234–35, 240, 243, 271, 274, 445
- Labor's Non-Partisan League, 372–73, 374, 377, 383–84
- Labour Party (United Kingdom), 40, 59, 113, 222, 253, 260, 262, 276, 304, 316, 430, 434, 469, 560
- Lafargue, Paul, 34
- LaFollette, Fola, 187, 301
- LaFollette, Philip, 269, 282, 332, 371, 389–91, 393
- LaFollette, Robert Jr., 273–74, 332, 344, 386, 393
- LaFollette, Robert Sr., 86, 119, 128–30, 131, 133–34, 136–37, 150, 204, 223, 240–41, 255, 260–61, 268–71, 272, 273–79, 282, 301, 315, 332, 360, 377, 457
- LaGuardia, Fiorello, 277, 280, 286, 304–5, 332, 335, 338, 359, 368, 384, 390, 415
- Laidler, Harry, 251, 311, 315, 327, 359, 380, 396, 466, 493
- Landis, Kennesaw Mountain, 204–5, 250
- Lanfersiek, Walter, 149, 158, 165, 170
- Langer, William, 430, 431
- Langston, Luther, 123, 141, 214, 258, 315, 330
- Lantala, Erik, 152
- Larkin, James, 173, 226
- LaRouche, Lyndon, 511, 574
- LaSalle, Ferdinand, 4, 14
- Lasch, Christopher, 81, 474, 496, 597
- Lash, Joseph, 330, 385
- Latimer, Thomas, 142, 175, 345
- Laurell, Karl Ferdinand, 13–14
- League for Independent Political Action (LIPA), 301, 303, 315–16, 331–33, 344, 359
- League for Industrial Democracy (LID), 251, 309, 311, 358, 395, 466, 483, 491–93, 494, 513, 527, 543. *See also* Intercollegiate Socialist Society (ISS); Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID)
- Lease, Mary, 41, 43, 44, 108
- Lee, Algernon, 59, 71, 85, 91, 138, 175, 183, 185, 202, 216, 236, 285, 348, 350, 360–61, 370, 371, 397–98, 434
- Leffler, Elwood, 122
- Lefkowitz, Abraham, 274, 283, 332, 340, 410

- Legien, Carl, 132–33
- Lehman, Herbert, 325–26
- Lemke, William, 375, 376–77
- Lemlich, Clara, 111, 112
- Lenin, V. I., 9, 27, 30, 70, 163–64, 178, 216–17, 239, 248, 260, 262, 271, 272, 278, 289, 310, 312, 381, 383, 398, 416, 422, 545, 577, 599
- Lens, Sidney, 579
- Lerner, Max, 386, 533
- Lerner, Michael, 551–52
- Lester, John T., 125–26
- Le Sueur, Arthur, 154, 162, 169, 170, 187
- Lettish Federation, 120, 163, 226
- Levitas, Sol, 355, 366, 469
- Lewis, Ann, 563
- Lewis, John L., 271, 282–83, 330, 364–66, 372, 375, 387, 388–89, 393, 394, 403–4, 429, 567
- Lewis, Lena Morrow, 117, 350, 398
- Lewis, Marx, 330, 331, 390
- Libertarian Socialist League, 454–55, 459, 466, 468, 477, 584
- Liberty Union Party, 573, 575, 578, 585
- Limbach, Sarah, 364, 394, 432
- Lincoln, Abraham, 6, 9, 38–39, 73, 97, 242
- Lindbergh, Charles Jr., 293, 412–13, 414–15
- Lindbergh, Charles Sr., 150–51, 162, 211, 214, 256, 293, 320–21, 498
- Linville, Henry, 330, 332
- Lippmann, Walter, 122, 148, 161, 167, 183
- Lipset, Seymour Martin, 109, 445, 461, 519, 533, 590
- Lipsig, James, 409
- Little, Frank, 188, 189
- Little, Melvin, 586–87
- Lloyd, Henry Demarest, 40–42, 44–45, 47–49, 66, 107
- Lloyd, Lola Maverick, 167–68, 404
- Lloyd, William Bross, 107, 168, 225, 226, 231
- Lochner, Louis, 186–87, 218, 226
- Loeb, James, 410, 433
- London, Jack, 83–84
- London, Meyer, 110–12, 119, 124, 138, 141, 153, 156, 159–61, 164–65, 167, 171, 175, 182, 205, 211, 212–14, 223, 243, 250, 253, 258, 289–90, 304, 330, 343, 448, 478, 598
- Long, Huey, 258, 292, 316, 344–45, 360–62
- Lore, Ludwig, 114, 164, 169, 170, 177–79, 272, 380, 591
- Lovestone, Jay, 219, 230, 259, 303, 310, 340, 355–56, 369, 372, 388, 392–94, 395, 396, 401, 402, 435, 438, 456, 461, 522, 537, 590
- Lovestoneites. *See* Lovestone, Jay
- Lowe, Caroline, 97, 154
- Lowenstein, Allard, 498, 503
- Lundeen, Ernest, 332, 344, 359, 361, 375, 393–94, 498
- Lunn, George R., 122, 141, 156, 161
- MacCartney, Frederic, 54, 125
- Macdonald, Dwight, 386, 410, 418, 425, 430, 432, 440, 441, 447, 449, 461, 502, 577
- MacDonald, Marie, 243
- MacDonald, Ramsay, 157, 222, 238, 304
- Machinists Union, 16, 34, 79, 142–43, 169, 173, 224, 228, 230, 253, 265, 266, 546, 548, 567
- Magnes, Judah, 186–87, 193, 253, 470, 571
- Maguire, Matthew, 44–45
- Mahoney, William, 265–66, 269–71, 272, 345, 379

- Maily, Bertha, 91, 412
 Maily, William, 66, 91
 Malcolm X, 475, 488
 Maley, Anna, 142
 Malone, Dudley Field, 197, 235, 241
 Marcantonio, Vito, 359, 361
 March on Washington Movement, 418–19, 484
 Marcy, Mary, 247
 Marshall, Thomas, 188
 Martin, Anne, 214
 Martin, Homer, 369, 386, 388–89, 390, 392–93, 394, 438
 Martin, James J., 554–55
 Marx, Karl, 3, 4, 14, 22, 39, 70, 113, 123, 233, 239, 251, 294, 346, 410, 521
The Masses, 147, 171, 187
 Matchett, Charles, 29, 44–45, 49
 Matthews, J. B., 340
 Matthews, William, 121
 Maurer, James, 121, 142, 149, 159, 165–66, 169–70, 174–75, 187, 188, 194, 203, 224, 235, 254, 283, 294–98, 302, 317, 318, 322, 324, 326, 330, 340, 351, 364, 395–96, 397, 421
 Mayer, Milton, 404, 420, 421
 Mazey, Emil, 388, 431, 545
 McAdoo, William, 262, 268
 McBride, John, 33
 McCarthy, Eugene, 498–99, 500, 508, 574–75, 576, 581, 586
 McCarthy, Joe, 457, 461, 463, 474, 499, 503
 McCarthy, Patrick, 113, 127
 McCormick, Robert, 128, 129, 135, 408, 422
 McCraith, August, 17, 34
 McDonald, Duncan, 187, 235, 272, 359
 McDonnell, J. P., 4
 McGovern, George, 514–18, 520, 521, 531, 535, 544, 550
 McGuire, Peter, 4, 6, 12, 13, 14, 18, 29, 44
 McKinley, William, 45, 51, 57, 61, 67, 94
 McKinney, Ernest, 341, 391
 McLaurin, Benjamin, 440
 McLevy, Jasper, 320, 337, 349, 372, 394, 423, 436, 455, 468–69
 McReynolds, David, 465, 467–68, 471, 472, 492, 500, 505, 508, 513, 517, 537, 573, 574, 577–78, 581, 583, 587
 Meany, George, 467, 487, 490, 498, 513, 516, 522, 523, 526, 544, 545–46
 Mehrens, Peter, 315
 Meier, Deborah, 545, 546
 Meir, Golda, 212
 Melms, Edmund T., 109, 214
 Mencken, H. L., 251, 442–43
 Menton, John, 121, 149–50
The Messenger, 201–2, 221, 242, 251–52, 284, 475
 Meyerson, Harold, 594
 Michigan Commonwealth Federation, 431, 443
 Milgram, Morris, 342, 368, 387, 412
 Miller, A. Grant, 159, 175
 Mills, C. Wright, 441, 467, 474
 Mills, Walter Thomas, 59, 71, 93, 97, 100, 162, 272, 354
Milwaukee Leader, 132, 194–95, 270, 302, 371, 383, 398, 400. See also *Social Democratic Herald*
 Mineworkers Union, 65, 67–68, 142–43, 148, 155, 187, 254, 271, 330, 364, 365
 Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, 142, 262, 266, 269, 293, 308, 322, 344, 345, 359, 360, 375, 379, 389, 393, 425
 Mitchel, John, 196, 197, 200
 Mitchell, Andrew, 121
 Mitchell, H. L., 341, 391, 410, 431, 506, 550, 573, 575
 Mitchison, Naomi, 357

- Mitterand, Francois, 559–60, 578
- Mondale, Walter, 535, 563
- Moore, Brian, 587
- Morgan, J. P., 129, 135, 136
- Morgan, Thomas J., 34, 40, 53, 56, 124
- Morrison, Frank, 68
- Mortimer, Wyndham, 369, 388, 389, 392
- Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, 487, 524, 525, 527, 531
- Munger, Bill, 506, 513, 517, 570, 572, 575
- Municipal Ownership League, 84–85, 87
- Munson, Rube, 188
- Muravchik, Emanuel, 416, 471, 512, 536, 593
- Muravchik, Joshua, 483–84, 507, 514, 521, 527, 528, 535, 538, 541–42
- Murphy, Charles, 85, 107
- Murray, Philip, 387, 404
- Murray, William “Alfalfa Bill,” 95, 154, 315–16
- Muste, A. J., 283, 306–7, 317, 318, 333, 339–40, 369, 382, 386, 396, 404, 413, 462, 465, 472–73
- Myers, Gustavus, 114, 170, 185, 186
- Nader, Ralph, 582, 583–86, 587
- Nagle, Patrick, 159, 187
- The Nation*, 55, 175, 199, 248, 251, 301, 305, 323, 381, 386, 396, 399, 517, 568, 584–85
- National Civic Federation, 67–68, 167, 307
- National Educational Committee for a New Party (NECNP), 431–34, 437, 443, 457–58
- National Endowment for Democracy, 534–35, 542
- National Party, 194, 214
- National Review*, 435, 473, 512, 521, 533
- National Rip-Saw*, 93, 97, 154, 168, 268, 292
- National Student Association, 480, 484, 495
- Nearing, Scott, 168, 187, 211, 214, 218, 226, 277
- Nelson, George, 371, 375–76
- Nelson, Louis, 356, 375, 386, 396, 415, 441, 461, 463
- New America*, 476, 497, 506, 510–11, 513, 516, 521, 529
- New American Movement (NAM), 550–52, 554, 556–58, 560, 562, 569, 570, 574, 575, 584, 595
- The New Leader*, 265, 289, 296, 299, 304, 307, 313, 314, 317, 319, 336, 339, 348, 351, 355, 357, 358, 360–61, 366, 395, 431, 459
- The New Republic*, 161, 167, 323, 343, 415, 497, 536
- The New Review*, 148, 163, 178
- New York Call*, 91, 114, 118, 166, 175, 185, 196–97, 225, 249–50, 265, 357
- New York Leader*. See *The New Leader*
- New York Liberal Party, 430–31, 434, 443, 467, 477
- New York Review of Books*, 502, 553–54, 566, 598
- New York Times*, 38, 86, 90, 196, 225, 250, 289, 319, 346, 349, 381, 439, 495, 503, 535, 536, 538
- New York Volkszeitung*, 49, 52, 114, 146–47, 164, 170
- Niebuhr, Reinhold, 301, 311, 357, 368, 375, 385, 409, 425–27, 456–57, 495
- Non-Partisan League (NPL), 162, 187, 193, 211, 234, 240, 254, 255, 257, 258, 271, 308, 330, 353, 375, 431, 432
- Norris, George, 255, 315, 344
- Norton, Seymour, 42–43
- Novgorodsky, Emanuel, 441

- Nuorteva, Santeri, 217–18
- Nye, Gerald, 255, 332, 359, 361, 370, 386, 404, 408, 409, 413
- Obama, Barack, 534, 561, 563, 565, 568, 587, 596
- Oglesby, Carl, 493
- O'Hare, Frank, 93, 235, 283
- O'Hare, Kate Richards, 93, 97–99, 154, 169, 170, 175, 182–83, 203, 206, 227, 237, 250, 268, 283, 354, 421, 449
- Oklahoma Leader*, 258, 315
- O'Leary, Jeremiah, 243
- Olson, Floyd, 308, 344, 359, 360, 370, 375, 379, 524
- Omaha World Herald*, 41, 75
- Oneal, James, 59, 163, 188, 227, 239, 254, 283, 314, 315, 317, 349, 350, 352–53, 355, 368, 371, 372, 395, 397–98, 412, 434, 467, 468–69
- Orr, Samuel, 236, 327
- Ovington, Mary White, 112
- Owen, Chandler, 201, 221, 251
- Packard, John, 320, 353
- Page, Kirby, 323
- Palmer, A. Mitchell, 201, 222, 225, 236, 247
- Palmer Raids. *See* Palmer, A. Mitchell
- Panken, Jacob, 187, 202–3, 229, 251, 253, 287, 307, 356–57, 411, 430, 435, 463, 469
- Pannekoek, Anton, 164
- Pape, Thomas, 121
- Park, Milton, 55, 76
- Parsons, Albert, 4, 12, 15, 19
- Patterson, Joseph Medill, 86, 107, 128, 129, 403, 408, 422, 458
- Paul, Ron, 581, 589, 596
- Peace and Freedom Party, 498, 501, 517, 569, 578, 580, 587. *See also* People's Party
- Peffer, William, 26–27, 41
- People's College, 93, 97, 154, 203
- People's Council for Democracy and Peace, 186–88, 192–94, 218
- People's Party, 569–70, 572, 573–74, 575, 578, 582
- Pepper, John, 260–61, 271
- Peretz, Don, 471
- Peretz, Martin, 497, 533
- Perkins, George, 135
- Perle, Richard, 514, 523, 528, 531
- Perot, Ross, 581–82, 583
- Pettigrew, Richard, 263
- Pinchot, Amos, 129, 135, 172, 187, 197, 235, 240–41, 323, 407
- Pinchot, Gifford, 129, 135, 432
- Podhoretz, Norman, 512, 519, 520, 523, 524, 528, 529, 531, 532–33, 536, 537, 539
- Pogany, Joseph. *See* Pepper, John
- Polakowski, Walter, 327
- Polikoff, Max, 524
- Polin, Morris, 431, 470
- Polk, Leonidas, 28
- Populism. *See* Populist Party
- Populist Party, 26, 27, 28–30, 33, 38–43, 45–47, 48, 49, 55, 57–60, 61, 63, 65, 72, 74–76, 78, 88, 93, 95–96, 97, 101, 106, 108, 118, 121, 135, 153, 191, 316, 341, 344, 353, 444–45, 457
- Porter, Paul, 345, 355, 370, 379, 383, 400, 410, 434, 524
- Postwar World Council, 415, 428–29, 462
- Powderly, Terrence, 11, 15–16
- Powell, Adam Clayton, 396
- Pressman, Lee, 366
- The Progressive*, 360, 420–21, 431, 442, 443, 447, 474, 577, 596
- Progressive Citizens of America. *See* Progressive Party (1948)

- Progressive Party (1912), 135, 137, 139,
 141, 150, 160, 161, 171–72, 187, 194,
 197, 235, 400
 Progressive Party (1924). *See* Confer-
 ence for Progressive Political
 Action (CPPA)
 Progressive Party (1948), 432, 437–38,
 441, 460
 Prohibition Party, 26, 46, 56, 57, 77,
 141, 194, 460, 465, 584
 Proletarian Party, 231, 264, 388, 454,
 506
 Puddington, Arch, 525–26
 Pullman, George, 34, 35, 284

 Quick, William, 307, 319

 Radosh, Ron, 474–75, 546–47, 550, 553,
 554, 561
 Railroad Brotherhoods, 6–7, 16, 31,
 32–33, 35, 36–37, 254–55, 258, 262,
 263, 265, 268, 275–76, 314
 Raimondo, Justin, 540–42
 Randolph, A. Philip, 198, 200–202,
 221, 242, 251–52, 274, 278, 284–85,
 330, 375, 396, 404, 410, 414, 418–19,
 424, 431, 436, 440, 441–42, 443, 449,
 459, 461, 475, 484, 487, 488–89,
 494–95, 511, 526, 529–30
 Rand School of Social Science, 5,
 91–92, 97, 99, 101, 131, 151, 158, 169,
 219, 239–40, 293, 306, 395, 412, 434,
 435, 467, 478
 Rankin, Jeanette, 214, 404, 413
Rebel, 97, 98, 101, 133, 155, 188–89
 Record, George L., 129, 135, 172, 240
 Reed, John, 147, 171, 208, 218, 225, 226,
 228, 231, 259, 356
 Regnery, Henry, 474
 Reimer, Arthur, 174
 Reinstein, Boris, 216

 Reuther, Roy, 369, 393, 431
 Reuther, Valentine, 222
 Reuther, Victor, 222, 369, 389, 403,
 428, 431, 545, 546, 548
 Reuther, Walter, 222, 369, 375, 388–89,
 392–93, 394, 429, 432, 443, 466, 467,
 499, 502, 545
 Richardson, Darcy, 119, 161, 586
 Rieve, Emil, 322, 329, 332, 340, 373,
 387, 397
 Rhodes, George, 444
 Robinson, Frederick, 342, 368
 Roche, John, 495, 499, 519, 521, 525
 Rockford Labor Legion, 234
 Rodgers, Ward, 357–58
 Rodriguez, William, 235
 Roe, Gilbert, 237
 Rogoff, Harry, 213, 287, 470
 Roman, Richard, 482
 Roosevelt, Eleanor, 385, 432, 525
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 172, 231, 301,
 306, 316, 321, 323, 325–26, 328, 329,
 332, 335, 336–37, 346, 352, 353, 358,
 360–61, 362, 366, 370–77, 384, 385,
 399, 402–5, 407, 411, 413, 414, 418,
 422, 423, 425, 432, 436, 448, 458,
 510, 596
 Roosevelt, Theodore, 20, 30, 51, 67,
 74, 75, 77, 78, 83, 86, 89, 106, 108,
 128–29, 134–40, 142, 150, 171–72,
 197, 198
 Root, Elihu, 186, 198
 Rose, Sumner, 125–26
 Rosen, Burton, 454, 506
 Rosenhaft, Ann, 505
 Rosenwald, Nina, 535
 Ross, Ben, 546, 556, 560, 562
 Rothbard, Murray, 561
 Rozins, Fricis, 217
 Rubin, Jerry, 552
 Rubin, Morris, 431

- Ruskin, John, 47, 59
- Russell, Charles Edward, 112, 134, 140, 156, 167, 185, 186, 197, 398
- Russian Federation, 164, 181, 218, 225, 226
- Rustin, Bayard, 465, 475–76, 477, 484–85, 487–90, 491, 492, 494, 496–97, 501, 507, 509, 512, 516, 522, 523, 525, 527, 530, 533, 536–37, 574
- Rutgers, S. J., 164, 178
- Ruthenberg, Charles, 124, 149, 150, 162, 175, 183, 219, 225, 226, 228, 230, 232, 257, 259, 270, 303
- Ryskind, Morrie, 323, 396, 413, 430, 441, 447
- Sageng, Ole, 109
- Salutsky, Jacob. *See* Hardman, J. B. S.
- Salvatore, Nick, 39–40, 46, 134, 144, 292, 591–92
- Sandburg, Carl, 132, 216, 398–99
- Sanders, Bernie, 573, 575, 578–79
- Sanial, Lucien, 140
- Saposs, David, 283, 333
- Scanlan, Martin, 214
- Scates, Louis, 50
- Schaeffer, Louis, 306–7
- Schilling, George, 10
- Schilling, Harry, 124
- Schlesinger, Arthur, 440, 456–57
- Schlesinger, Benjamin, 187, 293, 303
- Schlossberg, Joseph, 78, 187, 365, 368, 373, 396, 397, 441, 466, 469
- Schmidt, Ernest, 10
- Schmitz, Eugene, 65
- Schneider, George, 344, 359
- Schumacher, Kurt, 435
- Schuyler, George, 251, 419, 428, 441, 447
- Scripps, E. W., 129, 241
- Seidel, Emil, 118, 119, 131, 134, 156
- Selden, David, 516
- Senior, Clarence, 302–3, 332, 337, 345, 358, 361, 362, 396, 428, 435, 461
- Shachtman, Max, 276, 303, 379, 381, 417–18, 422, 429, 464–65, 471–72, 477, 478, 479–81, 485, 487, 493, 518, 521–22, 525, 532, 534, 538, 539–40, 541, 587, 593
- Shadid, Michael, 349, 354, 355, 359
- Shanker, Al, 440, 487, 499, 502, 511, 516, 522, 525, 533, 539
- Shannon, David, 59, 83, 105, 118, 150, 157–58, 191, 224, 228, 308, 314, 327, 328, 467, 584
- Shaplen, Joseph, 319, 346, 349, 394
- Sharts, Joseph, 220, 297, 319
- Shearn, Clarence, 84–85
- Sheehan, James, 307, 330
- Sheinkman, Jacob, 546, 556
- Sherman, Charles, 79, 99–100
- Shier, Carl, 513, 546, 565
- Shiplacoff, Abraham, 159, 202, 211, 214, 327
- Shipstead, Henrik, 256, 266, 269, 393–94, 408, 430
- Shriver, Sargent, 514
- Siegel, Lee, 597–98
- Siitonen, Harry, 468, 472, 506, 508–9, 569, 571–72, 574, 583
- Simons, Algie M., 45, 59, 69, 71, 90, 99, 100, 103, 114–15, 158, 171, 185–86
- Sinclair, Upton, 83, 185, 186, 311, 353–54, 355, 360, 395, 584
- Skidmore, Thomas, 5, 10
- Slaiman, Don, 481–82, 483, 487, 539
- Slayton, John, 134, 280
- Slobodin, Henry, 53, 91, 101, 153, 185, 274
- Smith, Al, 141, 268, 276, 301–2
- Smith, Bennie, 284–85, 431
- Smith, Henry, 20, 26

- Smith, Tucker, 340, 388, 433, 438, 453, 463
- Snow, William, 275
- Snyder, George, 294
- Social Democracy of America. *See* Social Democratic Party (1890s)
- Social Democratic Federation (SDF), 372–74, 376, 384, 390, 394–96, 397–98, 412, 431, 434, 461, 466–67, 468–69, 470
- Social Democratic Herald*, 20, 40, 70, 71, 89, 118, 132. *See also* *Milwaukee Leader*
- Social Democratic League, 101, 185–86, 194, 205, 206, 214, 222, 276, 398, 448, 591
- Social Democratic Party (1890s), 48, 53–55, 56, 57, 58, 66, 110, 152, 353
- Social Democratic Party (Germany), 4, 9, 12, 14, 68, 94, 101, 106, 132–33, 157–59, 179–80, 185, 206, 217, 435, 458
- Social Democrats USA (SDUSA), 519, 521–43, 544, 545, 559, 566, 570, 581, 593, 594, 597
- Socialist Call*, 357, 364, 380, 382, 384, 392, 395, 414–15, 429, 437–38, 466, 467, 476
- Socialist International, 98–100, 156–57, 179–80, 238, 257, 287, 291, 298, 317, 351, 356–57, 468, 469, 541, 545, 559–60, 571
- Socialist Labor Party (SLP), 9–12, 15, 20–21, 22, 23, 29, 30, 34, 40, 44–50, 52–53, 54, 57, 59, 61, 69, 74, 78–81, 83, 89, 99–100, 101, 110, 118, 121, 124, 130, 140, 163, 174, 216, 279, 460, 477, 501, 575
- Socialist Party of America (SP), 5, 17, 37, 38, 41, 47, 70, 74, 75, 76–78, 84, 85–87, 88, 91–92, 93, 95, 99, 100–102, 107–8, 111, 112, 126–28, 129–31, 139–42, 146, 151–55, 159–64, 176, 177–82, 199–201, 210–11, 219–21, 235–37, 251, 258, 260, 261, 264–65, 287, 288, 290–91, 301, 304–5, 306–7, 325, 330, 334–35, 336–38, 342, 363, 374, 375–78, 379, 398, 420, 421, 426, 435, 464–65, 474–75, 479–80, 486, 495, 496, 497–98, 504, 524, 526–27, 539, 543, 558, 569, 574, 576, 578, 579, 581, 584–85, 600–601; 1900 unity negotiations to form, 53–57; 1904 convention of, 72–73, 79; 1909 “labor party” debate in, 113–16, 148; 1910 national congress of, 119–20; 1911 municipal victories of, 121–24; 1912 convention of, 132–34; 1916 campaign of, 169–71, 172–75; 1917 emergency convention of, 182–84; 1917 municipal victories of, 198, 202–3; 1920 election and, 237–44; 1924 election and, 269, 271, 274–80; 1930s Farmer-Labor movement and, 314–16, 320–21, 331–33, 343–47, 358–62; 1930s “Militant” faction of, 310–15, 316–19, 320, 326, 331, 339–41, 345, 347–50, 356–57, 361–62, 364, 366–70, 381–84, 385, 389, 392, 401, 409–10, 411, 428, 433, 447, 493, 504, 591; 1932 campaign of, 319–29; 1932 convention of, 318–19; 1934 Declaration of Principles, 347–53, 371; 1936 convention of, 371–72; 1937 special convention of, 380; 1938 convention of, 389–90; 1944 convention of, 423–25; 1948 campaign of, 436–44; 1950 convention of, 454, 455–56; 1952 campaign of, 459–61; 1968 election and, 499–502; America First Committee and, 408–9, 412, 415; analysis of failure

to become a major party, 444–46;
 CIO and, 365–66, 369, 383, 386–87,
 391, 397; civil rights movement and,
 475–76, 484–85, 489–90; Communist
 split from, 216–19, 224–34; CPPA
 and, 253–55, 257, 268, 275; early race
 attitudes of, 61–64; final splitting
 of, 505–19; founding convention
 of, 58–59, 61–62, 64, 96; historic
 platform of, 71–72, 103, 136–37,
 160–61, 168, 321, 402, 446; historical
 memory of, 60–61, 142–45, 231–33,
 328, 444–49, 456–59, 554–56, 582–83,
 590–97; language federations of,
 120, 150, 213, 218, 226, 230, 232, 249;
 late 1920s rebuilding of, 282–86,
 292–98, 302–3; membership figures
 of, 142, 231–32, 364; merger with
 ISL, 471–72; National Executive
 Committee (NEC) of, 66, 69, 91,
 108, 114, 117, 118, 125, 132, 139, 142,
 143, 147, 149, 150, 155, 157, 162, 165,
 169, 173, 182, 202, 223, 225–26, 227,
 230, 249, 258, 298, 320, 332–33, 349,
 354–55, 358, 367, 368, 382, 393, 403,
 410, 416, 417, 433, 436, 453, 455, 545;
 NECNP and, 431, 433–34; opposi-
 tion to American entry into First
 World War, 166–69, 182–98, 203–8;
 opposition to American entry
 into Second World War, 385–86,
 396–97, 400–406, 408–16; peace
 plan presented to Wilson, 165–66;
 positions after Pearl Harbor, 417;
 reaction to outbreak of First World
 War, 157–59; reaction to Russian
 Revolution, 202; “realignment”
 policy of, 476–78; relations with
 SDF, 394–96, 397, 434; response
 to Great Depression, 308–9, 321;
 response to New Deal, 329, 389–90;
 reunification with SDF, 468–70;
 SDS and, 481–83, 491–93; state of in
 1950s, 466–68; trade union policy
 of, 64–69, 73, 79–81, 90, 100, 133–34,
 142–43; in UAW, 388–89, 392–93,
 403; Vietnam War and, 491–94,
 508–9
 Socialist Party USA (SPUSA), 569–83,
 585–87, 593
 Socialist Propaganda League, 163, 178,
 216, 217
 Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance
 (STLA), 48–49, 53, 79, 81, 100
Socialist Tribune, 506, 513, 570, 572,
 576
 Socialist Workers Party (SWP), 384,
 417–18, 472–73, 511, 517, 575
 Solidarnosc, 532–33, 534, 537–38, 541
 Solomon, Charles, 236, 335, 347–48,
 352, 354
 Solomon, Usher, 161
 Sorel, Georges, 82, 222
 Sorge, Friedrich, 3, 4
Southern Mercury, 42, 55, 76, 95
 Southern Tenant Farmers Union
 (STFU), 341–42, 357–58, 391–92
 Spargo, John, 59, 86, 92, 104, 115, 117,
 133, 139–40, 157, 171, 183, 185–86, 194,
 214, 222, 249–50, 276–77
 Spencer, Herbert, 17–18
 Spinrad, Alex, 546, 556, 557, 562
 Spock, Benjamin, 497, 517, 574
 Stallard, H. H., 159, 175, 210
 Stedman, Seymour, 56, 141, 175, 195,
 208, 221, 229, 237, 239, 244, 373
 Steffens, Lincoln, 108, 312, 323, 324,
 584
 Steinem, Gloria, 548, 563, 564
 Steinmetz, Charles, 122
 Steinsapir, Seymour, 505
 Stern, Andy, 567

- Stern, William, 513, 536
- Steunenberg, Frank, 88
- St. John, Vincent, 79, 90
- Stokes, James Graham Phelps, 75, 83, 84–86, 90, 92, 114–15, 148, 185, 194, 276
- Stokes, Rose Pastor, 85, 148, 167, 203
- Stolze, Henry Jr., 121
- Stone, I. F., 485
- Stone, Oliver, 595–96
- Strasser, Adolph, 4, 12, 13, 14
- Streeter, Alson, 26, 28
- Stryker, George, 473
- Stuart, R. Douglas, 408, 409
- Student League for Industrial Democracy (SLID), 302–3, 311, 318, 330, 368, 385, 476, 482. *See also* Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)
- Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 476, 487–88, 490, 491, 499
- Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), 476, 477–78, 481–83, 488–89, 491–93, 497, 499, 502, 505, 511, 546, 550, 552, 553, 568, 576
- Studies on the Left*, 474–75, 478, 492, 496, 546, 550, 552, 556, 561
- Stump, J. Henry, 278, 294, 363, 423
- Suall, Irwin, 460, 471–72, 479–80, 481, 489, 494, 500, 507, 515, 524, 534, 536, 597
- Suall, Joan, 471, 513, 517–18
- Suitor, Fred, 330
- Swanberg, W. A., 285, 301, 322, 348, 349, 362, 490, 526
- Sweeney, John, 543, 566–67
- Swinton, John, 19–20, 38–39
- Swope, Gerard, 387–88
- Symes, Lillian, 379–80, 400, 404, 413, 418, 429
- Taft, Robert, 447, 455
- Taft, William Howard, 106–7, 108, 128–29, 134–35, 140–41, 200
- Taylor, Charles, 266, 272
- Teigan, Henry, 269, 379
- Third International, 164, 181, 216–17, 218, 231, 233, 339–40. *See also* Comintern
- Thomas, Norman, 251, 278, 283, 291, 294, 303, 309, 311, 314, 316–17, 332, 334, 336, 337, 356, 367, 370, 374, 379–80, 382, 384, 386–87, 388, 395, 402, 403, 417, 419–20, 422–23, 430, 431, 447, 448, 460, 466, 468–71, 472, 473, 474, 477, 481, 483, 484–85, 489, 506, 508, 511, 516, 526, 536, 543, 544, 564, 565, 570, 584, 596; 1928 campaign of, 297–99, 301–2; 1932 campaign of, 318–29; 1934 Declaration of Principles and, 347–49, 351–53; 1936 campaign of, 371, 375–78; 1940 campaign of, 400–401, 404–5; 1944 campaign of, 424–29; 1948 campaign of, 436–43; Cold War and, 455, 461–64, 495–96; death and legacy, 502–5; early life of, 198–99; early SP involvement of, 199–200; final years of, 490, 492–93, 495–96; Warren Harding and, 248; Long/Coughlin movements and, 361–62; New York campaigns for office of, 275–76, 285–86, 304–5, 307, 352, 353; opposition to entering Second World War, 385–86, 396, 407–10, 412–16, 462; views on Soviet Union, 296, 383, 410; and SP after 1948, 453–54, 456, 459; STFU and, 341–42, 357–58
- Thomas, Violet (Stewart), 199, 322, 395, 436
- Thompson, Carl, 59, 102–3, 114, 170, 185

- Thompson, Dorothy, 409, 441–42
- Tibbles, Thomas Henry, 75
- Titus, Herman, 70, 100, 219
- Tobey, Charles, 413
- Tokoi, Oskari, 218
- Totten, Ashley, 284, 396, 410, 419
- Townley, Arthur, 162, 187, 330
- Trager, Frank, 383, 392, 410, 435
- Trautmann, William, 79, 100
- Trotsky, Leon, 27, 177–82, 183, 216–17, 248, 264, 272, 278, 297, 303, 369, 380–82, 383, 398, 471, 479, 518–19, 520, 534, 538, 539, 541–42, 591, 593
- Truman, Harry, 425, 432, 436, 440–43, 447, 514
- Tucker, Benjamin, 17
- Tucker, Irwin St. John, 204
- Tucker, Robert, 506–7
- Turner, Frederick Jackson, 30, 37, 590
- Tyler, Gus, 370, 382, 392, 395, 400–401
- Tyler, Walter, 121
- Typographical Union, 4, 16, 17, 49, 73, 143, 365
- Udall, Morris, 547, 550
- Union for Democratic Action, 312, 385, 409–10, 417, 425–26, 428, 432, 433. *See also* Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
- Union for Democratic Socialism (UDS), 461, 463–64
- Union Labor Party (1888), 26, 41
- Union Labor Party (San Francisco), 65–66, 102, 113, 127, 162
- United Auto Workers (UAW), 364, 369, 375, 387–89, 392–93, 394, 403, 419, 429, 431, 438, 443, 454, 476–77, 481, 487, 502, 513, 527, 545, 547, 567, 583
- United German Trades, 22, 49
- United Hebrew Trades, 22, 23, 49, 53, 54, 78, 106, 110, 152, 212, 224, 307
- United Mineworkers of America. *See* Mineworkers Union
- University Settlement, 84, 114, 129
- Utley, Freda, 410, 422, 428, 447
- Van Lear, Thomas, 169, 173, 192–93, 211, 254, 498
- Van Ronk, Dave, 454
- Vidal, Gore, 154, 528
- Viereck, George Sylvester, 12, 457
- Villard, Oswald Garrison, 55, 113, 175, 248, 301, 312, 323, 332, 386, 387, 399, 408, 412, 420, 421, 428, 441, 447, 449, 554, 596
- Vladeck, B. Charney, 202, 286–87, 307, 317–19, 327, 348, 352–53, 354, 372, 380, 383, 395, 439
- Vogel, Virgil, 454, 477, 500, 506, 571–72, 574, 579, 583, 584
- Vogt, Hugo, 20, 49
- Voorhis, Jerry, 353
- Wagenknecht, Alfred, 142, 225, 226, 228, 232, 359
- Waite, Davis, 34, 38, 45
- Wald, Lillian, 112
- Waldman, Louis, 123–24, 180–81, 202, 236, 265, 297–98, 318, 325, 337, 348, 349–50, 352, 356, 370, 371, 372–73, 383–84, 394, 395, 427–28, 435–36, 557
- Wallace, Henry, 342, 358, 371, 425, 432, 437–38, 439, 440–41, 442, 443, 474, 518, 561, 579, 596
- Walling, Anna Strunsky, 84, 112, 441, 463
- Walling, William English, 84, 86, 92, 112, 114–16, 117, 146–47, 148, 157–58, 161, 183, 185–86, 194, 222, 283, 305, 463, 537
- Walling, Willoughby, 86, 107

- Walton, Jack, 258, 280
- Warren, Frank, 329, 427
- Warren, Fred, 134
- Warren, Josiah, 17
- War Resisters League, 370, 386, 465, 491, 492, 501, 537, 576
- Watson, Thomas E., 27–28, 38, 40, 43, 45–46, 52, 63, 74–76, 77, 78, 82, 84, 85, 86, 95, 106, 108–9, 135, 171, 190–91, 242, 256–57, 458
- Wattenberg, Ben, 514, 519, 521, 528, 543
- Wayland, Julius, 45, 47, 49, 70, 71, 92–93, 146
- Weaver, James, 11, 20, 28, 29, 32, 41, 43, 78
- Webster, Milton, 284–85, 431
- Weinstein, James, 143, 145, 166, 224–25, 231–33, 235, 243–44, 269, 270, 345, 445, 474–75, 478, 505, 507, 547, 556, 597
- Weinstone, William, 219, 294, 388, 394
- Weisbord, Albert, 280
- Weisz, Morris, 418, 435
- Welch, Albert J., 109
- Westenhaver, David, 210
- Western Federation of Miners, 68–69, 79, 88, 90, 99, 122, 152, 218, 387
- Wheeler, Burton, 122, 188, 255, 274, 276, 277–79, 309, 344, 403, 404, 408, 409, 411, 412–14
- Wheeler, Fred, 127, 141
- White, Bertha Hale, 254, 274–75, 280, 293
- White, William Allen, 172, 400
- Whitlock, Brand, 86, 107
- Whitten, Richard Babb, 361
- Williams, David, 480
- Williams, Howard Y., 331, 344, 360, 370
- Williams, John D., 178
- Williams, William Appleman, 474–75
- Wilshire, Gaylord, 57, 86, 89, 185
- Wilson, Edmund, 380, 386
- Wilson, J. Stitt, 121–22, 141, 149, 185, 327, 353
- Wilson, Lilith, 307, 320, 349, 363–64, 394
- Wilson, Woodrow, 108, 113, 116, 137–38, 140, 142, 145, 150, 154, 161, 165–66, 167, 170–71, 172, 173, 174, 186, 189, 192, 200, 203, 215, 220, 222–23, 224, 241, 242, 243, 247–48, 249, 250, 258, 262, 268, 328, 353, 425, 455, 458, 459
- Winchevsky, Morris, 106
- Winpisinger, William, 546, 548, 559, 561, 564, 566
- Wisconsin Progressive Party, 332, 344, 359, 371, 372, 391, 394
- Wise, Stephen, 191, 304, 323, 325–26
- Wohl, Max, 500, 506, 573, 575
- Wolchok, Samuel, 431
- Wolfe, Bertram, 226, 303, 386, 395–96, 402, 410, 413, 419, 435, 441, 461
- Woll, Matthew, 282, 283, 300, 306, 307
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 168, 386
- Wood, Robert, 408–9, 411
- Woodbey, George Washington, 59
- Woodcock, Leonard, 403, 410, 545
- Woodhull, Victoria, 13
- Woodward, C. Vann, 24, 38, 74, 256
- Work, John M., 125, 149
- Working Class Union, 153, 155, 188–90
- Workingmen's Party of America, 4, 7–9. *See also* Socialist Labor Party (SLP)
- Workmen's Circle, 120, 212, 224, 264, 291, 363, 372, 513
- The World Tomorrow*, 248, 301, 311, 323, 357
- Woywood, George, 500
- Wurf, Jerry, 545, 548

- X Club, 85, 91, 147
- Young, Andrew, 531
- Young, Art, 140, 208
- Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), 488–89
- Young Communist League (YCL), 276, 342–43, 368–69, 465, 474, 482
- Young Democratic Socialists (YDS), 568
- Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL), 149, 204, 257, 280, 309, 342–43, 356–57, 358, 364, 368–69, 379, 384, 385, 387, 405, 454, 460, 464, 474, 477, 481, 482, 483–84, 489, 507–8, 511, 512, 514, 525, 527, 529, 534, 542, 545, 557, 558, 560, 563, 573, 596
- Young Socialist League (YSL), 465, 471, 472
- Youth Committee Against War, 385, 396
- Youth Committee for Peace in the Middle East, 507, 523
- Zahnd, John, 266–67
- Zam, Herbert, 356, 370, 382
- Zaritsky, Max, 332, 365
- Zeidler, Frank, 400, 411, 428, 431, 436, 468, 472, 478, 500, 506, 517, 569–70, 572–73, 575, 581, 582, 586
- Zimmerman, Charles, 294, 303, 356, 386, 402, 461, 512–13, 516
- Zinn, Howard, 595
- Zinoviev, Grigori, 163, 238, 264, 380
- Zukerman, William, 463, 470

