MODERNIZED REPUBLICANISM: AMERICAN SOCIALISTS DURING THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In April 1902, Eugene Debs described how he became a socialist in an article published in *The Comrade*. Debs detailed how he climbed the ranks of the local locomotive fireman's brotherhood in his hometown of Terre Haute, Indiana, where he began working for railroads in his mid teens. Over the ensuing years Debs earned greater responsibility on the lines and within the national trade union. He later left the brotherhood to take on an influential role in the fledgling industrial union, the American Railway Union. In 1894, Debs led the ARU in a national boycott of trains carrying Pullman palace cars in sympathy with the strikers at the Pullman Company outside of Chicago. The Pullman strikers were not part of the ARU, but the industrial union helped in their effort nonetheless. Debs wrote that the infamous Pullman Strike was a success for the workers until forces he previously misunderstood became apparent. With the Pullman Company on the verge of capitulating to the workers' demands the United States government supported Pullman through court injunctions calling for an end to the picketing and the National Guard being mustered to protect Pullman's interests. The government arrested Debs and other ARU leaders. The court sentenced the ARU leaders to six months in the Woodstock jail. While in jail Debs contemplated lessons from the Pullman Strike. He realized that capital always won in battles with labor. Capital was better organized as demonstrated by their ability to successfully stifle the insurgency in

Illinois. They also had the powers of government on their side as shown by the effective use of the injunction. Fighting for higher wages, shorter hours, and better conditions were not enough against the forces of capital, nor would these battles ever let the workingman become completely independent. Debs ended his article with these words: "[The American Railway Union] lives and pulsates in the socialist movement, and its defeat but blazed the way to economic freedom and hastened the dawn of human brotherhood."[1]

Debs' choice of words was significant in at least two ways. First, it revealed his historical materialism or Marxism. By associating the socialist movement with the ARU, Debs clearly envisaged socialism as a working class movement. Furthermore, the ARU's defeat was a necessary step in the evolution of history, rather than a random occurrence that existed, failed, and ultimately left little imprint on history. Second, Debs' words emphasized a connection to America's republican past. For Debs, socialism embodied the ideals of freedom and brotherhood, something an earlier generation of Americans may have called liberty and fraternity. In relating his story of how he became a socialist, Debs asked for no less than an end to corrupt governmental practices orchestrated by a privileged group of economic elites whose practices forced American workers into a state of dependency. His move to socialism demonstrated his awareness that reforming the present economic system offered little but temporary relief for American workers and nothing short of a revolution would fix the debauched system. Did not American revolutionaries offer the same critique of their society and demand the same?

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[1] Eugene V. Debs, "How I became a Socialist," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 39-45.

That Debs evoked the spirit of republicanism was not a new argument. In his 1982 biography of Debs, Nick Salvatore emphasized the republican part of Debs' intellect. Salvatore wrote of Debs' outlook: "If technological progress was achieved at the price of American democratic tradition, then that 'victory' signalled [sic] the destruction of American republicanism," a result that smacked against Debs' "commitment to democratic thought." The Debs who emerged in Salvatore's book was a man who believed passionately in democracy, egalitarianism, and political and economic equality. Debs owed this outlook "more to a dissenting American tradition than to Socialist or Marxist thinkers." This differentiated Debs from "many radicals" of his own day who posited "a concept of class or a vision of Socialism based on determinism." In short, Debs' brand of republicanism made him different than most socialists. His way of thinking did not always mesh easily with the Marxist foundations of his comrades – whichever interpretation they espoused – within the movement, although many Americans responded favorably to Debs' orations.[2]

Salvatore wrote a convincing argument about Debs' republicanism-dominated ideology; however, he assumed a Marxist minimum for American socialism in general and Debs was by no means the sole expounder of democratic rhetoric within the socialist movement. The Debs that Salvatore depicted had a unique quality among socialists because of his republicanism. Salvatore uncovered the essence of Debs' thought, but he erred in construing the rest of the socialists as having a Marxist foundation. Historians of American socialism always assumed a Marxist minimum; that is, socialists were first and foremost Marxists who had their Marxist core altered in some respect. Generally, the

[2] Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), xii, 344.

argument had been that socialists had their Marxism "Americanized," thus making them less revolutionary than doctrine called for. For example, by focusing on the electoral function of the Socialist Party American socialists became too much like their American political counterparts who worried about winning elections instead of working more directly for the inevitable revolution. Thus for historians socialists were Marxists who got their Marxism wrong, leading to the failure of the socialist movement to create a communist society as history mandated. Consequently, a whole slew of studies emerged to find out what went wrong. This approach only made sense if you were a Marxist scholar or American socialists of the early twentieth century were in fact Marxists at their core. The former was generally a truism, but the latter may be disputed. Debs was a republican at his intellectual roots, as Salvatore noted. But this did not make him unique in the socialist movement, for in fact socialists generally shared this republican viewpoint. Republicanism united socialists whatever their backgrounds or opinions on tactics. Marxism affected their republicanism, rather than the other way around. From this point of view it becomes more tenable to analyze the long-lasting influence of socialism in the United States rather than seeking to understand why Marxist prophecy failed to materialize.

To be a socialist when the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth was to be a modernized republican. Socialists were republicans in that they shared a similar critique of society with the generation that fought the American Revolution. According to James Kloppenberg, "classical republicans called for independent citizens to protect fragile civic virtue against the threat of corruption represented by the extension of the executive power." He added that the republican "ideal of a community" included individuals who

"define[d] their interests in terms of the common good."[3] Socialists shared these ideals with eighteenth century republicans, but were modernized in that the "threat" changed. Whereas classical republicans fought against the tyranny of the aristocracy, crown, church, and a burgeoning bourgeoisie, socialists battled the forces of industrial capitalism. Both classical republicans and socialists desired a commonwealth of humanity free from the corruptive influence of privileged economic elites who molded government for their own selfish ends. By 1900 plutocracy was the evil foe to be vanquished. Thus socialists in essence fought a moral revolution. They wanted to purify society from the stain of capitalism; good to replace evil. Humans ought to want socialism, socialists imagined. But socialists were modern in another way. Their espousal of Marxist doctrine imbued their movement with an element of certainty stemming from strains of nineteenth century positivism that classical republicans lacked. Socialism was not only something that people should want, it was also inevitable. This tension created tactical problems for socialists and it was this tension that historians have focused on. The republican part of their ideology has been neglected or simply seen as a corrosive agent in the revolutionary dogma of Marxist determinism.

Marxism certainly affected the socialist mind, but it was more of a mechanism to make sense out of their critique of society based on a foundation of modernized republicanism. The unifying agent that bound socialists together was republicanism, an ideology they contrasted to liberalism that supported capitalist society. When socialists spoke of liberalism they generally equated it with individual license. Kloppenberg called such an idea "possessive individualism," an ideology he suggested derived from Thomas

[3] James T. Kloppenberg, *The Virtues of Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24.

Hobbes. In either case, this brand of liberalism promoted the pursuit of individual economic gain with little interference from the government. Kloppenberg indicated that a second type of liberalism existed during the nineteenth century, one that emanated out of the works of John Locke and Adam Smith. This "virtuous liberalism," Kloppenberg correctly concluded, promoted community above naked self-interest even if Locke and especially Smith became closely linked in modern times to unfettered capitalism. This tradition also contained links to the republican tradition of the Enlightenment era. Still, socialists of the Debsian era would not have been impressed by the distinction between the two types of liberalism. In the socialist mind the former created obvious rampant human misery. The latter inspired well-intentioned reformers such as Progressives or Populists to offer reform programs to curb the abuses of the capitalist system, never realizing that their ideology needed an update in light of modern industrial society.[4]

Socialists believed liberal ideology created a morally decadent society that required transformation. They bemoaned how captains of industry literally stole from the working class to build their financial empires while forcing laborers into a state of dependency, all the time justifying their measures in the spirit of liberalism or social Darwinism. Capitalist manipulation of government astounded socialists who could only view such deeds as corrupting the body politic. Plutocracy made a mockery of democracy, and socialists aimed to rectify the situation. They envisioned a cooperative commonwealth where fraternity replaced competition, thereby paving the way for a more just society where all citizens shared in the bounty of the land and the factories.

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[4] Ibid., 25-26.

Government ceased to be a tool for a small cadre of industrialists to exploit; instead, it became a benign instrument to manage economic affairs for the benefit of all. Socialists did not want large, intrusive government. They demanded an egalitarian society where a truly democratic government of the people allowed for the common good to be established among a body of independent citizens. Unfortunately for socialists, reformers and capitalists alike utilized socialist ideas in part to preserve capitalism while building a state to protect workers from the excesses of it. Still controlled by the capitalists, this government regulated society in a way amenable to capitalism and fell far short of the cooperative commonwealth. The specter of a dominant state run by capital still looms over the United States, even against the ironic backdrop of big government being socialistic. American socialism developed in opposition to liberalism, utilized republican principles from a century earlier but applied them to industrialized society, and shaped the development of progressivism and the welfare state.

The historiography of American socialism focused on four main questions.[5] All of them were marked by the influence of Marxism. First, historians asked why the socialist movement failed in the United States. In fact, this theme was broached by most writers on socialism. In essence they wondered where Marx erred, where socialists misinterpreted the message of Marx, or what it was about the United States that stunted

[5] A number of sources proved especially beneficial in recounting the historiography of American socialism. The most useful were: Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 1-18; D.H. Leon, "Whatever Happened to an American Socialist Party? A Critical Survey of the Spectrum of Interpretations," *American Quarterly* 23 (May 1971), 236-258; Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Richard Schneirov, "New Perspectives on Socialism I: The Socialist Party Revisited," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003), 245-252.

socialism. If Marx was correct that socialism was the end result of industrial development, why did not the most advanced industrial nation achieve socialism? This question dominated the historiography of American socialism, especially because most of the writers on this topic seemed to have an allegiance to Marx, thus making this question very important. Second, under the theme of socialist failure historians analyzed whether internal or external factors had more of an effect. Scholars wondered whether problems within the movement such as disputes over tactics or circumstances peculiar to the United States (in other words American exceptionalism) doomed socialism. Third, social historians examined how the socialist message – a presumed Marxist message – reached the rank and file members of the movement. They analyzed socialism from the points of view of gender, race, ethnicity, urbanity, religion, and any number of other factors. These historians wanted to know what was said and what the listeners heard. Finally, a few recent scholars have examined the influence of non-Marxist ideology on socialism. Again, the rationale was to find out what killed American socialism. They measured these outside ideologies against Marxism.

The unofficial beginning of the historiography of American socialism was German sociologist Werner Sombart's 1906 essay, "Why is there no Socialism in the United States?" As the title indicated Sombart's essay asked the question that plagued historians for nearly a century. Besides posing the dominant question of the ensuing historiography the conclusions drawn by Sombart prefigured important trends. Historian Stephen Burwood wrote almost a century later that Sombart in essence followed the theme of American historian Frederick Jackson Turner arguing that the frontier doomed socialism in America. The availability of land prevented Americans from facing the dire

consequences of industrial capitalism as had happened in Europe. Slowly the United States would become like Europe thereby making socialism more feasible. Sombart's invocation of Turner was interesting because many American socialists of the early twentieth century who studied history such as Algie Simons and James Oneal often utilized Turner's arguments to explain the limited electoral success of the Socialist party. Also, Sombart's essay can be viewed as the first to argue American exceptionalism, an argument that became a standard in the historiography thereafter.[6]

The first major historical works on socialism in the United States appeared in the 1950s. The works by sociologist Daniel Bell and historians Ira Kipnis and David Shannon in their own way continued the theme of American exceptionalism. Bell argued that American socialists adhered to Marxism too rigidly, thereby making them too inflexible to operate in the American political environment. Their Marxism made them alien in the United States. This argument was made on a grander scale by Louis Hartz three years later when he wrote that Americans were too Lockean to accept a foreign ideology such as Marxism. America's exceptional nature of not having a feudal tradition inhibited the growth of historical materialism. Kipnis and Shannon examined the internal workings of the party, revealing that America's liberal tradition de-radicalized the Marxism of American socialists. So-called right wing socialists such as Victor Berger and Morris Hillquit who advocated piecemeal reform turned the socialists into a mere reform party. Kipnis further argued that socialism died in the United States when William Haywood, leader of the direct action left wing, was expelled from the National Executive Committee of the Socialist party in 1913. The tension between right and left in

[6] Stephen Burwood, "Debsian Socialism Through a Transnational Lens," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003), 253.

the party finally led to its demise. Kipnis lamented that the right wing won out. He viewed the right wing as mere reformers who pandered to the bourgeoisie for electoral success at the expense of revolutionary fervor. America's political system corrupted the party and split the movement.[7]

Kipnis and Shannon began a trend of looking for internal causes for the failure of socialism whereas Bell and Hartz analyzed external factors. In her biography of Milwaukee socialist Victor Berger, Sally Miller followed in the footsteps of Kipnis and Shannon, only she laid blame at the feet of the left wing instead of the right. Miller portrayed Berger as being a very practical politician. He built a socialist political machine of sorts in Milwaukee that dominated the city until World War II. Berger achieved this through working with local trade unions, offering a broad program of municipal reforms, and building a strong coalition of electoral support. Miller argued that these tactics resulted in success. Milwaukee became the largest city to elect a socialist mayor and the state of Wisconsin supported socialism more than most. The demise of the party came when left wing dogmatists paid more attention to theory than the practical results of men like Berger who had a flexible enough outlook to work within the existing political apparatus. Similar to Bell, Miller saw rigid adherence to Marxism from the left wing as the group to blame for the party's failure.[8]

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[7] Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States" in *Socialism and American Life,* ed. Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955); Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1955).

[8] Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).

A few years before Miller published her book on Berger, James Weinstein disputed Kipnis' claim that the party fell apart in 1913. In the process, Weinstein explored another external cause of failure: government repression after World War I. Weinstein maintained that the Socialist party remained vital into the war years. Despite losing Haywood and some of his syndicalist followers, the party remained revolutionary and held its 1912 strength until the 1920s. Weinstein demonstrated, for example, that even though the party received fewer votes for its presidential candidate in 1916 than 1912 (the relatively obscure Allan Benson ran instead of the charismatic Eugene Debs, contributing to the decline), socialists actually gained popularity in municipal elections.[9] What really destroyed the party was a wave of government repression emanating from post-war superpatriotism. Weinstein also showed in his book that the Socialist party appealed to a rather diverse constituency. He included sections of chapters on women and blacks within the movement, thus beginning a trend toward social history.[10]

The late 1960s through the present witnessed many social histories of the socialists. Some focused on grass-roots socialism in the cities and the countryside. In effect, these authors wondered how rank and file supporters of socialism responded to the socialist message at the local level. Put another way, they asked how laborers responded

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[9] A number of local studies verify Weinstein's point about socialist vitality through World War I. They include Garin Burbank, "Agrarian Radicals and Their Opponents: Political Conflict in Southern Oklahoma, 1910-1924," *Journal of American History* 58 (June 1971), 5-23; James J. Lorence, "'Dynamite for the Brain': The Growth and Decline of Socialism in Central and Lakeshore Wisconsin, 1910-1920," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Summer 1983), 250-273; "Socialism in Northern Wisconsin, 1910-1920: An Ethno-Cultural Analysis," *Mid-America* 64 (October 1982), 25-51; William C. Pratt, "Socialism on the Northern Plains, 1900-1924," *South Dakota History* 18 (Spring/Summer 1988), 1-35.

[10] James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

– or did not – to the Marxist message of class struggle being propagated by party leaders. Other studies analyzed to role of immigrants within the movement. Authors of these works explored how ideas from the Old World influenced American radicalism and to what extent foreigners were marginalized in the larger movement. Still other historians examined the role of other marginalized groups in relation to the socialist movement. In particular historians asked to what extent socialists reached out to women and blacks, and conversely the effect of these groups on the movement itself. All of these scholars endeavored to bring the socialist movement into starker relief. They wanted to move from abstract ideology to concrete effects. Also, these historians carried on Weinstein's project of what Richard Schneirov described as the attempt of "New Left intellectuals...to construct a usable, non-communist past."[11] Social history works contributed to this project, consciously or unconsciously, by detailing the varied nature of American socialism at its electoral core. They softened the radical foreignness of the movement demonstrated in earlier studies.

Many studies emerged that examined socialism in particular cities. Miller's work on Berger also served as a brief history of Milwaukee socialism. In it she argued that Berger and his cohorts drew support from immigrant laborers, trade unions, and other Milwaukeeans fed up with the corrupt policies of previous administrations. The city's residents liked the municipal reforms of the socialists and continued to support them. James Lorence made a similar argument in his ethno-cultural studies of the small cities in Marathon and Manitowoc counties in Wisconsin. His research led him to conclude that socialists in these counties elected socialists based more on religious and ethnic reasons

[11] Richard Schneirov, "New Perspectives on Socialism I: The Socialist Party Revisited," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 248-249.

rather than class. This was especially true during World War I. Kenneth Hendrickson argued in his study of Schenectady, New York, that the local socialists welcomed one-time reformer George Lunn as their candidate for mayor before finally expelling him from the party for essentially not being Marxist enough. Lunn and the party used each other for their own purposes before parting ways. In a collection of essays on socialism in cities including Milwaukee, Schenectady, Reading, and Oklahoma City, editor Bruce Stave synthesized the arguments in these terms: "American socialism was most successful in winning power when it was most progressive; as 'gas and water socialism,' it espoused democracy rather than revolution." Richard Judd asserted in a broad study of socialism in American cities of the upper midwest that socialists achieved "a proud heritage of struggle for social justice that has left its mark on American society" even without culmination in the cooperative commonwealth. Furthermore, he saw socialists as "more than pawns in the play of larger historical forces, and something less than free agents developing independently of their milieu." These socialists won office in part due to the corrupt practices of their predecessors, even though they maintained their radicalism and were much more than left-wing progressives. They lost power when the traditional parties ran fusion tickets and offered reforms similar to those of the socialists. These studies on cities shared a common point of departure of Marxism. The works of Miller, Lorence, Henrickson, and Stave showed socialists to be more practical-minded reformers than Marxist ideologues, at least at the local level. Judd concluded that socialists worked for their cause for moral reasons (social justice) and were not carried forward by the tide of Marxist determinism, even though they adhered to a radical ideology. These studies also shared an inclination to see particular communities or cities

in general as different from an assumed ideal of socialism – namely Marxist class struggle.[12]

Writers on agrarian socialism also measured their subjects against a Marxist minimum, but over time these scholars tended to portray farmers as more radical than they were originally given credit for. Because farmers had been marginalized by some within the socialist movement for being bourgeois, writers on agrarian socialism focused on farmers' merits as radicals. Early histories of rural socialism emphasized farmers as mere disgruntled Populists, while later writers tried to restore the reputation of farmers as true radicals, no different than their urban comrades. The irony, of course, was that urban socialists seemed to lack this revolutionary ardor as well. Three books in particular illustrated the differing opinions. Garin Burbank's study of Oklahoma socialists showed them to be non-believers of what he considered true class-conscious socialism. Oklahoma socialists, who came mostly from rural areas and often had the highest percentage of votes of any state for socialist candidates, voted red mostly out of frustration for their dire poverty than a sustained intellectual critique of America's political economy. James Green's study of the southwest, including Oklahoma, described these socialists as more radical than Burbank claimed, yet this was because of outside agitation from urban-based socialists. When rural socialists in the southwest acted on their own things tended to go awry. Still, socialists in the southwest managed

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[12] Miller, *Victor Berger,* 71-75; Lorence, "'Dynamite for the Brain,'" 250-273; "Socialism in Northern Wisconsin," 25-51; Kenneth E. Henrickson, Jr., "George R. Lunn and the Socialist Era in Schenectady, New York, 1909-1916," *New York History* 47 (January 1966), 22-40; Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 5-6; Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 182-183.

for a while to unite workers and farmers against the abuses of industrial capitalism. Rural socialists were much more than neo-Populists, although they maintained their legacy of agrarian dissent. In a recent study, Jim Bissett argued that both Burbank and Green had "a thinly veiled anti-agrarian bias" that did not allow them to see the true insurgency at the core of Oklahoma socialism. Christianity, republicanism, and agrarian radicalism combined to make Oklahoma socialists – and rural socialists generally – a variant of socialism, but socialist nonetheless. It may be argued that Bissett provided a correct portrayal of rural socialists, but he did not need to measure the Oklahoma variant against some presumed ideal. In truth Oklahoma socialists differed very little from their urban comrades.[13]

Historians also analyzed socialism in terms of sex, ethnicity, and race. The general conclusion, as Sally Miller recently wrote, was that the Socialist party was "for white men only." Despite the lofty rhetoric concerning women, immigrants, and blacks, most socialists "denied that specific struggles on behalf of defined groups were necessary." Instead, they subsumed all questions under the class struggle. The few, but steadily growing, works on these topics confirmed Miller's generalization. Mari Jo Buhle argued that socialist women suffered from an "enduring dynamic...that had rendered Socialism a literal function of class, class a function of wage labor, and the woman question a function of both." Thus there was no room for women and their peculiar problems within the socialist movement, despite some moves toward limited

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[13] Garin Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976); James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999).

inclusion from 1908-1913 when the Woman's National Committee existed. Paul Buhle was among the first American historians to study in depth the role of immigrants in the socialist movement. Immigrants typically worked outside of the mainstream socialist movement in part due to language difficulties, despite the Socialist party's effort to publish propaganda in multiple languages. These immigrants connected American socialist ideology loosely to European developments thereby giving it a transnational feel. This effort mostly went for naught as many members of the party, led by Austrian immigrant Victor Berger, worked to keep immigrants out of the party. Like women, socialists usually viewed immigrants as "other" and therefore outside of the main movement. The same can be said of blacks. In his lengthy work on black Americans within the socialist movement, Philip Foner first scolded authors such as Bell, Kipnis, and Shannon for barely mentioning the role of blacks in the party. He went on to argue that the negro question was prevalent in the writings of white socialists, that many black socialists worked diligently for the party, and that socialists spoke to the problems of blacks more than acted on them. Still, it became clear that the problems faced by blacks were to be treated within the confines of the larger class struggle.[14]

A number of studies emerged in the past twenty-five years that critically examined other intellectual influences on American socialists. One theme that united these studies was how the idea under consideration, whether republicanism, pragmatism,

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[14] Sally M. Miller, "For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003), 302; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 310; Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987); Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, ed., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: State University Press of New York, 1996); Philip Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), xii.

or Darwinism, affected the socialist norm which was Marxism. Salvatore's biography of Debs illustrated the point. Debs found it difficult to reconcile his republicanism and Marxism. They often came into conflict over how he understood "manhood, duty, citizenship, and work." Furthermore, Debs' streak of republicanism made him different than most other socialists. The main difference being that other socialists did not incorporate the republican ideal of democratic citizenship into their Marxism-dominated ideology.[15]

Anthony Esposito carried the theme of republicanism further than did Salvatore. Esposito argued that republicanism was an unconscious undercurrent in socialist ideology that was not completely at odds, as Salvatore imagined it, with the more conscious attitude of class struggle. This produced a "distinctly American" ideology in opposition to plutocracy. Still, the focus was to see how republicanism informally affected revolutionary Marxism. Esposito's entire argument revolved around the concept of class and how that fit into what he considered republicanism's anti-class ideal. Also, Esposito favored direct action tactics in the workplace as endorsed by the IWW and left wing as opposed to political tactics of the right wing. He saw a major change affect the socialists in 1909 when the right wing behind Berger, Hillquit, and John Spargo came to dominate the party. These constructive socialists fought for "top-down welfare legislation achieved by socialists alone" where "skilled craftsmen had become the 'real proletarians'" at the expense of all the unskilled laborers that could have been organized. World War I exacerbated the right wing's fatal flaws as they supported the war in the name of democracy, even though the left argued that imperialism killed democracy. In the end,

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[15] Salvatore, 343.

the socialists behind the leadership of the right wing created corporate liberalism and the welfare state to hide class differences. The group that best understood America's republican ideal of egalitarianism, Esposito asserted, was the IWW who endeavored to democratize the workplace. They carried this fight forward along with the Communist party after World War I. Esposito was right to see the significance of republicanism within the socialist mind, but wrong to describe it as unconscious, expressed best in syndicalism, and that the party through its right wing leadership sold out to progressivism.[16]

Esposito's discussion of worker republicanism was reminiscent of the works of new labor historians concerning labor during the final quarter of nineteenth century. David Montgomery and Leon Fink saw in rank and file workers inside unions such as the Knights of Labor and outside them a sincere espousal for republican rhetoric based on productive and non-productive labor, the workers epitomizing the former. These unions cherished small independent producers, much like Jefferson, and loathed the effects of industrialization. Like Populists, these worker republicans pined for an idealized past. This sentimentalism for the past differentiated them from forward-looking socialists who modernized their republicanism.[17]

Another intellectual strain that influenced socialism was liberalism, albeit in a negative way. Typically these authors placed their arguments in the context of Hartz's liberalism paradigm that stated socialism was doomed in the United States because of the

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[16] Anthony V. Esposito, *The Ideology of the Socialist Party of America, 1901-1917* (New York: Garland, 1997), 3, 4, 6, 105-106, 259.

[17] Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967).

pervasiveness of liberalism. Kenneth McNaught took this argument directly to task. He argued that socialism was not only viable, but very American as well. McNaught believed that liberals from multiple parties created the myth of socialism being an alien influence to American institutions to confront what they conceived to be a serious socialist threat. He also claimed that a variety of mainstream intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann, Herbert Croly, and John Dewey tacitly supported socialism, only to abandon it for Wilson and the Democrats. A political conspiracy external to the party destroyed it, not the actual foreignness of its ideology. Mark Kann challenged Hartz's conclusion that Lockean political culture either isolated the left (as in the case of Daniel DeLeon and the Socialist Labor Party) or assimilated it (as with John Spargo who left the Socialist Party after World War I for more mainstream groups). Kann used Debs and Hillquit as examples of how a compromise of sorts could be found between liberalism and Marxism. Debs remained a committed advocate of working class insurgency, only he expressed his ideas in a moralizing Lockean language. Hillquit added to his Marxist ideology a need for immediate reform and a belief in elite leadership through the Socialist party, both of which Kann argued connected Hillquit to Locke. Kann's conclusion was that socialists could have maintained their ideology while being flexible in the American political environment, but they chose not to. He added that the New Left never figured this out either. For Kann, to be a socialist meant to be a Marxist. From this base one adhered dogmatically to Marxism and was isolated (DeLeon), gave it up entirely for another party (Spargo), or let liberalism modify it to meet with success in a liberal political culture (Debs and Hillquit).[18]

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[18] Kenneth McNaught, "American Progressives and the Great Society," *Journal of*

Mark Pittenger authored a work in which he detailed the effects of evolutionary thinking on American socialism. Pittenger analyzed the different ways socialist intellectuals incorporated the ideas of Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin into socialism. Two periods developed, roughly divided at 1900. The earlier generation that included figures such as Richard Ely, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Edward Bellamy utilized evolutionary discourse in a non-Marxist way to critique industrial capitalism without relying on working class militancy. They envisioned a transformation of society to prevent class conflict. A later generation of socialist thinkers including Algie Simons, Arthur Lewis, and Robert Rives La Monte developed a more sophisticated scientific analysis of society based on class, yet occasionally lapsed into a "Spencerian cosmic evolutionism and teleological optimism" that was reminiscent of the earlier generation. In short, even this later generation neglected scientific rigor in favor of fanciful dreaming. From this Pittenger concluded that the incorporation of "nonsocialist" ideas such as Darwinism into their ideology "repeatedly undercut the radical potential of American socialism" by diluting Marxism. The actual process was one in which socialism became "subsume[ed]...in a broader and vaguer tradition of optimistic social evolutionism that obfuscated crucial theoretical questions about political and social struggle, and that disarmed the movement in the face of a 'progressive' political order that could absorb some of its tenets as reforms." Again, the Marxist standard had been corrupted.[19]

American History 53 (December 1966), 504-520; Mark E. Kann, "Challenging Lockean Liberalism in America: The Case of Debs and Hillquit," *Political Theory* 8 (1980), 203-222.

[19] Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 4, 7, 8-11.

Brian Lloyd added pragmatism to Darwinism as a corruptive influence on American Marxism. Reaching back to the consensus school of American history typified in the writings of Louis Hartz, Lloyd argued that indeed America was a place where pragmatism found proponents more easily than did Marxism. Lloyd argued in an incredibly dense work that American socialists were in fact quite theoretical, but their theory incorporated too much pragmatism at the expense of sound revolutionary theory. He argued further, often invoking V.I. Lenin as a guide, that a revolution could not happen without a revolutionary theory. American socialists, like the vast majority of their European counterparts, trimmed too much from Marx's writings as to make the entire movement a disaster. Lloyd did not fault the Debsian era socialists for this error. They coped as best they could with what they knew and legitimately tried to construct a revolutionary theory that worked. Lloyd did take issue with New Left historians since the 1960s that searched in vain for a usable past when confronted with the consensus argument of American exceptionalism. In the process of calling himself a member of the Old Left that consensus historians like Hartz and Richard Hofstadter abandoned, Lloyd dubbed New Left historians like Paul Buhle "social democrats" in their misguided effort to place the Debs era socialists in a context they found useful in their own world. He even stated that Hofstadter and Hartz understood Marxism much more in depth than did recent radical historians. Lloyd called for an end to scholars asking Sombart's tired question of "why no socialism in the United States," and instead seeking a viable revolutionary theory. The true failure of American socialism was "the surrender of the ideological ground upon which a genuinely anticapitalist campaign could even be visualized, let alone fought." He wanted to confront the arguments of Hartz anew by

developing sound theory that effectively addressed the malignant influence of capitalism.[20]

Lloyd provided important insights in a number of respects, even if his appeal for a more disciplined Marxism made one shudder at the possibility of another dark journey down a Leninist passage. He was correct to say Sombart's question of "why no socialism in the United States" was the wrong one to ask. As Lloyd noted this question begged an answer rooted in American exceptionalism.[21] More importantly, it may be contended, was that the question only made sense within a deterministic framework. The premise of the question was that something was supposed to happen, but did not. Such a question made sense for a Marxist scholar, but nobody else. Failure was to be addressed within a Marxist model. This approach ignored the influence of socialism on the overall course of American history. A better question to ask would simply be: "what effect did a strong socialist movement have on the development of twentieth century America?" Socialism left an indelible imprint on American life, even if the cooperative commonwealth was never achieved. This will prove to be a more fruitful approach to American socialism than writing dozens of epitaphs.

Lloyd was also correct to say socialists of the early twentieth century were not really Marxists. Lloyd lamented this turn of events, even if he admired the socialists' struggle to create a workable anticapitalist theory. Still, according to Lloyd, true revolutionary theory as espoused by Marx was diluted by various strains of positivism,

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[20] Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 13, 14, 409, 415-416.

[21] Lloyd, 417.

whether pragmatism or Darwinism. The prevailing attitude of all scholars of socialism that a pure Marxism existed to dilute may be seriously questioned. Socialists, like all people, utilized a variety of intellectual weapons at their disposal. Marxism was certainly an important one; indeed, they used the Marxist idiom to propagate much of their message. But Marxism coexisted with pragmatism, Darwinism, liberalism, republicanism, Christianity, and any number of other ideologies. Socialists molded these into something workable that evolved over time. To analyze socialists as Marxists that had their ideology corrupted in some manner was to miss the essence of socialism.

My purpose in this dissertation, then, is twofold. First, I wish to explore how American socialists modernized republicanism of a century earlier to critique the capitalist society in which they lived. In doing so, I hope to show republicanism as an essential element of the socialist mind that coexisted and conflicted with Marxism. Republicanism thus becomes a crucial element of socialism rather than an agent for diluting the presumed Marxist basis. Second, once freed from the tethers of Marxist determinism, socialists can be gauged as significant contributors to the development of modern America rather than alien radicals who created a stir and disappeared in disgrace in Lockean America. The contribution I focus on is a theory of government that was much more inclusionary and collective than the prevailing model, even if their model became distorted to the ends of capital.

The entire concept of failure seems irrelevant as well. For example, nobody views the incredibly small number of yeoman farmers in twenty-first century American society and then attempts to find the failure of Jeffersonian Republicans. Nobody asks: "why no yeoman farmers?" Even the Populists are viewed within the context of the

contributions they made to American life rather than marginalized as an abject failure. Populists contributed reform ideas that were implemented during the Progressive Era and New Deal along with a new political style. Nobody asks: "why no free silver?" or "why no Populism?" Like the socialists, political entities such as Jeffersonians, Populists, and others enjoyed certain successes and bemoaned particular failures. The individual successes and failures combined to change America in both small and large ways. For example, the Equal Rights Amendment was never adopted, but did not the very fight for it change America in significant ways? In terms of a piece of political legislation, the ERA failed. As a consciousness raising campaign it enjoyed marvelous success, whether in the direction of the legislation's proponents or against it. Inequities in pay for the same work based on gender were exposed to a wider audience and addressed (if, regrettably, not completely), while "feminism" became an epithet of sorts used to smear women who challenged the traditional social order. Participants in the fight for the ERA certainly viewed these results with mixed feelings, but the fight itself left its imprint on American society. It is in this spirit that I look at the socialists, rather than from the limited viewpoint of Marxist determinism that shows the lack of a cooperative commonwealth as simply failure.[22]

My approach to research differs from most of the previous studies on socialism. Earlier studies such as those of Kipnis, Shannon, and Weinstein, relied heavily on serials and the records of the Socialist party with an eye toward debates on specific issues. They

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[22] On Populism and the ERA, see respectively: Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995; reprint, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); William H. Chafe, "The Road to Equality: 1962 – Today," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States,* ed. Nancy F. Cott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 558, 569.

told the chronological development of the party within an interpretative framework. Later studies focused on socialism within specific localities or from the perspective of a select group of socialists such as women or Finnish immigrants. The works on ideology such as those by Pittenger and Lloyd explored in depth the ideas of a small number of significant thinkers. They were limited in part because only a few socialists had the intellectual background to sufficiently grapple with the ideas of Marx, Darwin, and Dewey on a sophisticated level. Then there were the handful of biographies that obviously focused solely on one individual within the context of the larger movement.

My approach is to incorporate as many voices as possible, but not focus too narrowly on any one voice. This has the advantage of moving toward finding a commonality among socialists generally, but suffers from not being able to reveal the subtleties of the arguments propagated by certain individuals. Because the latter has been done in numerous ways, I chose to employ the former. That being said, a number of voices will be heard more than others simply because they left much more behind. The works of Debs, Hillquit, Mary Marcy, O'Hare, Algie Simons, and Spargo recur frequently because of their voluminous writings and availability, whereas lesser known and less prodigious socialists such as George Allan England, Hubert Harrison, Daniel Hoan, May Walden Kerr, and N.A. Richardson make fewer appearances, but in my view are equally as important. By incorporating the words of socialists who participated less in the upper echelons of the party, the full complexity and vitality of the movement can more easily be discerned. That socialists regardless of sex, race, geographic location, job, ethnicity, or status within the party shared a rhetoric of republicanism I believe is extremely significant.

Fortunately, a vast record exists of the writings of these socialists who were not luminaries within the party. The socialist pamphlet collection within the Socialist Party of America Papers, the Radical Pamphlet Literature Collection at the Tamiment Institute, and individual books and pamphlets in repositories scattered throughout the country constitute the majority of the research for this dissertation. I supplemented this research with sporadic forays into the numerous socialist serials that still exist. I used serials often based on references from earlier works, or to supplement points of view that were not as prevalent in the pamphlet literature such as the ideas of women, blacks, syndicalists, and Fabians. Obviously I have not incorporated every voice from every point of view, but I believe the number of people I have utilized provides an enticing glimpse into what it meant to be an American socialist during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.

The organization of this dissertation is a bit unorthodox as well. Instead of tracing how socialist ideology changed over a period of time or examining the rhetoric of individuals based on presumed factions, geography, or issues, I have decided to analyze socialism as a general intellectual force over a fixed period of time, 1894-1918. While individual points of view certainly changed during those years, I think it is still possible to find general recurring themes amidst the differing and continually changing opinions. This lacks a certain precision (although I am doubtful how precise intellectual history can ever be) but makes up for that possible deficiency by understanding socialism on a broader level. I am looking at the forest instead of the trees. In the first three chapters after the introduction I examine socialist ideology based on their interpretations of past, present, and future. Chapter two critiques the socialist interpretation of American history, revealing themes of republicanism in tension with and complementing well tenets

of historical materialism. Chapter three offers a view of how socialists critiqued the very society they lived in. While they spoke in class terms, the inequities of class they exposed revealed an underlying argument based on notions common to republican thinkers. Chapter four deals with how socialists imagined the cooperative commonwealth of the future. The ideal society each socialist imagined differed markedly, yet they always addressed the problems acknowledged by their republican critiques of past and present. The final two chapters show the limitations of modernized republicanism expressed within the Marxist idiom of class struggle. Chapter five shows how the moral critique of society allowed socialists to see the unique problems of farmers, women, blacks, and immigrants, yet their attempt to rectify these problems within the confines of class struggle left them wanting. This attempt demonstrates how Marxism affected their underlying republican beliefs rather than the other way around and marks a beginning in America for politics becoming more inclusionary, despite the rough start. The final chapter explores how the socialist attempt to rescue democracy from plutocracy through public ownership unintentionally led to the development of corporate liberalism. It is from this point that the ambiguous legacy of American socialism can start to be measured.

Chapter 2

Understanding the Development of the Social Problem: The Socialist Critique of American History

Socialist use of Marxist thought became most apparent in their analysis of the historical development of the social problem that existed in the early twentieth century. Marxism imbued the socialist mind with ideas of historical materialism and class struggle. Historical materialism meant that changing economic circumstances dictated the course of history. Whether through technological innovations, concentration of capital, or new modes of production, these continually varying economic conditions affected all aspects of American society. The natural result of these changes, according to socialists, was a growing struggle between classes of people. Those who had some measure of control of economic life, could profit in some way from them, or simply owned the machinery became the upper class, while those who found themselves at the mercy of the upper class or could only sell their labor in the current economic environment became the lower or working class. The gap between these two classes widened over time and the ensuing struggle ultimately ended in a vast reorganization of society. According to the socialist reading of Marx, this arrangement had been the blueprint for human history. Whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century the two classes were bourgeoisie and proletariat, in earlier epochs they had been master and slave, or lord and serf.

In the United States socialists used historical materialism and class struggle to understand the development of the nation's history. Early merchant capitalism at the end of the eighteenth century and industrialization during the nineteenth century greatly affected the growth of the United States, changing its underlyintg ideology from republicanism to liberalism. The egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence, underscored by plenty of private property for everyone, gave way to a hierarchical society where an ever decreasing number of people controlled an ever increasing amount of private property. The Constitution of 1787 guaranteed property rights and over time became more effective in that mission as the government comprised of property owners controlled its interpretation. The propertyless lower class therefore became dependent on property holders and could only sell their labor to survive. Along the way chattel slavery outlived its usefulness in a rapidly expanding capitalist system and was therefore eradicated in a long and costly war once it became clear that southerners refused to peacefully give up their old economic system and the cultural power they derived from it. After the Civil War government became an extension of big business where gross corruption kept a select minority in power. Through this material conception of history and class struggle American socialists viewed the development of the social problem. Just as Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry hoped to usher in a new period of equality, independence, and prosperity by ridding the colonies of an oppressive and corrupt old regime and establishing a new order based on private property and free enterprise, modern day patriots such as Eugene Debs and Mary Marcy hoped to do likewise. Socialists wanted a new revolution that ended wage slavery, purified corrupt government, and took the next natural step in economic development which was the

organization of industry collectively. This they believed would finally end the class struggle and bring about a just society.

This brief description of socialist theory seems like straight-forward Marxism. American socialists, however, were usually quick to acknowledge a gigantic intellectual debt to Marx while maintaining a safe distance from unquestioning loyalty to Marx's entire programme. Most socialists in the United States found a great need for human agency amid their largely economically determined outlook. They quarreled among themselves about the necessity of religion, ethics, and violent revolution. Often these debates occurred within an intellectual discussion over what Marxism meant, but not always. Generally speaking, socialists split into two groups, the right and left. The right wing socialists, headed by the Milwaukee contingent behind Victor Berger, wanted to build unity slowly by winning local elections, enacting reforms, and getting the already large AFL to support their cause. These so-called sewer socialists (because they advocated municipal reform), opportunists, or step-at-a-time socialists have generally been viewed as less Marxist and more progressive because of their reform agenda. The left wing, headed by IWW radicals such as William Haywood, wanted a thorough and decisive revolution that was not muted by reform. They wanted to use industrial unions to organize workers for the assault on capital and take the battle right to the doorstep of their oppressors. These direct actionists, or impossibilists as their detractors within the movement called them, have been deemed more Marxist because of their avowal of revolution. Such categorizations have their merits, but they tend to obscure more than they reveal. For example, if you had a sincere faith in economic determinism – or were thoroughly Marxist by one interpretation – you could conclude that anything you did

would not alter the ultimate course of history. By this thinking the right wing could be seen as more Marxist. Similarly, the left wing could be viewed as not adequately Marxist because they lacked the patience to let the revolution develop. I suppose this could be called the Leninist fallacy. In the end, socialists as a group seemed to suffer from an updated version of the Puritan Dilemma: how should one act in a world that has already been determined? Just as the Puritans continually foundered over this difficult question, so too did the socialists. And just as recent scholars have examined Puritan thought and culture outside of the narrow – if extremely important – confines of Calvinist thought, so too is it important to study American socialists against something other than Marxism.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first demonstrates that Marxism was important to socialists, but not an all-consuming ideology. They accepted historical materialism and the importance of class struggle, but conceived of these ideas more as a starting point for transforming society than as an absolutely true scientific lesson. The second shows how socialists constructed a usable American past through their materialist conception of history. American socialists used Marx to interpret American history in a general sense where changing economic conditions led to the inequality, dependency, and corruption they loathed. However, they viewed Marxism as less an immutable law and more as a guiding spirit where human agency also directed the course of material and moral progress.

Socialism and Marxism have become almost synonymous in the contemporary American mind. If not used interchangeably, those who uphold the free enterprise system use the words as epithets when describing programs or ideas that seem to threaten

freedom and individualism. Systems for national health care are derided as "socialistic" by their opponents while many parents tremble at the thought of their children being taught by "tenured radicals" who espouse Marxist dogma at every turn. That socialism and Marxism have come to be seen as the same and threatening should be no surprise. An entire generation of Americans came of age and died in an atmosphere where the two terms were connected and came to mean the exact opposite of everything the United States supposedly stood for. Socialism and Marxism were woven into the fabric of Soviet-style communism, that most undemocratic and atheistic of creeds that developed into monotony, repression, terror, and the Gulag. Teachers all over the United States taught their pupils the virtues of individualism, competition, and democracy. Any threat to these foundations of American society threatened civilization itself. Even Joseph McCarthy, the great anti-communist demagogue, was not admonished for the justness of his cause as he was for the methods he employed. While the Cold War may be over and the idea of free enterprise seemingly triumphant, the supposed evils of wrongly conflated ideologies of socialism, communism, and Marxism, have endured as terms to smear the campaigns of those who try to change society in non-traditional ways.

One great irony of this was that America's most famous socialists – those of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – were not strict followers of Marxist theory. They promulgated their message in the name of democracy and individualism instead of in opposition to them. The American socialists of the Progressive Era were a diverse lot when measured against their various backgrounds in religion, ethnicity, sex, occupation, education, and income. From these varied circumstances, American socialists encountered Marx in different ways. Some, such as Daniel DeLeon, developed a

rigorous and sophisticated understanding of Marxist thought and demanded those around him in the movement do likewise. Others, such as Eugene Debs, used Marx as a tool in understanding what he already knew from experience – that capitalism created misery. Still others, such as William Dwight Porter Bliss, coupled Marxist materialism to Christian morality to develop a faith-based blueprint for the cooperative commonwealth. Many other unique obligations to Marx can easily be added to the list. It can be concluded from this that to call American socialists Marxists would be ambiguous if not completely meaningless. Similarly, scholarly attempts to understand the failure of the Socialist party around World War I in Marxist terms would be equally fallacious. Calling the Debsian era socialists too doctrinaire or not doctrinaire enough in their Marxism might satisfy the Marxist inquiry, but it does not do justice to the socialist movement itself.

American socialists did owe an intellectual debt to Marx. They shared with Marx a belief in the historical development of society where economic structures played a decisive role. They all came to this realization by observing the triumphs and tragedies of modern industrial capitalism, especially the plight of workers being swallowed up by the ever increasing reach of factory life and wage labor. They believed, in one way or another, that class struggle served as the mechanism for change. But Marx was not the sole source for such revelation. Some American socialists drew upon English Fabianism as an ideological source for reform. Others clung to the time-honored tradition from John Winthrop to Edward Bellamy of utopian dreaming to mend the evils of society. Socialists saw in the future a better society and most utilized Marx in some capacity to

explain it. However, Marx was but one intellectual source American socialists drew upon to critique and transform society.

Marxism, of course, was an essential element in the socialist mindset, but they did not adhere dogmatically to a set of principles they described as Marxist. Instead, socialists in different ways took from Marx ideas on historical development and class struggle, putting them to use in their local circumstances or in a broader American context. The three basic tenets of Marxism that socialists continually referred to in their literature were the material conception of history, class struggle, and the law of surplus value. Robert Rives La Monte, a self-proclaimed "Marxian," called these the three "great thoughts" of Karl Marx while May Walden Kerr dubbed them the "principles of international socialism."[1] Many socialist writers referred to these tenets directly or indirectly in their tracts. In some cases writers defined the material conception of history and demonstrated how it operated over time. Many pamphlets told the tale of how by changing methods of production human society developed from primitive communism to slave societies to feudalism and then to the current society of industrial capitalism.[2] Propagandists then showed how class struggle naturally resulted from these circumstances. It was easy for the modern working class to see and comprehend the horrible plight of slaves and serfs in earlier societies. Socialist writers then showed that the law of surplus value put workers in a capitalist society into a similar subservient

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[1] Robert Rives La Monte, *Science and Socialism,* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1900), 3-15; May Walden Kerr, *Socialism and the Home,* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901), 31-32.

[2] Two such examples are: Mark Fisher, *Evolution and Revolution,* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, n.d.), 9-20; A.M. Simons, *The Man Under the Machine,* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1899), 10-19.

position. As socialist writers never tired of demonstrating, modern workers produced much more wealth than their grandfathers did, yet more destitution and extravagant wealth existed in the current day. This occurred because those with the extravagant wealth – the capitalists – collected the surplus value produced by laborers for themselves and forced the workers into more dire circumstances by letting the labor market drive their wages closer to subsistence level. From this authoritative or at least scientific perspective socialists hoped to educate the working class about their plight and their historic mission to overcome it.

With these principles as a basis, socialists began to build upon Marxism in an attempt to update it and make it workable in the American context. They filled their propaganda and theoretical literature with references to Marxism that showed it as a fluid concept. John Spargo, a widely read theoretical writer, described scientific socialism as practiced by the Socialist party as not being "economic fatalism." He added that "the scientific spirit destroys the idea of romantic, magic transformations of the social system" and instead relied on the "human factor" to shape the future. Such faith in human agency would make some Marxists uneasy, both then and now. But for Spargo, the uncertainty of the progression of socialism was one of its greatest assets. He accentuated this pragmatic outlook by boldly declaring that Marx's epic work *Kapital* was not the *Bible*. Furthermore, critics of socialism who attempted to discredit the movement by finding errors in Marx's writings in no way threatened the theoretical basis of socialism because Marxism and socialism were not exactly the same. Spargo further illustrated the fluidity of socialism in a statement that simultaneously embraced and distanced Marx: "In [socialism's] abandonment of the errors of Marx it is most truly Marxian – because it is

expressing life instead of repeating dogma." While one could easily quibble with Spago's reading of Marx – he also called Marx "splendidly religious in his irreligion" – Spargo's writing illustrated that American socialists used Marx creatively but not exclusively.[3]

Spargo was by no means alone among socialist theorists in showing a Marxist influence, but not being rigidly confined by them. Morris Hillquit, another widely read theoretician, differed with Spargo on the idea of human agency under Marxism. Hillquit defined the underlying theory of Marxist scientific socialism as "the social and political structure of society at any given time and place is not the result of the free and arbitrary choice of men, but the logical outcome of a definite process of historical development." The "foundation" of said structures was "the economic system upon which society is organized." This more clearly economic determinist model did allow for variation however. The variation rested within the borders of particular nations. Socialism developed differently according to the infrastructure of specific countries. In the United States, for example, Hillquit argued that socialism grew slowly during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century and it consisted of mostly foreign, especially German, workers. It was not until the 1890s when rapid industrial development accompanied by the emergence of trusts led to massive strikes and the collapse of various reform efforts that socialism attracted a wider following.[4] To say that Hillquit allowed for a more flexible Marxism because he allowed for every nation to develop differently would be erroneous

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[3] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 68-69, 76, 121.

[4] Morris Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 331, 353-354. For a more detailed analysis see Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1919).

since Marx made the same point. But Hillquit's analysis does allow for more flexibility than he may have intended. As he acknowledged in his preface to *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, socialism as a matter of policy embraced the principle of a "practical movement of the masses." The masses in different countries responded differently to circumstances, economic and otherwise. They acted practically as matters related to the quest for human emancipation. As Hillquit observed, "we never shall reach perfection. A state of perfection in society would imply the arrest of all human endeavors and progress, the death of civilization. It is improvement, not perfection, for which we are striving."[5] Hillquit used Marx for a historical critique of modern society, but did not pretend that Marx had all the answers. For Hillquit, Marx directed socialists to view the economic base as the agent of change for other structures – political or social. But where these changes were headed in different nations was uncertain. Hillquit concluded that "it is still impossible to arrive at scientific and indisputable conclusions as to conditions of even the immediate future."[6] Thus even the New York lawyer saw Marxism as a guide not a law.

Still other socialists expressed their understanding of Marx in even simpler terms. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn exclaimed that striking textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and herself "talked Marxism as we understood it – the class struggle, the exploitation of labor, the use of the state and armed forces of government against the workers."[7] Kate Richards O'Hare described socialism as "the awakening social

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[5] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, v, 3-4.

[6] Ibid., 111.

[7] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography: My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 135.

consciousness of the race" that did not necessitate ever hearing of Karl Marx or the ability to differentiate "Economic Determinism" from "a new fangled bandage or a baby food." A good heart and common sense seemed to be enough.[8] Eugene Debs, the most famous of the pre-World War I socialists, shared with Flynn and O'Hare a practical understanding of Marx. As the famous story goes, Debs converted to socialism while doing time in an Illinois jail following his actions with the American Railway Union during the Pullman Strike. Victor Berger gave the forty year old Debs a copy of *Kapital* to peruse while the plutocratic court decided his fate. But as Debs's most astute biographer, Nick Salvatore, noted: "In terms of Socialist theory Debs was closer to being a Lassallean than a Marxist in his advocacy of political action – but in reality he was neither." Instead, Debs embraced republicanism and the American democratic tradition as inspirations for saving society.[9] Berger himself endorsed an "updated Marxism" based on the constructive revisionism of Edward Bernstein in the German Social Democratic Party where violent revolution had no place. He also led a movement in 1908 along with Spargo to defeat a Socialist party resolution that would have made March 14 Karl Marx Day. Berger wryly suggested that "if I wanted any saints I would prefer to join the Roman Catholic church [sic] and get them wholesale."[10]

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[8] Kate Richards O'Hare, "The Leaven Doing its Work," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 56, 59.

[9] Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 177.

[10] Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 7, 14, 24; Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 215-216.

The brief examples above were included not only to show the variety and fluidity of Marxist thought within the socialist ranks, but to demonstrate the varied backgrounds of the socialists themselves. Spargo and Hillquit were both New Yorkers and held positions of prominence in the party. Spargo informed his step-at-a-time gradualist approach with a Christian ethic causing him to back military intervention in the Great War while condemning the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Hillquit gradually drifted from his Jewish upbringing and his early connection with Daniel DeLeon's Socialist Labor Party to become a dominant figure within the Socialist Party. Ironically, he was not Marxist enough for DeLeon, but too Marxist for many within the new party.[11] Flynn, the fiery daughter of a working-class Irish family in New York, expressed her socialist feelings through the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World rather than the Socialist Party. O'Hare spent much of her time agitating among disgruntled Populists on the Great Plains and raising her family. Debs came to socialism through the trade union movement and also connected with the yeomen of the Great Plains and Midwest. Berger, an Austrian immigrant who taught school with a thick German accent in Milwaukee, ran the heavily immigrant city like a political machine in his quest to improve the lot of workers. The diverse backgrounds of these six socialists were indicative of the promise and problems of American socialism. It allowed for an incredible array of ideas to be

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[11] Hillquit, born Moses Hilkowitz in Latvia, left DeLeon's authoritarian SLP with others including Max Hayes to form what was called the "Rochester Socialist Labor Party." They merged in 1900 with the Social Democratic Party headed by Berger, despite Berger's objections based on a combination of racism and fear of Marxist dogma. Hillquit later became seen as a centrist between Haywood's syndicalism and Berger's opportunism, until by 1910 he was clearly associated with the right wing of the party. Howard Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953), 341-345; Kipnis, 82-83, 92-94, 215.

expressed but hindered cohesive action. The remarkableness of this collection of radicals rested in their ability to come together at all as socialists, not in the disunity that increasingly became a problem after 1908. The commonality that brought them together was not so much Marxism, but an understanding of the afflictions that cursed American society, an understanding that was informed by multiple intellectual sources. Republicanism combined with Marxism to bring together American socialists to fight against the vices of inequality, dependency, and corruption.

The socialist interpretation of American history illustrated the congruence of ideologies in the socialist mind. Like many intellectuals of the Gilded Age and Progressive Ear, socialists often looked to history to substantiate their ideas and understand the development of historical forces. Marxism, of course, relied very heavily on historical inquiry. But so too did republicanism. Great republican thinkers from Machiavelli to Rousseau to James Madison scoured historical texts in attempts to understand what did and did not work in republics of the past. Socialists shared this perspective. The desperately wanted to know why such noble republican principles as those annunciated in the Declaration of Independence somehow led to the misery of the Gilded Age. They wanted to know what went wrong in the United States. The socialist interpretation of American history criticized the growth of liberalism marked by individual license, at the expense of republicanism with its cornerstone of virtuous individualism. Socialists told the story of how economic elites attempted to control culture and ideology to maintain their privileged status in light of drastically changing economic conditions, something Marx had realized in all previous societies. They

bemoaned the human cost of this turn of events, but soberly reflected on the certainty of the coming cooperative commonwealth and the happiness that would come to humanity when industrial progress benefited the public at large instead of merely a handful of industrialists.

For socialists, the engine that drove historical change was economic development, usually through advances in technology. History was the story of classes of people struggling to dominate production and distribution of goods. In the United States this struggle existed even before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. In his path-breaking Marxist account of American history, Algie M. Simons, an undergraduate student of Frederick Jackson Turner and Richard Ely at the University of Wisconsin, described Columbus' arrival in America as an extension of European history. He argued that "the operation of forces" such as new technology including the compass, astrolabe, and gunpowder; the desire for goods from the Orient; and the emergence of the merchant class from the shackles of feudalism, made the "discovery of America" the "inevitable resultant." This account consciously downplayed the role of "great men" in the making of history and treated Native Americans only briefly as "the ablest savage fighters" that "exercised a profound influence upon American history" by being relentless adversaries to white encroachment and the "decisive influence" in all American wars. As such it exemplified the socialist belief in the materialist conception of history. As Simons stated in his preface, "changes in the industrial basis of society – inventions, new processes, and combinations and methods of producing and distributing goods – create new interests with new social classes to represent them." This economic evolution of society created "what we call progress." America's development after the permanent arrival of

Europeans in 1492 relied upon material change. Its very discovery resulted from material changes and the struggle of the merchant class against the prevailing feudal and ecclesiastical order.[12]

According to Simons, material conditions dictated the colonization of what became the United States. Again linking the development of the United States to conditions in Europe, Simons argued that Europe pushed immigrants out rather than the New World pulling them in. Specifically, social turmoil in Europe pushed a diverse group of people to America during the two centuries after Columbus' voyage. The growth of the merchant class pushed serfs and peasants off the land and freed them "to hunt for employers." The merchant class, or "advance guard" of the "great capitalist army" that would "clear the way for the army of occupation, - the industrial capitalist," created upheaval as they fought against the privilege of the landed nobility. A concurrent revolution in religion occurred known as the Reformation. The new religion that developed championed "individualism in theology" and "was as perfect a reflex of capitalism as 'free competition' and *laissez faire* in economics." Amidst this upheaval where the new dominant merchant class destroyed traditional society and built a culture that better suited their needs, thousands of people traveled to the New World as indentured servants or were captured in Africa and sold as slaves. To Simons the changing dynamics of the economy created the tumult that culminated in colonization. It resulted from neither the act of "great men" nor a movement for religious freedom.[13]

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[12] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), vii-viii, 1-11, 27-28.

[13] Ibid., 12-20.

Another socialist author, James Oneal, analyzed American history in a manner similar to that of Simons. Oneal's work, *The Workers in American History*, originally published in 1910, also admonished the "great man" theory of history, stressed the economic connection between America and Europe, and told the heretofore little recognized story of the American worker. In the preface to the 1921 edition, Oneal recognized the significant contribution of John R. Commons' 1918 publication of *History of Labor in the United States*. Oneal observed, however, that Commons' work was "devoted mainly to the history of labor organization and not to the history of the working class in general." Oneal intended to tell the story of the American working class, paying specific attention to its "historical evolution," the character of its "social and economic life," the nature of "its subjection to various forms of economic servitude in the colonies," and its improvements in organization. Oneal hoped to "give modern workers a historical culture that added to their discipline and solidarity" in an effort to make the American working class more prominent as a movement. Unlike Simons, who attempted to tell the story of American history in a grand narrative fashion, Oneal focused on the role of workers within a historical context. Oneal's new-labor-history-as-pre-old-labor-history studied workers, but did not make them the instrument of change in society. That role was to come as capitalism matured. In the mean time, Oneal analyzed the development of the American working class in order to prepare them mentally for their great historical role as destroyers of capitalism. The workers "will transform every factory into a palace of art and every workshop into a studio where 'ALL WILL BE JOY-

SMITHS AND THEIR TASK SHALL BE TO BEAT OUT LAUGHTER FROM THE RINGING ANVIL OF LIFE.'"[14]

Oneal's depiction of the arrival of Europeans in North America very closely resembled that of Simons. Oneal focused on how forces such as the Black Death, the Reformation, and the thirst for land ownership, all contributed to the construction of a new dominant class of merchants. As such, Oneal described the Reformation as a "crusade...of a new ruling class that wished to throw off the old feudal restrictions" and a movement to put valuable lands held by the Catholic Church into the private hands of an emerging merchant elite. Serfs became wandering vagrants as a result and many found their destiny in the New World as indentured servants.[15] For Oneal, like Simons, the European arrival in North America was the result of changing economic forces. Supposed "great men" such as Christopher Columbus, John Winthrop, and John Smith, did not create these forces, they were simply dragged along by them. Socialist historians such as Simons and Oneal hoped to destroy the myths of history being propagated in Progressive Era classrooms and replace them with what they believed the truth: the role of economic forces in the development of society.[16] From this perspective, workers

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[14] James Oneal, *The Workers in American History*, 4th ed., (New York: The Rand School of Social Science, 1921), 6-7, 208. Robert Rives La Monte also criticized the "Great Man" theory of history, claiming Marx and Herbert Spencer had destroyed the last vestiges of that outlook. Robert Rives La Monte, *Socialism: Positive and Negative* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 19-20.

[15] Ibid., 12-13.

[16] Simons cited love of union, hatred of slavery, and morality as myths on the causes of the Civil War. As will be seen later he ascribed that conflict to divergent economic interests. Oscar Ameringer described classroom myths with an anecdote. He said "if you look for the cause of the 'War for Independence' don't look into little Mary's School History. It isn't there." Such books were "fairy tales" that replaced real problems such as property relations with empty platitudes. "Mary's book tells about great men who held a

played a key role instead of just being anonymous toilers in the hands of a few important politicians, industrialists, and generals. Socialists hoped this would motivate workers to be less passive in the fight to reorganize society in a way that benefited all of society, not just those who happened to come into wealth.

The story of Colonial America also became one of changing economic interests. Simons' account of New England barely mentioned Puritans or Native Americans. Instead, he focused on the environment and the development of industry. Rivers that were navigable only for a short distance prevented plantation farming but eventually allowed for power to be harnessed from them, leading to the growth of urban centers. Good coastal fishing allowed for a commercial class to quickly develop. While this commercial class matured, most of the work done in New England happened in the home and on the farm. Women constituted a good measure of this workforce as they produced goods for the home and farm. The family benefited together from all it produced, even if the wife felt unappreciated because she remained dependent on her husband by law as she had formerly been dependent on her father. By contrast, Virginia experienced almost completely opposite circumstances. The good land, poor fishing, and navigable rivers

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meeting in Philadelphia" who declared "all men are born free and equal,...no taxation without representation," and "give me liberty or give me death." Ameringer lamented that "Mary's book said nothing about the nickle [sic] under the foot," the real cause of the war in his mind. Ernest Untermann said his book transcended "socalled [sic] standard histories" used in "Standard Oil universities...Y.M.C.A. meetings...and Carnegie libraries." His history told with the "Marxian method" was of value to workers. May Wood Simons added that teachers were not "allowed to teach the facts of history." Instead, they "must teach what those historians say who have written in accord with the interests of the ruling class in society." Such educations perpetuated falsehoods and class domination. A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 217, 221; Oscar Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam: A Little History for Big Children* (Milwaukee: Political Action Co., 1912), 18; Ernest Untermann, *The World's Revolutions* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 171-172; May Wood- Simons, *Why the Professional Woman Should Be a Socialist* (Chicago: The Party Builder, n.d.), 2.

allowed for large tobacco plantations to develop. The Puritan Revolution in England affected the two colonies differently as well. It meant a boom for immigration to Virginia while New England saw its population become stagnant. The Cavalier immigrants to Virginia enjoyed much power in England and sought similar status in Virginia. Over time these economies developed in relative isolation so that colonists created unique political structures to manage the economy. As each colony grew individually, they also grew together. The "interests of the ruling classes of America and England" thus became "antagonistic" and led to conflict.[17]

Thus socialists saw America becoming a miniature (in status, not size) version of England, only the colonies were economically backward compared to the mother country. Just as England had competing economic factions, so too did the colonies. And just as England had aspiring entrepreneurs who wanted to make a name for themselves in the economy, so too did the colonies. According to Simons, these conflicting forces came to a head after the Seven Years War when English debt forced the government to become more proactive in making the colonies a key ingredient in terms of balance of trade under the mercantile system. As a result, England passed taxes to raise revenue, enforced old taxes while lowering them in an effort to end smuggling, controlled land speculation in the west to prevent future costly war, and controlled the issuance of paper money in the colonies so English merchants could reap a higher reward against the wishes of the debtors in the colonies. As Simons concluded, "large classes of the population [of the American colonies] required an independent government to further their interests." This

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[17] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, 33-49, 60; May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem* in *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally M. Miller, 183-196 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 188.

would only happen through revolution; a revolution ultimately brought on by conflicts over economic interests, not "insignificant taxes and abstract principles of politics." Or as Mark Fisher more succinctly described it: "The leading citizens of the American colonies – the Washingtons and Hancocks – could not exploit the colonies because they did not control the government; so they seized the government from the British ruling class."[18]

While Simons and Fisher did not portray the revolutionaries in a particularly noble light (they were generally described as exploiters, smugglers, and land speculators), they were depicted as economic visionaries who sought to advance the interest of themselves and their lands against a repressive and destructive force emanating from England. Simons called these patriots "the most energetic and far-sighted among the colonists." He also saw the patriots as an extension of a longer revolution happening in England. The patriots were in essence Whigs; small capitalists fighting for constitutionalism and free enterprise against historical forces such as the existing order of privilege and nobility left over from feudal times, Hanoverian kingly prerogative, and even some elements of a now declining merchant class. The patriots were a minority in the colonies, yet they won the War for Independence because they were "the class whose victory was essential to progress." The patriots, like the Whigs, destroyed the privilege of a "dead society" whose economic system was in the process of "crumbling into the dust of history." American patriots ushered in a new era of independence and equality based on private property, the individual drive to attain it, and the good of the community

[18] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, 60-69; Fisher, 44.

at large (at least as long as land was available).[19] It was their destiny. Socialists in the early twentieth century came to share this feeling of destiny with their Whig and patriot brethren.

Ernest Untermann, an immigrant from Germany who became an American citizen, shared Simons' economic determinism, but included an element of bourgeoisie versus proletariat that Simons minimized during this era. Untermann claimed Americans of the revolutionary generation witnessed the beginning of a new era of history, one marked by prosperity and lofty ideals. He described these ideals in these words:

> Equality and freedom sit enthroned in perpetuity. Life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and other so-called inalienable human rights, are enjoyed to the full. And everything is lovely, or, at least, it ought to be. And whoever raises any doubts and disturbs this dream by any matter-of-fact questions is either an anarchist or a trades unionist, or, perhaps, even a Socialist.[20]

Untermann added that this new era had yet to be completed. The "buried history" of the working class showed the above ideals to be lacking, and only when laborers shared in the basic liberties the revolution claimed as its purposes would the revolution truly be finished.[21]

As society stood at the end of the eighteenth century, according to Untermann, the War for Independence had not been "fought to free the American working people, but the American business men." As evidence he claimed that no legislative assembly in the colonies sat any working men, nor did the group that drafted and signed the Declaration of Independence include any laborers. Among the privileged "gentlemen" that

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[19] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, 69-71, 75.

[20] Untermann, 106-107.

[21] Ibid., 107.

participated in such endeavors were George Washington who stole his land, Benjamin Franklin who protected Washington's property before agents in London when threatened by the Quebec Act, Thomas Jefferson who was an "aristocratic" elitist that "stood on the shoulders of the disfranchised whites and slaves," and the smuggler John Hancock. Untermann also argued that famous events such as the Stamp Act and tax on tea were of little relevance to workers because such revenue raising measures barely affected them. In general, workers drank little tea and seldom used the documents taxed by the Stamp Act. Even more palpable problems like the Quartering Act caused consternation among workers only after gentlemen like Washington and Hancock had ignited the flames of revolution. Whether Untermann correctly related the events of the Revolution was not as important as what he believed happened. He saw the American Revolution as a bourgeois revolution. He even said it played out exactly like the French Revolution, only unlike France the workers in the United States never gained control of the revolution, thereby forcing the bourgeoisie into the arms of a military dictator (Napoleon) to solidify bourgeois gains without freeing the workers. The goal of the gentlemen revolutionaries in America was "freeing the American working class in the name of human liberty from the rule of English business men and placing them under the rule of American business men." The noble ideals of revolutionary rhetoric rightly inspired many colonists, but the outcome simply changed the privileged master and left the egalitarian rhetoric as mere words.[22]

Oscar Ameringer, a so-called agrarian socialist who worked in Missouri, Oklahoma, and later became a chief lieutenant in Berger's Milwaukee machine,

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[22] Ibid., 114, 116-124.

emphasized the conspiratorial elitist aspect of Untermann's analysis while downplaying the economic determinism that marked the writings of both Untermann and Simons. While acknowledging the primacy of economic determinism, which he defined in his own folksy way as "the thing that makes people turn their noses in the direction whence they hear the jingle of easy money," he described the revolutionaries as economic elites who tricked the mass of American workers with noble rhetoric to fight the British for the sole economic gain of the elites. Ameringer called patriots "members of the property owning class" who held profit-making as a "sacred privilege." They believed taxes and laws "were fine things to keep the lower classes in check," but when they affected "the pocket books of the very best citizens, then it is high time to call a halt." Patriots then used the "fine talk" of liberty, freedom, and equality to "rile up those who didn't have a nickel to stand on." The lower classes – mostly workers – believed the rhetoric of the "slave owners, smugglers, capitalists, lawyers and landlords" and fought the War for Independence for those lofty purposes. Like Untermann, Ameringer believed republican rhetoric was all the lower classes could have possibly fought for since they could not afford to drink the tea that was taxed, they did not use the documents that were taxed, they could not claim taxation without representation because as non-property holders they did not vote and thus were not represented anyway, and they drank cheaper liquor than the rum that was taxed. The economic reasons listed above were the real causes of the Revolution, but they were the reasons of the few, not the many. The many were duped into fighting by use of republican rhetoric. Ameringer hammered home the point by showing the reward for these lower class republican patriots to be worthless scrip, burdensome taxes, a smashed rebellion in Massachusetts, and eventually a reactionary

Constitution that made private property preeminent.[23] Ameringer seemed to superimpose his contempt for modern plutocratic society back on the revolutionary generation, although he sincerely believed that greedy burgeoning capitalists sold-out the mass of Americans who desired real liberty.

A fourth socialist commentator on the revolutionary generation, W.A. Corey, also used the past as a lesson to inspire present society, although in a more positive sense than did Ameringer. Corey evoked the ghost of America's most eloquent and celebrated foreign ideologue of revolution – Thomas Paine – to show the necessity of a modern socialist revolution. For Corey as with Paine it was sheer common sense to cast off "irresponsible and despotic" power. In Paine's generation the monarchy held this power while in Corey's private capitalists wielded the instruments of control. Corey asserted that "the old tyranny has assumed a new form" and attempted to convince his readers the justness of socialist revolution by comparing the society Paine criticized to the one of the present day. Just as Paine criticized the English Constitution in *Common Sense*, so too did Corey in the American context. Corey argued that the United States Constitution was "modeled on this mongrel English Constitution" that Paine legitimately castigated. The United States version was "illogical," grossly favored property concerns, and was based on fear (built-in checks on the majority, that is, the people). Likewise, Corey compared

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[23] Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam,* 5, 18-25. Ameringer published a portion of the above verbatim as, Oscar Ameringer, *Causes of the Revolutionary War* (Chicago: Socialist Party, n.d), 1-4. Throughout his account, Ameringer argues that a large and well-formed working class had already developed in the United States during the revolutionary era. Simons denies this description: "It would be foolish to attempt to draw the class lines too clearly at this time. In only a few localities was the factory stage present....Class interests could not but be confused in such a society, and their political expression would necessarily confound that confusion." A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, 71. Interestingly, Ameringer cited Simons as one of the four historical accounts on which he based his own.

kings to capitalists. While kings and capitalists could both be "benevolent" and even "admirable" as in the case of some capitalists creatively organizing industry, this did not diminish the fact that they both held "unchecked power of one man over another." Besides infringing on individual liberty with their excessive power, these rulers needed to be dethroned because they caused wars for their own benefit, acquired power illegitimately through use of force, and simply outlived their usefulness in the development of society.

Corey completed the comparison by showing the necessity of independence over reconciliation. For both Paine (at least according to Corey) and Corey, reconciliation with the power that be or reforming the old system stunted progress. Just because the old way had produced fabulous wealth and wonderful innovations did not mean it had to be kept. Progress only occurred because the current system had replaced an older one, which was just as much better than the one it had replaced. Thus, progress in society continually necessitated change. Paine and Corey both noted the conservative nature of people and the sense of duty or "filial obligation" they felt toward their leaders. Corey claimed to understand the sentiment but encouraged his readers to look at organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers or the brutality of strikebreakers and then readdress the sense of obligation they felt. Both Paine and Corey believed that the greatest threat to progress via revolution came from a certain group of people. Paine described them as "a certain set of moderate men who think better of Europe [America, in Corey's case] than it deserves, and...will be the cause of more calamities to this continent" than even the those in power and their minions. Corey transposed that to mean reformers in present society. Specifically, he pointed to United Mine Workers

president John Mitchell as an example of such a person that loved the present system despite its faults. Reformers like Mitchell only wanted to mend abuses while maintaining the system. Corey castigated modern reconcilers because "the reform program leaves the governing of economic power in the hands of the capitalist" and "since reforms are, at best, but temporary expedients, they leave the country in an unsettled and harassed condition like an armed truce." For Corey, like Paine, complete independence from the predominating power structure that strangled republican principles was common sense.[24]

Simons, Untermann, Ameringer, and Corey offered different viewpoints on the American Revolution. Simons gave a sophisticated account of conflicting class interests in the trans-Atlantic economy that inevitably led to revolution in the English colonies in America. The revolutionaries based the society they hoped to create on republicanism, only they found themselves controlled by economic circumstances that led them in another direction during the nineteenth century. Untermann seconded Simons' economic determinism, but believed the patriots exhibited sinister intent against the working class from the beginning. Still, economic forces would eventually correct unequal circumstances. Simons and Untermann described society as it was going to be. By contrast Ameringer wrote an essay on how America ought to be. Patriots deceived the bulk of Americans with lofty republican rhetoric only to further their own economic self-interest. Ameringer believed in the republican principles that had been used deceitfully and suggested that socialism would bring them into fruition, but only through a human desire for change. Ameringer emphasized class conflict within America as opposed to

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[24] W.A. Corey, *Common Sense: A Reading of Thomas Paine's Revolutionary Pamphlet, "Common Sense," in the Light of the Socialist Revolution. The Voice of 1776 Speaks to the 20th Century* (Los Angeles: Common Sense Publishing Co., 1906), 7-8, 12, 15, 17-19, 21-30.

Simons who saw conflict happening primarily, but not exclusively, across the Atlantic. Corey's account fell somewhere in between those of Simons and Ameringer. Corey followed Simons in asserting the continuity of revolution. At the end of his essay Corey proclaimed "the Socialist revolution ...will complete the political revolution of 1776 by making it purely democratic" and "will extend the function of this democratic government to the field of industry."[25] However, Corey clearly sympathized with Ameringer's view that socialism was something that people should want. By using a heroic figure like Paine, comparing King George III to capitalists, and suggesting that republicanism was as feared in 1776 as socialism was in 1906, Corey tried to convince his readers that socialism was something to which they ought to strive.

These four accounts of the American Revolution could be used to show divisiveness within socialist ranks or as a measure against how well they understood Marx. A better approach, it may be argued, was to examine the commonalities. All four writers viewed republicanism as a worthy ideal, even if in different contexts. In essence, they all wanted the United States – and the world for that matter – to become what patriots of the revolutionary generation expressed in pamphlets and the Declaration of Independence. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were noble, if vague, goals in any generation. They also showed the continuity of socialism within the American historical experience. Socialism was not a foreign importation that made little sense within the already free atmosphere of the United States. It actually grew out of, and was an expression of, lofty rhetoric of America's most sacred and revered event – at least according to these socialists. It is also worth noting that historians and contemporaries

[25] Corey, 33.

considered Simons and Ameringer part of the right wing of the Socialist Party.[26] Again, this could be used to show factionalization within American socialism, but also be used to show the tenuousness of the gap between right and left. Simons's rigid economic determinism makes him an excellent candidate for the left, but so too does Ameringer's willingness to lash out at economic elites and his support for armed insurrection as in the case of Shays' Rebellion. In short, the right-left dichotomy obscures more than it reveals and American socialism should be considered for what the socialists shared.

The socialists saw it as their destiny to strive toward the same core principles that motivated the earlier patriots and their ideal republican society. However, the class of privilege had changed. Gone were the King, landed nobility, and mercantilism (along with early merchant capitalism) and replaced by plutocracy, capitalists, and the ideology that sustained them – liberalism. The socialist critique of American history from the American Revolution up to 1900 told the story how liberalism became the ideology and way of life that grew out of nineteenth century industrialization and the ensuing fight to control the fruits of it. The maxim that summarized the republican attitude of the revolutionary generation was Thomas Jefferson's famous words in the Declaration of Independence: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Socialist economist Scott Nearing declared that those words were indeed words to live by and worked well during the nation's early years when abundant land and natural resources were available.[27] However, by the early years of the twentieth century those words seemed a cruel

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[26] James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 26; Kipnis, 217-218, 293.

[27] Scott Nearing, et al., *Should Socialism Prevail* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1916), 12-13.

mockery in light of the misery brought upon the masses by private control of the fruits of the industrial revolution. Those who controlled the means of production created the ideology of liberalism to justify their position in society. With their economic power they came to control government, courts, and culture. Socialists aimed to overthrow the unjust system just as an earlier generation had thrown off the corrupt and economically retarding system of the British. The evolution of society demanded no less and had Jefferson – the "Father of Democracy" – lived at the time he would "denunciate" and call for the "overthrow" of the system louder than any socialist.[28]

Socialists frequently pointed to the creation of the Constitution as an important step in the creation of liberalism and the destruction of republicanism. They saw the Constitution as a victory for property-owners at the expense of the liberty of the toiling masses and western debtors. Many socialists wrote on how the Constitution favored property-owners and thereby made it undemocratic by favoring certain individuals. John Spargo described the Constitution as undemocratic from its inception. The Founding Fathers never intended it to be a democratic document despite efforts by later generations to make it so. The lack of universal adult suffrage was but one example of the Constitution's undemocratic nature. Emil Seidel, socialist mayor of Milwaukee, claimed the Constitution had been subverted by the capitalist class that controlled the means of production. He insisted that after the socialist revolution "the constitution [sic] then will

[28] This author only pointed at how Jefferson would want to "overthrow" the debauched legal system, but it would not be a stretch to say he believed Jefferson would want to transform the system that created the corrupt courts. Debs often claimed Jefferson would be a socialist if he lived at the time. George Allan England, *Socialism and the Law: The Basis and Practice of Modern Legal Procedure and its Relation to the Working Class* (Fort Scott, KN: Legal Department Appeal to Reason, 1913), 36-37; Eugene V. Debs, "Speech of Acceptance (1904)," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), 74.

have a new meaning – that of Jefferson – that of Lincoln. For we shall then have a republic of the workers which means a republic of the people, by the people, for the people." Austin Lewis derided the Constitution because it only "guarantees the right of the economically strong to dispossess the economically feeble." He also proclaimed that "our constitutions rest primarily upon the rights of property, we know nothing and care less about rights of man." Silas Hood called the constitutional convention a gathering controlled by "commercial buccaneers," the "well-born...landed interests of the states," and a "conspiracy of monied interests." Ameringer remarked: "What a queer thing this Constitution of the United States! After declaring the protection of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness the purposes of government, the Constitution delivers life into the hands of property!" He also called the new government "a way to keep the rabble in check," an "undemocratic democracy," and "a democracy with strings attached."[29] The remarks of all five commentators spoke to how the republican ideals of the revolutionary generation had been subverted by the Constitution. They all believed socialism would remedy this problem by removing the corruptive influence – capitalism and the private control of property.

Simons' explanation of the development of the Constitution sympathized with the aforementioned theme of conspiracy and evil, but couched it more explicitly in terms of

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[29] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910) 288-289; Emil Seidel Papers, 1906-1940, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Austin Lewis, *The Militant Proletariat* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 106-107; Silas Hood, *United States Constitution and Socialism* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing, Co., 1911), 5; Oscar Ameringer, *Two Constitutions* (Oklahoma City: American Guardian, n.d.), 1-2; Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam,* 25, 28, 33. Not all socialists detested the United States Constitution. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn claimed that a teacher had "drilled us so thoroughly in the U.S. Constitution and especially the Bill of Rights that I have been defending it ever since." Flynn, 41.

economic development. Simons argued that events like Shays' Rebellion in Massachusetts and a similar incident in Rhode Island forced aspiring capitalists to regroup "in obedience with material class interests." Whereas they had fought the Revolution against a competing class in Great Britain, now the enemy lurked inside the borders of the new nation. Thus the weak central government of the Articles of Confederation, created partly so as to not interfere with developing industry and partly because no national class interest could be identified with which to build a national government around, had to be abandoned for something stronger that would protect "budding capitalists" and creditors in the east from debtor farmers in the west. Simons soberly described the change this way: "In 1776 they [aspiring capitalists] were all for paper money, restriction of the courts, 'natural rights,' and the whole string of democratic principles. By 1786 they had rejected all these principles" and left them behind to be craved for by "debt-ridden farmers and workingmen." Thus, the American patriots screamed "Liberty!" when an opposing economic class controlled the government, but sought to squelch such ardor when they themselves controlled the government.[30]

Simons went on to condemn the framers of the Constitution for deliberating in secrecy and exceeding their mandate from Congress. He also scoffed at the ratification process that enabled the illegal document to be forced upon an unwillingly populace. Ratification was not put before the people, but to special state legislatures that were voted for by what Simons figured to be about one quarter of the electorate that could vote at the time because of property qualifications. Simons estimated that the vast majority of those not entitled to participate in the ratification procedure would have rejected it, thereby

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[30] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 90-99.

making the Constitution unwanted by around three-quarters of the population. Simons and the socialists obviously did not view this as democracy or popular sovereignty. He summarized his argument as follows:

> the organic law of this nation was formulated in secret session by a body called into existence through a conspiratory trick, and was forced upon a disfranchised people by means of a dishonest apportionment in order that the interests of a small body of wealthy rulers might be served. This should not blind us to the fact that this small ruling class really represented progress, that a unified government was essential to that industrial and social growth which has made this country possible. It also should not blind us to the fact that there was nothing particularly sacred about the origin of this government which should render any attempt to change it sacrilegious.[31]

The summary of Simons showed how the socialist mind battled itself over a desire to blame greedy capitalists for the state of society and to coolly understand how economic forced directed social growth. This mirrored their conflict over building a society that ought to be or was going to be. Whatever the case, socialists saw the implementation of the United States Constitution as a key point moving the nation from republicanism to liberalism.[32]

The courts began the assault on liberty by becoming a branch of government not directly responsible to the people and allowing for the economic elite to acquire and control private property. John Marshall personified the problem for socialists. George Allan England declared that Marshall "was the court" and moved it in directions he alone desired. Simons vilified Marshall as the man who fashioned the "usurpation of power"

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[31] Ibid., 99.

[32] Ibid., 90-99. Other commentators scoffed at the ratification process. Silas Hood commented that "the constitution was ratified by the various state legislatures only after the most flagrant political corruption and political trickery, such as would rival Tammany tactics, had been resorted to." Hood, 19.

from the people to a strong centralized government that operated for the benefit of capitalists. When Marshall ran the Supreme Court "he constantly extended and strengthened the power of his office until it reached proportion undreamed of even by those who founded this government." That was quite a denunciation considering how conservatively Simons viewed the Founding Fathers. With federal judges and Supreme Court justices not accountable to the people, this suddenly powerful branch of the government stemming from the *Marbury v. Madison* decision made the federal government inaccessible to the people and a tool of capitalists. England went so far as to claim that if Thomas Jefferson lived today he would "denunciate" and call "for the overthrow" of legal system louder than any socialist. By the first decade of the nineteenth century democracy was but an empty phrase that people cherished but could not practice – unbeknownst to most of them.[33]

The upgrade in power of the courts was by no means simply the maneuvering of Marshall alone or a small cadre of capitalists. It reflected the changing nature of the American economy. As the United States slowly began to industrialize institutions like the court and government had to change to meet new requirements. As William Haywood and Frank Bohn noted; "the change from hand labor to machine labor…was the most important revolution that the world has ever known."[34] Not only did the nature of work change tremendously, but the very way people lived and how they were governed. In terms of work, machines lowered the amount of human power needed to do traditional jobs. Power looms spun clothes more quickly than by hand while steam-

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[33] Ibid., 125-127; England, *Socialism and the Law,* 3, 36-37.

[34] William D. Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 14-15.

powered engines replaced the brute animal power of man and beast alike. Instead of improving the condition of workers, these changes ultimately hurt them. More and more workers found themselves selling their labor to an owner of machinery for a wage. With this loss of independence came the uncertainty of sudden dismissal. Most workers simply submitted to this new aristocracy (or as Simons called them, the "royal heir" and "last prince" in the "long line of ruling classes that have dominated society since the appearance of private property"), while others responded by moving west to acquire land and reassert their independence or organizing in fledgling labor unions. The beginning of industrialization did not ease the burden of Americans, instead it created an old kind of misery – dependency – in a new form.[35]

While concerned about the brutal exploitation of these dependent workers, socialist commentators focused more on their struggle for independence against the capitalists who owned the means of production and the government they directed to their own ends. Dependency stemming from wage slavery developed because of technological innovations, European war, and individual initiative by entrepreneurs to build profitable enterprises. European industrial inventions dating to the mid eighteenth century such as the steam engine, railroad, and factory system gradually made their way to the United States. Once in America, many of these innovations became improved, such as Francis Lowell's textile mill, and ultimately resulted in the creation of a dependent class of wage laborers. This early process of industrialization was not as simple as technology floating across the Atlantic Ocean. The Napoleonic Wars, fought for "commercial supremacy"

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[35] On the early labor movement, the influence of Frederick Jackson Turner and the idea of western migration for independence see Oneal, 148-154, 158-167; A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History*, 147, 152-153, 179-190.

and European domination where the United States played a minor military role, pushed the United States into a position of increased industrialization. The elimination of European wares from the market due to war compelled Americans to produce more themselves. Modest factories sprung up across New England, considerably advancing the economic status of the United States in a few years due to the profits they enjoyed with lack of foreign competition.[36] Such an account not only demonstrated the economic determinism of socialists such as Algie Simons, but also showed the connection between Europe and the United States in the minds of American socialists. Because events in Europe affected the economic fortunes of the United States so greatly it only seemed logical that ideologies traversed the Atlantic as well. While such an outlook could be used to show that Marxism was a European import to the United States, it could also be used to illustrate the tie of republicanism between the two continents. Whether first expressed in Renaissance Italy or the eighteenth century English countryside, principles of republicanism traveled to the New World to critique a rising industrial aristocracy that threatened the liberty of individual Americans.

The new ideology of liberalism that slowly gained adherence in the United States as the nation grew during the nineteenth century became the predominant outlook that socialists came to criticize. As already noted, socialists critiqued the United States Constitution and the Supreme Court as governmental appendages of liberal ideals. These institutions protected private property, including the private ownership of the tools of production, to the detriment of wage laborers and the community at large. Even though liberalism called for little state interference in the economy, an attribute that was

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[36] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 143-148.

supposed to guarantee liberty for everyone, this only made sense from an eighteenth century perspective. When everybody owned their own tools of production and had some hope of freely competing locally, a doctrine that called for limited state interference made sense. Once competition resulted in winners and losers, and thereby the winners dominating certain industries, lack of government response meant repression to the losers who became dependent wage laborers. Just as republicanism developed before 1800 as an expression of the desire for political and economic democracy against the privileged dominance of the aristocracy in commerce and government, socialism developed during the nineteenth century as a similar expression of democracy against a new industrial aristocracy and the resulting plutocracy.

Political developments during the antebellum years convinced socialists that liberal ideology corrupted American government. The tariff was perhaps the best example. Liberal government purported to have limited, if any, control over the lives of individual Americans. But just after ratification of the Constitution, Congress passed a limited protective tariff under the artful leadership of Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton, a man admired and admonished by socialists because he more than anybody else masterminded the capitalist development of the United States, also persuaded Congress to create a national bank and an excise tax. These measures, along with the national debt, "created a class" of manufacturers "peculiarly dependent upon the national government, and who could be reckoned upon to rally to its support and to demand further favors in return for that support." In essence, plutocracy was born with the nation itself after ratification of the Constitution. The protective tariff increased over the years at the request of northern manufacturers. While this created consternation among the southern

planter elite they could do little but complain – and eventually secede – because economic history had passed them by. The relationship between government and northern industry grew up until the Civil War. Examples of this include Henry Clay's championing of the American System, the rise of political machines and parties to buy offices, and decisions by the Marshall court such as *McCullough v. Maryland* and the Dartmouth College case each of which contributed to the growth of plutocracy. Far from being limited, liberal government in early nineteenth century America fostered capitalism at the expense of a rapidly growing working class and individual liberty.[37]

Women and children also found themselves affected by industrialization. As the United States underwent the change from artisan economy to mass industrialization, women and children steadily left home and entered the workforce. Hillquit declared that "the machine...made child labor on a large scale possible, it was capitalist competition that made it desirable, and it was capitalist exploitation of the adult workers that made it inevitable." The use of industrial machinery moved the workplace from the home to the factory. It also deskilled work, thus making children of all ages prospects for work. Capitalists claimed that children did not need wages that matched their adult counterparts because they ate less and did not deserve as much money because of inexperience. Child laborers then competed with adult workers and drove down wages overall. This had to

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[37] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 116-117, 153, 209-213; W.V. Holloway, *The Supreme Court and the Constitution* (Oakland: The World Press, 1906), 34-35. Quite often Hamilton came off as the arch-villain of the destruction of republicanism and the triumph of liberalism. Silas Hood called him the "chief conspirator" at the constitutional convention. Hood summarized Hamilton's ideology as "that inequality of property would exist so long as liberty existed, and that it would unavoidably result from that very liberty itself." Hood commented on that view saying it "sounds like plutocratic logic. No wonder the banker Republicans of Chicago and the financial and steel interests of Pittsburg [sic] have their Hamilton clubs. A magnificent preceptor was Hamilton for these haters of republicanism to pattern after." Hood, 9-10.

happen because the goal of capitalist production was profit, and if one company hired child laborers and therefore paid less in wages the competing companies had to do the same. A factory owner told Kate Richards O'Hare "as long as my competitors employ children, I must give them [child laborers] work, revolting as it may be to me." Again socialists saw the primacy of economic change in the development of American society. Child labor resulted from the rise of capitalism, not necessarily the amoral ways of factory owners. In the end, capitalism changed yet another facet of society.[38]

Women too found their lives changing drastically. Industrialization also forced women out of the home and into the factory. Like with child labor, capitalists used woman labor to drive down the price of labor, arguing that a woman's income was supplemental to that of the husband or father and therefore should not be as high. The movement of women and children into factories along with the decline in wages of course had detrimental effects on working class families from lack of parental supervision to hastily prepared meals stemming from woman's dual role in wage and domestic labor. Woman's move into the factories had unexpected results as well. Theresa Malkiel described this change as a "turn in the road" in the drive for independence of women. Where women had been dominated by their husbands or fathers in home work, now they had the opportunity to leave the "lonely farm-house" and experience "a new freedom heretofore undreamt of." This "new freedom" did in the end bring a new kind of dependency, that on the factory owner, but it illustrated how socialists viewed the importance of breaking the chains of dependency. Malkiel saw how

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[38] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 225; Kate Richards O'Hare, "As a Bud Unfolds," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 53.

bringing women together in factories ultimately brought a sense of female solidarity that propelled the "woman question" to the fore later in the century. This move "tore our conception of woman's sphere from its age-long mooring place, shattered all former traditions, trampled on custom and convention, creating chaos and dissatisfaction where peace and submission formerly reigned." Malkiel saw a silver lining – the growing sense of female solidarity and breaking out of traditional gender roles – while other socialists saw women as being dragged into a second form of dependency. Now they battled patriarchy and the factory owner. Whichever view they chose, socialists saw dependency as an evil to be ousted and changing economic conditions affected the forms of dependency.[39]

The changing economy during the antebellum years could have produced an "idyllic picture" where men and women were freed by machines from arduous work in order to pursue leisure activities and improve the community. Instead, "the machines became instruments of private profit in the hands of a class of non-workers who soon became a power in the national government, while those who operated these instruments were doomed to exploitation." This trend continued and strengthened until the end of the nineteenth century but not before civil war destroyed the vestiges of the old economic order that still existed in the south. Algie Simons treated traditional interpretations of the causes of the Civil War with contempt. He argued that neither moral outrage over slavery nor a desire to keep the union together persuasively accounted for hostilities. As evidence he cited the ill-treatment of abolitionists in the north and the numerous attempts at secession from various quarters before 1861. Instead, he argued that the "divergent

[39] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 232; Theresa Serber Malkiel, *Woman of Yesterday and To-day* (New York: The Co-Operative Press, n.d.), 4-5, 12.

and antagonistic interests" of chattel slavery and capitalism caused the war. By 1860, northern capitalists had a political party that supported their interests and they clearly controlled the government. Slaveholders realized their economic system was geographically confined and only growth would help them retain power, and this growth could not happen so long as they did not control the government. The course of the war and its inevitable outcome solidified the hold capitalists had on American government. Ameringer stated the case more clearly. He declared that "the tariff, more than any other factor, was responsible for the war between the north and the south." Like Simons, Ameringer showed that antagonism existed between the elite class of both the north and south. Each needed to control the government to prosper economically. The tariff was the paramount issue for the industrializing north and the agricultural south. When it became clear that the north would dominate the government and therefore the tariff, the south felt compelled to secede to preserve the status of its planter elite. William Leffingwell compared the actions of southern slaveholders to the Founding Fathers. Just as "the Washingtons and Hancocks" could not exploit their land because they did not control the government, so too with southerners. Both attempted to remedy their situation by fighting for control of the government. The only difference was that southerners had lost that power while the Founding Fathers had never enjoyed it. As for the war itself, the workers in either section fought it, but not for the tariff or the elites of their section. They fought for abstract principles such as "justice, God, fatherland, flag, freedom" that spewed from the lips of those who had an economic stake. The same

grisly tale that described the War for Independence also served to explain the Civil War a few generations later.[40]

The conflict itself demonstrated to socialists the nature of the corrupt government and whose interests the war served. Ameringer asked rhetorically: "Have you ever heard of General Rockefeller or General Morgan, of Major Carnegie, Captain Vanderbilt, Colonel Gould?" The answer of course was no, and it was because "the property owners of the north utilized the government instituted for the protection of property, to exempt property owners from military duty in the Civil War." This was done through the practice of buying substitutes for the war. Ameringer noted that property owners could fight, and many of them did. However, they had an option, unlike the "landless, homeless, tooless [sic] proletarians that had to serve." He illustrated his point with a number of poignant and folksy anecdotes. Mark Hanna, the one time "high-priest" of the Republican party, did not serve in the war so he could tend to his wholesale grocery business:

> As a leading business man he had too many pressing engagements to find time for soldiering. He consequently hired a substitute, not for the grocery, but for the war business. And oh, grim humor, two years before Mark Hanna died, the Grand Army of the Republic elected him honorary member of that body. Maybe it was in honor of his substitute.

Likewise, John D. Rockefeller bought a substitute as did Andrew Carnegie after a not so splendid experience at Bull Run. Simons reported that J.P. Morgan, despite being an excellent physical specimen according to his biographers of the day, did not serve in the military. Instead, he bought "condemned rifles" for $3.50 apiece and sold them back to

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[40] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 156, 220-221, 284; Oscar Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam*, 46-49; William H. Leffingwell, *Easy Lessons in Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1902), 44.

the government for $22.50. When the government became wise and refused payment, the Supreme Court found in favor of Morgan, undoubtedly appealing to the sanctity of contract established by Marshall's decision in the Dartmouth College case. Ameringer added that "had Morgan been a poor man he most likely would have swung for high treason." However embellished these stories may have been, although he almost assuredly took them from Gustavus Myers's *History of the Great American Fortunes*, the anecdotes illustrated the socialist contempt for the power and corruptive influence of capital.[41] For all the talk of the supposed economic freedom of liberalism, socialists indicated that they only applied to those few who controlled the means of production and therefore the government. These few elites spoke nobly about abstract principles as freedom and liberty, but it only applied to them. The growing mass of workers became increasingly dependent and exploited, and eventually fought a war on behalf of their oppressors. The consolidation of this liberalism gone awry continued after the Civil War.

The Gilded Age continued the trends of earlier in the century. Capital became concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy men while they simultaneously controlled an increasingly more corrupt government. Algie Simons commented that indeed "the one great fact of the" post Reconstruction "years has been the stupendous development of concentrated capitalism." With it came economic panics such as in 1873 and 1894, immigration of laborers from Europe, urbanization, the growth of railroads (financed by

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[41] Ameringer listed Myers' book as one of four history books for further reading. Other socialists cited the muckraking progressive as well. Haywood said of Myers' book: "This great and valuable work should be read by every American." In a small way this demonstrated that socialists were not parochial. They welcomed the arguments of people not explicitly within the movement. Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam,* 54-56; Haywood and Bohn, 28-30; Gustavus Myers, *History of the Great American Fortunes*, 3 vol. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907-09).

government for private profit), and monopolies. This evolution of the capitalist system also brought destitution for the new laborers, squalor in the cities, companies such as railroads that lined the pockets of owners while sending workers to early and ghastly demises, and companies that thwarted competition in an economy that championed that very principle. It was no wonder that Simons titled his chapter on the Gilded Age "The Triumph and Decadence of Capitalism." The "triumph" was a negative one, at least from the perspective of labor. It meant the conquest of society and government for the benefit of the privileged owners of capital. As Ameringer noted, this caused political parties to holler empty platitudes such as "high tariff, free trade, gold standard, free silver" or whatever else enticed Americans to support their party. In reality, these parties had become "pliant tools of their capitalist masters and willingly supplied police, militia, regular army and court injunctions" to protects the interests of capital. This was the decadent society of the Gilded Age.[42]

What Simons, Ameringer, and other socialists wanted was for the triumph of capitalism – efficient use of machines to ease the burden of workers – to lead to a better community; one where everybody enjoyed the fruits of modern technology. This only happened when the community owned the means of production. The desired effect of this vision differed little from that of republicans a century earlier. Where the earlier generation saw the good community coming from independent property-holders competing equally in a developing commercial economy where a democratic government allowed nobody special privilege (thus destroying the privileged advantage of historical aristocracy), the later generation wanted to destroy the privilege of the new machine-

[42] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 304-305; Ameringer, *Life and Deeds of Uncle Sam,* 64.

owning aristocracy and create the good community through joint ownership of labor-saving machinery where truly democratic government granted no special advantage to any particular group.

Armed with this outlook, it was not surprising that socialists treated reform groups such as the Populists with contempt. These social critics, who sincerely loathed the decadence of capitalist society, wanted to turn back the clock and not embrace the positive triumph of capitalism. James Oneal saw the People's Party as a conglomeration of irate farmers, scared small capitalists, and some urban workers. He quoted from Charles Edward Merriam's *American Political Ideas* as to their ideology: "They were...on the side of individualism, ...democracy,...and on the side of collectivism where necessary to curb monopoly or unfair competition,...but not for common ownership of capital." Likewise, Simons called Populists "discontented members of the crumbling small-capitalist class" that sought remedy through inflation as the debtor class had done for centuries. In essence, Populists embraced republicanism too, but did not apply the lessons to modern industrial conditions. They advocated independent property holders, democracy, and government protection of the common good, but this denied the evolution of society, at least according to socialists. Populists looked to eighteenth century republicanism for answers to twentieth century problems, while socialists looked to the principles or guiding spirit of eighteenth century republicanism and brought them to bear on twentieth century problems. The time of a nation of small individual property-holders was gone forever. New solutions had to be found for the timeless problems of the elite economic class' domination of government and society for their own ends.[43]

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[43] Oneal, 185; A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History,* 307.

The socialists, then, constructed an updated model of republicanism utilized by patriots at the end of the eighteenth century. Patriots wanted revolution to allow for economic advancement, to end dependency, and to establish equality. Socialists at the beginning of the twentieth century wanted no less. Economic advancement for the socialists, however, meant public ownership of the means of production instead of private ownership. This fostered more production and better living conditions. An end to dependency to socialists meant reaping the full reward of work (as opposed to selling one's self for a wage) instead of the patriots' plan of freeing themselves from the bonds of English laws and duties. Equality meant for socialists that everybody worked, everybody took home what they worked for, and everybody enjoyed a high quality of life free to pursue their individual interests. Patriots saw equality in terms of land ownership and individual advancement. The problems of the twentieth century had deep roots in the American past. The basic problems of inequality, dependency, and corruption remained, only their relation to economics had changed. Industrialization changed the nature of the historic vices listed above.

Their critique of American history not only allowed socialists to understand the development of the social problem, it served as an example of one way socialists attempted to address its remedy: an emotional appeal to the masses. By showing that the principles of the Declaration of Independence had been violated, that workers had historically been duped into fighting wars for privileged economic interests, and that a non-democratically selected Supreme Court approved laws contrary to the interests of the majority of Americans, socialists appealed on an emotional level to Americans.

Socialists aimed at American consciences as often as they did consciousness. Gaylord Wilshire articulated this view in these words: "until the belief in Socialism gets hold of the hearts and emotions of the people more as a religion than as an understanding of economic events,...there is not going to be a Social Revolution."[44] Just as socialists combined reasoned economic analysis with moral condemnation in their critique of the history of the United States, so too in their analysis of problems during the early twentieth century. The basis of the moral critique remained a commitment to republican principles of a century earlier.

[44] Gaylord Wilshire, *Socialism: A Religion* (New York: Wilshire Book Co., 1906), 1.

Chapter 3

Identifying the Social Problem: Republican Critique of Progressive Era Life

The basic problem socialists identified during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era was inequality. In the economic realm this meant the existence of a working class that lacked independence. Workers sold their labor to a member of the capitalist class and thus became dependent on the market and their owner's goodwill for the livelihood of themselves and their families. Their dependent status illustrated to laborers and socialists the depths of inequality in American society. In politics, inequality was evident by the corrupt manner in which a select group of insiders dominated governmental power. Politicians responded more and more only to the needs of the capitalist class whose pocketbooks put them in office. Industrial interests dictated the public policy of society, forcing greater dependency on the working class and allowing the economic elite to have an unequal amount of power. Corrupt methods kept these men in power as backroom bargaining and Wall Street dealing prevented the concerns of the working class from being addressed. Socialists perceived inequality between the classes growing as the United States entered the twentieth century. The burgeoning number of immigrants, women, and children in the workforce along with combination among industrialists helped push more middle class Americans into the ranks of the working class. Socialists looked in horror as industrial society ground human beings into a pathetic state of dependency and misery.

By critiquing society in terms of inequality, dependency, and corruption, socialists placed themselves squarely in a neo-republicanism tradition. Republicanism, as defined by recent historians, consisted of five elements: government protection of the common good, virtuous individuals who muted self-interest, political and economic independence, politically engaged citizenship, and equality.[1] Since the specific elements of republicanism have a general appeal, most ideologues in the United States can claim to be republican in total or in part. As one historian noted, "once having been identified, [republicanism] can be found everywhere."[2] Socialists of the Progressive Era were no different. Those born in the United States found themselves exposed and often educated in republican traditions. Even those who immigrated to America could not help but be influenced by the promise of equality. In many instances, immigrants came to the United State because of the allure of republican institutions. The bulk of American socialists did not immerse themselves in the republican classics of the English country Whigs or the Scots humanists. Rather, they lived and worked in a culture defined by the rhetoric of republicanism or at least its promise. Republicanism or at least its rhetoric permeated American intellectual life and culture while the industrial revolution steadily made those ideals seem more distant. Participants in the socialist movement were actively engaged in the cultural ferment of American intellectual life and thus steeped in the ideas of republicanism.

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[1] Sean Wilentz, "Society, Politics, and the Market Revolution," in *The New American History*, rev. ed., ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 71.

[2] Joyce Appleby, "Republicanism and Ideology," *American Quarterly* 37 (Autumn 1985): 461.

Socialists shared with other observers the perception of growing inequality at the turn of the twentieth century. Reformers of various stripes since the beginning of the nineteenth century acted to ameliorate the wretched living conditions of the working class or those dependent in some way. In fact, some worked feverishly to prevent a society of classes from developing at all. What differentiated socialists from bourgeois reformers was the desire to completely recast society. The socialist outlook of society's problems, its origins, and their remedies incorporated a variety of seemingly contradictory notions. Economic developments completely out of the hands of human beings created the problems of modern society, yet the actions of informed people could solve them. Socialists spoke of a world that was already determined along side one that ought to exist. Science and technology were both causes of and cures for the ills of society. Socialists viewed the United States as both unique and typical in its historical development. Finally, socialists ridiculed bourgeois values, yet often found themselves prisoner to them, especially in matters relating to gender and family. The story of American socialism was how a heterogeneous group of well-intentioned social critics attempted to sort through a maze of contradictions and problems in their quest to transform the United States into a nation of full and equal citizens. They sought to comprehend why the republican vision of the American Revolution never materialized and develop a plan to establish the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. To understand how the socialists helped transform American society during the Progressive Era by looking to the past to understand the future, one must comprehend how the socialists critiqued the world they lived in and communicated that critique to society at large.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first examines how socialists imagined capitalism corrupted American life. They balanced moral outrage and historic inevitability as they expressed indignation toward how capitalists through trusts created rampant economic inequality, corrupted government, made a mockery of democracy, and molded the Constitution to their own interests. The second analyzes how socialists believed capitalism affected the people in a negative way. They showed that the growth of capitalism increased dependency, created wage slavery, limited individuality, changed the role of women in society, and destroyed families. What was more, the misery of these human problems only worsened over time. The socialist critique of the society they lived in consisted of multiple variations of republican themes from the American past tied together by a desire to end the inequality and dependency foisted upon the working class by capitalism.

Socialists believed that by the 1890s the United States developed into a country of two classes of people based on economic power and control. In Marxist terms, socialists identified the two classes as the bourgeoisie and proletariat, or for a more economic definition those who controlled the means of production and those who sold their labor. This duality could also be simplified to the capitalist class and the working class or even the "haves" and "have-nots." Socialists filled their literature with such terminology, especially the more theoretical tracts. While economic distinctions served as the basis for class definition, socialists incorporated a more thorough understanding of inequality to their class-based critique of American society. This understanding included recognition of power structure, that the upper-class controlled not only economic institutions, but

government and the courts as well. This translated further to a de facto control by the economic elite of culture itself. Socialists analyzed the rampant inequality in two basic ways. First, they critiqued the corruption of society by capitalists who dominated it. Second, they demonstrated the pernicious effect this corrupt society had on the majority of society, especially the working class.

The socialist analysis of the unmitigated power of the capitalist class demonstrated the extent of inequality and the corruption of democracy that underscored their republicanism. The unequal distribution of wealth immediately caught the attention of the socialists. They fervently opined about the unfairness and unjustness of a small class people controlling so much wealth. William Haywood and Frank Bohn remarked that "industry is at present governed by a few tyrants" whose "purpose is to give the workers as little wealth as possible." Eugene Debs referred to the capitalist class as "Christless perverts who exploit labor to degeneracy and mock its misery." Mary Marcy compared capitalists to common criminals, telling the workers that they "are stung and the big thieves get away with the swag, with a thousand laws to protect them in their lootings." Morris Hillquit added that the typical robber baron of the Gilded Age was "a more dangerous potentate than any political despot." Kate Richards O'Hare intoned that private ownership among the capitalists "means the right and power to despoil childhood, debase womanhood, and enslave manhood." Socialists did not lack adjectives to employ in their rhetoric to show the rampant inequality in the present economic and social system.[3]

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[3] William D. Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 4; Eugene V. Debs, "Roosevelt's Labor Letters," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), 278; Mary Marcy,

That socialists found inequality in the United States in the years around the turn of twentieth century was not extraordinary by any means. Americans from captains of industry to laboring immigrants to erstwhile reformers recognized inequality in society, they differed over what it meant and what, if anything, should be done about it. Socialists themselves wavered over what inequality meant and what action should be taken. The Marxism that informed the thinking of socialists taught them that capitalism was a phase in history. The capitalists performed a crucial, if seemingly inhumane, role in the development of human society. This prompted many socialist commentators to refrain from passing moral judgment on capitalists for their actions. John Spargo argued that "the capitalist class is no more responsible for [unequal] conditions than the worker, there is not only no personal hatred for the capitalist engendered, but, more important still, the workers get a new view of the relationship of the classes, and their efforts are directed to the bringing about of peaceful change." Hillquit explained the inequality of society as the "necessary result of our economic institutions" that even the industrial barons were "without power to change." He continued that "the capitalists are driven into the fatal course by the inexorable laws of industrial development." While Spargo and Hillquit used historical materialism to comprehend the current state of affairs, they still admonished capitalists for their complicity in the exploitation of labor.[4]

"Open the Factories," in *The Tongue of Angels: The Mary Marcy Reader*, ed. Frederic C. Griffin (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 84; Morris Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 7; Kate Richards O'Hare, "As a Bud Unfolds," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 55.

[4] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 180-181; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 7. It should be noted that not all socialists viewed the acquisition of wealth by

The socialist critique of society contained two distinct messages. First, they developed a moral message. Their observance of inequality in society caused them to use words such as despot, tyrant, parasite, and enslaver, to describe the capitalist class. This gave a definite moral quality to their rhetoric. They equated capitalists with things that should be removed from society because of an inherent destructive or evil quality. Second, they espoused a neutral doctrine of historical inevitability. By this way of thinking, socialists argued that the inherent qualities of capitalism contained the seeds of its own destruction. These two lines of thinking created a problem for socialists that they never quite resolved. Republicanism infused their moralism as they advocated socialism in the name of liberty, equality, and independence. Marxism and the class struggle served as the basis for their belief in the inevitability of socialism. While the two ways of thinking were not necessarily mutually exclusive, they did cause consternation over modes of action. Republicanism made them want to reform society to help the working class much like Progressives advocated, while their Marxism almost necessitated a laissez-faire approach so history could run its course. They had to let conditions worsen for the working class through the continuation of unregulated capitalism so that a revolutionary spirit could be instilled in the proletariat that would lead to socialism through revolution. The trust problem illustrated the conflict between these two approaches and further delineated their contemporary critique of society.

The problem of combination in business came to the fore during the Gilded Age and culminated with the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890. This piece of legislation called

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capitalists as free from moral problems. Haywood and Bohn, for example, relied on *History of the Great American Fortunes* by the muckraker Gustavus Myers as evidence of how most "thieving capitalists" unlawfully acquired their fortunes; Haywood and Bohn, 28.

for judicial action to be taken when economic combination caused a restraint of trade. Little happened to break combinations of capital until Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency in 1901. He responded to an increasing popular outcry against these giant conglomerates that stifled competition and therefore hurt small businesses in the same field. Roosevelt did not see all monopolies as inherently evil. In fact, he marveled at their efficiency and understood them as natural outgrowths of the competitive economic system. He disliked "bad" trusts that betrayed the public confidence and put individual greed above the public good. Perhaps he disliked trusts that challenged the authority of the federal government or his own personal power.[5] Whatever the case, beginning with his attack on James J. Hill and E.H. Harriman's Northern Securities holding company in 1902 and continuing throughout his administrations, Roosevelt's action against the trusts achieved popular support, thrusting him into the spotlight as a reformer and champion of the average American.

Against this backdrop the socialists needed to take a position in regard to the trusts, and by trusts I mean combination of industry in any form so that a specific industry is completely or near completely controlled by one organizational body. Marxist theory, according to any interpretation, described trusts in much the same manner as Roosevelt. Trusts were the natural culmination of competitive capitalism. They more efficiently produced goods than a collection of independently competing firms. Socialists complained that the benefits of trusts went entirely into the hands of the private

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[5] Interpretations vary wildly on Roosevelt's motivation for trust-busting. They include Roosevelt as an earnest reformer, a power monger, and a tool of conservative businessmen. See respectively George Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 1900-1912* (New York: Harper, 1958); Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001); and Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-interpretation of American History, 1900- 1916* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963).

individuals that controlled them. Socialists, through their Marxism, advocated that trusts be taken out of the private sector and be given over to the public. This ensured that the benefits of this efficient industry would be more equitably shared. Here socialists encountered public relations difficulties. As a political group that railed against the inequities of capitalism, it seemed strange to the population at large that socialists did not back a plan to break apart trusts – the ultimate expression of corporate greed and extravagance. The socialist plan of nationalizing trusts also seemed extreme. Many people assuredly backed a reform plan over a drastic change of society as a whole. Finally, vague socialist schemes to buy trusts or confiscate them seemed dangerous as well. Thus, socialists faced a set of complex problems. They had to balance the game of electoral politics with ideological purity, while identifying to which ideology they wanted to remain pure. In short, they had to decide upon battling inequality or adhering to a materialistic conception of history. This dilemma stymied socialists throughout their existence.

Socialists complained bitterly about how trust magnates had created inequality in American society by controlling so much wealth. A few statements by socialist commentators demonstrated the socialist contempt for privately held monopolies. Robert J. Wheeler opined on the gross inequality of lifestyle between trust owner and worker. He claimed that the daughter of a trust owner spent $200,000 annually on clothes, a wife of another threw a party that cost $150,000, and the widow of another spent over $1 million to entertain the King and Queen of England. This wasteful extravagance came at the expense of the working-class whose grinding toil built these vast fortunes but still found themselves earning subsistence wages, drinking putrid milk, and living in squalor.

The 1912 *Socialist Campaign Book* used statistical data from Moody's *The Truth About the Trusts*, progressive Republican Senator Robert La Follette's speeches, and Senator Jeff Davis' comments to demonstrate the remarkable concentration of wealth in the hands of a few men. The conclusion can be summarized by Spargo's assertion that less than one percent of working Americans in 1900 controlled over 70 percent of the wealth.[6] Trusts made lives miserable for all but a few wealthy industrialists, and the problem only worsened.

Socialists were not alone in their condemnation of the trusts, as their use of La Follette and Davis in their own campaign literature demonstrated. Socialists followed in a path of political groups that despised the trusts that included factions of the Democrats, some insurgent Republicans, and most recently the Populists. These groups advocated plans to limit the power of trusts and bring back the supposed days of free competition. The Sherman Act of 1890 culminated these efforts. It quickly became clear that the Sherman Act lacked the preciseness required to make it effective legislation. Critics of concentration of wealth again clamored for new reforms or at least the effective implementation of the Sherman Act. These reformers shared a strong belief in the power of competition to regulate economic life. None, even the Populists, seriously considered the collectivization of all trusts as a solution to the problem. As Emil Seidel put it, "Karl Marx had predicted" the development of trusts "as a logical process of economic evolution; hence we Socialists were not disturbed by the growth of trusts." He then

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[6] Robert J. Wheeler, "What shall we do with the Trusts?" *International Socialist Review* 12 (August 1911); 86; Carl D. Thompson, ed. *Socialist Campaign Book 1912* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1912), 122-127.

castigated non-socialist politicians for having "no such insight," leading them to become regulators where "they're puttering at that hole yet."[7]

The socialists alone championed the efficiency of trusts as business enterprises while condemning them for creating inequality by profits going directly into the pockets of the men who controlled them. Combinations in industry created efficiency by eliminating unproductive ventures and strengthening the more productive ones. This allowed for greater specialization in the new larger firm and increased productivity. However, trusts in private hands sought to limit production and thereby artificially create and increase demand. This resulted in higher prices and more profit for the business. This hurt workers in at least three ways. They paid more for goods, limited production meant fewer jobs, and profit generated by the trusts did not find its way to the wages of the worker. Socialists liked the efficiency of trusts but hoped to further improve upon it by taking them out of the control of private interests. Trusts in the hands of the people run through the state increased production, thereby creating a need for more jobs and lowering consumer prices. It also led to reduction of hours for workers because maximization of profits no longer dominated business enterprises. Safer work environments became standard as profit-seeking no longer dominated the intent of the enterprise. Workers enjoyed more certainty about maintaining employment for fair compensation. With the people in control, workers no longer played-off against each other to see who would work for the lowest wage. Socialists claimed that nationalized industries offered a tremendous boon for workers. "Industrial tyranny" where capitalists

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[7] Emil Seidel, *Emil Seidel Papers – Autobiography, Part 3*, 56.

exercised their "freedom to enslave the working class" would be replaced by cooperative industry run efficiently by and for the workers.[8]

Trusts existed as a significant problem for socialists. Socialists pilloried trust magnates in their rhetoric as tyrannical industrial giants who caused rampant misery among the working class who in fact created the enormous fortunes enjoyed by robber barons. Inequality in society that socialists loathed grew out of the control over the economy exhibited by industrial giants. By condemning trust magnates in moralizing language, the socialists sent a message that the trust problem must be addressed for the good of society; a message similar to what other reformers of the time and in the past put forth. Socialists called not for the destruction of the trusts, but for more and bigger trusts. What made monopolies evil, socialists reasoned, was wealth being funneled into the pockets of too few people. Socialists demanded instead that the trusts be nationalized for the benefit of society. While this made sense on a theoretical level from a Marxist perspective, the message of the state controlling trusts seemed to go against conventional wisdom of the public at large. The existence of government controlled monopolies to most meant two bad things: statism and no private competitive industry. Other reform parties addressed the trust problem in less drastic terms.

Trusts not only created economic inequality but they corrupted democratic government as well. Socialists saw the development of plutocracy as another reason to transform society. Domination of government by corporations meant the existence of an unequal voice in politics. Average citizens who participated had little influence, while an increasing percentage of people refused to participate in government. This development

[8] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 111-114; Haywood and Bohn, *Industrial Socialism*, 33-37.

worried socialists. Again, the identification of corruption in government had deep roots in the American past from the Sons of Liberty to the Mugwumps and Populists. While Mugwumps worked for civil service reform and Populists called for the direction election of United States Senators to make the government more responsive to the people, socialists saw these as superficial reforms that did not solve the underlying problem that caused corrupt and inefficient government. Socialists believed that trusts controlled who entered government; therefore, policies enacted by these bought politicians only benefited the trusts. Election and patronage reform dampened the effects of this system, but by no means fixed it. The existing government solidified the position of trusts in society and any overhaul of society required a purification of government.[9]

Lack of democracy and poor response to the demands of workers stood at the center of the socialist critique of corrupt government. Their stance on the nature of national elections and woman's suffrage illustrated their contempt for the undemocratic nature of American government that resulted in an unequal distribution of power. Socialists shared with Populists a desire for government being more responsive to the people through the direct election of government officials.[10] Whereas Populists viewed

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[9] Herein was the problem that divided left from right within the movement and has been the focus of histories of the socialists. The left believed changing the economy would purify government, whereas the right wanted to conquer government to change industry. Each side blamed the other for wrecking the movement. This question of tactics served as the early dividing line between interpretations of socialism. Daniel Bell blamed the left for the failure of socialism while Ira Kipnis blamed the right. Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States," in *Socialism and American Life,* ed. Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 213-405; Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952).

[10] Socialist support for old Populist complaints like the unresponsiveness of government helps explain in part why socialists did well on election day in former Populist strongholds in the south and plains. For example, see Grady McWhiney, "Louisiana

reforms like the direct election of United States Senators as ends in themselves, socialists envisioned reforms as part of a bolder plan to rebuild democracy. In isolation, reforms curbed plutocracy in minimal ways at best. Businesses and corrupt state political machines could still influence the direct vote in senatorial elections. Socialists called for more drastic remedies to growing plutocracy. Their platforms in the presidential election years prior to World War I called for the direct election of the President and Vice-President. They also demanded that initiative, referendum, and recall be applied at the national level, including deciding the constitutionality of laws. Socialists also worked for the abolition of the Senate and to end the veto power of the president. Victor Berger introduced such a bill to the House of Representatives on April 27, 1911. Taken together, these reforms attempted to dismantle capitalist bastions of power in government and provide mechanisms for the people to more directly influence policy.

Socialists further complained about the unfairness of elections in the United States because they undemocratically punished minor parties.[11] Hillquit illustrated that in 1908 United States House of Representative elections, minor parties such as the Socialist party received over 5 percent of the total vote nationwide, yet only Democrats and Republicans held seats in Congress because they had the only candidates that won pluralities. By Hillquit's calculations, the minor parties should have been awarded

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Socialists in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study of Rustic Radicalism," *Journal of Southern History* 20 (August 1954): 317-320; Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 4-5.

[11] A vast literature exists by modern historians and political scientists explaining how the American political system makes it difficult for third parties to thrive. For a summary of how this affects socialists during the Progressive Era, see Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 43-83.

twenty-one of the 391 contested seats to equal their 5 percent. The Socialist party would have eleven representatives, seven for the Prohibitionists, two for the Independence party, and one for the People's party. This type of proportional representation guaranteed that the voices of all minorities would be heard in the government.[12]

Lack of universal suffrage also stifled democracy in the United States. Fairness and democracy dictated that women should be enfranchised. Berger summarized the socialist stance in a statement before Congress quoted in the *New York Times*. The Milwaukee representative supported the woman suffrage amendment because women "ought to have the vote as a matter of justice...as a matter of democracy" and "simply a matter of economic fairness" because women entered the workforce in larger numbers. He also indicated that support for the amendment was not politically self-serving because states with women's suffrage in the west generally supported socialism in a minimal way. Hillquit shared Berger's third reason of suffrage for economic reasons. The New York lawyer called woman's suffrage "an immediate material necessity" because working women needed an avenue to fight for their rights as workers. Spargo echoed Berger's comments on the undemocratic nature of women not being allowed to vote. He argued that "justice requires that the legislative power of society rest upon universal adult suffrage, the political equality of all men and women, except lunatics and criminals." For these three socialist leaders reasons of equality and democracy necessitated the enfranchisement of women by the government. Lack of the vote for women

[12] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 274-277.

demonstrated the current decadent status of American democracy and the inequality it bred.[13]

American government not only lost its democratic quality, it also responded poorly to the demands of largest segment of the population – the working class. Among these demands were eight hour laws and workers compensation, neither of which the government seemed in any great hurry to consider. Socialists demanded a limitation on the number of working hours as a major part of their campaign. Mary Marcy noted in her *Shop Talk on Economics* that a federally regulated eight-hour day increased wages and decreased unemployment. Reducing hours meant more people needed to be hired to do the work of one worker under the present system, thus helping the unemployment problem. Measures that curbed unemployment in return lessened the labor pool, which increased wages by creating a smaller labor supply. Perhaps most importantly such legislation allowed for more leisure time for workers. Among other things, this time could be spent working "in the Army of the Revolution."[14] Again, such a reform was not an end in itself for the socialists, but a way to alleviate the existing repressive conditions on the way toward building class consciousness and bringing the cooperative commonwealth. Support for the particular reform that helped workers showed how socialists wanted to help workers immediately by advocating legislation that conformed to an ideal of how society ought to be. For most socialists this contradicted nothing in their materialistic vision of how society was going to be. As if to add insult to industry,

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[13] Victor L. Berger, *Victor L. Berger: The First Socialist in the United States Congress, The Story of His Work in Congress as told by the Press* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Co., 1912), 57, Victor L. Berger Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 282; Spargo, *Socialism*, 288, 329.

[14] Mary Marcy, "Shorter Hours for Labor," in *The Tongue of Angels*, 59-60.

the inefficient government that socialists railed against could not even produce legislation that was effective. Berger bemoaned the federal government's inability to construct an effective law since they started trying in 1848. The current bill under consideration proved Berger's analysis because it was needlessly complex and weak. The *Baltimore Sun* quoted Berger as wryly asking his peers in Congress: "Why don't you get a brick-layer to write an eight-hour bill? Let it be about ten lines in length and have some of the newspaper boys examine and approve it, and we would have a law that we might understand." The reporter for this east-coast bourgeois paper commended Berger for his "refreshing frankness," further evidence of the inefficiency and political gamesmanship rampant on the banks of the Potomac River.[15]

A system of workers compensation or workingmen's insurance also demonstrated the unwillingness of government to address the problems of workers as well as the internal conflict among socialists over what ought to be and what was going to be. Hillquit showed that countries with viable socialist parties had enacted forms of workmen's insurance against old age, disability, and sickness dating back to the mid nineteenth century. France had such laws as early as 1848 while Germany passed various legislation for workers during Bismarck's years as Chancellor. Other European countries including Austria, Norway, and Finland followed suit before the dawn of the twentieth century. But the United States did not. Hillquit considered a system of workingmen's insurance run by the state as "a potent lever for the elevation of the physical and moral standard of the masses," even if it did not serve as "a measure of adequate relief of the more pressing needs of the working class." He hoped reforms such as workers

[15] Victor L. Berger, *Victor L. Berger*, 53.

compensation eased the minds of workers as to their uncertain future and thereby made them more amenable to socialism. Uncertainty made workers "timid and conservative," therefore more inclined to keep what they had than fight for a radical solution. Even syndicalists like Haywood and Bohn, neither of whom embraced the "step at a time" approach most commonly associated with Berger and at times Hillquit, saw reforms like workingman's insurance and eight-hour laws as legitimate fights. They preferred that unions undertake these battles within industries and that the Socialist party remain focused on the ultimate goal of revolution. They feared "capitalist reforms" would "retard" the revolution. Nevertheless, they contended that socialists within the unions should fight for economic reforms that benefited the working class. Socialists agreed that justness and humanity demanded industrial reforms to help the plight of workers. They differed over who should initiate the reforms and realized the bourgeois government would never give the workers a law that worked.[16]

Political battles over reforms designed to aid the working class showed how socialists believed the government only enacted reforms that ultimately benefited the bourgeoisie. This happened because the undemocratic nature of American politics allowed plutocracy to flourish, resulting in politics that only concerned capitalists. Socialists pointed to trust-busting and tariff legislation as two issues that dominated political discourse yet had very little significance to the mass of industrial workers who socialists believed were not represented in government. Wheeler castigated government efforts at handling the trust problem. Government officials who opposed trusts set out two basic plans of action to handle them. The first called for regulation and was

[16] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 254-268; Haywood and Bohn, *Industrial Socialism*, 60.

espoused by men like Theodore Roosevelt. The second plan simply demanded that trusts be broken apart. Wheeler scoffed at both plans. The regulators called for a differentiation between good and bad trusts, a decision made by the Supreme Court, which Wheeler described as being "composed of CORPORATION LAWYERS, who formerly were HIGHLY PAID SERVANTS of the TRUSTS." While such action might lead to trusts having a less exploitative effect on society, it would still be exploitative nonetheless and certainly not help the plight of workers, either as laborers or consumers. The second plan was equally bad because it aimed to help small business interests by bringing back an idealized past centered on competition. This not only destroyed the efficient albeit exploitative modern industrial system, but helped workers little because consumer prices rose and no guarantee existed that industrial workers would be any better off in small businesses. Furthermore, such a plan overlooked the laws of history that mandated "that the outcome of Competition [sic] must always be MONOPOLY." Breaking up the trusts only delayed a final solution to the trust problem while destroying the efficiency of industry. Hillquit added that even government ownership of industry was not necessarily the answer to the trust problem. Government ownership of industry where capitalists dominated government benefited society little if at all. He argued that "national ownership of railroads, telegraphs and telephones has been in most cases introduced by the government for reasons of military expediency or for the sake of revenue," neither of which were steps toward the "socialist coöperative republic." Socialists demanded nationalization of industry through a government not "perverted to

private purposes." Only this type of public ownership – not merely government ownership – offered to solve the problem of inequality in the United States.[17]

Much like regulation or destruction of trusts only benefited middle-class and upper-class Americans, the same could be said of the tariff issue. Arguments over tariffs dominated nineteenth century political discourse in the United States and in many cases served as the key issue that differentiated one political party from another. Socialists, however, had no interest in the tariff issue because it affected the working class on only a superficial level. As such, the importance of the tariff issue in American politics demonstrated without question that the political system was built by and existed for the capitalist class only. Berger described the tariff as "mainly a manufacturer's issue." It only affected workers in their role as consumers, unless the government enacted drastic changes to the law in which case the result would be "disastrous" for workers. Berger did not explain why, but presumably because a large swing in tariff rates in either direction would force companies to compensate by lowering wages or firing workers in order to keep profit margins high. The Wisconsin Congressman called the tariff question a "sham battle" and a "shameless humbug when we compare its importance with the question of the exploitation of labor." For Berger and other socialists, the tariff issue was much ado about nothing when it came to the struggles of working Americans. It surprised socialists little that tariff legislation dominated national government because by and large capitalist stooges composed the legislative bodies that debated and enacted

[17] Wheeler, "What Shall we do with the Trusts?" 87; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 286-287.

laws. Such a circumstance was undemocratic and hurt society from the socialist perspective.[18]

Socialists blamed more than government itself for the rampant inequality that bourgeois reforms exacerbated. They also pointed to the political party system as inherently flawed and thus a contributing factor to the lack of democracy evident in the American political system. The theoretically-minded Hillquit drew a distinction between administration (or government) and politics. Administration managed affairs of state through bureaucrats assigned to various tasks. Politics was the "indirect management secured through influence or power over the public official." Economic interests shaped politics and defined political parties. Hillquit believed that members of a particular party in modern society were not joined together by ideology, but by material interests. These coalitions of individuals with similar economic interests guided the ideology and policy of the men they put into office. Debs, a gifted spokesperson if somewhat less sophisticated theoretician, put it more plainly. Debs decreed that:

> Between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party there is no difference so far as the workingman is concerned...If he organizes and forces up wages his exploiters raise prices. He has not the least interest in the tariff, or finance, or expansion, or imperialism. These issues concern the large capitalists represented by the Republican Party and the small capitalists represented by the Democratic Party, but they appeal to no intelligent wage worker, and the fact that workingmen divide upon these capitalistic issues accounts for their...being the victims of wage slavery everywhere.

In his own folksy style Debs articulated the same argument as Hillquit. The two major political parties came together for shared economic interests, fought for policies and politicians that helped their economic interests, and offered little of significant interest to

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[18] Victor L. Berger, *The Working Class must have its own Party to give Expression to its Own Class Interests* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 6-7.

wage workers. Socialist chafed at the very idea that workers made up the vast majority of the population, yet had no true voice of their own interests in a supposedly democratic government. Socialists aimed to be the party that represented the economic interests of the workers and let their voice be heard in government. The American political party system contributed to the inequality seen in society.[19]

The judicial branch of government also raised the ire of socialists as they attacked American institutions that made inequality possible. Debs led the attacks and based his critique on his personal experience with American jurisprudence after the Pullman Strike of 1894. The former president of the American Railway Union landed in jail for failing to abide by an injunction issued by a federal judge. While enduring incarceration for six months Debs turned to the socialist writings of Karl Kautsky, Edward Bellamy, and Karl Marx -- the latter in the form of a copy of *Kapital* provided by Victor Berger – and started down the path that made him the supreme spokesperson of the class struggle in the United States. The time Debs spent in jail while the weak case against him fell apart and George Pullman evaded a penalty for failing to honor a court summons, hardened Debs' views on the class struggle causing him to direct his attack on the inequality of American society at the courts. Upon release from the Woodstock jail Debs railed against the unfairness of the injunction, pointing out that the same judge that wrote the injunction also served as the jury and passed judgment. The injunction itself was undemocratic because it did not express the will of the people or even the will of an elected representative. It was the sole prerogative of one person. Debs declared this

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[19] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 144-153; Eugene V. Debs, "The Socialist Party's Appeal (1904)," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 103.

unconstitutional and bemoaned that "the right of trial by jury has been abrogated, and this at the behest of the money power of the country" who controlled judicial appointments. The Supreme Court did not escape Debs's attacks as he saw that body controlled by "money power" and found it "reeking with more stench than Coleridge discovered in Cologne and left all the people wondering how it was ever to be deodorized."[20]

Debs frequently returned to injunctions and the courts as examples of how the wealthy undemocratically dominated society. He peppered his speeches and writings from the Pullman Strike through the first decade of the twentieth century with invectives that denounced the corrupt nature of the courts. Debs articulated his disdain for the injunction in a 1905 article for Berger's Milwaukee mouthpiece, the *Social Democratic Herald.* In 1893, Judge James Jenkins rendered an opinion that argued workers should be forced to accept a reduction in wages through court injunctions so that companies – in this case the Northern Pacific Railway – could stay in business. Failure on the part of workers to abide by the injunction resulted in jail time. Debs declared Jenkins and other judges like him, including William Howard Taft, as guilty of "the subjugation of labor by judicial prowess." Debs further castigated these judges for what they called "liberty regulated by law" as nothing more than plutocrats who had no interest in the condition of the working class. The Indiana labor leader also had strong words of denunciation for plutocracy and the courts over the arrest of Haywood, Charles Moyer, and George Pettibone for their alleged assassination of former Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg. The 1906 rant of Debs in *Appeal to Reason* called for workers and lovers of liberty to

[20] Eugene V. Debs, "How I became a Socialist," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 44; Eugene V. Debs, "The Role of the Courts," in Ibid., 47-48; Eugene V. Debs, "Liberty," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), 6-20.

unite against plutocracy: "From the farms, the factories and the stores will pour the workers to meet the redhanded destroyers of freedom, the murderers of innocent men and the archenemies of the people." The courts would not help the workers in this battle because the capitalist class dominated them. Debs declared that "their courts are closed to us except to pronounce our doom. To enter their courts is simply to be mulcted of our meager and bound hand and foot; to have our eyes plucked out by the vultures that fatten upon our misery." The usually restrained Debs – at least when compared to other agitators like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn or Mother Jones – could not help himself when it came to the corrupt nature of the government, especially the courts. His personal experience in Illinois undoubtedly shaped this incredible distaste.[21]

Other socialists echoed Debs' sentiments on the courts. Haywood, who as already noted had legal problems, saw the judiciary as having two functions. The first involved settling private property relations between property-holders, an issue of no relevance to the working-class. The other was "to sit in judgment upon and determine the punishment...of the poor as may have been 'guilty' of disrespect for private property. Of course everybody now knows that rich offenders purchase this 'justice,' while poor offenders get it presented to them." Spargo, too, reprimanded the courts for the way they fostered inequality by the manner in which they meted out justice. He complained that the courts increased their power, allowing them to nullify legislation beneficial to

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[21] Eugene V. Debs, "The Growth of the Injunction," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), 169; Eugene V. Debs, "Arouse Ye Slaves!" in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 143-144. Nick Salvatore noted that the Pullman experience not only entrenched his hatred of plutocracy, but that trade unions no longer served any useful purpose against corporate capitalism. Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 148.

workers that seemed to be guaranteed under statute law and even that most reactionary of documents, the United States Constitution. Through use of the injunction and judicial review the courts in effect created laws that hurt workers and helped capitalists, all without being open to the democratic process. Spargo pointed to a recent ruling in Rutland, Vermont, as an abusive example of judicial power. The court decided that striking union workers had to pay for corporate losses incurred during the strike. Spargo, an Englishman by birth, found this ruling eerily similar to the infamous Taff-Vale Law in Great Britain that called for similar action. Jack Whyte, brought to trial in 1912 for fighting for free speech in San Diego, summarized the attitude of socialists toward American courts that favored business over the people: "to hell with your courts; I know what justice is."[22]

The socialist critique of the structure of American society that created inequality went past the policies of government, political parties, and the courts all the way to the Constitution that gave meaning to these entities. Algie M. Simons described the creation of the United States Constitution as an illegal conspiracy among the economic elite to maintain their superior status in his thoroughly materialist account of American history. The language Simons employed in his attack on the Constitution was instructive because it compared favorably to the argument made by the progressive historian Charles Beard and it demonstrated socialist contempt for the undemocraticness of American society

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[22] Haywood and Bohn, *Industrial Socialism*, 49; Spargo, *Socialism*, 192-193, 197-199; Jack Whyte quoted in Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography: My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 178-179.

since 1789, but not for America's intellectual heritage as a whole.[23] Simons utilized a variety of secondary sources to argue:

> That with the return of peace [after the American Revolution] the wealthy classes, including those who had remained Loyalists during the actual fight, returned to power. The merchants of Boston, frightened at Shays' Rebellion, the manufacturers of Pennsylvania, anxious for protection, and wishing to restrict the growing power of the western districts, the commercial classes of the South, desiring a central government for the settlement of disputes concerning navigable rivers, – all of these were opposed to democracy. All were anxious to secure their privileges against attack by the discontented debtors, frontiersmen, farmers, and wageworkers. It was from these classes, inspired by these motives, that the delegates were drawn that framed the constitution.

Simons further argued that "fully two thirds of the population" opposed the Constitution, but the lack of the referendum made it possible for the Founding Fathers to foist this reactionary document on an unwilling people. From this vantage point, Simons lamented that the egalitarian spirit of the Declaration of Independence where "'all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed' had been relegated to the limbo of political platitudes." Americans received instead a body of law "formulated in secret session" by a group of wealthy men who subverted the existing law. They "forced" this new constitution onto a "disenfranchised people" for the self-interest of the elite men that created it. Simons noted that the Constitution did allow for the "industrial

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[23] Daniel Gaido recently wrote that the progressive interpretation of history associated with Beard should be renamed the Populist interpretation of history. Beard along with Frederick Jackson Turner, Vernon Parrington, and John Dewey, all responded to the demise of the middle class, did not understand the Marxist basis of commodity production and technological improvement, and in essence forwarded an "anti-capitalist 'agrarian' ideology." They were the first American historians to see capitalism as the basis of history in the United States, but did not comprehend, as did Marx, the necessity of capitalism in the progress of civilization. Such an outlook, Gaido reasoned, did not allow Beard and the rest to look forward, thus making them not progressive in a literal definition of "progressive." Only true historical materialists could claim that title. Daniel Gaido, "The Populist Interpretation of American History: A Materialist Revision," *Science & Society* 65 (Fall 2001), 350-354, 372.

and social growth which had made this country possible," but that "should not blind us to the fact that there was nothing particularly sacred about the origin of this government which should render any attempt to change it sacrilegious."[24]

Other socialists agreed with Simons and worked feverishly to convince Americans, especially the working class, that the Constitution exacerbated inequality and needed to be replaced by something better. Berger linked the Constitution's conservative origins, its capacity to be manipulated by capitalists, and the corruption of the courts when he stood before Congress and demanded a new Constitution. He claimed that the Supreme Court continually struck down good laws by deeming them unconstitutional. The problem was not that the Justices acted incorrectly because most of the laws they struck down were in fact unconstitutional. The problem was that time had made the Constitution outdated. Berger noted that in 1787 trusts, corporations, railroads, and telegraphs did not exist. To pretend the Constitution could deal with these modern problems in any meaningful way was laughable. Furthermore, interpretations by generations of bourgeois Justices meant the Constitution had been "torn and patched in the most ridiculous way." Berger echoed Simons's concern that any public denunciation of the Constitution made the speaker seem to be a traitor, further evidence of its undemocratic nature and the way capitalists controlled the very culture of America. He concluded by saying only a new Constitution would prevent a bloody revolution. Socialist platforms reinforced the ideas of Simons, Berger, and other socialists that criticized the Constitution. In 1908 socialists called for more democracy: judicial review to be taken away from the Supreme Court and "that the constitution be made amendable

[24] A.M. Simons, *Social Forces in American History* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1914), 96-97, 99.

by majority vote." In 1912 they called again for more democracy, but added a demand for "a convention for the revision of the constitution of the United States."[25]

Socialists, then, critiqued American society in part by denouncing the way in which the capitalist class dominated all aspects of life and thereby created the inequality socialist found so loathsome. Capitalists controlled the economy in terms of material wealth in a very obvious manner that resulted in trusts. But equally as insidious was the way this economic elite controlled the lives of all Americans. Swollen pocketbooks meant control of political parties, platforms, elections, and therefore government as a whole. The actions of these men dictated who would decide on the laws of the land and therefore the interpretation of the Constitution as well. The democratic nature of American society – only marginally in existence at any point in the nation's history – crumbled in the face of the concentration of wealth. Democracy existed in the United States only for the diminishing number of men who had a stranglehold on the economy. Socialists attempted to educate the American populace about this dangerous trend toward plutocracy and that the system ought to be transformed for the good of the public.

Having dispensed with how capitalism debauched American society, socialists turned to the second aspect of their critique of contemporary society – how this corrupt society affected the working class. They examined the plight of those who did not control the economy; the workers who toiled for wages and an ever decreasing percentage of the total wealth of the United States. In their attempt to understand inequality in American society and simultaneously reach their working-class audience,

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[25] Berger, *The Working Class must have its own Party,* 9.

socialists diagnosed the ills of capitalist-dominated America in terms workers comprehended from personal experience, namely the existence of wage slavery. The concept of wage slavery was by no means new, or even unique, to socialist rhetoric, but socialists used comparisons to chattel slavery as an effective tool to convince workers of the unfair conditions that marked their existence. The core of wage slavery was dependency. Workers relied on the good will of the capitalist they worked for to take home a wage and keep their job. Specific concerns stemming from dependency included unfair wages, uncertainty of maintaining employment, and the degeneration of the family. For these reasons socialists hoped to convince workers to embrace socialism out of reasons of morality and justice under the rubric of wage slavery. By showing workers the unequal circumstances under which they lived, socialists hoped to demonstrate that the working class ought to want socialism.[26]

Socialists often pointed to the dependency of the working class on capitalists and the capitalist system in general as one of the major flaws in the economic structure. By implication, socialists stressed independence as a virtue to strive toward, something republicans of past generations would also endorse. The developing industrialized economy prevented a growing number of Americans from being independent. Workers sold their labor to capitalists on the open market, thus making them commodities more than individuals. Freedom rested more with capitalist selecting workers to exploit than with workers selecting an employer. Capitalism stripped workers of their humanity and

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[26] Labor historians have done a lot of work on how rank and file workers responded to the message described in this chapter. Starting points into this literature include: William M. Dick, *Labor and Socialism in America: The Gompers Era* (Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972); Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969); Lipset and Marks, 85-124.

made them into disposable goods. As commodities, workers depended on owners for everything: wages, direction, instructions, steady employment, and even a moral compass. Socialists often pointed to this arrangement as a reason why workers should shed the capitalist system through organization in unions or political action through the Socialist party. The expected result was the deliverance of the working class to the cherished American ideal of economically independent individuals.

One way socialists demonstrated to their working class audience the nature of their dependency was to compare the existence of workers to chattel slavery from the antebellum years. Debs was among the foremost socialist agitators in evoking race slavery as a comparative tool to reach the hearts and minds of workers. After his release from jail in 1895, Debs, a recent convert to socialism, delivered a speech in Chicago where he juxtaposed liberty and slavery. Debs observed that God gave liberty to humanity as a gift, but from the moment of creation evil people had stolen liberty from certain individuals. The revolution of 1776 proclaimed individual liberty as an inalienable right, but in modern times plutocrats used the courts and the Constitution as tools to rob laborers of their liberty, making them wage-slaves and dependent upon others for survival. Debs also considered John Brown to be a martyred saint of the labor cause, or more specifically, a champion of liberty over slavery. Debs called Brown "history's greatest hero" because he unselfishly "lay his life on Freedom's altar in wiping out that insufferable affliction" of slavery. Debs then asked: "Who will be the John Brown of Wage-Slavery?" In his speeches and writings Debs often used the abolition of chattel slavery as incentive for his audience of laborers to view socialism as a noble and moral cause. For example, in a 1908 speech in Girard, Kansas, Debs compared the work of

socialists to free soilers who came to Kansas in the 1850s for the sake of freedom and the work of Wendell Phillips working for abolition in Massachusetts. These noble citizens worked against the prevailing current of ideas for what they deemed a holier cause. Many of their contemporaries hated or ignored these insurgents, but history and God smiled on them, according to Debs. Debs delivered a simple message: wage-laborers today were slaves to capitalists in much the same way southern plantation owners enslaved blacks before the Civil War. By working for freedom and to rescue wage-slaves from their lives of dependency, socialists established a moral and holy cause that they imagined history vindicated, just as with the abolitionists. The religious and republican rhetoric used by Debs certainly struck a chord with many in his audience, and it also demonstrated the varied nature of Debs' intellectual outlook. While other socialists refrained from such imagery, especially the religious, it nevertheless showed the complexity of socialist thought at this time.[27]

Other socialists used slavery as a metaphor to illustrate that wage labor resulted in dependency. Marcy in fact described wage slavery as worse than chattel slavery. In the latter, the system mandated that owners "feed, clothe, and house" their slaves. In the former, owners paid at best subsistence wages to workers who had to degrade themselves to beg for work from parasitical capitalists. Furthermore, wage slaves could "never be free or independent" under this system because "the man who owns your job owns you." The answer was socialism where men and women were their own bosses, thus independent members of society. Haywood and Bohn titled part one of their plea for

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[27] Eugene V. Debs, "Liberty," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage Press, 1948), 8-10; Eugene V. Debs, "John Brown: History's Greatest Hero," in Ibid., 280-281; Eugene V. Debs, "The Issue," in Ibid., 307.

industrial socialism, "Industrial Slavery." In it they detailed the inequality of what the workers produced against the enormous riches enjoyed by the idle rich. They exposed the wretched conditions of industrial workers and that social mobility existed only in fiction. More importantly they showed the dependency of workers on capitalists through the loss of hope. Young workers generally viewed wage labor as temporary or not so bad since they only had to feed themselves. As time went by and male workers took on family responsibilities, wage labor became more of a liability. Yet they could do little about these circumstances because they depended on their meager wages for survival. Thus strikes or any kind of collective action were difficult to endorse since they threatened to end what little income they enjoyed. Working class subsistence was completely dependent on the capitalist class. Haywood and Bohn began their book this way to show socialism as a message of hope to restore the dream of independence to the American worker. The plight workers needed to transcend was wage slavery. Spargo elected to address the topic using words with deep meaning in the American past and its progressive mission. He declared that "the working class, in emancipating itself, at the same time makes liberty possible for the whole race of man, and destroys the conditions of class rule." He implied that by fighting for socialism workers could experience true independence from their capitalist enslavers, just as blacks did after the Civil War – at least in legal terms. Perhaps more importantly, by winning the battle themselves, workers could achieve a greater sense of independence because they broke their own shackles. The emancipation of humanity, for Spargo, seemed to be the culmination of history. He linked emancipation closely with independence.[28]

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[28] Marcy, "Are You a Socialist?" in *The Tongue of Angels*, 66; Haywood and Bohn, 5-11;

Socialists also related individualism closely with independence. They went to extreme measures in some cases to show that socialism actually fostered individualism, even as they advocated a collective society. Many of their propaganda pieces contained rebuttals to the arguments of critics of socialism. Socialists continuously defended themselves against the charge that socialism ended individualism. They countered this assertion by claiming collective society actually gave individuals more autonomy in their everyday lives by ending dependency. William Dwight Porter Bliss, a Christian socialist, university professor, and leader of the American Fabian movement during the 1890s, stressed the relationship between individual and community. He argued that "society makes the individual, more than the individual makes society." He maintained that in the present competitive system, individuals did not "develop their deepest, highest, truest personal characters." That could only be achieved in a socialist society marked by peace and collectivism. Bliss took careful measures to ensure his readers realized that socialism was more than cooperation. He defined cooperation as individuals coming together. Bliss, from his Christian perspective, saw the world as beginning as a community and had been broken apart by competition. What needed to happen was for people to realize their unity through socialism and act in their natural fraternal state instead of paternally. Thus socialism ushered in a social system free of a dependent class that would also be more natural. George Herron, another scholar and Christian socialist, also emphasized that socialism fostered individualism, though he stressed republican

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Spargo, *Socialism*, 200. Debs too believed workers should break their own shackles to achieve their independence. This served as the basis of his critique of craft unionism and explains why each time he accepted the Socialist Party's nomination for president, he did so almost ashamedly out of sense of duty. See for example Eugene V. Debs "Speech of Acceptance (1904)" and "Revolutionary Unionism," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, 73, 215.

themes over Bliss' Christian brotherhood. Herron argued that "socialism should come to American life as the real and ransomed individualism. We should present Socialism as the co-operation of all men for the individual liberty of each." He continued that socialists were the "herald[s] and defender[s] of the American liberty, which has been so betrayed by capitalist politics and teaching." Herron's comments on individualism as a measure of liberty showed he too had disdain for the dependence of so many Americans on others. He believed socialism ought to be established to ensure the continuation of these American ideals. These arguments also carried forward Herron's ideas of human agency in society over economic or spiritual inevitability.[29]

Socialists that did not purport to be Christian socialists or have academic careers also blasted opponents who charged that socialism destroyed individualism. Hillquit argued that workers and farmers did not have individualism – that is, they were dependent – so they could not lose it. Capitalists, he declared, were "the slaves of their wealth rather than its master," thus their claim to individualism was tenuous. Hillquit further argued that capitalists made an "idol of individual liberty." They morphed individual liberty into "individual license," an outlook of "shortsighted egoism." Capitalists benefited materially from this credo and shamed everybody else into adherence. What socialists wanted to accomplish, according to Hillquit, was to socialize economic distribution in the way that production had already been socialized. As a result, individualism as a philosophy would be sheared from economic self-interest and it

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[29] William Dwight Porter Bliss, *What Christian Socialism is* (Boston: Office of *The Dawn*, 1894), 4; William Dwight Porter Bliss, *A Handbook of Socialism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 7-9, 11; George Herron, *The Day of Judgment* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), 24.

would take on a more humanistic or social quality.[30] Similarly, Haywood and Bohn understood individualism as a term corrupted by capitalists. They argued that socialism would lead humanity out of the "state of individual selfishness and meanness," and the mechanism that would make this a reality was a new kind of dependence, that of "worker upon worker" in a system of brotherhood. Socialism meant "the coming freedom," with its basis in "the freedom of the individual to develop his powers." In this idyllic setting everybody could pursue the education of their choosing, arts and sciences would "flourish," there would be no stealing, and nobody would suffer from want. This type of individual progress could only occur in a society free of dependency. Capitalism had to be destroyed to make it happen.[31]

While many socialists critiqued American society because of the dependency inherent in it, other socialists noted the critique had a unique meaning for women.[32] Women were not only dependent as wage-workers on a capitalist, but on a man as well per the established patriarchy of the day. Socialists divided over the "woman question," that is, should women's emancipation be treated as part of the greater working class struggle or as a unique problem in itself. Most male socialists sought to subsume the patriarchy question in the class struggle. Bliss believed socialism "would solve the woman question, by making women financially independent of men, without ignoring the

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[30] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 12-16, 28-31.

[31] Haywood and Bohn, 31, 63-64.

[32] The number of studies on socialist women and the "woman question" has increased dramatically since the late 1970s. The best general treatments are Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) and Sally Miller, ed. *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

natural differences that must ever exist between man and woman." The emancipation of the working class would create economic equality, but presumably not challenge male dominance at home or at large in society. Hillquit and Spargo both called for full economic equality, but did so in a very Victorian way. While recognizing the "useful and necessary work" performed for no pay at home by women, Hillquit argued that adding factory work to her duties was "not a proud assertion of the rights of woman, but a pitiful and tragic surrender of her maternal duties and feelings to the cruel exigencies of dire poverty." Thus, Hillquit asserted, socialists aimed their program at wage increases for the "father of the workingman family" so as to prevent women and children from being forced into laboring outside the home. Similarly, Spargo called motherhood "woman's highest and holiest mission." Women should not be torn "from their true vocation as builders of the bodies and souls of their sons and daughters" by the capitalist system that unabashedly forced them into the workforce outside the home. For both Hillquit and Spargo, women needed to be released from a social system that made their families dependent on their meager income for survival. However, they maintained very bourgeois attitudes toward the role of the patriarchal family where women remained dependent on the male head of household. In essence they reestablished the ideals of republican motherhood from the nineteenth century. Socialists like Hillquit and Spargo did not see this as a form of subjugation, but as virtuous division of labor between sexes.[33]

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[33] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 234-235; John Spargo, *Socialism and Motherhood* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1914), 25-26. Mark Pittenger wrote that Darwinism made many socialist men see women as "evolutionary outsiders." Thus women held a tenuous place in the progress of the race. Some female socialists used evolutionary thought it radical ways. Lida Parce used it to reinforce matriarchy while

Many women within the socialist movement believed differently than Bliss, Hillquit, and Spargo.[34] They advocated full economic and sex rights. They wanted to destroy dependency in terms of both class domination and paternalism. The question that stymied many female socialists was whether to fight in terms of class, sex, both, or one leading to the other. May Wood Simons, for example, noted that industrialization changed the nature of dependency for working women from husband or father to employer. Those women who did not work, and that was the majority of women in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, were still dependent on men. Even worse, these women depended on laboring men for their economic well-being, thus making women dependent in a "double sense" because they depended on a wage slave who depended on a capitalist. Simons declared that "economic equality of women can be accomplished only through the economic liberation of the working class." Simons, while more sympathetic to the peculiar plight of women than some of her male comrades, stood

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Josephine Conger-Kaneko saw the study of science as essential to the liberation of women. Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 186-197.

[34] It should be noted that not all socialist men put class struggle before sex rights. Floyd Dell, part of the "new intellectuals" that emerged primarily in New York before World War I, lamented that "men don't want the freedom that women are thrusting upon them." Instead, "men want the sense of power" they derive from being "sultans in little monogamic harems" over the increased freedom emancipating women would bring. In a letter to the editor of *Socialist Woman,* even Debs pledged to do whatever he could to make the woman question more prominent within the party. In the same letter he complimented Grace Brewer as a "splendid example of what a woman can do in the way of giving her thought and energy and capabilities to the Socialist movement while at the same time maintaining an ideal home adorned with all of the graces and amenities of home life." Debs, for all his compassion for human suffering, could not escape his Victorian roots and see domestic life as a form of slavery. Floyd Dell, "Feminism for Men," *Masses* 5 (July 1914), 19; *The Socialist Woman*, February 1908, 10. For more on the "New Intellectuals" in regard to the woman question, see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 246-287.

alongside them in pursuing the class struggle as a mechanism to end sex inequality.[35] Other prominent socialist women such as Lena Morrow Lewis and Mary Marcy endorsed this strategy as well.[36]

Still other socialist women articulated differing viewpoints. These women fought for sex rights as a necessary part of the class struggle. Winnie Branstetter, Assistant State Secretary of the Socialist Party in Oklahoma and Meta Lilienthal Stern, Associate Editor of the *New Yorker Volkzeitung*, both asked for less docility among male members of the Socialist Party. As Stern put it: "We know that theoretically we have your [male members of the Socialist Party] full support...but mere theoretical recognition will not suffice." She then called for active efforts on behalf of the male-dominated party to achieve woman suffrage and to increase the amount of female participation within the party. Stern lamented that women had a "double burden to bear" because they were exploited as women and workers. She called the woman question the "burning question of the hour" because socialists could become the true party of the "exploited and oppressed." Reform parties were beginning to endorse woman suffrage in hopes of luring women into their fold. Therefore, socialists must address the issue of sex equality immediately and with vigor before other groups could steal the issue. Stern protested

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[35] May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem,* in *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 188, 190, 196.

[36] The Second International articulated the same strategy. It was also promulgated in August Bebel's famous German book, *Woman Under Socialism*, published in 1879. While difficult to verify, Mari Jo Buhle believed Lewis and those who shared her outlook to be in a "unique position" among socialist women. Most, apparently, placed sex equality on par with class struggle. Mari Jo Buhle, "Lena Morrow Lewis: Her Rise and Fall," in *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 82; Mary Marcy, "Why Women Are Conservative," in *The Tongue of Angels*, 143-152.

that civilization could not wait for the class struggle to eventually free women.[37] Lida Parce of the University of Chicago agreed with Stern that special action apart from the class struggle needed to be taken to completely emancipate women. She stated that "only revolution" will destroy the "evil of sex subjection." The two parts of the revolution were "socialization of industry" to end women's economic dependence and suffrage so women could "remove those special and artificial disabilities which have been placed upon her by male legislation." The latter part of Parce's revolution offered to end the restraint of paternalism that currently shackled women.[38] Socialist women felt the grip of dependency more acutely than their male counterparts. They differed over how to gain independence, but they recognized how dependency inhibited their human potential. As Robin E. Dunbar put it; "Girls are meant for wives, workers and children, under the Bourgeois System. Under Socialism they will not be meant for anything. They will mean something for themselves."[39]

Socialists varied as to tactics regarding the woman question and whether paternalism was a form of dependency, but they agreed that the capitalist system destroyed families. Socialism offered a remedy to restore the traditional family, although many women were not sure they wanted it. Among other things, socialists pointed to how capitalism inflicted physical harm on families, created bad parents, and made marriage an economic arrangement. Physical harm came to family members through the profit motive that underscored capitalism. In order to ensure the highest possible profit,

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[37] *The Socialist Woman*, February 1908, 5; May 1908, 3.

[38] *The Progressive Woman*, March 1909, 5.

[39] *The Socialist Woman*, October 1907, 5.

business leaders did not pay for safe working conditions and rarely offered compensation to victims of accidents. They also hired children for dangerous work because they could be paid less. Debs castigated capitalists in a 1905 article in *Wayland's Monthly* for their brutal treatment of children in their quest for profit. He charged that the "march of conquest" of capitalism was "stained with the blood of infants and paved with the puny bones of children" as they "lusted for pelf and power."[40] Debs and other socialists believed that the destruction of children also crippled society. Long hours also tested the stamina of workers. Once a laborer could no longer manage the pace of work a replacement would quickly be found. Because so many working class families required multiple incomes to manage even a subsistence lifestyle, any harm to employed family members created problems that potentially had dire consequences. When an accident caused a cessation of income from a major revenue source, families often had to split apart in hopes of survival. Socialists pointed to this precarious circumstance as prevalent in working class neighborhoods and proof of the decadence of capitalism.[41]

Bad parenting threatened to destroy families as mothers and fathers were forced to work long hours in degrading conditions. May Wood Simons compared capitalism to the military with the effects they had on the family. She asserted that both instances removed men from the home and sent them to undertake debauched work. Whether in

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[40] Eugene V. Debs, "Childhood," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs*, 165.

[41] One need look no further than Upton's Sinclair's 1906 socialist muckraking novel, *The Jungle*, for examples of how the pursuit of profit under capitalism caused physical harm to workers and thereby negatively affected families. Although fiction, Sinclair's account of Chicago's meatpacking industry is factual since he actually observed the Packingtown in person. Perhaps more importantly, the entire novel was published serially in *Appeal to Reason* and enjoyed wide circulation as a published novel so that socialists probably viewed the depiction in *The Jungle* as standard capitalist practice. Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Bantam, 1981).

the military or a factory, these men found their minds warped until distasteful practices became acceptable. When these men returned home they no longer made effective husbands or fathers. Their consequent negative effect on their children as a poor role model caused deterioration of the family. In a 1913 article published in the *National Rip-Saw*, Kate Richards O'Hare argued that capitalism drove working men to drink, which had adverse effects on the family. She stated that laborers in a capitalist system toiled "under unnatural conditions and live abnormal lives" and therefore "demand stimulants to spur the jaded brains and bodies on to renewed effort, and to provide a substitute for the thrill of life of which they are robbed." Drunken workers tore families apart by drinking their meager incomes, acting violently at home, and providing a poor example for children. Temperance advocates – including O'Hare at the beginning of her crusading career – since the antebellum years had made similar arguments. The many socialists that preached temperance drifted from the traditional argument by blaming the economic system instead of individual moral failing. Despite the difference in perspective, temperance reformers believed alcohol and parenting did not mix. Spargo, too, believed that environment – specifically the economic environment – instead of inherent moral failings caused social problems that made bad parents and harmed families. He proclaimed that "the whole authority of modern science supports the demand of the Socialist for such a change in our industrial system as will free motherhood and make it possible for every mother to devote herself to the care of her children." While supporting patriarchy, Spargo appealed to his readers that socialism

ought to replace capitalism as a necessary move to maintain the idyllic family by allowing mothers to perform what he saw as their noble duty.[42]

Capitalism also threatened the family by making marriage an economic arrangement instead of a social one. May Wood Simons wrote that "the supposition exists that marriages today are founded on the mutual regard of two individuals. In fact, however, they are principally made for economic reasons. The girl toiling the factory or shop thinks she sees in marriage an escape from her slavery."[43] Only socialism freed men and women to marry out of love and respect instead of economic necessity. Historian Mari Jo Buhle noted that marriage as an "escape" from the clutches of wage-slavery made recruitment of working-women to socialism or unions difficult because of the temporary nature of wage labor for single women. Socialists actually appealed to working women on the grounds that marriage could be more than an "escape" from the daily grind of wage-labor. In fact, marriage could be about love, but only once collective action ended the capitalist system that created economic marital unions.[44]

Inequality in American society, the dependent nature of the working class, and destruction of the family all evoked criticism by socialists as they analyzed Progressive Era society. That these problems seemed to worsen over time worried them even more. Women and children entering the workforce in increasing numbers and the steady tide of immigration served to exacerbate these problems by increasing the labor supply and

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[42] May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem*, 192; O'Hare, "Drink, Its Cause and Cure," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, 80; Spargo, *Socialism and Motherhood,* 32-37.

[43] May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem,* 191.

[44] Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism*, 186.

consequently reducing wages. Socialists viewed labor as a mere commodity to be bought and sold by capitalists. Besides having dehumanizing effects, the price of labor – or wages – fluctuated with its availability. Wages were at the mercy of supply and demand. Thus, as more women and children entered the workforce throughout the nineteenth century, socialists not only complained about the physical harm and what it did to families, but this increase in the supply of labor drove down wages for everybody. O'Hare observed that when she took on work in a machine shop the male workers balked because of the precedent she set. The men feared that "if one girl learned the machinist trade, others would, and soon the shops would be overrun by women, and wages would go down as they have in every trade that women have entered." Women dragged down wages not only because their availability increased the general labor supply, but because capitalists believed women should be paid less than men because they had no dependents. Single women worked for only themselves whereas married women worked to supplement the income of her husband – the true breadwinner who had to care for dependents. May Wood Simons noted the above circumstances and saw an even more vile trend. Starting from the perspective of classical economics where wages leveled off at the subsistence point, Simons argued that employment of women forced the subsistence point to a lower level. She maintained that industries – she used railroad clerks as an example – replaced men with women. They then paid these women less because they had no dependents. The women were then replaced by men, but the wages for the men had sunk to the level of the preceding women. The cycle continued

downward. Socialists saw no hope for mending the ever-worsening plight of laborers. The only solution rested with collectivization.[45]

The continuing flood of European and Asian immigrants worsened the problems of inequality and dependency that socialists identified. Just as with women and children entering the workforce, immigrant labor also caused a drop in the price of labor while causing divisive bickering among socialists. Some socialists advocated curtailing or completely ending immigration as a means to limit the labor supply and therefore make the social problem more manageable. Victor Berger, himself an Austrian immigrant to the United States in 1878, supported strict immigration restriction. His principle biographer, Sally Miller, identified three reasons for his stance. First, trade unions, which served as the electoral basis for his political success in Milwaukee, vehemently opposed immigration because they hurt the effort of unions to secure higher wages. Berger, always conscious of building support, could not alienate this valuable bloc. Second, he feared flooding America's working class with immigrants who had not developed class consciousness. "New immigrants" from Europe and Asian immigrants came primarily from rural areas and therefore lacked the proletarian quality of "old immigrants" from Europe like himself who had been mostly exposed to the ravages of industrialization. Finally, as if to justify his outlook, he argued that internationalism needed to be downplayed at this point in the world struggle for socialism. Socialism

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[45] Kate Richards O'Hare, "The Girl Who Would," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, 42; May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem*, 188-189.

needed to be addressed in individual countries before a true international movement could occur.[46] In short, Berger believed continual immigration served only to exacerbate the problems of inequality and dependency. Even if mixed with racism and egoism, Berger's outlook showed a sincere desire to isolate the problem and attack it. Other socialists shared Berger's opinions. Ernest Untermann, Max Hayes, and Hillquit all in various degrees supported exclusion of immigrants – especially Asian – for many of the reasons Berger mentioned. The immigration controversy rocked the Socialist Party from 1908-1912 causing bitter divisiveness, especially after the Committee on Immigration released majority reports in 1910 and 1912 that called for harsh restriction policies. Supporters of the majority report believed immigration to be a tool of capital, therefore any measure to destroy capital helped socialism. These socialists aimed to help current American workers by addressing an aspect of the social problem that made conditions worse.[47]

Critics of the majority report lashed out at the seemingly inhumane conclusions of Berger and his cohorts. In a 1910 letter to the *International Socialist Review*, Debs called the 1910 Committee on Immigration majority report "outrageous" and "reactionary." He vehemently opposed any tactical political advantage gained at the expense of socialism's international mission to help the oppressed of the world regardless of race or background. Spargo, who authored the minority report, argued that Asian immigration was so small at present as to be insignificant. Therefore, no thoroughgoing exclusionary policy need be

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[46] Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism*, 28.

[47] For a detailed account of the immigration controversy from 1908-1912 with a decidedly anti-Berger angle, see Kipnis, 277-285. For a synthesis of scholarship on the relationship between socialism and immigration, see Lipset and Marks, 125-166.

enacted immediately, although in the future it might become necessary. Hillquit created a compromise report that he hoped would circumvent all mention of race. He argued that socialists should back any immigration restriction policy, regardless of race, that would limit the number of possible strike-breakers entering the country. Also, socialists should support any policy that would regulate mass immigration for the sole purpose of helping capitalists by undermining the labor movement. Hillquit, in effect, tried to rally socialists around a critique of capitalist use of immigration as a tool to harm laborers, as opposed to the race-based appeal of his colleagues that caused divisiveness.[48] Whatever their plans to handle the immigration controversy, the important point was that all socialists saw immigration as an event that worsened the conditions of the laboring class. The present direction of society was toward more inequality rather than less. Like most groups that shared an ideological outlook, socialists were far from united as to course of action.

The socialist critique of American society during the Progressive Era leads to three general conclusions. First, socialists borrowed from the rhetoric of republicanism. While it would be specious to call Debs or Hillquit a latter day Thomas Jefferson, similarities existed between republicanism and socialism. Inequality and dependency were crucial elements of both critiques. True individualism could never be achieved while gross economic distinctions forced large sections of the American population into a lifestyle associated with slavery. Jefferson and his generation found possible remedies in private property ownership and even capitalism, while Debs and his generation looked to

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[48] Eugene V. Debs, "On Immigration," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, 166-167; Kipnis, 283-285.

an alternative vision based on collectivization.[49] Second, socialists were very much a part of the reform milieu of Progressive Era America. Some historians have argued that socialists were largely foreign radicals with foreign ideas that were not conducive to American democracy.[50] On the contrary, socialists had great affinity for democracy, republicanism, the Declaration of Independence, and American heroes of the past. Socialists in fact challenged Americans to become the nation they claimed to be. In a developing industrial nation, freedom, democracy, and equality needed to be readdressed as those terms increasingly applied only to select people. Finally, socialists encountered contradictions and differences of opinion in their ideology. As has already been well documented, American socialists were not monolithic as a bunch of dogmatic Marxists covertly plotting the proletarian revolution. Instead, they had a fluid ideology but shared human emancipation as an ultimate goal. At times they spoke with certainty about the inevitability of their cause, while at other times they articulated a vision of the United States that Americans ought to build for themselves. Socialists often ridiculed middle class values, but often found themselves advocates of those same values, especially in regard to women's issues and the family. Socialists also belittled reform efforts as inadequate to the enormity of the social problem, yet they endorsed similar reforms only under the thin veil that their reforms actually helped toward overhauling society. Middle class reformers and socialists shared the same basic critique of Progressive Era society. They parted ways over how they envisioned the remedy to the social problem.

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[49] For an account that shows American republicans as embracing capitalism as opposed to the traditional view where they see capitalism as the evil spawn of Hamiltonian federalism, see Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

[50] Bell, 213-405.

Chapter 4

Republican Remedies for Liberal Problems: The Socialist Vision of the Cooperative Commonwealth

In their interpretation of American history socialists professed that the republican ideals of 1776 had been lost to liberalism as industrialists acquired private property and manipulated society to their own ends. In light of this development socialists sought a strategy to reap the fabulous rewards of industrialization while still holding republican values. They wanted the benefits of cooperative production to be enjoyed by all those who participated in the process. Socialists strove for a commonwealth of producers based not on equality of condition, but on equality of opportunity. Their concern over lack of equality of opportunity in present society spoke volumes on how they considered the privilege of an elite class as a very real and pernicious circumstance. Thus, socialists endeavored to build a commonwealth based on equality yet allowing for individualism. The industrial republic of the future would be a place where individuals pursued their own interests but always kept an eye toward maintaining the good of the community. They would exercise individual liberty, not individual license, with the intent of improving the community, not just their own interests. Socialists in fact believed that in capitalist society only the wealthy had the ability to exercise their individual will because they enjoyed economic independence and had leisure time. Yet even with those

advantages, the wealthy lacked complete autonomy in their lives because they were slaves to the profit-making system and lived in perpetual fear of upheaval from below. Socialists aimed to end all this misery by establishing a commonwealth on the foundation of publicly owned industry, eradication of the class system, and a society of independent and equal citizens.

For all their excitement over the coming cooperative commonwealth, socialists foundered over two key aspects, both of which related back to Marxist thought. First, socialists saw the cooperative commonwealth as inevitable, which gave them hope and inspiration, yet also prevented them from deciding decisively on what exactly they needed to do in the here and now. Again socialists battled within their own minds over the issue of human agency in an already determined world. Second, they had no clear vision of what the cooperative commonwealth would look like. They often offered incomplete visions and broad ideals, but too often this smacked of utopian socialism of a century earlier that they ridiculed as unscientific.[1] As a result, socialists became mired in tactical problems: what was the role of the political party, should they support dual-

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[1] Hillquit described utopian socialism during the nineteenth century as a "humanitarian" response to industrial progress that was "in accord with idealistic philosophy" rather than the positivism he and his cohorts embraced during the early twentieth century. Utopians also lacked intimate knowledge of the process of industrialization and class struggle. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1910), 17-20. Historians have attempted to measure the influence of utopian socialism on the later movement. Howard Quint argued that Bellamyites and Fabians made the supposed anarchism of Marx "respectable" in the United States. The Johnpolls saw a more discernable evolution from nineteenth to twentieth century socialism in the United States that succeeded in reforming America. British scholar Alexander Gray traced socialism in a general sense throughout Western history. Bernard K. and Lillian Johnpoll, *The Impossible Dream: The Rise and Demise of the American Left* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 350; Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition: Moses to Lenin* (London: Longmans, 1946; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

unionism or work within the existing American Federation of Labor, should they advocate reforms, should they try to win elections, should they work with bourgeois reform groups. They could not answer these questions because they were confounded by determinism and the practical realities of American political life. Historians have focused on these very real problems. The eventual crumbling of the Socialist Party led them to conclude generally that socialism would not work within the United States or its Marxist ideology prevented them from enough flexibility to be successful as a political entity. These may be true, but they give the impression that socialism was completely foreign to the American intellectual tradition. But their very critique of the problems of American society along with their historical roots showed that socialists acted very much within the republican tradition. The sometimes vague and speculative visions of the future cooperative commonwealth also revealed republicanism. Socialists wanted to restore the principles of the eighteenth century republican commonwealth that liberalism had destroyed. Just as Thomas Jefferson and his ilk wanted to end privilege through creation of an agrarian republic based on private property to ensure a good community, socialists wanted to end privilege through creation of an industrial republic based on public property to ensure a good community.

This chapter consists of two sections. The first describes the socialist vision for the cooperative commonwealth in terms of morality, democracy, and economics. Their collective vision reveals many possibilities, a lack of unanimity, and often measure the society they wanted to build against the one they desired to replace. The second details the varied opinions among socialists over what societal changes would transpire in the cooperative commonwealth. They imagined important changes in sex relations,

marriage, motherhood, education, crime, housing, and even aspects often taken for granted such as shopping. The section ends with the socialist belief in the coming world peace inaugurated by the cooperative commonwealth. Socialists wanted to recreate a society based on political and economic democracy, independence, and virtuous individualism – all of which would lead to a better community – only within the context of the productive advantages and realities of modern industrial life. There was no going back to Jefferson's vision as Populists would have it, but socialists hoped to express his spirit in the cooperative commonwealth.

Socialists did not share an absolute vision of what the cooperative commonwealth would look like or even that it was inevitable. Instead, they posited that through scientific understanding of social evolution an approximation of what was to transpire could be ascertained. John Spargo declared that "Karl Marx was not a prophet" and made no prediction as to the exact form of the socialist state. Instead, Marx was a scientist who understood the "law of social dynamics." This discredited an earlier generation of utopian socialists who dreamed of a perfect society and convinced modern socialists to pursue the scientific "principle" of socialism, which was any act that contributed to the "efficient organization of wealth production and distribution to the end that the exploitation of the wealth producers by a privileged class may be rendered impossible." Morris Hillquit also chastised utopian socialists as visionaries who wrongly assumed the socialist state to be a fixed place in human evolution. He instead argued that "an element of speculation" was required to foresee the coming socialist state based upon the present society and proposed reforms of the socialists. This gave people something to

strive for and required active human participation, yet was not absolute. Robert Rives La Monte also fused science and uncertainty when he claimed that by studying history scientifically in relation to material development, only then could the "course of human development" be predicted "within limits." George Herron strayed furthest from assuredly predicting the coming of socialism when he declared that he did not believe "that socialism is inevitable merely because the collapse of capitalism is inevitable." He instead posited that "human progress" is a "spiral rather than a continuous ascent" and required human hands to build the cooperative commonwealth according to no fixed plan. Perhaps the best summary of the socialist outlook concerning the cooperative commonwealth was Ethelwyn Mills's quoting of the German socialist theorist, Karl Liebknecht: "The important thing for us is not to paint a picture of the of the future – which in any case would be useless labor – but to forecast a practical program for the immediate period, to formulate and justify measures that shall serve as aids to the new socialist birth," whatever that may be. The left wing of the Socialist party offered direct action through an industrial union as the best "practical program," while the right wing championed municipal reform and working within the AFL. This difference in tactics split the party eventually, but they nevertheless shared many of the same ideas in the picture they painted of the cooperative commonwealth.[2]

Part of the transformation they envisioned included a moral revolution of sorts. Instead of defining this in terms of an absolute morality socialists hoped to have in the

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[2] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 150, 277; Morris Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 109-111; Robert Rives La Monte, *Socialism: Positive and Negative* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 25-26; Ethelwyn Mills, *Legislative Program of the Socialist Party* (Chicago: The Socialist Party, 1914), 3.

cooperative commonwealth, they shaped it in terms of what was immoral in capitalist society. Much of what socialists saw as immoral in capitalist society stemmed from profit-seeking capitalists controlling American culture.[3] Syndicalist writers Earl Ford and William Foster wrote that "capitalists, who are heartlessness and cupidity personified," were the "shapers" of American institutions that kept the working class in chains. From their position of dominance they even controlled what was deemed good. They did this through having their values promulgated in schools, churches, government, and other venues of culture. As Algie Simons described it, the capitalist class "has determined the form and administration of government, set the fashions in dress and manners, formulated codes of ethics, and in general has exercised all the powers of social control." Such a system of ethics "hypnotized" society, according to William Thurston Brown. He opined that "there is no absolute standard of right and wrong, but what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' are determined almost wholly by the necessities of the economic or industrial system under which people are living." This led to a "double-standard" in ethics to which even churches contributed, either "consciously or unconsciously." Brown offered a variety of examples that illustrated the debauched morality of the capitalist system. First, he argued that all people were taught in church, school, and home that lying was wrong. But when done "in the interest of" an employer

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[3] The concept of cultural hegemony based on the writings of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci during the 1920s and 1930s drew the attention of neo-Marxist scholars in the past thirty years. American socialists during the Debsian Era understood this concept already, even if they did not use the word hegemony. For an example of how the power of capital controlled worker culture see Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (London: Verso, 1986). A general discussion of cultural hegemony can be found in T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (June 1985), 567-593.

it was deemed okay. Lying was in fact the basis of sales, yet few people viewed this as immoral. Brown believed this was because the dominant economic interest set moral standards and manipulated them to their own benefit. A second example was stealing. A worker taking a hunk of coal from a freight car without compensation to warm his family was declared to be wrong. However, when Rockefeller "swindled" another oil producer out of his business without compensation the public observed this as "successful finance" instead of stealing. When Carnegie became wealthy off the work of laborers he compensated poorly, the people did not ostracize the steel magnet as a criminal. Society instead viewed Rockefeller and Carnegie as "example[s] of every moral virtue" and "successful [men], the envy of the whole world." This occurred because such men shaped the morality of the capitalist world. A third example was murder. A man who stole bread to feed his starving family and killed another when caught by surprise in the act was labeled a murderer. Yet when Theodore Roosevelt killed Spanish soldiers in the interest of American capital or when mineowners indirectly killed miners in shafts they knew to be unsafe, they did not have the label of murderer applied to them. Brown concluded from such examples that the capitalist system was "not only taking the lives of thousands instantly and of millions bit by bit, by slow starvation, by physical impoverishment, and by unsanitary conditions, but it is blasting the whole moral life of millions."[4]

Unhappy with the hypocritical nature of capitalist-imposed ethics, socialists championed the belief that the cooperative commonwealth would have a better code of

[4] Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, *Syndicalism* (Chicago: William Z. Foster, n.d.), 3. A.M. Simons, *The Philosophy of Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, n.d.), 6; William Thurston Brown, *How Capitalism has Hypnotized Society* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, n.d.), 4, 7-16.

ethics. This new code of ethics would also be determined by society, but it would be at the bequest of everybody not just the small minority that controlled life as in capitalist society. In essence, political and economic democracy meant a new morality based on justice for all instead of the economic interests of the few. Justice and morality would be based on the good of the community instead of naked self-interest. Charles Kerr stated this belief in a very general way: "In the better social order that is coming, that action will be right which is for the good of all." Kerr's wife, May Walden Kerr, along with Robert Rives La Monte, expressed in more specific terms the achievement of this new code of ethics. It stemmed from eradication of the class system. May Walden Kerr envisioned in the cooperative commonwealth that "each worker had plenty of time to develop a healthy body, opportunity to enrich the mind by study, travel and recreation, and these conditions would create a code of ethics better than the world has yet dreamed of." She argued that a truly democratic society laid the foundation of a new morality that appealed to everybody because they had the same interest at heart, namely, building an equal and just community.[5] La Monte echoed Kerr's sentiments when he declared that the three ideals

[5] There is the problem of what socialists meant when they spoke of the common good, the good community, or any similar platitude. They never developed a deep meaning for such terms as Rousseau did with "general will." It seemed socialists assumed common good had a universal meaning often defined in terms of socialization of distribution (to accompany the already socialized production). I think socialists had an implied meaning to common good which was that it embodied what capitalist society did not. Working toward the common good did not result in poverty, vice, or crime. Everybody lived an independent and secure life. George Brewer used the utilitarian notion of "greatest good for the greatest number" while F.G.R. Gordon argued for "public welfare" over "vested interests." George Brewer, *The Rights of the Masses* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 1; F.G.R. Gordon, *Municipal Socialism* (Terre Haute, IN: Debs Publishing Co., 1899), 3. Christian socialists wrote of the ideal of common good in terms of the Golden Rule, a rhetoric used by more mainstream socialists as well. See William Dwight Porter Bliss, *What Christian Socialism is* (Boston: Office of *The Dawn*, 1894), 3, 4, 9-11; Jacob H. Dorn, "'In Spiritual Communion': Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist

of socialism – comfort for all, leisure for all, and the fullest possible physical and intellectual development of each person – would be realized with the eradication of the class system based on capital, wage labor, and coercive state. This created a new morality based on mutual consent within a society of equal producers instead of the old morality which was imposed from the top down. Socialists viewed capitalist society as immoral because only a privileged few decided on what was moral. These controllers of the means of production passed their ideas to the masses through institutions such as church, school, and government – venues which they in effect corrupted. Socialists sought to end this corruption by ending the class system.[6]

Having castigated the immorality of the capitalist system and offered little more for a replacement than a vague conception of equality through destroying the authority of economic privilege, socialists defended their outlook against charges of anarchy. Without moral authority rooted in some foundation, critics maintained, society would stumble into anarchy. Two Fabians, Richard Ely and William Dwight Porter Bliss, responded to the charges of anarchism by placing their brand of socialism in a compromise position between authoritarianism and anarchism. Ely claimed to write in a "conservative spirit" between those who strove for great wealth and radical anarchists. For Ely, socialism was neither of the above, but a movement of the middle conducted by thoughtful individuals that sought to reform the abuses of the old order without lapsing

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Christians," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003), 301-325; Jacob H. Dorn, ed. *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20th Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998).

[6] Charles Kerr, *Morals and Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1899), 17; May Walden Kerr, *Socialism and the Home* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901), 22; La Monte, *Socialism*, 63, 86-87.

into anarchy. Bliss followed Ely's lead by describing socialism as a political movement that obeyed law, supported government, and had a great respect for life. Anarchists shared none of these qualities, thereby making socialism a different ideology. While Ely and Bliss only had tenuous connection with the Socialist party of the early twentieth century, their comments nevertheless revealed that they believed early socialists suffered undeservedly from the charge of anarchism.[7]

Other socialists answered the charge of anarchism. Unlike the Fabians who saw socialism as a middle ground between a strong state and anarchy, Hillquit linked anarchism and capitalist government together and offered socialism as a remedy. He argued that both anarchists and liberal capitalists "would rob society of all its social functions." Hillquit continued that both outlooks "base their philosophy on individual competition and the brutal struggle for existence rather than on the principle of human cooperation, both make an idol of individual liberty, both suffer from a morbid exaggeration of the Ego, and both sanction all means to attain the end of individual happiness." For Hillquit this was not a desirable situation for society. He, like most socialists, championed a cooperative society that put the good of all above individual desires. Socialists believed in the end this type of society created more individual happiness through freeing people from constant competition and uncertainty. John Spargo also answered critics, especially from the middle class, who charged socialists with anarchy and violence. Spargo proclaimed that socialists "have done and are doing more to allay hatred and bitterness of feeling, and to save the world from the red curse of

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[7] Richard Ely, *Socialism: An Examination of its Nature, its Strength and its Weakness, with Suggestions for Social Reform* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1894), viii-ix; William Dwight Porter Bliss, *A Handbook of Socialism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 14-15.

anarchistic vengeance, than all the Rooseveltian preaching in which thousands of venders of moral platitudes are engaged." Spargo believed that class conflict caused divisiveness in society that eventually led to anarchy. Only socialists worked to end this class arrangement.[8]

Socialists considered political democracy a crucial element of the cooperative commonwealth. As such, reorganization of government was of prime importance in their vision. They saw government as an organizer of industry when it operated democratically in a society of independent citizens that had abolished class rule. In the cooperative commonwealth, the state as such did not exist. Because of this vision they chafed at the commentary of critics who charged them with statism. Hillquit argued that the very definition of "state" implied repression or coercion, whether through making laws, collecting taxes, or maintaining social order. The state was "an organization of the ruling classes for the maintenance of the exploited classes in a condition of dependence." The point of socialism was not to replace the rule of one class (capitalist) with that of another (proletariat), but to end class rule and "make liberty possible for the whole race of man." Without one class forcing another into subjugation, government operated not to keep one class in power or the party of a particular class in power, but to efficiently run society for the benefit of all. Government in the cooperative commonwealth took on much more of an economic function and much less of a political one. Because everybody in a classless society shared similar economic interests, no need existed for political parties and government became a benign instrument for organizing productive industry.[9]

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[8] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 16; Spargo, *Socialism,* 2, 181.

[9] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 93-94, 98, 141. Spargo, *Socialism*, 200. Spargo based his objection to the Bolshevik Revolution on this reasoning. He called the

In the cooperative commonwealth the primary function of government was the efficient organization and management of industry. Upton Sinclair declared that "the Industrial Republic will be an industrial government of the people, by the people, for the people." He stated further that society shared ownership in "industrial sovereignty" (which he equated with capital) as it did political sovereignty. This industrial sovereignty was to be administered by elected officials of the people just as was political power, at least in theory. The government then acted to run the affairs of business efficiently for the benefit of all, whatever form the people decided to give government. Syndicalist writers also focused on government's industrial responsibilities. Mark Fisher believed that industrial unions served as a prototype for government in the coming socialist society. They were infused with the spirit of cooperation as opposed to craft unions that merely monopolized labor, thereby helping those within their narrow parameters and allowing the community as a whole to suffer. The "industrial republic" would have "a government not of people but of things." To that end the legislative body in the new government would be partitioned by industry (such as representation for railroads, mines, etc.), not territory (such as states), and their soul purpose rested in the management of resources. Bill Haywood and Frank Bohn echoed these sentiments. They wrote that technological innovations such as the telegraph and railroad had made state boundaries obsolete. They too envisioned an industrial republic where the representative bodies "would be composed of men and women representing the different branches of industry

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Russian Revolution a "crime against democracy" because "democracy has always meant absence of class rule; proletarian dictatorship is class rule." Spargo referred to Lenin's government as not "a democratic state, but a very despotic one, a dictatorship by a small but powerful ruling class." John Spargo, *Bolshevism: The Enemy of Political and Industrial Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1919), 162, 209, 224.

and their work would be to improve the conditions of labor, to minimize expenditure of labor-power, and to increase production." Furthermore, this "shop government" only addressed non-industrial issues that were "of benefit to the workers" such as education and "public activities." These writers maintained that once the class issue had been removed from government then it could serve the interest of the people by efficiently running industry instead of exploiting them for the benefit of a "few tyrants" who used government to protect private property – the cornerstone of liberalism.[10]

Based on such an outlook of government to organize industry for the benefit of all instead of a few, the structure of government looked different in the cooperative commonwealth than in contemporary society. However, socialists did not agree on the exact form of the new government, although in function it ceased to be an agent of compulsion dominated by the privileged class. Spargo shared with the syndicalists the belief in government for economic organization, but he also gave it broader duties to address. He advocated government-run businesses to replace private ventures where "private enterprise is dangerous to the social well-being, or is inefficient." He went on to say that the state should not have "absolute monopoly" on all functions of society, thus leaving much room for private industry so long as it promoted the community at large. Like Haywood and Bohn, Spargo stressed the need for government control of public education, but he listed many more specific functions of government. He mentioned the role of government in combating disease and natural disasters, "trade agreements,"

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[10] Upton Sinclair, *The Industrial Republic: A Study of the America of Ten Years Hence* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1907), 216-217; Mark Fisher, *Evolution and Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, n.d.), 50-55; William D. Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 4, 49-50, 54-55, 60-61.

diplomacy, and police and fire protection. For Spargo, government took an active role in protecting citizens against calamities of all kinds, including industrial despotism. Eventually industrial despotism faded away under socialism meaning government protection was only required against natural catastrophes.[11]

While Spargo was vague as to on what level government operated and the syndicalists implied a very centralized structure, Hillquit declared that smaller entities like cities ran society, thus making government very decentralized. He called centralization part of the growth of capitalism. Competition led to monopolies and these tightly run business enterprises in turn controlled politics through very well coordinated political parties. A socialist state had little use for such structure because there was unity of purpose. Government in fact increased its duties under socialism, but these duties need not be directed through a centralized political structure because socialist government did not contain competing factions or have a need to keep its own members in line. Local governments responded to local problems without worrying about being a corruptive influence because these governments exercised the will of the people. Charlotte Perkins Gilman summarized this spirit of democracy within the socialist commonwealth by saying "government ceases to be compulsion, and becomes agreement; law ceases to be authority and become co-ordination." She went on to say that the coming of socialism meant that "democratic government is no longer an exercise of arbitrary authority from above, but is an organization for public service of the people themselves." Socialists envisioned the government of the cooperative commonwealth as a benign facilitator of industry instead of coercive agent of the privileged. Statism, then,

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[11] Spargo, *Socialism,* 294-295.

did not apply to socialism. It only occurred where conflicting interests existed and that was not the case in the cooperative commonwealth.[12]

Following Hillquit's call for decentralization, some socialist writers spoke more directly to the threat of centralization or bureaucratization. Economist Scott Nearing avowed that he "subscribe[d] thoroughly to the dictum of Thomas Jefferson, 'that government governs best, which governs least'; provided...a sufficient amount of government must be provided to safeguard the welfare of the majority of the people in the community." He added that "we need not more government, but sufficient government." Nearing warned against the growing size of government, especially when utilized in undemocratic ways. He illustrated the point with the example of the unavailability of land and natural resources. Those who had some called it private property, had it "labeled MINE," and used government for personal instead of community gain. This was government being used in a corrupt manner by being against the common good. James Connolly added that government in the "Socialist Republic of the future" would be an "administrative force" that organized the economy. It eradicated "all the fears of a bureaucratic state" that ruled "every individual from above." Government as administration of economy was offered as "an extension of the freedom of the individual, and not a suppression of it." Again, government ceased to be coercive and instead serve the interest of the community. Statism was not an ominous threat of socialism. It was, however, a growing influence in the present plutocratic arrangement

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[12] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 133-135; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture* (New York: Charlton Company, 1911), 185. It should be noted that Gilman linked the coercive force of government, what she called "androcracy," with male traits of brutal competitiveness. Socialism would in effect feminize this brutal world.

that socialism intended to eradicate. Whether centralized or decentralized, local or national, the government of the cooperative commonwealth acted as a positive organizing vehicle for industry that benefited everyone. In a society without classes where government operated for the benefit of all, government could not be corrupted because the interest of each individual was the continuance of the community that promoted independent citizenry. Hence, the tentative vision of government in the cooperative commonwealth addressed problems rooted in the republican past (dependency and corrupt government) by destroying the mechanism that created these problems; classes based on economic control and the resultant liberal state.[13]

Desiring or even envisioning the cooperative commonwealth was one thing, explaining how the transformation would occur was much more difficult. Socialists expressed a variety of schemes addressing how the transformation from private ownership to public ownership would happen. Two general courses emerged: purchase of the trusts and confiscation. Those who favored purchasing the trusts believed in working within the law, controlling political apparatus to their ends, and generally hoping for a peaceful transition. Those who advocated confiscation favored direct action, the organization of workers into industrial unions, and violence if necessary (most assumed it to be unavoidable). More than anything, the question of tactics divided socialists into right and left camps.[14] Despite their division over tactics, both sides envisioned a similar cooperative commonwealth and expressed it in republican terms.

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[13] Scott Nearing, Morris Hillquit, Rev. John L. Belford, and Frederick M. Davenport, *Should Socialism Prevail* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1916), 13; James Connolly, *Socialism Made Easy* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 46.

[14] In a recent study John Enyeart asserted that willingness to work within the bounds of law was what most differentiated between right and left. He added that scholars should

The right wing of the party that hoped to peacefully acquire the trusts through government action was dubbed sewer socialists or constructive socialists. This stemmed from their willingness to act within local governments by instigating constructive reforms such as building sewers to help the general public and work slowly toward the cooperative commonwealth. Victor Berger, the unofficial leader of this wing of the party, expressed their ideology as being "revolutionary in its final aim" but was "distinctly evolutionary and constructive in its method." These socialists endorsed reforms that helped everybody in the community – especially the workers – and were not mere "political baits" designed only to woo voters. Berger believed that good reforms not only helped the plight of workers, but "offer the possibility of a peaceful, lawful, and orderly transformation of society." Sewer socialists hoped to peacefully transform society by acquiring trusts from capitalists. This could happen in any number of ways short of direct confiscation. One plan included heavily graduated income and inheritance taxes to in effect make the capitalists foot the majority of the bill for the public purchase of their businesses. Another plan involved using non-transferable and non-inheritable bonds to pay for trusts with the hope that the trust owners would die before the entire principal of the bond had to be paid. Other plans included paying a pension to trust owners until they died or having the public build competitive businesses as non-profit

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not assume that radical direct actionists constituted the "real" socialists. He maintained that evoutionaries like Hillquit helped create legislation legally that made the lives of workers much better than that of their parents, even in western states where labor militancy was assumed. He too saw a positive legacy of socialism. John P. Enyeart, "Revolution or Evolution: The Socialist Party, Western Workers, and Law in the Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (October 2003), 377-402.

organizations until the trusts went out of business because they could no longer compete.[15]

These plans had their drawbacks. Ones involving pensions or bonds seemed unfair since they required the people (workers) to pay capitalists again for the profit they immorally derived from labor in the first place. Building competitive companies seemed wasteful. Tax schemes could be risky if socialists did not thoroughly control the government, thereby preventing capitalists from finding loopholes and delaying the process. Many constructive socialists realized these limitations, but they followed the reasoning best expressed by Oscar Ameringer. The one time editor and party functionary who worked in Oklahoma, Missouri, and Wisconsin argued that the United States had a history of confiscating private property, referring to the Civil War. He maintained that Americans spent over ten billion dollars and sacrificed "hundreds of thousands of valuable young lives, seas of blood and rivers of tears" to confiscate five million slaves whose 1861 value he estimated to be around one billion dollars. In the long run Ameringer felt it would have been cheaper for the United States to follow the lead of England, Portugal, and Spain, each of which paid an indemnity to slave owners to get their property. He advised a similar approach for trust acquisition saying "for the sake of expediency, we are perfectly willing to pay the trust owners for their property in their own coin."[16]

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[15] Victor Berger, *The Working Class must have its own Party to give Expression to its Own Class Interests* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 11; Daniel Hoan, *The Failure of Regulation* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1914), 91-92; N.A. Richardson, *Methods of Acquiring National Possession of our Industries* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1903), 15, 18-26, 29-30.

[16] Ibid.; Oscar Ameringer, *Socialism: What It Is and How to Get It* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1913), 6-8.

The party's left wing, or "impossibilists" as they were derisively called by the right wing for the doubtful nature of their program, advocated direct action through industrial unions. These socialists, who often had controlling influence in the Industrial Workers of the World, espoused a plan that called for workers to organize by industry, call a general strike, and take over industries when owners failed to run them without the help of workers. IWW agitator Elizabeth Gurley Flynn described this type of syndicalism as "Thoreau-like – the right to ignore the state, civil disobedience to a bosses' state." Flynn and her cohorts such as Mark Fisher and William Brown chastised constructive socialists for their plan of piecemeal reform and winning elections. They believed that as long as the capitalist class controlled courts and armies, any attempt at radical transformation would be squelched no matter what happened at the polls or in the legislatures. Brown believed that only "direct action" could break the working class out of the spell they were under brought by the capitalist-controlled culture. The workers needed to be inspired, not told to wait for future developments. As one syndicalist editor noted: the worker "does not wait for historical developments, he is intent to make history himself."[17]

The tactics for achieving the cooperative commonwealth differed markedly between right and left, but they all desired the same end. In fact, many socialists expressed a great deal of uncertainty over how the socialist state would be achieved and instead focused on the inevitability and desirability of such a state. James Oneal declared that the objective of socialists was "to capture as much of the law making and governing

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[17] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography: My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 134; Fisher, 46; Brown, *How Capitalism has Hypnotized Society*, 23; *Industrial Union Bulletin*, June 20, 1908, 2 .

powers as will enable us to transfer wealth-producing plants into the hands of the people and thus overthrow the present ruling class." He did not care whether this happened through "another emancipation proclamation, ... seizure in the name of the sovereign people, ... slow and peaceful process of legislation or in the throes of civil conflict." Oneal simply wanted socialism and believed it was near at hand. Novelist Jack London echoed this sentiment when he wrote about the progress of the revolutionary army of socialism around the world. The rapidly growing army of over seven million socialists internationally would eventually gain socialism. He hoped for a peaceful transformation through the ballot box, but they were willing to "meet legal murder with assassination" if necessary. Allan Benson, socialist candidate for president in 1916, also saw socialist revolution as the necessary outcome of capitalism. It did not matter whether revolution came "by the ballot" or "by the sword," either way the destruction of capitalism was to be achieved. He believed that socialism stood for "peaceful revolution of the ballot and it bases its hopes for victory on the ability of the American people to recognize the nature of their wrongs before it is too late and apply the logical remedies." Benson wanted the people to work for socialism peacefully before fate made them reach for it violently. William Brown added that "no man who believes in evolution can doubt that the Co-operative Commonwealth will mark a distinct advance over any industrial system we have ever known," thereby showing socialism's inevitability and desirability however it was to be achieved. Hillquit too contended that socialism was the goal whether through confiscation or compensation. He hoped for the peaceful transition to socialism through gaining control of government, but noted that the process differed by region and nation. Hillquit tied the evolutionary way of the cooperative commonwealth back to America's

republican past when he defended the coming transformation of society against the accusations of non-socialist critics. He stated that "this program has been denounced as confiscatory [sic] and revolutionary, but it is no more so than was the abolition of chattel slavery." Hillquit added that socialism "has been ridiculed as utopian and fantastic, but it is no more so than the demands of the eighteenth century capitalist for the abolition of the privileges of birth were to his contemporaries." Progress meant change and this created fear among many people. Socialists united behind an outlook of what shape the product of change took, but they differed over how to make the change happen.[18]

Socialists believed achievement of the cooperative commonwealth eradicated problems of corruption, privilege, and dependency. Their writings on the coming socialist state as it related to municipal ownership, the law, and the nature of work, often revealed these themes. Socialists viewed municipal ownership as more than an end in itself, but a means toward a better society. By ending private ownership of industries such as street railways, waterworks, electric utilities, and gas utilities, socialists believed the resulting public concerns provided more benefit to the community. James Oneal believed this to be so because it eliminated classes. He proclaimed that "every man, woman and child will be a part of the public that will own, operate and manage all industry for the common good of all." Revenue generated by public companies benefited everybody, not just a small cadre of capitalists that controlled the industry. Daniel Hoan, who became socialist mayor of Milwaukee after World War I, agreed with Oneal, but

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[18] James Oneal, *Militant Socialism* (St. Louis: The National Rip-Saw Publishing Co., 1912), 29; Jack London, *Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 8; Allan L. Benson, *Socialism Made Plain: Why the Few are Rich and the Many Poor* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Co., 1908), 125; William T. Brown, *After Capitalism, What?* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1900), 24; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 11, 102-104.

added the necessity of a purely democratic government to accompany municipal ownership. Otherwise, if capitalists still controlled the government they could bend municipal ownership to their own needs, a circumstance they labeled as corruption. Hoan cited Philadelphia and Japan as examples of how municipal ownership could be manipulated by capitalists. He stated that in Philadelphia capitalists in government convinced the public to lease the productive utilities back to private hands, while in Japan the revenue generated by public utilities was used to give tax breaks to the wealthy. Despite instances of "municipal mismanagement," socialists maintained that such a system was better than private mismanagement for profit only.[19]

By putting public concerns in the hands of the public itself instead of a few capitalists motivated by individual profit, socialists believed community members became more happy and independent. Oscar Ameringer argued that an employee of a publicly owned utility was "every bit as good a husband and father" as the employee of privately held company. The only difference was "that the income of the public servant as a rule, allows him to bring up a happier and healthier family than does the employee of the [private company] on starvation wages." Ameringer added that "poverty and fear of want are no foundation for love nor family life. Socialism...would result in a better, purer and happier family than the world has seen so far." Hillquit argued during a debate in New York that municipal ownership was part of a larger plan to end the dependency of individuals on employers. He stated that "the point is not so much who operate the industries." Rather, socialists "object to the power of any person to control the labor of another person, to the right of one individual to amass fortunes at the expense of others."

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[19] Oneal, *Militant Socialism*, 17; Hoan, 88; Gordon, 2.

Socialism was but one way to end this degrading economic system where so many people were required to sell their labor to another. Freed from this restraint, individual citizens experienced more freedom and independence, indirectly creating a better community. While municipal ownership helped in making more people happy and independent, Algie Simons noted that the issue of municipal ownership was of "trifling importance" compared to the large reorganization of society brought by socialism. Simons favored municipal ownership, but was more concerned with reducing crime, ending poverty, and providing more quality education. Municipal ownership was only a small, but essential, part of this broader quest.[20]

Socialists also intended to transform what they viewed as a corrupt legal system that worked for the benefit of the minority of capitalists instead of the majority of workers. In his critique of the American legal system, George Allan England focused on how American law prevented the will of the majority from being expressed, a problem that dated back to the drafting of the Constitution. In the cooperative commonwealth, however, socialists "can make a fact of democracy and of our Republic, in place of the specious, false and deceptive appearance of popular rule which has till now masked the reality of government by Gold." For England, the key was to reform the judicial system. He maintained that capitalists "must have some means of controlling the people," and that power was "exercised through the courts." The courts themselves were minorities where capitalists selected judges through bought legislators. England declared that it was

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[20] Oscar Ameringer, *Communism, Socialism, and the Church* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Social-Democratic Publishing Company, 1913), 60; Scott Nearing, Morris Hillquit, Rev. John L. Belford, and Frederick M. Davenport, *Should Socialism Prevail* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1916), 22-23; A.M. Simons, *What the Socialists Would Do if They Won in this City* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901), 22-23.

ridiculous to speak of "majority rule" under such a system. In true republican spirit England argued that "our law-making system is wholly in violence of the Declaration of Independence." He insisted that laws should be made by the people and they should stand until a majority – not a minority court – repealed them. True democracy freed the people from the abuses of corrupt government and the courts that kept them in power.[21]

Work, too, would be different in the cooperative commonwealth by promoting individual liberty. In the words of James Oneal: "Instead of the long and bitter struggle to pay the expenses of a low standard of living – and often fail to pay it – all workers could enjoy an abundant, happy life with a few hours of pleasant, healthful toil." While Oneal's description sounded a bit fanciful, it described the socialist aim of everybody contributing to the community through work, yet nobody suffering due to the hoarding of profits by a small minority of the population. John Spargo made the same point in a more structured way. He said the socialist organization of industry accomplished two things. First, it achieved "a maximum of general, social efficiency." Second, it provided a maximum of "personal liberty and comfort to the workers." He added that "the state would not only guarantee the right to labor, but ... would impose the duty of labor upon every competent person."[22]

For socialists the ideal of universal employment improved significantly the current state of affairs. Under the present capitalist system, however, Ben Hanford defined the right to labor as "a man's sacred right to be a scab and take your job when

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[21] George Allan England, *Socialism and the Law: The Basis and Practice of Modern Legal Procedure and its Relation to the Working Class* (Fort Scott, KN: Legal Department Appeal to Reason, 1913), 44, 52.

[22] Oneal, *Militant Socialism*, 2; Spargo, *Socialism*, 306.

you go out on strike for better pay." This was part of the experience of the fabled "free American workingman" that the major political parties liked to speak about. For Hanford, that platitude simply meant "a man who is free to starve if he cannot get employment." In the cooperative commonwealth everybody worked, thus eliminating the uncertainty of tenuous employment. Machines undertook drudgery work but everybody benefited, not just the people who owned the machines. Some socialists maintained that the workday would decrease to as little as two to four hours and all agreed conditions would improve because work would be done for the public good instead of private profit. Meta Stern Lilienthal expressed the freedom and joy workers would realize in the cooperative commonwealth when she described her vision of future factories: "The welfare of the workers would be the main consideration. Sanitary conditions would be assured; hours of work would be limited according to hygienic requirements, and each worker would find his life rationally divided into time for work and time for amusement, self-culture and a free, personal existence." She, like other socialists, hoped for nothing less than a society of free individuals who contributed equally to the common good.[23]

Despite the cooperative nature of the socialist state, socialists imagined the continuation of private enterprise and private property that marked the present capitalist society. It might be limited or transformed, but private ventures would endure. In the cooperative commonwealth private enterprise continued in industries where its operation did not infringe upon the good of the community or exploit workers. Spargo stated that socialization of industry only occurred when private businesses "fail in efficiency or

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[23] Ben Hanford, *The Free American Workingman and the Sacred Right to Work* (New York: New York Labor News, 1909), 2; N.A. Richardson, *Introduction to Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1902), 26-28; Meta Stern Lilienthal, *Women of the Future* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1916), 10-11.

result in injustice and inequality of opportunities." He also held that businesses that produced luxury items would probably remain in private hands, only subject to regulation "for the protection of health and the public order." Spargo illustrated the possible continuance of private industry by using shoemaking as an example. He assumed that shoemaking was socialized in the cooperative commonwealth and therefore run by the state. If a citizen did not like the shoes produced by the state, he could endeavor to make his own. Because the state-run factory guaranteed a substantial income to its workers under conditions of full employment, the privately held firm needed to match those numbers in order to hire workers. Thus no exploitation resulted, which was the point of socialism in the first place. Spargo asked rhetorically of the above labor arrangement that allowed for the private shoe business: "What reason could the state possibly have for forbidding the continuance of such an arrangement between two of its citizens?"[24]

Mary Marcy and John M. Work elaborated on the theme of limited private enterprise within the cooperative commonwealth. Marcy suggested that only industries used socially – she used "great factories, the shops, the woolen mills and flour mills, the privately owned railroads" as examples – and land ownership would be socialized. She argued that things used by the public should be owned by the public while things used privately would remain privately owned. She clarified this concept by saying "no man will be permitted to own privately anything that the lives of men depend upon. Then every man and woman will have an opportunity to produce and enjoy all the good things of life." Marcy believed the net result was "better and more beautiful clothes, ... comfortable homes," and "luxuries." Work contended that socialism actually increased

[24] Spargo, *Socialism,* 296-297.

the amount of personal property enjoyed by citizens. He stated that property used by citizens for "personal purposes" or to perform work without "exploiting others...should be privately owned." However, Work argued, "no one has a moral right to own as private property the things which others must use to earn a living." It was this latter condition that caused the "extremes" of luxury and poverty. Socialists like Spargo, Marcy, and Work wanted everybody to enjoy the finer things in life, not just the few capitalists who exploited workers for their own gain while reducing the workforce to a state of dependency.[25]

Many socialist writers, especially women, elaborated on how the cooperative commonwealth brought an end to the dependent nature of women upon men. They wrote that the achievement of socialism drastically changed the very nature of sex relations, marriage, and motherhood. Socialism offered an end to the patriarchal nature of society that existed throughout the history of the United States. Some socialist writers believed that sex relations would become much more harmonious and equal. For example, Lilienthal wrote that work no longer needed to be divided between men's work and women's work, instead only "human work" existed. Everybody worked under socialism – a retort to critics who claimed socialism led to women being pushed back into domestic duties or idleness – and therefore contributed to the improvement of the community. There no longer needed to be a differentiation made between men's and women's work; all labor was useful. Gilman added that a cooperative commonwealth ended the

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[25] Mary Marcy, "Why Catholic Workers Should be Socialist," in *The Tongue of Angels: The Mary Marcy Reader*, ed. Frederick C. Giffin (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 74-75; John M. Work, *What's So and What Isn't* (n.p., n.d.; reprint, New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 52.

"despotism" that was the "man-made family" of capitalist society. Socialism freed women and made the family as democratic as society itself. This only happened when socialism abolished the brutish, competitive system of male dominance that underscored capitalism (Gilman referred to this as "androcentric culture"). In socialist society women and men enjoyed equal status in all parts of society including the family.[26]

With greater equality between the sexes socialists believed marriage became a better institution in the cooperative commonwealth because union based on love replaced marriage out of economic necessity. Spargo declared "there is no Socialist theory of marriage," yet he and other writers often opined on how the institution improved under socialism. More than anything, commentators reflected on how marriage changed from a dependent slave relationship based on economic circumstances to a purer union based on love. As it stood, they contended, women faced the dilemma of remaining single and becoming a wage slave or marrying a wage slave. Both options put women in a place of dependency. Socialist critics of marriage in capitalist society articulated a vision of a reformed institution of marriage based solely on love between individuals. Gilman stated that marriage did not serve its purpose of two people acting together for happiness until they were in fact "class equals." The union remained imperfect until patriarchy ceased because the man was in a position of dominance. Lilienthal, too, noted that the slight chance women had of achieving economic independence "terminated with marriage." She believed socialism collectivized domestic industry and resulted in "giving all women economic independence, regardless of their marital relations." Mary Marcy intoned that

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[26] Lilienthal, 8-9; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, with an introduction by Carl N. Degler (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 40.

socialism ended the practice of "bought love" – or prostitution – by creating "free women and free men" who "do not sell themselves either mentally or physically." The demise of capitalism, and with it the tenuous nature of work, dependency, and desperation, ended prostitution by creating better options for all. Love by default became purer as the specter of illicit love was removed from the streets.[27]

Socialism not only improved marriage and love, but motherhood as well. Some socialists complained that critics had a skewed understanding of what socialism offered in regard to raising children. Lilienthal grumbled that critics distorted reality when they put forth visions of "great, state-owned orphan asylums, in which all the children will be herded together while public officials go about the country robbing mothers of their babes." She called this criticism erroneous at least in part because of the conflation of socialism and statism. Instead, she posited that the socialist state improved institutions such as schools, kindergartens, and playgrounds, while allowing mothers to continue "their socially productive labor outside the home." This created a positive example for children – socially productive parents – instead of the undemocratic one that Gilman complained about. This model was of wife and mother as servile and therefore unequal. Spargo insisted that socialism led to a democratization of life and allowed every mother to experience the "healthfulness and happiness of motherhood" that until now had only been enjoyed by the "privileged few." For Spargo, the cooperative commonwealth allowed women to pursue their "highest and holiest mission" of being a mother. Socialism freed women from the toils of factory life and allowed them to pursue "their

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[27] John Spargo, *Socialism and Motherhood* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, 1914), 118; Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 219-220; Lilienthal, 18, 21-26; Charles Kerr, *The Folly of Being 'Good'"* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1901), 16-23.

true vocation as builders of the bodies and souls of their sons and daughters." From a modern perspective, Spargo's comments smacked of sexism and failed to address the problem of dependency within a patriarchal system and traditional gender roles. Many socialists, especially women, did not fail to notice the hypocrisy.[28]

Nevertheless, Spargo and other socialists saw this as true progress against the rising tide of increasingly brutish wage labor. He reasoned that putting women in factories and children in the handful of factory nurseries did not serve the best interests of society. Mothers, Spargo believed, should be assisted by the state in raising their children by being given maternity subsidies, time-off before and after childbirth, and inexpensive medical care. In short, he believed motherhood should no longer be "subordinated to profit-making." Spargo argued that women should contribute to the community through work, whether in the factory or at home with children. As Lilienthal put it, "Motherhood will be guarded as never before. Though women will be treated as human beings first and foremost, the fact that they are the bearers and nourishers of the coming generation will be given far more consideration than it is at present." The socialists quoted above had tremendous concern for the plight of women in industrial society and what that did to the community especially in terms of the raising of children. They hoped to remedy the problem by supplying generous aid to mothers in caring for children. It apparently never occurred to them that fathers could play a more active role

[28] For a discussion of how the "woman question" divided socialists, see Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Sally M. Miller, ed., *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Sally M. Miller, *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Twentieth Century American Socialism* (New York: Garland, 1996).

in this endeavor.[29] Not all socialists felt as strongly about equality of the sexes and there certainly was not unanimity on the issue. Many socialists in fact did not care to speak on the issue. The ones that did, however, clearly demonstrated their beliefs in equality and independence as rights for everybody regardless of sex, even if their actions wanted in many respects. Even those that did not speak on the issue thought as much, but believed it would be achieved through the class struggle and refused to speak of sex issues apart from what they construed as the bigger picture. Again, tactics differed more than the basic republican ideology that drove the movement.

One factor socialists focused on concerning motherhood was how mothers often failed to adequately educate their children due to their status in society. In good Victorian fashion, socialists viewed education in the home as a feminine task. Working class mothers who left home to bring in extra income often did not have time or energy to educate children at home. In some cases children worked beside their mother in the factories or found petty jobs elsewhere. Some socialists, like Gilman, argued that working mothers in fact made the best mothers since they had more life experience to pass on to their children, even if they lacked the time to do so. Women who did not work probably did not have the benefit of much education and lived in a dependent relationship for their entire life. Gilman wondered how such women could possibly raise good children. Because children grew into the adults that ran affairs, socialists – like most revolutionaries and reformers dating back to the enlightenment era – viewed a proper education as essential to their cause and the progress of humanity in general. Socialists maintained that in the cooperative commonwealth educational opportunities abounded

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[29] Lilienthal, 12, 26-27; Gilman, *The Man-Made World*, 42; Spargo, *Socialism and Motherhood*, 24-26, 28, 31, 58-62.

and promoted creativity. Lilienthal supposed that everybody remained in school until they were eighteen or twenty because the necessity of work no longer forced anybody to quit school early. A.M. Simons concurred, adding that the cooperative commonwealth required more teachers to meet the demand for education and to help each student develop according to his or her own interests. He contended that the new education emphasized creativity, which included older students selecting their own courses according to their tastes. This along with traditional courses and "manual training" allowed for the "development of the entire personality." Under capitalism, this did not happen because many students received little or no education, while those that did attend school were taught to conform to the standards of capitalist society. Even if the children of workers received a full education it did not inspire individuality as under socialism for the simple reason that children who learned to express individuality made poor workers for repetitive work behind a machine. Such an educational outlook as offered by the socialists not only promoted individuality, but placed an emphasis on creativity that allowed for more and greater progress in all pursuits.[30]

Other aspects of the cooperative commonwealth promoted community and individual liberty by destroying private property and the corruption of society that came with it. Socialists pointed to the rapid decrease in crime that came with the initiation of a socialist state. Algie Simons claimed that "crime would be immediately reduced much more than fifty per cent" once socialism was adopted, and be virtually wiped out within one generation. The reduction in crime was a direct result of the ending of the capitalist property relationship that caused misery, despair, and resentment. May Walden Kerr

[30] Gilman, *Women and Economics,* 185-186; Lilienthal, 12-14; A.M. Simons, *What the Socialists Would Do,* 6-8, 10.

added that ending the private ownership of property lessened crimes caused by poverty because poverty no longer existed. She also noted a great deal of irony that capitalist society incarcerated people who steal and hurt by not doing useful work (for example, thieves and muggers work but was not of benefit to society), yet the tasks performed by owners of large industries were not useful and only hurt their workforce. Sinclair intoned that slums created "rowdies" and socialism eradicated slums. Crime resulted from the cruel existence of wage slavery and its degrading dependency. Socialism wiped these away too. The happy result was a vast reduction in crime and cities that were "work[s] of art." Clarence Darrow, the famous attorney of the Scopes Trial who began his legal career defending laborers such as Eugene Debs after the Pullman Strike, summarized the socialist attitude toward abolishing crime quite simply; "[give] the people a chance to live – by destroying special privileges." He believed that petty criminals and large criminals (capitalists who manipulated the law to take from the workers what they truly deserved) alike ceased to exist under the cooperative commonwealth. Darrow stated that we should "make fair conditions of life. Give men a chance to live. Abolish the right of private ownership of land, abolish monopoly, make the world partners in production, partners in the good things of life. Nobody would steal if he could get something of his own some easier way." Socialism offered this communal relationship that made everybody feel much happier and secure.[31]

Socialists included numerous examples of how various institutions might be reformed to better serve people in the future. Algie Simons believed that the few

[31] A.M. Simons, *What the Socialists Would Do,* 21-22; May Walden Kerr, *Socialism and the Home*, 22; Sinclair, *Industrial Republic,* 227-228, 232; Clarence Darrow, *Crime and Criminals: Address to Prisoners in the Cook County Jail* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1902; reprint, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1975), 38.

criminals that remained under the socialist state would have such an outlook because of mental deficiencies. The state no longer continually arrested and released these criminals, but reformed them in sanitariums or humanely locked them away so as to no longer threaten society. He also championed better and cleaner hospitals with equal access for all. Simons advocated a healthier environment as well. This happened when companies produced goods with the good of the community in mind instead of profits. Similarly, food production improved and became more healthful. Communal bakeries made pure bread instead of adulterated bread once they no longer operated for profit. Without profit the incentive to bake and sell poisoned bread to the public disappeared. May Walden Kerr argued that socialist elected officials worked for the public good instead of "squandering the public money" as corrupt capitalist officials did. One result of this change was "systems of engineering and scientific and economical methods of caring for the disposal of waste matter so that this suicidal way of poisoning our lake and river water and using it again for household purposes will be quickly abolished." Similar to the example of baking impure bread, the nonsensical polluting of the environment as happened in capitalist society, Kerr reasoned, ceased once the profit motive was removed. Kerr also noted that even shopping differed. In the cooperative commonwealth there no longer existed such thing as "bargain days" because cost always reflected the actual worth of a product. Lilienthal and F.G.R. Gordon described the possible existence of municipal kitchens and laundries. Both mentioned that highly skilled women – again assuming such domestic work to be the purview of women – worked in these institutions as "social servants" and earned fair compensation for their service to the community. This freed women from these time-consuming and difficult

domestic chores. Housing was better constructed and more available as well. This might take the form of many little cottages or enormous apartment complexes, but future generations worked this out themselves based on what best suited a particular community. Whatever the decision it need not be based on the private desire of a particular builder's quest for profit. In the cooperative commonwealth, people still owned individual items such as clothes, watches, and fountain pens, but the private ownership for profit of things used socially such as railroads and factories ended. Ownership and operation were turned over to the people.[32]

The crowning achievement of socialism was the beginning of a new era of human peace. Socialists believed all of human history had been marked by competition, and hence exploitation, between classes of people. Public ownership of the means of production stopped these conflicts and thereby ended the need for war, or that "relic of barbarism" as N.A. Richardson called it. War ceased because once people had removed their "power to exploit" others, "you remove all necessity and desire to kill them." Fighting occurred over ownership rights. If everybody owned things communally, socialists reasoned you removed all incentive to fight. Richardson put this point wryly when he said "socialism would have no more use for live soldiers, as such, than capitalism has for dead ones." Mark Fisher linked the cessation of war with the harnessing of technology for the benefits of all instead of a few. He too wrote that "all of the war and hate and struggle of man" were over the struggle to live in a competitive world. Once man was "no longer compelled to struggle against his fellows in order to

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[32] A.M. Simons, *What the Socialists Would Do,* 12-18, 21-22; May Walden Kerr, *Socialism and the Home,* 14, 18; Lilienthal, 5, 19-21; Sinclair, *Industrial Republic,* 236-237; Gordon, 13.

exist; when he is assured a living without the worry and struggle of fighting for it; when the enslavement of the modern machines of production has solved for all time the problem of animal existence," then the "industrial republic" will mark a "new era of human progress." According to Carl Thompson, wars occurred because capitalists needed to find markets for their surplus production. Capitalists of the world then used their workers to fight each other for access to foreign markets. Sinclair concurred with Thompson that wars happened over the need for markets, but added that the desire to exploit the natural resources of less-developed nations and race hatred contributed as well. Sinclair believed socialism eradicated these causes of war. Howard Caldwell expressed the dream for peace more sublimely: "In but a few years our children will visit some landlocked bay, where some of the present-day warships will be preserved as relics to show the children the barbarous tools of murder used by their ancestors for the destruction of life and property before the people emerged from the savage system of capitalism."[33]

Hillquit somewhat mechanically defined socialist society as "one based on the system of public or collective ownership of the material instruments of production, democratic administration of the industries, and cooperative labor." He added that the "guiding principle of such society must be recognition of the right of existence and enjoyment inherent in every human being." Charles Kerr put it more colloquially: "Under socialism the words 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' will begin to have

[33] Richardson, *Introduction to Socialism,* 40-41; Fisher, 59; Sinclair, *The Industrial Republic,* 236-237; Carl D. Thompson, *The Constructive Program of Socialism* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Co., 1908), 78-80; Howard H. Caldwell, *The Trust Question Answered* (Chicago: *Chicago Daily Socialist*, n.d.), 20.

real meaning." He also envisioned under socialism a world "where poverty shall be unknown, where people can help each other instead of having to fight each other, where it will be possible for every one to live according to the teachings of Jesus, doing as they would have others do to them." Kerr and other socialist saw no room for the Golden Rule in capitalist society, whether they believed in it because of faith or because they thought it was just a good idea. The majority of Americans had dependency and exploitation done unto them by a privileged class who had corrupted society to their own ends. Socialists believed in the progress of humanity by removing the exploitative capitalist ethic from society and replacing it with an ethic based on community and cooperation. Many people heard this message and embraced it. Others sympathized with the arguments but ultimately could not break free of the hypnotic trance, as William Brown put it, placed on them by capitalism. Socialists expected their task to be difficult and were ready to work. Unfortunately, many socialists could not think outside the confines of class struggle between factory owner and industrial worker. As a result they struggled when they appealed to people who faced exploitation based on issues just as or more complex than class.[34]

[34] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice*, 87; Charles Kerr, *The Folly of Being Good,* 27-29.

Chapter 5

Where Class Fails: Farmers, Blacks, Immigrants, Women, and the Socialist Message

Socialists had in effect developed their own progressive interpretation of American history. This interpretation detailed the progress of human liberty that culminated in the cooperative commonwealth through the scientific understanding of the historical development of society based on economic relations and class struggle. This critique of America had a definite moral quality to it. Through using the idiom of class struggle, socialists demonstrated who had their liberty infringed upon and who exploited the liberty of others. Throughout history there were always those benefiting wildly from the system and those being swallowed by it. This dichotomy between good and bad or perhaps haves and have-nots always underscored the socialist message, even if socialists tended to blame the system more than the people in it. Nevertheless, this moral message had wide appeal and was in fact the common element among all socialists. Despite the commonality most socialist writers consciously downplayed the moral element of their message. They instead used a language that emphasized science, inevitability, and certainty. They endeavored to give their moral message a sound scientific foundation and in fact often dismissed moral preaching as sentimentalism and out of date. This approach was of course common among most intellectual groups during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, ranging from William Graham Sumner and Theodore Roosevelt to John Dewey and Jane Addams. Socialists fervently believed that their class struggle paradigm

covered all contingencies in the development of society. Once the class struggle was realized events would unfold in such a way to bring the cooperative commonwealth. This element of certainty tied socialists closely to their enlightenment forefathers and distanced them from their modernist descendants (even if socialists had no precise plan for the future).

But socialist certainty and their reduction of the social problem to a simple equation based on class struggle caused problems that ultimately splintered the movement while setting the social agenda for the twentieth century. The moral compass of socialists allowed them to measure the oppression of groups such as farmers, blacks, immigrants, and women, but their insistence on the class struggle paradigm did not allow for a course of action that addressed their peculiar problems. Many attempted diligently to explain the plight of these groups within the parameters of class struggle, but these attempts caused fissures within the socialist movement and proved ineffectual to those who heard the message. Farmers, many of whom owned their own land while seeing their hard work absorbed by capitalist interests, found themselves on both sides of the class struggle. When some socialists attempted to incorporate farmers on the side of the proletariat, others, especially from the left wing, argued that such a move pandered to bourgeois sentiments in a shameless attempt to garner votes. Immigrants, whether from Asia or Europe, usually found work in unskilled professions. This made them unworthy for trade unions but prime material for socialist endorsed industrial unions. Many socialists who opposed agitation toward farmers endorsed inclusion of immigrants, while those on the other side saw immigrants as unorganizable and only a means to worsening already poor labor conditions through expanding the labor market. This heightened the

controversy over dual unionism. Women and blacks, too, did not fit neatly within the class struggle paradigm. Both groups faced biases rooted in tradition or science whether they were obvious members of the working class or not. At best socialists could argue that the coming cooperative commonwealth mended the ills faced by these groups without giving much specific information as to how this happened in actuality. At worst they could break apart irrevocably.

This chapter consists of four sections. Each section examines the peculiar plight of a certain segment of the population that did not fit easily into the critique of society developed by socialists. These groups are farmers, blacks, immigrants, and women. The socialist moral condemnation of capitalism and its effects did not always mesh well with the easily definable class struggle paradigm of white, male, urban workers. Their confrontation with issues concerning farmers, blacks, immigrants, and women, revealed an uneasiness in the socialist mind between the world they knew was coming based on scientific analysis and the world they thought ought to be constructed because of the human misery created by the current economic system. The moral side of this conflict in socialist ideology, often rooted in republicanism, helped socialists identify problems for peculiar groups of Americans, but their insistence on the certainty of class struggle blinded many to American social crises that existed outside of class parameters. The socialist struggle to include "others" outside of class met with little success, yet helped shape the politics of pluralism of the twentieth century.

One approach utilized by socialists to address the plight of farmers was to equate farming with factory work. Thus the same way industrial workers suffered at the hands

of capitalists who exploited them was equivalent to how farmers were exploited. James Oneal, an Indiana socialist who directly observed the struggles of Midwestern farmers, demonstrated how both industrial workers and farmers generated value through labor but did not enjoy the full benefit of that labor. While industrial workers sold their labor directly to a capitalist at the lowest price sustainable by the market, farmers that worked their own land did not sell their labor directly but "the produce of the farm which has absorbed his labor power." Just as industrial workers could not set their own price for their labor, neither could farmers with their crops. Instead, the price for the farmer's crops was "fixed by his enemies, the capitalist class and the gamblers in his produce." Therefore, farmers lacked independence in financial dealings just as did industrial workers. The privileged capitalist class reaped the majority of the financial reward from the labor of the workers, whether in field or factory. Oneal lamented this immoral arrangement:

> When I think of the overworked and debtridden farmers of the Southern states, slowly sinking into slavery; when I think of the miners in the slave-pens of the mining regions, or of the sweatshop hells where the blood of children is drained to support an idle class of millionaires and remember also that many of us are indifferent to these things, I wonder if our power to think had not been suspended and we have lost even the impulse to protect our loved ones which is ever present in animals.[1]

For Oneal, the insurmountable problem faced by farmers was much more than an economic arrangement rising out of the developing capitalist economy; it was a moral abomination.

Algie Simons agreed with Oneal that farmers and industrial workers faced hardships emanating from the same source. Simons added, however, that farmers faced a

[1] James Oneal, *Militant Socialism* (St. Louis: The National Rip-Saw Publishing Co., 1912), 2, 10.

greater illusion of freedom than did wage slaves in the cities. Simons contended that the basis of farmers's modern problems was "not NATURAL but SOCIAL." In the past good weather and hard work meant success. Now manmade forces outside the control of the farmer caused perfectly good crops to "rot where they lay" while at the same time many city residents suffered from lack of food. This social problem emanated from farmers not having complete autonomy over their industry. While some farmers may own their own land they still generally relied on private interests to finish production by moving the agricultural goods to market. Ventures such as railroads, telegraphs, elevators, and stockyards, "appropriate[d] all that the farmer has produced, save the same share that the laborer has always received – a bare living." Just as Oneal observed, farmers and industrial workers shared a common plight against the abuses of capitalist interests. However, Simons reasoned that farmers balked at the socialist message more than did laborers. This was because farmers maintained "the appearance of freedom" by owning and working their own land, not working directly under a task master, and controlling their own hours of work. In truth farmers were as dependent on capitalist interests as were urban laborers, just in a less obvious way. This, Simons noted, was a different arrangement than previous class struggles. In the past there had "been no attempt to disguise the fact of slavery and class rule." But in modern America the worker and farmer were "given the ballot" and occasionally some property and "told that he is a free man." Simons lamented that these "free men" were continually duped by the privileged class to elect government officials that only served to solidify the class

arrangement. Simons believed that socialism offered the only remedy to this immoral arrangement.[2]

Mary Marcy and Morris Hillquit recognized the plight of many farmers as similar to that of workers; however, some farmers had links to bourgeois interests, either real or imagined. Hillquit wrote that socialists included more than industrial workers when they spoke about the proletariat. This group included others such as "the 'agricultural' proletarian, the farmer who does not own his land, or the hired farm hand." But Hillquit warned that farmers generally held a middle ground between proletarian and bourgeois. The economic interests of farmers conflicted with those of the bourgeoisie because farmers depended on them as middle men to make a living. However, farmers usually identified themselves as bourgeois because they aspired to be independent producers and landholders. Thus, the consciousness of farmers had to be raised to their plight, which generally meant an awareness of their proletarianization.[3]

Marcy made the point more explicitly. In a 1917 article in the *International Socialist Review*, Marcy concluded her Marxist analysis of commodity value and exchange with these strident words about farmers. She said "socialists are not in the least concerned with helping the...town farmer who hires two or three men" and sees him rob

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[2] A.M. Simons, *Socialism and the Farmer* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1900), 5, 8-9, 20, 22-23. John Spargo also realized that small farmers had similar interests of the working class. He used the works of Karl Kautsky to agree with Simons that the "exploitation of the small farmer" was "indirect, through the great capitalist trusts and railroads." Spargo was optimistic that workers and small farmers would see their unity of purpose and eventually work together through the Socialist party. John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 168-169.

[3] Morris Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 156, 160.

his workers of their valuable labor only to have himself robbed by a capitalist middle man. She continued that socialists "do not grieve to see the expropriator expropriated – the robber robbed." Socialists only worried that those who produced a valuable product through their labor would receive what they were due. Thus for Marcy the message of socialism was intended for the hired farmhand and "the farmer who owns or is paying on a small farm, who works the farm himself." Hillquit and Marcy recognized that the capitalist system slowly swallowed farmers, whether they owned the land, rented the land, hired hands, worked the land themselves, or some combination of the above. Agricultural workers found themselves exploited by other farmers or capitalist agricultural interests. Some farmers were both exploited and exploiter. Socialists endeavored to educate farmers and even members of their own movement about their peculiar plight, yet they did not fit neatly into the class struggle argument.[4]

Socialists realized that farmers watched their traditional family farms steadily disappear with a tremendous amount of anxiety. They offered hope to farmers, whether they wanted it or not, by attempting to show them that the march of progress dictated the gradual demise of small independent farmers and that a better collectivized world was in the future. Oscar Ameringer made this case in his discussion of the agricultural revolution. He argued that technology and financial concerns dictated the course of farming. Ameringer offered mechanization of cotton production as evidence. He showed that the mechanical gin changed the nature of antebellum cotton plantations, while the advent of the new "mechanical cotton picker...threatens to supplant the present

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[4] Mary Marcy, "How the Farmer is Exploited," in *The Tongue of Angels: The Mary Marcy Reader*, ed. Frederic C. Griffin (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 62.

tenant system with a new plantation system resting upon wage slavery." He also showed through use of government statistics that the most valuable farm land in the United States, such as in the upper Mississippi valley, belonged to fewer actual farmers. Corporate interests and speculators instead owned this land and reaped financial reward from it. Ameringer drew two conclusions from these circumstances. First, family farms were a thing of the past. Farmers need not worry about socialists taking farms from families because capitalism had almost already accomplished that task.[5] Technological innovation and consolidation were the "great forces" that made small family-run farms obsolete. Second, the material rewards of consolidated farming increasingly benefited idle landholders rather than the actual tillers of the soil. Ameringer argued that only the socialists could help farmers. The tendency of other political parties to offer monetary schemes to aid farmers were unrealistic and shams. What farmers, like industrial workers, needed was to control the government and "use it as their agent...to recover possession of the land and the machines." He even called on the new government of workers to tax land to "its full rental value" as a move to "abolish the race of landlords."[6]

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[5] Opponents of socialism often argued that collectivization destroyed traditional social arrangements such as family farms. Socialists countered these accusations in a variety of ways. Ameringer argued that capitalism was already doing this by consolidation through competition and technological advance. John Work argued that farmers would be helped through the "socialization of the great industries," which would limit exploitation of farm production. He also stated that "socialization of farming" would help too, but it would be "foolish" to force this on farmers. Instead, this should happen when "farmers themselves undertake to bring it about." In essence Ameringer gave a materialist rebuttal while Work opted for gradualism. Oscar Ameringer, *The Agricultural Revolution* (n.p., c. 1912), 7; John M. Work, *What's So and What Isn't* (n.p., n.d., reprint, New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 45.

[6] This proposal was reminiscent of Henry George's "Single Tax," a program most scientific socialists dismissed as utopian or merely a reform. Their main objection was that the tax on rent alone would not cure the social problem. Ameringer offered his scheme as part of a broader plan. In fact, by 1912 the Socialist party included a plank in

However it happened, the cooperative commonwealth promised to end the exploitation of farmers. Privately owned family farms became an entity of the past, but a new system of collectivized agriculture operated by traditional farm families restored the bounty of the harvest to those who actually produced it. Socialists aimed to have society take advantage of agricultural technology rather than let profiteers take advantage of society by privately owning agricultural technology.[7]

These various arguments served as the basis for debate within the Socialist party over what the official political program should offer to farmers. In his detailed account of the political maneuverings within the Socialist party before 1912, historian Ira Kipnis showed how the question of farmers' place within the party varied during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1899, a fraction of the fledgling Social Democratic party voted convincingly 478-81 to not include special demands for farmers in its list of demands. They followed the reasoning of left wing agitators who demanded close adherence to class struggle dichotomy. Therefore, no special provisions should be made for petty capitalists such as farmers no matter how much they suffered. Over the course of the decade, a center-right coalition behind such luminaries as Victor Berger and Hillquit came to dominate the party. As part of their step-at-a-time approach, they

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its national platform calling for "the collective ownership of land wherever practicable, and in cases where such ownership is impracticable, the appropriation by taxation of the annual rental value of all land held for speculation or exploitation." This does, however, show a connection to socialism's utopian past. Ameringer, *The Agricultural Revolution,* 10; "The Socialist Party Platform, 1912," *Socialist Party of America Papers, 1897-1963,* reel 75. For a criticism of George's Single Tax see Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 291-295.

[7] Marcy also explained how technological advances hurt the traditional place of small farmers in society. Marcy, "How the Farmer is Exploited," 60-62; Ameringer, *The Agricultural Revolution,* 1, 5-7, 10-11.

endorsed various reforms such as taxes and public ownership of transportation to directly help farmers. Those on the left, at least according to Kipnis who clearly sympathized with the left's more doctrinaire Marxist approach, saw such moves as pandering to the middle class in order to secure votes, and thus diluting the revolutionary fervor of the movement. In 1912, the Socialist party endorsed the Farmers' Demands that had been rejected a dozen years earlier. Kipnis noted that "the Populist attack on privilege and monopoly which had been so effective in 1892 and 1896" at attracting electoral support "was revived by the Socialists, who developed further the Populist program of government aid to farming." Neither Kipnis nor the left wing of the party at the time relished this turn of events. Kipnis argued that such pandering for votes by the gradualists caused the demise of the party.[8]

But such an analysis does not do justice to the outlook of the gradualists or American socialists in general. At the root of socialist ideology was contempt for the wretched lives of workers, whether urban or rural, wrought by capitalism. Socialists endeavored to ameliorate this suffering by awakening the sufferers to their historic struggle against ever-changing economic conditions. All socialists sought to ground their ideology in scientific analysis, thus giving certainty to their course of action. To this end socialists studied Darwin, Spencer, and especially Marx to find guidance for their movement. From all this socialists acknowledged the existence of classes and their antagonistic interests. However, identifying specifically who belonged to what class was not as easy as some indicated. Farmers illustrated the point. Their suffering was easy to detect, yet their existence within class organization was difficult to determine. Based on

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[8] Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 71-73, 128-129, 217-220.

exploitation and domination by gigantic interests, even fairly successful farmers were part of the dependent class. However, when examined through commodity relations and simple ownership of means of production, those same farmers were part of the capitalist class, even if doomed to proletarianization. Farm hands, tenants, and farm owners with land mortgaged, had similar problems of definition. If farmers were not part of the proletariat, they at least shared similar complaints with industrial workers and lived difficult existences. Socialists intended to help farmers. Those on the right intended to help farmers directly through instruments such as legislation, while those on left believed relief would come at the end of lengthy class struggle. If attempting to help farmers brought votes and party membership, the right welcomed such results. The left only saw the predetermined class struggle being mitigated. The domination of farmers by capitalists was wrong, what should be done about it caused wavering opinions.

Closely related to the place of farmers within the socialist movement was that of blacks. Like farmers, blacks had a peculiar existence within American society and many blacks continued to work the land, especially in the south. Eugene Debs recognized the serious difficulties faced by blacks in the United States due to the twin problems of economic subjugation and racism.[9] Debs, like a number of socialists, fervently believed that the successful conclusion of the class struggle culminated in a second emancipation

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[9] Commentators on Debs' racial views generally conceded that he was less racist than most socialists, although he maintained some prejudice. Salvatore wrote that Debs became decreasingly racist over his career, while Philip Foner emphasized Debs' rhetoric of equality against his reliance on class struggle as a solution. Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 226-227; Philip Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans: From the Age of Jackson to World War II* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 110-115.

for blacks. In a 1903 article in the *International Socialist Review,* Debs wrote that "there is no Negro question outside the labor question." He observed that the real question was not one of "*social equality,* but *economic freedom.*" Debs believed that once the class struggle completely removed economic impediments in the lives of Americans, "the burning question of 'social equality' will disappear like mist before the sunrise." To achieve the goal of economic freedom Debs maintained that the Socialist party should include members of all races as full and equal members. He claimed that socialists were "the party of the working class, the whole working class, and we will not suffer ourselves to be divided by any specious appeal to race prejudice." For Debs, socialism was a movement of all the workers against the forces of economic subjugation and promised to lift all of humanity out of history of exploitation.[10]

Debs did not merely write off the problems of blacks as part of the class struggle. His journeys around the country made him well aware of widespread racism that when added to economic exploitation made blacks "doubly enslaved." At the same time, however, Debs opined that blacks as a race were inferior to whites in American society. He did not indicate that this was due to racial makeup, but to the historic subjugation of blacks by whites in the United States. Debs showed his moral outrage and quasi-paternalism when he wrote his "heart goes to the Negro and I make no apology to any white man for it. In fact, when I see the poor, brutalized, outraged black victim, I feel a burning sense of guilt for his intellectual poverty and moral debasement that makes me blush for the unspeakable crimes committed by my own race." Because of this ugly situation he added that all socialists should declare "their sympathy with and fealty to the

[10] Eugene V. Debs, "The Negro in the Class Struggle," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 88.

black race." Any socialist that did not "lack[ed] the true spirit of the slavery-destroying revolutionary movement." Debs invoked both Marx and the American republican tradition to further underscore his point about inclusion of blacks within the socialist movement:

> When Marx said: "Workingmen of all countries unite," he gave concrete expression to the socialist philosophy of the class struggle; unlike the framers of the Declaration of Independence who announced that "all men are created equal" and then basely repudiated their own doctrine, Marx issued the call to all the workers of the globe, regardless of race, sex, creed or any other condition whatsoever.

With his not so subtle jab at the Founding Fathers for putting economic interests above human interests, Debs reiterated the historic struggle of humankind against the tyranny of the minority to infringe on individual liberty. It also revealed the tension in their ideology between freedom and the realities of the present social structure, something the Founding Fathers foundered on as well. Debs' views on race, however, were not typical of early twentieth century Americans, even within the ranks of the Socialist party.[11]

At the beginning of his article Debs wrote that "so thoroughly is the South permeated with the malign spirit of race hatred that even Socialists are to be found, and by no means rarely," who shared these racist attitudes, avoided it, or "apologize for the social obliteration of the color line in the class struggle." This viewpoint became clearer to Debs a few weeks after the appearance of his article when a "staunch member of the Socialist Party" from Elgin, Illinois, wrote a letter to Debs in response to his demand for full inclusion of blacks within the socialist movement. This letter, reprinted in the January 1904 edition of the *International Socialist Review* along with a response from Debs, illustrated that racism was a major point of contention within the ranks of the

[11] Ibid., 88-89.

socialists. The anonymous letter writer – and this anonymity riled Debs almost as much as content of the letter because it showed the writer to be a "sneak or coward, traitor or spy" – appealed to traditional racist rhetoric to attack Debs' position. The writer commented that political equality led to social equality. That circumstance encouraged the newly empowered Negro to "ask the hand of your [white] daughter in marriage." Furthermore, blacks would not be "satisfied with equality with reservation." The result was blacks and whites becoming social equals, a circumstance that dragged whites down to the level of the inferior Africans.[12] The Illinois socialist castigated Debs' endorsement of black inclusion as a rotten "method to gain votes," a tactic he assured Debs resulted in a vast migration from the party. The writer closed with a plea for Debs to learn the truth about the unsoundness and impracticality of racial mixing in Thomas Dixon's racist tract, *The Leopard's Spots*; an outlook also endorsed by Abraham Lincoln according to the letter writer.[13]

Debs responded passionately to the racially charged letter from the "staunch socialist" in Illinois. His rebuttal combined learned party rhetoric with stern moral condemnation. Debs first mocked the letter writer's claim to be a staunch socialist. By

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[12] The letter writer appealed to an older argument of blacks as innately inferior that categorized earlier socialist thinkers such as Edward Bellamy and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Mark Pittenger described a change from this old way to an economist version that stripped blacks of racial identity and made them "another category of worker." Subjugation through economic development created the plight of blacks, a condition socialism slowly relieved. This outlook made it easier for socialist intellecutals to fit blacks into the class struggle. The author noted William English Walling as one dissident to this approach, favoring a "republican 'rights of man' tradition." Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 179-186.

[13] Ibid., 86; Eugene V. Debs, "The Negro and his Nemesis," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, 90-91.

reprinting the party's "Negro Resolution" in full he showed that a person could not espouse racist doctrine and still claim to be a socialist, or at least a member of the party. The resolution stated, among other things, that blacks held a "peculiar position" within the working class. This stemmed from capitalists attempting to divide the working class along race lines. But socialists claimed to be above such differences. They welcomed blacks as part of the class struggle. All problems of prejudice and inequality disappeared following "economic emancipation." Debs reasoned that anybody who did not follow this policy could not be called a true socialist. He then went on to attack some of the "silly and senseless" arguments of the Illinois socialist. As to the claim that blacks were not "satisfied with equality with reservation," Debs retorted, "Why should he be? Would you?" Debs continued that "in the present social scale there is no difference between you and the Negro – you are on the same level in the labor market." This statement served to show solidarity among all workers in the class struggle, while undoubtedly disgusting the Elgin socialist for being equated with a black person. Debs added that blacks, whites, and people of all races should attempt to live together in equality. He wrote that "a hundred years of American history culminating in the Civil War" showed that "it is impossible for the Anglo-Saxon and the African to live on *unequal* terms." Debs further argued that socialists advocated political and economic equality only. Social relations, like religion, remained individual decisions as they did not interfere with political and economic equality. As such, Debs added cynically; "our Elgin Negro-hater can consider himself just as 'superior' as he chooses, confine his social attentions exclusively to white folks, and enjoy his leisure time in hunting down the black specter who is bent on asking his daughter's hand in marriage." Debs realized the rampant racism in the United States

and that no amount of speeches was to soon end it. Despite this obstacle Debs insisted on inclusion of all racial minorities in the socialist movement as a matter of class theory and human compassion.[14]

By no means did Debs' attitude on race serve as exemplary for the rest of the socialist movement. Many socialists held views similar to that of the letter writer from Illinois. Kate Richards O'Hare, another Midwesterner, shared the belief with the letter writer that social equality was a bad idea. In a 1912 article for the *National Rip-Saw*, a St. Louis based socialist newspaper, O'Hare wrote that socialists stood for "EQUALITY," but that equality came with qualification. She argued that just as it was untenable to fight for physical or mental equality because individuals were born with unique traits, so too with social equality. O'Hare noted that "men and women always form social groups according to their various tastes and differences in social tastes and preferences will always remain and Social Equality is impossible and would be undesirable." What socialists merely wanted in regard to the race question, O'Hare exclaimed, was equality of opportunity in order to "PUT THE NEGRO WHERE HE CAN'T COMPETE WITH THE WHITE MAN." She reasoned that if every human being had equality of opportunity, then no worker could be exploited by capitalists. Black laborers could no longer be used by capitalists to drive down wages of any other worker, thereby helping all workers. While any group of workers faced economic dependency then no workers were truly free. It had nothing to do with love or hate of blacks, or even a belief in social equality, just that economic exploitation ultimately hurt all workers. Once given equality of opportunity under socialism, O'Hare promised to

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[14] Debs, "The Negro and his Nemesis," 91-95, 97.

fight for the only "solution to the race question," which was segregation. She campaigned for blacks to have their own section of the country with which to do as they pleased. There they would own the land and the tools of production and be left to "work out their own salvation." O'Hare vehemently denied that socialists advocated "'Nigger' equality." Instead she claimed socialists fought for equality of opportunity, thereby freeing white workers through segregation from toiling side-by-side with black laborers whether in the fields or factories. Socialism freed both blacks and whites from capitalist exploitation, but this did not mean social equality by any means. With such rhetoric she appealed to white southern voters to abandon the Democratic party that had placed white and black workers together doing the same degrading work. O'Hare believed that socialism offered the only way to independence from "the debasement of wage slavery yoked to Negro Equality."[15]

Yet another point of view on the race question was the one articulated by black socialist Hubert H. Harrison. In a 1912 article in the *International Socialist Review* Harrison in essence argued that the wretched lives of subjugation and dependency of American blacks – a plight he dubbed "the black man's burden" – was itself enough to condemn the capitalist system that caused it while showing their unique struggle. Harrison divided "the black man's burden" into four interrelated parts: political, economic, educational, and social. He argued that the denial of political rights to any able-minded person was a denial of citizenship. Blacks were denied voting rights through grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and a host of other devices, especially in the

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[15] Kate Richards O'Hare, "'Nigger' Equality," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Sally M. Miller (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 44-49.

southern states. This lack of citizenship made blacks a subjugated class and their existence meant the United States was not a true republic due to this lack of freedom. The lack of political rights forced blacks to become a dependent class in economic terms, which was the purpose of the denial of political rights by white capitalists in the first place. Wage labor, sharecropping, and other forms of peonage limited the economic freedom of blacks. Their denial of political rights allowed them no recourse. Lack of education further exacerbated the problem. Harrison cited statistics showing that states spent less money per capita on black education than white. This stemmed from white control of government (in part through the disenfranchisement of blacks) and a desire by capitalists to keep its workforce ignorant. The net result of the above circumstances was a society that deemed blacks to be socially unequal. One needed to look no further than lynchings and segregation to witness the status of "the black man's burden" in the United States. While Harrison never made a direct appeal for socialism it was nonetheless evident that his blaming of capitalist interests for the continued subjugation of the black race made it perfectly clear where the solution lay. However, Harrison also did not call for a unified class struggle to lift black and white workers alike out of the depths of misery. Harrison recognized that blacks faced unique challenges within the degrading system of American wage slavery.[16]

This sampling of socialist views on the race question illustrated the commonality of a moral objection to the effects of capitalism and a desire to address the problem by forcing it into the model of class struggle. Debs and Harrison approached the race

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[16] Hubert H. Harrison, "The Black Man's Burden," *International Socialist Review* 12 (April 1912): 660-663; Hubert H. Harrison, "The Black Man's Burden," *International Socialist Review* 12 (May 1912): 762-764.

question from a more positive humanistic angle, at least from a modern perspective. They envisioned an end to race prejudice and exploitation after capitalism collapsed. In essence, the class struggle subsumed the race question. An end to the class struggle resulted in a society where the various races lived harmoniously. Charles H. Vail and Algie Simons elaborated on this position in a pair of articles in the initial volume of the *International Socialist Review.* Vail argued that socialism was "the only hope for the negro and for humanity." As things stood, capitalism pitted workers of all races against each other. Competition and lack of education created race prejudice. Such prejudice could not exist, however, "with true enlightenment," something that socialism established through abundant and non-degrading work. Such action "fulfill[ed] the theory embodied in the Declaration of Independence, - that all men were created free and equal." The eradication of chattel slavery had only "altered the relation in which the negro stood to his master." Blacks had become wages slaves, a system that made their economic existence more tenuous than under chattel slavery and their claim as a "free being" illusory. Simons too noted the change in type of subjugation of blacks. He wrote that "the 'negro question' has completed its evolution into the 'labor question.'" The Civil War merely served to entrench capitalist control of government and society. They maintained this control through various tactics including race baiting, disenfranchisement, and lack of educational opportunities. The only hope to end the misery of the current arrangement was "when the white and black laborers of the United States will join hands in their unions to resist economic tyranny." Vail agreed, saying that through socialism blacks became "joint owners with his white neighbor in the nation's capital," thereby "secure[ing] him equal opportunity for the attainment of wealth

and progress." In short, socialism led blacks to finally realize "the enjoyment of the inalienable rights of all men to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[17]

O'Hare and the letter writer from Illinois also believed that the class struggle answered the race question. The result was not one of racial unity, but segregation where whites justly held a position of superiority. Such an outlook was not unique to southern socialists. Victor Berger of Milwaukee began a 1902 article entitled "The Misfortune of Negroes" this way: "There can be no doubt that the negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race – that the Caucasian and indeed even the Mongolian have the start on them in civilization by many thousand years – so that negroes will find it difficult ever to overtake them." From this starting point Berger analyzed the plight of American blacks in a racist and paternalistic manner. The "savage instincts" of blacks too often materialized in America because blacks were denied – legitimately due to racial inferiority, he claimed – access to property. This arrangement led to the "utter degradation of the negro," made blacks "a constant source of danger," and was their "chief misfortune." Socialization of property led to all having some property, thereby eliminating the "contempt" of American whites toward black human rights based on their lack of property. Nowhere did Berger call for social equality, equal distribution of property, or the eventual leveling of racial hierarchy. Although his article was vague, Berger implied a society where everybody had access to property, but whites naturally

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[17] Charles H. Vail, "The Negro Problem," *International Socialist Review* 1 (February 1901): 464-465, 468-469; A.M. Simons, "The Negro Problem," *International Socialist Review* 1 (October 1900): 208-209.

had more and made better use of it. Socialism, in essence, ended the danger posed to whites by blacks.[18]

E.F. Andrews, an Alabama socialist, agreed with Berger on the natural inferiority of blacks and followed O'Hare's desire for economic, but not social, equality. Andrews based his outlook on empiricism. He argued that by just looking around the south or remembering the wretched experience of reconstruction, the superiority of the white race could not be denied. Andrews believed the race question should be a matter for states to decide. Within the context of whether socialist locals should be integrated, Andrews argued that it should be up to each local to decide. He saw no reason to force locals in Wisconsin or Massachusetts to segregate if they did not want to, nor did he see any reason for locals in Alabama or Louisiana to integrate if they did not want to. For Andrews, the chief principles at stake were autonomy and economic freedom. He summarized his outlook like this: "if I object to consorting with a man because he has a black skin or a red skin or a dirty skin, nobody has a right to coerce me, so long as I leave him in undisturbed possession of the fruits of his labor." Andrews, like O'Hare, Berger, and Debs' antagonist in Illinois, viewed social justice in terms of economic opportunity only. Complete social equality was not part of their program.[19]

If nothing else, socialist views on the race question showed that they were not social levelers by any measure. They agreed that capitalism debased the majority of Americans by making them dependent workers in a system that crassly exploited them.

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[18] Victor Berger, "The Misfortune of the Negroes," *Social Democratic Herald,* May 31, 1902, 1.

[19] E.F. Andrews, "Socialism and the Negro," *International Socialist Review* 5 (March 1905): 524-526.

Socialists sought to redress this problem by socializing the means of production, thereby making all workers independent contributors to the cooperative commonwealth. Social arrangements were left to be resolved by society as a whole, only economic independence could not be tampered with. Some socialists envisioned a community where social equality among races naturally arose once the competitive scheme of capitalism faded away. Others could not conceive of such a circumstance based on the natural and wide discrepancy in the historical evolution of the races. The class struggle did not solve the question of race in any definite way. The socialist confrontation with the race question and its relation to the economic system helped raise the consciousness of all Americans to the unique plight of blacks. The problem still confounds Americans of all political outlooks to this day.

The immigration question also confounded American socialists. On the one hand, immigration from across the globe generally meant an increase in the size of the working class within the United States. The vast majority of immigrants were poor and seeking employment, especially after the Civil War. Many of these immigrants, especially those lacking English language skills, took jobs that required little skill. From the standpoint of a working class political movement in a democracy, more immigrant laborers meant more potential voters for working class parties. Their influx also meant a general drop in wages because they marked an increase in the labor supply, a circumstance that potentially generated more class consciousness. Furthermore, some immigrants – especially European – had already encountered socialism in their homeland. Such attributes made immigrants a potential boon to socialists. On the other hand, socialists

faced obstacles concerning immigration. American workers, whether native born or recent immigrants themselves, often resented the influx of new competition. They worried about their own standard of living and did not want to face competition from unskilled immigrant labor. Socialists faced an immediate concern because many socialists advocated working within the existing trade unions of the American Federation of Labor, an organization that had much support from native workers but was no friend of immigrants or the unskilled. Nativism also played a role, both among workers and members of the Socialist party. Similar to perception of blacks, many labor activists saw some new arrivals as inferior, especially those from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. It was argued that these inferior people lacked the ability to have their class consciousness raised, therefore making them harmful to the larger movement. Socialists also had to deal with the stigma, whether warranted or not, that their very ideology was a foreign importation. Similarly, many of the party's high-ranking members were themselves first or second generation immigrants and their doctrine claimed to be internationalist in nature. All these factors contributed to the immigration question being a cantankerous one for socialists.[20]

Socialists made many arguments in regard to immigration, but two important themes became recurrent. The first was human suffering. This moral argument focused

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[20] For an overview of the immigrant question, see Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 277-288; Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 125-166. A number of scholars have recently examined the work and ideology of foreign socialists in the United States, showing their outlook to have distinctly American characteristics while being transnational. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, ed. *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Steven Burwood, "Debsian Socialism Through a Transnational Lens," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 253-282.

on how the system of capitalism hurt immigrant laborers, native workingmen who had to compete with the influx of laborers, or both. The second theme was whiteness.[21] Whether for or against restrictions on immigration, socialists were quite conscious of race in their rhetoric. Those who supported restrictions on immigration often did so based on racial biases that deemed non-white people as inferior. Those who opposed immigration restriction based their argument on a mix of internationalism, human rights, and America's heritage of welcoming foreigners. Nevertheless, even those who welcomed immigrants consciously recognized the non-whiteness of many progressive era immigrants and took a paternalistic view toward them. Simply put, the class struggle was not color blind, but did force socialists and the rest of America to address the relationship between race, ethnicity, and labor.

Part of the socialist moral argument focused on how capitalism affected the immigrant worker, therefore making them fit under the socialist umbrella. In a 1910 letter published in the *International Socialist Review,* Debs lashed out at his comrades who had created the compromise at the recent national convention that called for the exclusion of Asian immigrants. Debs lamented the "tactics" that occurred at the convention, which prevented the "oppressed and suffering slaves" of foreign lands "from bettering their wretched conditions" in the United States. Debs wondered how a "movement whose proud boast...is that it stands uncompromisingly for the oppressed

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[21] Sally Miller addressed the topic of "whiteness" within the Socialist party before World War I. She argued that most members of the party followed the lead of Debs by positing a message of worker solidarity, but denying any special burdens based on gender, race, or ethnicity. In essence, the party assumed "worker" to mean a white male. Anybody else had to conform to that construct. Sally M. Miller, "For White Men Only: The Socialist Party of America and Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 301-302.

and downtrodden of all the earth" could adopt a resolution that rejected Asian immigrants with "the cruel lash of expediency." Debs' rhetoric revealed the general impression of most socialists that foreign laborers experienced a tough life while living overseas. They came to the United States with the hope of improving their lives. Once in America, however, most recent immigrants faced tough conditions, perhaps even tougher than from where they left. Hillquit wrote that the lives of immigrants new to America were "very miserable" at first. They were "herded together," resided in "small and dirty shanties," ate and dressed poorly, and had little access to education. They undertook physically demanding employment. Their problems were compounded by their work being unskilled, therefore making them unwelcome within most American trade unions. An effect of all this was that the horrible plight of immigrants made them desperate for any work. Their desperation, along with their very existence, drove down the wages of all unskilled workers. But Hillquit argued that these horrible conditions had nothing to do with ethnicity of the immigrants. Instead, he insisted that "to the extent to which immigration actually is an evil to the working class of the receiving country, it is an evil inseparable from the existing economic system." Debs and Hillquit both believed that socialists had an obligation to exploited workers of foreign lands.[22]

The capitalist system also hurt workers born in the United States by forcing them to compete against foreign laborers who were often more desperate than exploited American workers. In his article in the *International Socialist Review*, Hillquit quoted at length the views of AFL president Samuel Gompers from his message before the 1905

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[22] Eugene V. Debs, "On Immigration," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, 166-167; Morris Hillquit, "Immigration in the United States," *International Socialist Review* 8 (August 1907): 71, 73.

assemblage of trade unionists. Hillquit called Gompers' views "enlightened" and declared that "the unfriendly attitude of American labor towards immigration is not entirely without foundation." What Hillquit especially agreed with Gompers on was how the competition of foreign laborers hurt American workers. In the words of Gompers, immigrant workers were "at the mercy of employers" because of their desperation. Like woman and child labor, the pervasiveness and helplessness of foreign labor drove down wages. This led to "the unenlightened immigrant displac[ing] the labor of Americans who insist upon American wages and conditions." Moreover, unions like the AFL could not help immigrant workers because "most of them have known nothing of the principles of unionism in their own country." Thus, they could not be effectively organized, leading to worse wages and conditions for all workers in the United States. Upton Sinclair put it this way: "low as our lowest classes have been ground, they are not low enough. Thousands of agents of steamship companies are gathering the outcasts from the sewers of Europe and shipping them here." Immigration, through the demands of capital, hurt the standard of living of American workers.[23]

While Hillquit agreed with Gompers that foreign labor was "not a blessing" for American workers, Hillquit maintained that immigration's "evil effects are largely exaggerated" and that any harm that came from it stemmed from the capitalist system itself. Mass industry required a massive amount of cheap labor. As already indicated by Sinclair, capitalists lured workers to the United States to fulfill this demand through labor agents and high profits to shipping concerns. Hillquit noted that the importation of cheap

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[23] Hillquit, "Immigration in the United States," 70-71; Upton Sinclair, *The Industrial Republic: A Study of the America of Ten Years Hence* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1907), 110-111.

labor reached a "critical point" where it then became "not only unnecessary, but highly embarrassing" because the United States could no longer absorb the influx of new people. At this point capitalists joined with organized labor to demand a restriction of immigration, even if the two sides had different motives. Should the economy turn and require more cheap labor, Hillquit warned, then capitalists would again demand removal of all obstacles to immigration. Therefore, Hillquit argued, unions should work with immigrants instead of for their exclusion because they had a common enemy in capital. Any agreement between unions and business on the issue of immigration restriction was temporary and changed in favor of business when economic tides turned a different direction. Even if immigration laws did not change, Walter Thomas Mills commented, capital always prevailed because "if the Chinaman cannot come to the United States, the American machine will go to China." Capital always prevailed in a battle with workers and unions over any issue, including immigration. The economic system created misery for all workers. The only solution was to change the system.[24]

The arguments of Debs, Hillquit, and others, demonstrated the immorality of capitalism within the tidy confines of class struggle. Their rhetoric also revealed racial attitudes that contributed to the complexity of the social problem. For example, Hillquit concluded his article that generally argued against immigration restriction with a few instances of when it would be appropriate. Among them was one that called for immigration restriction based on the following three elements: country of origin had not industrialized, their race was "incapable of assimilation with the workingmen of the country of their adoption," and their racial backwardness prevented them from joining

[24] Hillquit, "Immigration in the United States," 67-68, 72-74; Walter Thomas Mills, *The Struggle for Existence* (Chicago: International School of Social Economy, 1904), 547.

organizations committed to class struggle. Hillquit did not specifically mention any races to which these criteria applied, but his final paragraph showed how this was used against Chinese workers in the west during the nineteenth century and was being used to justify the exclusion of Japanese currently. Hillquit's absence of denunciation of this approach showed where he stood on the issue.[25]

Victor Berger, arguably the most infamous race baiter among socialists, declared firmly where he stood in a 1907 article entitled "We Will Stand by the Real American Proletariat." Berger castigated members of the 1907 International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart, which included Hillquit, because they only called for limited restrictions on immigration. Berger argued that immigration was strictly a "race question" that called for American socialists "to break with a dogma that does not work in this case." The dogma Berger referred to was the Marxist proposition of internationalism. The Milwaukee socialist insisted that when Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* "there was no Chinese or Japanese or Hindoo [sic] labor problem." By not standing firmly against Asian immigration Berger insisted that socialists offered a program that would "drag us down to a coolie standard." By "us" Berger almost assuredly meant white, male, American workers of Anglo-Saxon descent. Berger continued that "the kernel of the question" was whether the United States would remain white and therefore racially superior to the rest of the world, "or become peopled by a yellowish black race with a white admixture." Where Hillquit justified exclusion of certain immigrants – although generally not white immigrants – based on economic rationale, Berger based his denunciation of immigration on a belief of the superiority of the white race. Debs, it may

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[25] Hillquit, "Immigration in the United States," 74-75.

be added, approached the immigration question from a predominantly humanitarian angle. They all agreed that immigration had a pernicious effect on American life because of its capitalist economic system, but they struggled to find agreement on the issue based solely on the idea of class struggle. The class struggle had an element of whiteness to it that belied easy integration into socialist theory.[26]

Just as whiteness was an implied quality of the class struggle and complicated the social question, so too was being male. Socialists had to contend with the woman question as a separate entity within the social question because of woman's peculiar place within American society as mandated by bourgeois values of the Victorian Era. This ideal emphasized woman as unpaid domestic laborer, moral guardian, mother, and dependent. As products of this era many American socialists – especially, but not exclusively men – cherished some of these Victorian sensibilities. As a result, some socialists saw the cooperative commonwealth as freeing women from Victorian ideals, while others saw it as allowing women to fulfill their feminine social function without degenerating into the throes of wage slavery. It was here that the competing ideologies of republicanism and class struggle clashed. Some socialists argued that the battle between wage laborers and controllers of the means of production inevitably resolved the woman question. Others countered that women first had to be made equals in the class struggle as independent producers before they could contribute to the movement and actually be freed by it. Also, settling the woman question to some meant freeing women from their dependency on the income of male wage labor (whether husband or father) so

[26] Victor Berger, "We Will Stand by the Real American Proletariat," *Social Democratic Herald,* October 12, 1907, 1.

women could more easily pursue their feminine social function. For others resolution of the woman question meant complete independence for women, including being freed from feminine social functions and economic ties to men. This debate occurred within a developing economy that saw an increasing number of women entering the workforce as both skilled and unskilled labor, both for reasons of necessity and desire. It also developed in a political atmosphere where women had no direct input (save for a few states and various local decisions) but an increasing political voice.

Some socialists advocated approaching the woman question as best they could through the lens of class struggle. They addressed the concerns of working women and professional women. Socialists observed the plight of working class women and attempted to convince them that socialism offered the only feasible remedy to their bitter lives. Like working class men, laboring women suffered from low wages and complete dependency on their employer, only to a much greater extent. In a 1913 article in the *National Rip-Saw,* Kate Richards O'Hare lamented the meager earnings of working class women. Utilizing data from sessions of the Senatorial Minimum Wage Commission that met in St. Louis, O'Hare claimed that independent working women needed to earn at least $11 per week to "maintain herself in good mule condition," by which she meant live a subsistence lifestyle. In St. Louis, however, young girls with little experience earned as low as $2.50 per week, older women earned from $5-8 per week on piece work, and that the average salary of women employed in "large factories" was around $5.50 per week. Clearly, O'Hare reasoned, this was not enough for a woman to make a living alone. Adding to the misery was that these women replaced men who were making upwards of $11 per week, thus creating more hardship among the male workers while adding to the

"swollen fortunes of the Big Biz." She also noted that all of these working women were "compelled to work." Their rationale for work included "no feminine unrest...no struggle for a 'wider life,' no suffragette tendencies, no revolt against the home, husbands and babies." Instead, "the whole question resolved itself into the question of bread." O'Hare painted a pretty bleak picture of the lives of laboring women in St. Louis; a life predicated on their being part of the working class. The solution to their ills ultimately rested in socialism, O'Hare declared, but she allowed herself to be satisfied for the time being with a minimum wage law that offered between $7.50 and $9 per week, still below subsistence level. She reasoned that "a minimum wage is another hardtack in our knapsack to fight on" for socialism. It was an "important skirmish in the class war" to "abolish the infernal wage system" that caused such misery and dependency. For O'Hare, socialism stood for bettering of conditions of working people who produced wealth. The ultimate goal of a cooperative commonwealth of independent workers where exploitation ceased to exist was more important than how it was attained.[27]

Other socialist writers analyzed the wretched conditions of working women in a similar vein to that of O'Hare. Theresa Malkiel also noted how most women worked because of dire need of money, not out of any reason of self-fulfillment. She further described how the entrance of women into the workforce dragged down the wages of everybody, thereby contributing to a system that sent more and more wealth to owners of capital at the expense of exploited workers. Because of this arrangement Malkiel asserted that marriage did not offer a way out of poverty for young working women due to the decrease in wages felt by men after competing against the low wages of women.

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[27] Kate Richards O'Hare, "The Wages of Women," in *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches)*, 63, 65, 67, 69-70.

Unlike O'Hare who welcomed minimum wage laws as at least a partial remedy to this problem, Malkiel called on women workers to study socialism. With their class consciousness raised, she prompted women to "join hands" with their fellow workers against the "common enemy" of capitalism.[28]

Hillquit too castigated the capitalist system. He viewed the "abuses of woman labor" as the "logical and necessary accompaniments of the competitive system of industry." Capitalists pitted workers against each other to achieve to the lowest possible price of labor. The results were a drastic decline in wages, labor conditions, and even a moral crime against humanity. Hillquit especially denounced the effect of this hurtful wage system on women within a large family. Wives had "enough useful and necessary work to perform at home," Hillquit explained. Work outside the home was "not a proud assertion of the rights of woman, but a pitiful and tragic surrender of her maternal duties and feelings to the cruel exigencies of dire poverty." The woeful consequence, Hillquit declared, was "incalculable physical and moral harm to her and her progeny." To solve this problem Hillquit argued that socialists fought to raise the wages of the fathers of working families, therefore making it unnecessary for women to work outside the home.

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[28] Malkiel's call for women to join with workers regardless of sex to combat capitalism showed that within the socialist movement women did not act solely based on sex. In fact, they were what historian Rebecca Edwards dubbed "angels in the machinery" of the party. Three different women held positions in the National Executive Committee of the party before 1920, O'Hare represented the United States at the Second International, Marcy edited one of the largest circulating serials, and their most effective stump speakers included O'Hare, Flynn, and Mother Jones. Still, a female subculture existed within the party, marked by the existence of the Woman's National Committee from 1908-1915 complete with its own serials. A cursory review of the literature shows that women writers tended to focus on sex specific topics more than men, Marcy being one notable exception. Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 8; Mari Jo Buhle, 149-150, 304-310; Theresa Malkiel, *To the Working Woman* (Chicago: Woman's National Committee of the Socialist Party, n.d.), 1-3.

When they worked away from home under socialism single women still received equal pay for equal work in comparison to men.[29]

Like O'Hare, Malkiel and Hillquit described the moral decadence of the capitalist system on female wage workers. They realized that being from the working class hurt these women along with their peculiar status in society as women. This opened them to double exploitation. The three socialists included above all hoped to free women from their predicament, but they differed over tactics: O'Hare called for a minimum wage, Malkiel for organization, and Hillquit for higher wages for men. These three socialists lacked agreement on how the woman question fit into class struggle. They recognized the moral problem, but did not have a unified class solution or one that addressed the gender roles of Victorian era women.

When socialists wrote on the topic of professional women the themes of class identity, gender roles, and dependency again became revealed in a complex matrix of ideas. May Wood Simons argued that the increasing number of women in the "professions," by which she meant occupations such as doctor, lawyer, teacher, writer, artist, and actress, created the illusion of "an escape from the slavery of the housewife." She took as a given the dependent nature of wife on husband within the traditional family. Simons maintained, however, that becoming a professional woman only changed the nature of dependency. While professional women made more money than their working class counterparts, they still lacked autonomy within their work environment. As examples she cited how school boards comprised of capitalists dictated the size of classes, materials to be taught, and even the interpretation of history to be used. Of

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[29] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 234-235.

course, Simons noted, that interpretation of history was one that was "in accord with the interests of the ruling class." She also demonstrated that doctors found themselves at the mercy of capitalist clients. Her training may convince her that her talents better served the masses in the realm of public health and treating the poor, but the profit system continually drove her toward those who had enough money for her services. Similarly, writers and artists were generally forced to satisfy the demands of the consuming, that is, capitalist, public. They produced works that people bought, not what their conscience dictated. From this Simons concluded that professional women had to realize their common interest with working women based on their similar dependent status. Instead, Simons lamented, professional women, like men,[30] often felt a common interest with capitalists because their livelihood was linked to them. She insisted that professional women should see this link not as a positive connection, but a negative one of forced dependency.[31]

Simons clearly saw dependency, or lack of autonomy, as the key element of the moral condemnation of capitalism. She saw how only a very few privileged Americans

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[30] Socialist writers addressed the question of professional men in terms of middle-class interests. They argued that men of the middle-class might feel closer to the capitalist-class than the working-class, but ultimately economic conditions would drive the middle-class down into the working-class. As Walter Thomas Mills put it, middle-class men opted for socialism "not because they are 'in sympathy with the working class,' but because they belong to the working class." Sooner or later they found themselves more exploited than exploitative. Mills, *The Struggle for Existence,* 451-468. Hillquit made essentially the same argument, but divided those between capital and labor into three groups: middle-class (farmers and small businessmen), intellectuals (managers, accountants, and others not in sweated trades), and professionals (doctors, lawyers, clergy, and others whose primary patronage came from the capitalist class). Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 159-161.

[31] May Wood-Simons, *Why the Professional Woman Should Be a Socialist* (Chicago: The Party Builder, n.d.), 1-4.

could truly claim to be economically independent, while the masses of laboring and professional women languished in dependency. Simons believed that socialism cured the vice of economic dependency, but she was unclear if or how this altered the dependent relationship of wives on their husbands. An assumption still existed among Americans generally, including socialists, that women wanted to work at home and that they naturally belonged there.[32] The writings of Spargo and Hillquit noted earlier illustrated this point. While they argued in the abstract that in the cooperative commonwealth women ceased to be dependent laborers because their domestic work was recognized as essential, many female socialists viewed these circumstances differently. Being released from the necessity of doing difficult manual labor to fulfill some sort of maternal obligation at home did not equal freedom. The marital crisis of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in 1910 illustrated the point. Flynn wrote in her autobiography that her husband of over two years, IWW agitator Jack Jones, wanted the pregnant Flynn to resign from her IWW speaking career that brought her to Washington and join him in Montana where she fulfilled her role as fulltime mother and wife. She objected and opted to return to New York to live with her mother until she sorted out her life. Flynn recounted that she "saw no reason why I, as a woman, should give up my work for his." She added that she "knew by now I could make more of a contribution to the labor movement than he could." There almost certainly was more to the disintegration of the marriage of Flynn

[32] Rebecca Edwards asserted that the Republican party during the Gilded Age expressed protectionism best, both in terms of policies like the tariff and holding the belief that women should be protected against the degradation of wage labor. The Republican party after the turn of the century embraced a more rigid masculinity, embodied by the machismo of Roosevelt, that added the ideal of woman as mother to the protectionism that came to include big government. Based on the comments of Spargo and Hillquit a few socialists could have been members of the GOP as well. Edwards, 7, 152-157.

and Jones than was related in Flynn's book. Nevertheless, this anecdote demonstrated the pervasiveness of dependency as an important moral indictment of capitalism. Flynn felt it as a woman and a laborer while other socialists, especially but not exclusively men, understood it and hoped to resolve it in narrow class terms. Again, the moral argument against capitalism worked, but describing it in class terms did not cover all contingencies.[33]

Many socialist women desired to be freed not only from economic dependency but from patriarchy as well. These women demanded the right to leave the home and pursue work of their choosing. Malkiel defined the act of leaving the domestic sphere as "woman's progress." The industrial revolution forever shattered the days of complete female dependency. She wrote that industrialization "made possible the realization of equal rights and equal opportunities for man and woman" by allowing women to leave home and work. New machinery made work easier, thereby allowing women to participate as ably as men. This taste of freedom in the workplace "woke [woman] from her long sleep." She proclaimed that "the forces which developed the age of industrialism sounded the knell of woman's subjection, the age of enlightenment opened its door to her." Malkiel championed this new freedom, a freedom she believed socialism brought to full fruition. She also castigated reactionary critics as ignorant of true progress for fearing that "woman's progress" destroyed families and ultimately destroy civilization.[34]

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[33] Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl, An Autobiography: My First Life (1906-1926)* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), 113.

[34] Theresa Malkiel, *Woman and Freedom* (New York: The Co-Operative Press, n.d.), 3-5.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman also called for women to be able to pursue work outside the home. Gilman recognized the importance and economic value of domestic work, but she still envisaged such work as forming a type of dependency on men. She equated women's domestic work with that done by horses; both were necessary but ultimately allowed only men to create more wealth for themselves with the time and energy they saved by taking advantage of such labor. Furthermore, both the wife and horse depended on the man to stay alive with the wealth produced. Thus for many women the socialist call for independence did not go far enough in aiding the lives of women. Freeing laboring men from the shackles of wage labor helped families from an economic standpoint, but it did not necessarily do anything for the dependent status of women within families.[35]

The answer most socialists posited for the woman question boiled down to work. Women had to be defined as workers, whether working class, professional, or domestic. From this an economic solution to the problem of dependency faced by women could be found under the rubric of class struggle. Once seen as an economic unit women found a position within the class struggle paradigm. John Work argued that women be allowed to work either inside or outside the home in order to attract them to the socialist movement. He maintained that female dependency stunted progress and that the prospect of work – and thus independence – inspired them to become socialists. In his article "Shall Women Work?" he wrote:

> It would be fatal to our prospects of reaching the women with the message of Socialism if we were to give the millions of wage earning

[35] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution,* with an introduction by Carl N. Degler (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 13.

> women to understand that we did not intend to let them continue to earn their own living, but proposed to compel them to become dependent upon men. They prize what little independence they have, and they want more of it. It would be equally fatal to our prospects of reaching the women with the message of Socialism if we were to give the married women to understand that they must remain dependent upon men. It is one of the most hopeful signs of the times that they are chafing under the galling chains of dependence.

Thus for John Work, labor meant freedom and independence. Whether male or female, work was the key to destroying the historic vice of dependency. Once accomplished, the economic independence of both men and women meant that "sex relations...will be raised to a plane of purity which can scarcely be imagined under the present degrading and impossible conditions." Economic freedom meant sexual freedom. For Bill Haywood and Frank Bohn work also equaled freedom. They wrote in reference to the suffrage question that "socialist government will be a democratic government of industry by all the workers." They added that "of course both men and women will work. Free people do not wish to be supported, nor support idlers and parasites. Therefore, when those who work rule, women will take part in government." Again, work became the means to independence for women.[36]

To resolve the woman question socialists often found it necessary to reduce to the problem to economic terms, something that was more easily understood. They trumpeted that women worked under socialism and therefore exercised freedom. But as the experience of Flynn and the writing of Gilman illustrated, women encountered forms of dependency that transcended the economic realm. Women were still expected to fit within an assumed family function. Even John Work affirmed as much when he stated

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[36] John M. Work, *Shall Women Work?* (Chicago: Woman's National Committee of the Socialist Party, n.d.), 3-4; William D. Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1911), 63.

that once every woman had "a full and free opportunity to earn her own living and receive her full earnings," then she no longer resorted to "marrying for a home." The implication was that working women still desired a home and family, but they no longer were coerced into a family life based on economic necessity. Under socialism women selected the circumstances under which they were dependent on husbands and gender constructs. For some women this was simply not enough. May Wood Simons wistfully declared: socialism "means not alone a revolution in the position of the laboring man but a complete change for women, economically, socially, intellectually and morally." Socialism did mean this, but that message often got lost in the rhetoric of class struggle especially for those who were not white, male, urban workers.[37]

Socialists recognized the tremendous amount of human suffering in Progressive Era America. They especially saw it in terms of a dichotomy between the working class that was being exploited and therefore suffered, and the capitalist class that inflicted this harm. Socialists also witnessed how society hurt groups of people that they tried valiantly to fit within the class struggle paradigm they thought led to salvation. Farmers, blacks, immigrants, and women all encountered problems in their lives stemming not only from economic relationships, but their peculiar plights as "others" within American society. Socialists morally condemned the capitalist system that reframed the historic vices of dependency, corruption, privilege, and lack of democracy that created these

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[37] Work, *Shall Women Work?,* 4; May Wood Simons, *Woman and the Social Problem*, In *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally M. Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 185.

painful circumstances, even if they could not always fit them neatly into the class struggle argument.

Like their republican forebears, socialists sought solutions to social problems by radically changing the structure of society that caused them. Jeffersonians championed the promulgation of private property and attempted to destroy the bastions of aristocratic privilege from where political and economic power emanated. Socialists too endeavored to revolutionize society. They wanted to destroy the privileged control of property by the new aristocracy (the capitalist class) and usher in a new era of cooperation, freedom, and democracy. Like the Jeffersonians, socialist met with limited success. As radicals in societies based on traditional social structure, revolutionary changes in both instances did not come to complete fruition. Jeffersonians worked out a society that implemented many of their ideas and perhaps even their spirit, but had to create it within the already existing social structure and compromise with other groups. Many failed to reconcile their heartfelt cry for liberty with the existence of an entire race in bondage. Socialists experienced similar results. They too struggled with their emancipatory doctrine in a world where people suffered from ills that were not easily defined within their critique of society. Also, their ideas of cooperation, government ownership, labor rights, and more democracy were in certain respects implemented in twentieth century America. The implementation of quasi-socialist ideas came through reform groups like the progressives who used socialist ideas to reform, but not transform society. Strangely, Jeffersonians were remembered as wonderfully successful contributors to the American dream, whereas socialists were viewed as visionary failures who threatened the very marrow of all that was good created by the Founding Fathers. The socialist analysis of the role of

the state, reform, and progressivism, helped shape twentieth century America in much the same way the Jeffersonian vision shaped the nineteenth century.

Chapter 6

The Emergence of Statism: Progressive Reform and the Socialist Critique

The moral indictment of capitalism by socialists based on republican principles went deeper than a critique of history, political economy, and social relations. Through their moral analysis socialists questioned the role of the state, the place of the individual within the state, and the importance of reform in curing the moral failings brought on by industrial capitalism. Socialism not only offered to improve the daily lives of the toiling masses and indeed all Americans by breaking the grip of dependency, corruption, and privilege, it also claimed to be a moral revolution. Socialism improved the very morality of people. Competitive capitalism created a society and a morality that promoted individual license. Laws, courts, and government swelled to protect the capitalist class that benefited most from the doctrine of individualism, an ideology socialists viewed as having run amok. Socialists preached a return to putting community before self-interest and having political society reflect (as opposed to a more coercive protection of) the common good. In short, socialists advocated a return to the principles of virtuous individuals and commonwealth; two cornerstones of enlightenment era republicanism. The socialist condemnation of the capitalist system in republican terms revealed no less than a crisis in American democracy. The very nature of the individual and the state had to be addressed through reforms with the ultimate goal of the cooperative commonwealth instead of mere amelioration of harsh living and working conditions.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first establishes a socialist belief that a crisis in democracy exited, marked by individual license instead of individualism. The second differentiates between progressive and socialist ideas of reform as a remedy for the crisis in democracy. The third shows how socialists feared the growing state established by progressive reform that created government ownership instead of the socialist vision of public ownership. Socialists aimed for a state that promoted the common interest of all individuals, but witnessed instead the enlargement of a state that protected individual license and crushed individual liberty.

In 1907, Treadwell Cleveland, Jr., and obscure socialist by all accounts, published his own article on what he called "The Crisis of Democracy." In it he connected the message of modern socialism to the republican past of the American Revolution. He praised the ideals of the revolutionary generation, especially its demand for political equality. He lamented, however, the growth of individual license that threatened the basis of democratic society. Democracy was not allowed to flourish where the excesses of rampant individualism caused classes to develop. It resulted in a small group of people having too much power, a power they generally used for their own interests instead of the public good. This was the "crisis in democracy." Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, Cleveland stated that the crisis was "the test by which the world shall know whether government of the people, by the people, for the people shall or shall not perish from the earth." A brief analysis into Cleveland's essay shows the strong link between

republicanism and socialism, especially in terms of the role of individual in socialist society.[1]

Cleveland began his essay by stating that a class struggle existed within American democracy over the distribution of wealth created by industrial America. He asserted that the struggle went "far deeper" than a "conflict between capital and labor." Cleveland boldly declared that the issues of the class struggle "root in the foundation of our national life." Furthermore, the struggle at hand "has come, as the Declaration of Independence came, that the oppressed may be relieved, that special privilege may give place to equal rights, and license to liberty." He asked rhetorically about the fate of democracy: "Are we destined henceforth to witness its decline, until [democracy] sets again in some new era of bondage, completing the cycle which dawned with the Declaration?" Cleveland answered this question with a resounding "no," arguing that the solution rested in "ourselves." Specifically, he believed Americans needed to reevaluate their ideals and return to the cherished notion of the Declaration – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – and reject the current cult of individual license that created misery for so many. "What actually endangers social liberty," Cleveland continued, was "not the restraint of the individual, but the individual license which causes that restraint." In essence, Cleveland objected to how the selfish actions of some individuals affected the liberties of others, thus creating dependency and hardship. People needed to think of the community at large rather than satisfying their own pursuits. After a century of individual license becoming more of a cherished ideal in the United States, the result was class struggle, which Cleveland defined as "an uprising against the towering individual

[1] Treadwell Cleveland, Jr., *The Crisis of Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: The Author, 1907), 44.

license which overshadows and threatens democratic liberty." This was the "crisis of democracy" that Cleveland wrote about, a crisis that emanated from the competitive capitalist system run afoul.[2]

Another pernicious effect of the crisis of democracy, according to Cleveland, was how it polluted government. The author commented on how the Founding Fathers exhibited great faith in the ballot as the ultimate check against abuses of government. However, Cleveland noted, they did not foresee that individual license "was to beget the industrial despot, or that competition, at first a sort of free and pleasant emulation, was, under the spur of colossal incentives of gain, to degenerate into bitter and costly warfare for the market." This led to hoarding of land, resources, and wealth by a small cadre of capitalists who promoted their own selfish ends above those of the greater community of humanity. Cleveland further concluded that the Founding Fathers could not have foreseen the consequent destruction of democracy by the above economic interests. Cleveland's generation witnessed "the cherished democratic safeguard" of the ballot "pass from the hands of the majority, the masses, to be turned against them by the few, the classes, whose prodigious and wasteful license would pervert it to the mockery of machine politics." For Cleveland, the individual license that was the essence of nineteenth century liberalism and had grown along with capitalism threatened the very sinews of the nation embedded in the words of the Declaration of Independence. Individual liberty and "the equal opportunity which the socialist desiderates is thus but a re-statement of the Declaration thesis, with the added significance gained in the course of historic experience." Cleveland wanted nothing more than to reestablish the ideas of life,

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[2] Ibid., 3-5.

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in modern society. This endeavor required the demise of capitalism and the individual license that accompanied it.[3]

Cleveland was bolder than most American socialists in his direct appeal to the revolutionary generation for inspiration. Many socialists, however, equaled Cleveland's disdain for the rampant individualism that had infested the United States. Eugene Debs, for example, stated that "the present order of society is developing all the symptoms of degeneracy and dissolution." The cause of the disease was "individualist self-seekers and their mercenaries" who gloried in the "animal struggle" of the capitalist world. These proponents of individual license triumphed by "climbing to the top over the corpses of their fellows." They then championed "our marvelous prosperity and the incomparable glory of our 'free institutions.'" Such rampant individualism, Debs reasoned, served only to hurt America in the long run.[4]

Socialist writers advocated a purer and non-exploitative form of individualism under the cooperative commonwealth that promised to mend the errors of individual license. Socialist authors made this argument against the backdrop of critics who maintained that cooperation as advocated by socialists destroyed individualism. John Work contended that wage labor failed to allow workers to "develop his or her individuality." This occurred because capitalism "forc[ed] people to spend so much of their lives in earning a bare subsistence." They enjoyed precious little time to become individuals. Socialism allowed workers to become individuals. John Spargo especially defended socialism against attacks on socialism's purported destruction of the individual.

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[3] Ibid., 16.

[4] Eugene V. Debs, "The Growth of Socialism," in *Writings and Speeches of Eugene V. Debs* (New York: Hermitage, 1948), 263.

He put forth that "one of the greatest and most lamentable errors in connection with the propaganda of modern Socialism has been the assumption...that Socialism and Individualism are entirely antithetical concepts." Spargo maintained that nothing could be further from the truth. He described the "Socialist ideal" as a "form of social organization in which every individual will the greatest possible amount of freedom for self-development and freedom; and in which social authority will be reduced to the minimum necessary for the preservation and insurance of that right to all individuals." Spargo held that in capitalist society, most individuals were not free at all. The working class could not pursue the vocation of their choice or even enjoy substantial leisure time. The middle class worked feverishly to maintain its tenuous status in society, one that was ultimately a losing proposition. Only the upper class enjoyed a certain degree of leisure time, and that was off the backs of the workers that produced their wealth. Spargo rejected this privileged society and the myth of individualism enjoyed by Americans. He asserted that society's function should be "to insure to each the same social opportunities, to secure from each a recognition of the same obligations toward all. The basic principle of the Socialist state must be justice; no privilege or favors can be extended to individuals or groups of individuals." Spargo, like republicans of a century earlier, rejected the inherent privilege of a class people and fought for the right of each person to exercise their individuality within the context of a just community.[5]

Other socialists also argued for the purification of individualism in the cooperative commonwealth. N.A. Richardson expressed the two parameters that most

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[5] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Summary and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910), 280, 284-287, 291-294; John M. Work, *What's So and What Isn't* (n.p., n.d.; reprint, New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 17.

socialists spoke of when they championed their version of individualism. They were that workers were to be freed from exploitation and allowed to enjoy equality of opportunity. These principles applied "not only in the field of labor, not only 'to make a living,' but to develop himself along any line where ambition might lead." Richardson, like Spargo, believed that the privileged status of the capitalist class prevented the great majority of the populace from expressing their individuality. Once work became for communal benefit instead of individual gain, then each individual was in fact freer than ever before. Each person pursued their own interests, free from the exploitation of wage labor that ground so many into a life of despair. Socialism indeed brought an end to the quest for individual material gain at the expense of others and replaced it with a purer form of individualism that involved self-discovery along with betterment of the community.[6]

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who began her public career as an editor of Fabian publications and continued to express socialist ideas throughout her career, explained how cooperation led to more individualism. She believed "union" to be the "basic condition of human life." As such, when people uniquely contributed to the community then "the individual is most advantaged, not by his own exertions for his own goods, but by the exchange of his exertions with the exertions of others for goods produced by them together." Gilman connected "true individualism" with contribution to the community instead of acquisitiveness and the exploitation of other's labor. This in fact served as an

[6] N.A. Richardson, *Introduction to Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1902), 24-25.

important theme in her book *Women and Economics* and was reminiscent of virtuous individualism described by republicans of a century earlier.[7]

Morris Hillquit argued that the rise of liberalism during the nineteenth century created individual liberty for property holders, but also created a large dependent working class. The exploitation of the workers by the bourgeoisie was an example of how "capitalist individual liberty had degenerated into individual license" marked by the selfish pursuit of one's own economic interests. Socialism, Hillquit believed, marked a return to a positive individualism that benefited all. Allan Benson also demonstrated how exploitation of labor led to a decrease in individual liberty. He posited that "Socialism does not dispute the right of the Individualist to own the wheelbarrow he has made. But it *does* dispute the right of any man to use even the wheelbarrow he has himself made to carry off the products of others." In short, he argued that individualism succeeded only so far as it did not interfere with the individual liberty of others; a circumstance he believed ultimately led to greater individual liberty overall. In the cooperative commonwealth everybody shared an equality of opportunity to express their individuality. Potential "geniuses" did not "perish unknown beside a machine" nor did female geniuses "perish unknown beside their family altar, the cooking stove." With those words Meta Stern Lilienthal declared her ardent belief in the true ability of all to live their lives as they saw fit instead of toiling in a state of dependency.[8]

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[7] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, with an introduction by Carl N. Degler (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 100-101.

[8] Morris Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 12-15; Allan Benson, *Socialism Made Plain: Why the Few are Rich and the Many Poor* (Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Co., 1908), 118; Meta

Socialists perceived a moral decline from the time of the American Revolution to the present day. Virtuous individuals working toward the common good disappeared in the face of an industrializing America that required naked self-interest to spur economic progress. Individual license replaced individual liberty thereby creating classes of people who either exercised their will over others or had their will dependent on the wishes of others. Socialism, then, was much more than reconfiguring the economy. It was a movement to change the very outlook of Americans as to what was good, fair, and just. The belief of liberalism – marked by everybody satisfying their self-interest to the best of their ability leading to the best possible society – had to be altered in the face of a rapidly degenerating social problem of classes. Socialists aimed their message at convincing Americans that a return to the ethics of the Founding Fathers, at least as socialists interpreted them, was what people ought to want. Socialists demanded not equality of condition, but equality of opportunity. This created the freest individual possible. As John Spargo put it: "not human equality, but equality of opportunity to prevent the creation of artificial inequalities by privilege is the essence of socialism." Socialists believed in individualism, but a virtuous individualism uninhibited by license that quelled the creation of artificial class distinctions based on ownership of property.[9]

Based on how thoroughgoing a transformation socialists envisioned for Americans, they scoffed at attempts to reform the present system they deemed decadent.

Stern Lilienthal, *Women of the Future* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1916), 11.

[9] John Spargo, *Socialism: A Study and Interpretation of Socialist Principles*, 236; quoted in Cleveland, 17.

Reforms as advocated by people like the progressives, socialists suggested, at best only lessened the severity of the wretched conditions of life experienced by Americans, especially those in the working class. Progressive reforms failed to address the basic problem of society, which was the ownership of the means of production by a privileged class, justified by a doctrine of individual license. The system needed to be changed. Palliative cures to capitalism's symptoms served only to lessen class consciousness and disguise the rampant misery of the system.

Many socialists, however, advocated reform. These reforms were not ends in themselves, but means toward educating the public about the harshness of capitalism while bettering the conditions of the working class to allow more time to consider the merits of socialism. Reforms were not answers to the social problem as progressives proclaimed, but a way of understanding the greater problem of society leading inevitably to socialism. Many socialists sympathized with the efforts of reformers to improve society, but ultimately rejected pure reformism because it failed to uproot the capitalist system that caused the social problem in the first place. Hillquit referred to one group of reformers as "kind-hearted but shortsighted gentlemen." These reformers from the "better classes" sought to alleviate the suffering in society without destroying the social system, which they viewed as fundamentally sound. Hillquit used Carl Schurz as an example. Schurz and his followers endeavored to fix a variety of social problems, as opposed to the socialist plan of attacking the only social problem – capitalism.[10] Similarly, Robert Rives La Monte wrote that "the hearts of many popular reformers…are

[10] Hillquit differentiated "ideologist" reformers from another group of reformers who naively attempted to return to the days of competition. This latter group consisted of mainly middle-class manufacturers and farmers who favored legislation such as trustbusting. Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 208-209.

on the right side," but they ultimately "betray workingmen" because their reforms only served to disguise the real social problem. In essence, reforms such as the initiative, referendum, and recall were good ideas, but lacked any real substance without destroying the wage system that corrupted government in the first place. Spargo compared "ideologist reformers" of his day to utopian socialists of generations earlier. The New York socialist chastised both groups for attempting to cure the vices of society that they deemed to have appeared because of "ignorance or wickedness" instead of the evolution of economic relations. Like Hillquit, Spargo believed that reformers saw too many social problems instead of the one true social problem.[11]

Reform movements, however, were far from benign. Reforms, whatever the particular intent of their supporters, usually served only the capitalist class at the expense of the working class. Socialists described the pernicious effects of reform in a variety of ways. La Monte warned his readers to be wary of reformers who "beguile[d]" workers into accepting schemes to modify the wage system when in fact they should settle for nothing less than the full product of their labor that came only when capitalism was destroyed. William T. Brown too urged his readers to demand complete emancipation from wage labor and not fall victim to petty reforms. Brown declared that the "parasitic classes...express themselves morally or ethically...by the words 'charity,' 'amelioration,' 'police regulation,' – in one word: 'Reform.'" Workers, however, should not be impressed by such rhetoric. Instead, they needed to fight for the socialist vision of "'justice,' 'brotherhood,' 'industrial freedom' – in one word: Revolution." Mary Marcy agreed with Brown about reform schemes and rhetoric duping the working class into

[11] Robert Rives La Monte, *Science and Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1900), 25; Spargo, *Socialism,* 75.

accepting less than they deserved. She described such capitalist reform plans such as the eight hour day and child labor laws as "sops" to keep workers "from the REAL BUSINESS OF SOCIALISM." Debs also castigated reform efforts, but his approach emphasized the severe limitations and therefore futility of reform. He argued that attempts to "purify the turbid stream" of capitalist-induced corruption in politics through reform was "as utter a piece of folly as to try with beeswax to seal up Mount Pelee." The system was rotten to the core and no amount of reform improved it. Nothing short of a complete change of the social system offered to better society. Thus, interest-based reform groups such as the Populist and Independence Parties were "ludicrous" because they sought to find an illusory "middle ground" between class rule by capitalists and socialism. Reform movements only served to confuse the electorate and delay the coming of the cooperative commonwealth.[12]

Socialists cited government's failure to effectively regulate business as evidence that socialist revolution instead of progressive reform offered the only solution to the social problem. Daniel Hoan, a Milwaukee socialist who became mayor after World War I, criticized progressive attempts at business regulation. Hoan cited eight reasons why regulation failed. They included inefficiency, its corruptive influence on government (regulation created a class a bureaucrats controlled by corporations), and no historical precedent existed the world over for successful business regulation. Hoan elaborated on

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[12] Robert Rives La Monte, *Socialism: Positive and Negative* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1912), 43; Rev. William T. Brown, *How Capitalism has Hypnotized Society* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, n.d.), 1; Mary Marcy, "Why the Socialist Party is Different," in *The Tongue of Angels: The Mary Marcy Reader*, ed. Frederick C. Giffin, (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 68; Eugene V. Debs, "What's the Matter with Chicago?" in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, ed. Jean Y. Tussey (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 68; Debs, "The Socialist Party's Appeal (1908)" in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks*, 164.

many specific examples of regulation failing. For instance, he claimed that the number of trusts punishable under the Sherman Act increased from 149 to over 10,000 during Theodore Roosevelt's time as president, even though the great trustbuster attacked on average six trusts per year. Hoan also criticized business regulation at the state level. In particular, he assailed Robert La Follette's much ballyhooed Wisconsin Idea. Hoan maintained that business regulation in Wisconsin favored large consumers (corporations) over individual consumers (the people). In essence, this legislation granted monopoly status to certain companies, guaranteed dividends to investors, and received protection from the government. The people were not so fortunate. The regulation of the gas industry in Wisconsin, Hoan argued, resulted in people saving $1.28 per individual per year. Yet the Milwaukee Railway and Light Company still enjoyed a net profit of $3.50 per individual per year "after being thoroughly regulated." Hoan saw no justice in this. He said of the Wisconsin Idea: "no shrewder piece of political humbuggery and downright fraud has ever been placed upon the statute books. It is supposed to be legislation for the people. In fact, it is legislation for the moneyed oligarchy." Regulation, or reform, by a government controlled by the interests of capital always benefited that group in the end.[13]

Another example of socialist disdain for reform attempts through a government controlled by the two major parties was the 1911 decision to destroy the Standard Oil and American Tobacco trusts. Socialists recognized immediately that these decisions worked only in the interest of those who controlled the trusts. The decision simply meant that "unreasonable," or bad trusts, had to disband and then reorganize as "reasonable," or

[13] Daniel W. Hoan, *The Failure of Regulation* (Chicago: Socialist Party, 1914), 7-8, 28-30, 54, 62, 72-83.

good trusts. In the minds of Socialists, this in no way helped the underlying concern which was how these large conglomerations of capital conspired to keep prices high and exploit labor. Furthermore, a pundit for the *International Socialist Review* who wrote under the pen name "John D.," interviewed a number of leading Wall Street businessmen about the Standard Oil decision. Their comments spoke volumes about this decision being anything but a victory for working Americans and instead a triumph for big business. A representative for John D. Rockefeller, the single person supposedly most affected by the Standard Oil decision, stated: "We view the decisions in the light of the emancipation proclamation for the industries of the country. Besides, all legislation now counts for naught. The court's decree is the biggest possible victory for industrial freedom." New York financier, J.P. Morgan, added: "I consider the decision concerning Standard Oil entirely satisfactory; moreover I expected it. The recent turn of the market for stocks shows that it is correct." George J. Gould, the inheritor of the railroad dynasty built by Jay Gould during the latter half of the nineteenth century, chimed in: "Business men know where they stand, whereas before the decisions were rendered they were slightly nervous. *I am for the United States Supreme Court every time....* This decision is the forerunner, in my opinion, of one of the greatest business booms in history." These comments from some of America's leading capitalists showed that the action of the Supreme Court was not surprising, nor did it severely affect the performance of their companies. In fact, the stock prices for both Standard Oil and American Tobacco went up after Wall Street heard the Supreme Court decision. The popular frenzy that surrounded the regulation of Rockefeller's industrial giant did not encourage socialists. They viewed it as a temporary reform that only blinded the workers to the still existent

scourge of capitalism, a problem exacerbated by the use of government and the Supreme Court in the interest of capital.[14]

Other socialist writers wrote more directly to how the Standard Oil decision only hurt workers. The decision mocked justice and fairness. Perhaps the best summation of the Socialists's unyielding criticism of the Standard Oil decision appeared in a sarcastic article in *Industrial Worker*, the newspaper of the IWW. Under the title, "Rockefeller Busted," the correspondent opined:

> The coal oil trust is busted flat as a pancake. The Supreme Court says it is a very UNREASONABLE trust and must dissolve. She's done gone busted, sah. Coal oil will likely raise a few notches to make up for the expense the old bald-headed parasite will be put to in order to make the trust RESPECTABLE and REASONABLE. Other trusts that are not so UNREASONABLE as Coal Oil Johnny's have taken their cue from the REASONABLENESS of the decision and the result is that the stock of the American Tobacco trust went up 15 points in 15 minutes after the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States. This is a GLORIOUS VICTORY for labor and we can feel the ground getting softer under our feet already and the blankets getting lighter. Say you slave, do you think the boss is getting an UNREASONABLE PROFIT FROM YOUR TOIL!

This Wobbly agitator saw nothing but business as usual from the decision. It helped private interests while workers still labored long hours for unjust incomes. Milton Clark, a Kentucky socialist, agreed. He declared that the Standard Oil decision was "not a howling success" as the companies involved were "making more profits than before." Yet the workers and consumers did not benefit. He added that there was "no reason to believe that regulation will prove more successful when applied to other trusts." Charles Edward Russell lamented that not a single trust magnate ever served time in jail for his

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[14]Robert J. Wheeler, "What Shall We Do About the Trusts?" *International Socialist Review* 12 (August 1911), 87; John D., "Wall Street and the Trust Decisions," *International Socialist Review* 12 (July 1911), 45. Italics in the original.

illegal business practices, even though the law called for such a penalty. Instead, the "dissolved" trusts brought in more profits than ever before. In short, socialists agreed that regulation or reform was not the answer to the social problem.[15]

Armed with such a view of reform, socialists saw reformers like progressives as not really progressive at all. In fact, for all the good intentions many had, progressive reformers were at best naïve and at worst reactionary. The sincerity of the desire of most progressives to help the needy was not be denied, as already noted. But socialists indicated that they believed progressive reform only aimed to destroy what was good about modern industry (its productivity and efficiency) while not entirely helping the exploited workers. The progressive desire to return to the days of competitive small producers was thus reactionary. Howard Caldwell commented that reformers "style themselves 'progressive,' but are in reality standing for the most reactionary position in American politics." What made this position especially reactionary, according to Caldwell, was the desire for political influence. In the middle of the nineteenth century small manufacturers had tremendous influence within political parties. They lost that during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era to corporate interests. With this reduction in political power came economic uncertainty as well. Progressives wanted to go back in evolution to a time where they dominated, a place Caldwell wrote was "impossible to return." Victor Berger wryly referred to "Robin Hood 'Progressives'" in a message before Congress. Berger argued that members of the Progressive party were in reality little different from politicians in the two major parties. They worked for capitalist

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[15]*Industrial Worker*, 25 May 1911, 2; Milton Clark, *Facts and Principles of Socialism* (Central City, KY: Argus Print, 1914), 9; Charles Edward Russell, "Current Styles in Governmental Bunk," *International Socialist Review* 15 (August 1914), 85.

interests and corrupted government. As examples he cited so-called progressives such as Boss Flinn in Pittsburgh and Tim Woodruff of the Albany Machine. His use of the words "boss" and "machine" showed what Berger thought of these allegedly progressive men. Thus progressives stood not for progress economically or politically, but for a reversion to a supposed ideal time or a continuation of business as usual.[16]

Socialist perspectives on Theodore Roosevelt, the penultimate progressive in the socialist mind, revealed their disdain for reform and its reactionary consequences. Roosevelt's rhetoric, socialists maintained, demonstrated his tacit acknowledgement of class while maintaining an older tradition that denied classes existed at all in the United States. The president's words also revealed his desire to work for the benefit of capital. Spargo castigated Roosevelt for his admonishment of "preachers of class consciousness" because the president believed such agitators only threatened to tear the nation asunder. Spargo quoted from the president's 1906 message to Congress in which he declared that the "class spirit" had proven to be "the downfall of republics" throughout history. Jack London on two occasions wrote about how Roosevelt begrudgingly became aware of the existence of classes in America, yet seemingly wanted to ignore the issue. Again the president preached that class agitation had more power to destroy "national welfare" than did race or religious animosity. The president had become aware of the existence of classes, or at least the spread of class agitation. Roosevelt's solution, however, seemed to be one that offered to kill the messenger. The president scolded socialists for their class-based agitation because it threatened his denial of the existence of classes. Furthermore,

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[16] Howard H. Caldwell, *The Trust Question Answered* (Chicago: *Chicago Daily Socialist*, n.d.), 3; Victor Berger, *The Working Class must have its own Party to give Expression to its Own Class Interests*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1912), 6.

once society realized class structure the republic was doomed. Roosevelt did not want classes in the United States, but neither did the socialists. Socialists advocated acknowledgement of classes and to remove the root of their existence – the capitalist system. Progressive reformers simply wanted to bury the problem of class or fix it as best they could without threatening the present social order.[17]

Roosevelt's rhetoric that at times denied the existence of classes, implied they existed, or scorned agitators who worked for the eradication of classes through revolution by the working class, portrayed him as on the side of capital. While this argument worked in the abstract for socialists, they also drew more direct parallels between Roosevelt and capital. George Herron noted in a 1904 article that the president accepted the trade union movement, probably referring to his settlement of the Anthracite Coal Strike that forced owners to recognize the union. Instead of being a victory for labor, Herron argued, it in fact demonstrated the president's desire to solidify the present social order. Herron reasoned that trade unions only existed because they were "necessitated" by the "predatory nature of capitalism." Workers needed to organize to have any hope of keeping their wages much above the subsistence level. Therefore, Roosevelt's calling for capitalists to recognize trade unions was "but a capitalist line of defense within the capitalist system." Trade unions required the existence of the competitive system, even if on the surface it appeared that gains by trade unions would cut into the hegemony of capital. Allan Benson made a similar argument over Roosevelt's endorsement of initiative, referendum, and recall. Such an act did not make Roosevelt a budding

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[17] Spargo, *Socialism,* 176-177, 180-181; Jack London, *Revolution* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1909), 28; Jack London, *War of the Classes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1905; reprint, New York: Regent Press, 1970), 43-44.

socialist, as some conservative critics maintained. In fact it reinforced his conservatism. Benson called the president "the most far seeing protector of the present order of things." Roosevelt urged capitalists to "give up the little he wants to take from them" in order to prevent "every vestige of power" from being "torn from them." In short, reforms worked to protect capital by muting class antagonisms. This preserved the natural order of social hierarchy by confusing the class issue instead of completely resolving it as socialists intended.[18]

Having ridiculed reform as reactionary, many socialists nevertheless found room to advocate reform in the name of the Socialist party. Victor Berger, the de facto leader of the right wing of the Socialist party from his base in Milwaukee, stated in a speech before Congress while an elected member in 1912, that socialists advocated "real reforms" that were not mere "political baits." Berger listed three components of "real reforms": to stop the "pauperization" and "enervation of the masses of people," to "uplift the masses," and most importantly to "offer the possibility of a peaceful, lawful, and orderly transformation of society." These reforms, in short, were a means to an end, the end being the cooperative commonwealth. Political reforms offered by parties run by capitalists were the "political baits" designed to gain votes, lift the living conditions of some, but not fundamentally change society. Hillquit, another leader associated with the right wing of the party by 1912, concurred with Berger. Hillquit wrote that "the aim of all socialist reforms...is to strengthen the working class economically and politically and to pave the way for" the cooperative commonwealth. He continued, saying "the effect of every true socialist reform must be to transfer some measure of power from the

[18] George Herron, *The Day of Judgment* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1904), 17-18; Allan L. Benson, *Issues and Candidates* (n.p., c. 1912), 11.

employing classes. A socialist reform must be in the nature of a working-class conquest." In the industrial realm, reforms ought to "remove from the workingman some of the cares and uncertainties of his material existence, to improve his health and spirits, to give him some measure of leisure" from where he can build his education and contemplate issues of the day. Therefore, Hillquit declared, "the principle aims of socialism are not those of local or temporary reform, but of permanent and radical social reconstruction." Unlike progressives who viewed reforms as ends in themselves, socialists conceived of them as means to the end of the cooperative commonwealth.[19]

Not all socialists welcomed the reform sentiments of men like Berger and Hillquit. Historians of American socialism have in fact focused on the dichotomy between right and left as a primary reason for the failure of the party to be more successful after 1912.[20] Right-wing socialists, as described above, generally supported reforms that became expressed in the party platform. The left-wing often chastised this effort as pandering to bourgeois sentiments, a pathetic attempt to garner votes from the middle-class, or changing the very nature of American socialism to another type of reform movement. The left-wing preferred industrial organization to secure the means of production, even though this often resulted in staging strikes to secure minimum concessions (whether hours, pay, or conditions) from capitalists without overturning the system. For the left wing, the party existed only as a propaganda agency. The real work was to be done in the industrial world.

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[19] Berger, *The Working Class must have its own Party,* 11; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 175, 209, 214-215.

[20] For an overview see Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 167-202.

The question of tactics was a paramount issue that divided right from left within the socialist movement. Whether on right or left, American socialists desired nothing less than the cooperative commonwealth. They wanted to end the existence of economic classes that resulted in dependency, corruption, and an immoral drive to satisfy naked self-interest at the expense of the community. Members of the American socialist movement also demanded an immediate alleviation of the suffering of workers until the cooperative commonwealth could be developed. Socialists, in essence, wanted to completely revolutionize society. This unity of purpose often became lost in historical studies that probed the factionalization within the party, especially in relation to a presumed Marxist ideal. Socialists differed in tactics: political or economic organization, gradual steps or cataclysmic revolution, slow or fast. Depending on their understanding of Marx, Darwin, historical materialism, the evolution of society, or their peculiar living conditions, socialists advocated different forms of action. Their individual conclusions made them adapt their basic republican critique to fit these challenges. Marxism or Darwinism was not the common point of departure for socialists, it was instead a moral critique of American society rooted in a modernized republicanism.

Having already established in their vision of the cooperative commonwealth a need for a government as facilitator of industry instead of a force of compulsion, socialists of both wings trembled at the prospect of a growing government as advocated by progressives and other reformers while capital still controlled government. Any number of socialists from across their political spectrum expressed this libertarian ideal. William Dwight Porter Bliss, a Christian socialist and early leader of American

Fabianism, bluntly declared that "socialism is not turning business over to the state." The state served a function in society, Bliss argued, but that function was fraternal rather than paternal. At the other end of the spectrum, syndicalists Earl Ford and William Foster fervently espoused their doctrine of "anti-statism." They wrote that syndicalists saw "in the State [sic] only an instrument of oppression and a bungling administrator of industry, and proposes to exclude it from future society." Syndicalists believed that industry should be run by the workers within each industry rather than through any form of government, whether that government was fraternal or not. In fact, much of the writing of Ford and Foster was an indictment of the Socialist party which they believed was too concerned with "legality" (such as buying the trusts instead of just seizing them) and only built a stronger state. There certainly was a great deal of difference between a Fabain like Bliss and syndicalists like Ford and Foster. In fact, many may not have even considered them socialists because they did not belong to the party and held ideals that made more mainstream socialists like Debs and O'Hare wary.[21] Nevertheless, all these people believed themselves to be socialist. One commonality among them was a desire to see an end to the coercive state. The state during the Progressive Era limited immigration of radicals, filed injunctions to end strikes, sent out the national guard to protect private property from starving workers, built jails to incarcerate agitators, and sent workers to war to protect capitalist interests. Socialists never advocated a larger more

[21] For example, Fabians endorsed political parties such as the People's Party. Syndicalists advocated use of sabotage. The Socialist party renounced these practices, the latter coming in 1912 and led to the expulsion of syndicalist kingpin "Big Bill" Haywood form National Executive Committee of the Socialist party.

intrusive state. They envisioned a benign entity that at most managed industrial affairs for the benefit of everybody.[22]

Because of their anti-statist or libertarian outlook, socialists distinguished carefully between government ownership and public ownership. The former was to be feared. Government ownership implied a coercive instrument that worked to benefit a particular interest. Whoever competed for and won government then bent it to its will. In such a scenario government worked for a privileged group and against the majority in most cases. Therefore, reforms such as those of the Populists that called for government ownership of railroads and telegraph lines meant little for the working class if the capitalist class still controlled government. A government that did not express the will of the majority in the public – that is, the working class – was not democratic and was to be feared. Public ownership, on the other hand, meant purely democratic administration of industry by and for the common good. Freely elected citizens ran businesses – whether within local shops as the syndicalists envisaged or a combination of local and national agencies as most mainstream socialists advocated – with the goal of benefiting the entire community as opposed to the pocketbooks of few financiers. The wealth produced through public ownership went to the public, not a privileged portion therein.

Walter Thomas Mills offered an example to distinguish between government ownership and public ownership. The state of Kansas owned a binding twine factory. The Kansas-run factory bought all of the raw materials that went into the production of twine from the binding twine trust, which held a monopoly on the materials. State

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[22] William Dwight Porter Bliss, *What Christian Socialism Is* (Boston: Office of *The Dawn*, 1894), 18; Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, *Syndicalism* (Chicago: William Z. Foster, n.d.), 5, 28-29.

prisoners then manufactured the twine, which was sold to the trust under a contract that had been negotiated to buy the raw materials. This was government ownership. The government, controlled by capitalists, offered essentially a free factory and cheap labor to a privately held trust. This trust reaped enormous profits from the endeavor by keeping its retail price the same even when the cost of production went down drastically. The general public not only did not benefit from this scheme, but in fact paid more for binding twine. Mills added to this that postoffices and streetcar railways owned by the government also exemplified government ownership. Workers did not have "equality of opportunity" to gain employment in these businesses because the spoils system granted employment. Furthermore, workers had no say in the operation of the business. Mills concluded: "So long as the government is administered by a political party controlled by the capitalists, any industries administered by such a government cannot in any way be said to be either examples of Socialism or steps toward Socialism."[23]

Other socialists elaborated on the distinction between government ownership and public ownership. In Manitowoc, Wisconsin, where the citizens elected a socialist mayor in 1905, city attorney R.W. Burke defended the socialist platform plank of municipal ownership against John Schuette, owner of the local privately run electric company. According to a report from a local non-socialist newspaper, Schuette warned that municipally owned utilities gave too much power to the party in office and that it led

[23] Mills qualified this statement three paragraphs later. He said that such programs of government ownership might be a "concession" to socialism by capitalists, thus making the entire socialist programme more viable "in the public mind." Also, there is a problem with terminology. Mills in fact differentiated public ownership from collective ownership. When Mills used the term public ownership it is what I called government ownership because that is what most socialists referred to it as. What I called public ownership Mills in fact called collective ownership. Walter Thomas Mills, *The Struggle for Existence* (Chicago: International School of Social Economy, 1904), 525-526.

citizens to desire more public ownership. Burke, a socialist, it seemed agreed. Burke advocated progressive-style reforms such as civil service, initiative, referendum, and recall, to make government more democratic. That being established, Schuette's objection of too much power to a given party was averted. The people held power in government and a substantial check against corruption. This also demonstrated the socialist belief in reforms such as civil service as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Burked added that municipal ownership was "the natural outgrowth of progress" and that the public should "make haste slowly" toward completion of this idea. In essence, this indicated that municipal ownership was indeed a step toward more public ownership to which Schuette objected. Burke accentuated the point made by his fellow socialists like Mills: public ownership, whether at the municipal or national level, only worked when the people controlled government instead of corporate interests. All else was government ownership and potentially hurt society.[24]

Hillquit as well wrote about the need for socialism to ensure public ownership for the people instead of the interests. He commented that "the movement for the national or municipal ownership of public utilities [around the world] is the most striking illustration of a reform movement which may be revolutionary or retrogressive according to the source from which it emanates." It was a positive reform, or public ownership, when offered by a socialist government or an administration "at least strongly influenced by the working class." Such democratically run utilities could then not help but operate in the interest of the employees and the public. Contrariwise, Hillquit continued, "capitalist governments may utilize [government ownership] for the purpose of strengthening their

[24] *Manitowoc Daily Herald,* January 16, 1907, 1.

grip on the people." He added that "middle-class apostles of municipal or national ownership of the type of Hearst or Bryan... see in it primarily a means of decreasing the taxes of property owners and reducing the rates of freight, transportation and communication for the smaller business man." While this latter critique was not necessarily lascivious in nature, it did not benefit everybody equally. What really irritated Hillquit, and the rest of the socialists for that matter, was that so-called public property in the hands of a government controlled by capitalists was in effect private property. Government controlled such ventures in the name of the people, but in reality it benefited most a small cadre of businessmen who controlled government. Middle-class businessmen may reap some reward and the working-class may even as well, but the majority of fruits of these public enterprises went to the privileged few. It was just masked better than overtly private concerns.[25]

Their despising of government ownership caused socialists to further vilify progressives. Socialists imagined that progressives stole reform elements from the socialist platform. The result, socialists claimed, was an increasingly larger government bureaucracy controlled by capitalists. In short, progressives used socialist ideas to build a type of government ownership, whatever the actual intent of the progressives. Richard Ely noted back in the 1890s that socialist agitation had increased awareness among the general public about the plight of the destitute and began a public discussion on "economic questions from an ethical standpoint." Non-socialists were forced to confront these issues in some meaningful way. Slowly other parties began incorporating socialist reform ideas into their own platforms. Frederick Ruppel made the point more directly in

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[25] Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 286-288.

a debate with his Progressive opponent for a seat in Congress from Ohio. Ruppel said "that there would never have been a National Progressive Party in this country, with its platform of reform, unless Socialists on street corners...had been preaching these things for years." Other socialists argued that the practice of reform parties or traditional political powers stealing ideas from socialists to mute their impact had a strong history in Europe. Hillquit, Walter Thomas Mills, and Ethelwyn Mills all wrote that many of Bismarck's reforms in Germany were inspired by socialists and designed as "sops" to slow the socialist movement. Whether government ownership of railroads or a workmen's compensation law, Bismarck's reforms solidified the position of government and their business allies by using socialist ideas for their own ends. Socialists in the United States feared Roosevelt was another Bismarck, and progressive reformers were his witting or unwitting accomplices.[26]

Debs' speech in Canton, Ohio, on June 16, 1918, laid bare many of the socialist arguments concerning the future of American liberty, especially in regard to the issue of a growing state. When Debs delivered his speech the United States had been actively involved in World War I for over one year. The war not only divided Americans, but socialists the world over. European socialists supported the war begrudgingly so to not lose popular support, while American socialists bitterly fought among themselves over

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[26] Richard Ely, *Socialism: An Examination of its Nature, its Strength and its Weakness, with Suggestions for Social Reform* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1894), 166; Frederick C. Ruppel and August R. Hatton, *Working Class Revolution Versus Capitalist Reform* (Cleveland: International Publishing Co., 1912), 23; Hillquit, *Socialism in Theory and Practice,* 193-194, 265; Walter Thomas Mills, 525; Ethelwyn Mills, *Legislative Program of the Socialist Party* (Chicago: The Socialist Party, 1914), 48.

American involvement.[27] They argued over issues such as the working class going to fight a war for capitalist interests, the potential loss of popular support politically, pacifism as an element of socialism, the high ethnic German element within the party, and strong evidence of German militarism. These issues divided American socialists causing further division between left and right within the party. Furthermore, many of Debs' comrades found themselves suffering at the hands of a powerful state that demanded unity of purpose domestically in order to fight a war overseas. Kate Richards O'Hare languished in prison for her opposition to the war (a fate shared by Debs as a direct result of the Canton speech), the University of Pennsylvania fired economics professor Scott Nearing for teaching Marxist economics, the government indicted Max Eastman for publishing a treasonous newspaper, and all socialist editors found it impossible to send their serials through the mails by decree of the government. Yet for all the gloom surrounding American socialism during the war years there was reason for optimism in the success of the Bolsheviks in Russia. Against this backdrop Debs spoke in Canton.

One recurrent theme Debs preached throughout the Canton speech was the aristocracy of capital. In particular he compared American plutocrats to Prussian junkers, both of whom he held responsible for the war. It was this class of people who started wars and justified such action in the name of liberty and patriotism. In the United States plutocrats attempted to distance themselves from the German aristocracy once the war

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[27] Much has been done on socialism and World War I. Starting points into this literature are: Lipset and Marks, 118-119, 184-192; Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 110-207; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 274-301; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 119-176.

began, even though they entertained German dignitaries on a regular basis before the war. Debs quipped of this hypocrisy: "our junkers...want our eyes on the junkers in Berlin so that we will not see those within our own borders." He further castigated the "Wall Street gentry" for advocating war in the name of democracy while holding a privileged station in society. They were "wrapped...in the cloak of patriotism, religion, or both to deceive and overawe the people," to entice them to support a war that secured the power of plutocracy. Debs no longer believed that even political democracy existed in the United States. He called the exhortations of capitalist leaders that "we live in a great free republic; that out institutions are democratic; that we are a free and self-governing people" an enormous "joke." Debs scolded the capitalist complicity in the war still more:

> Every solitary one of these aristocratic conspirators and would-be murderers claims to be an arch-patriot; every one of them insists that the war is being waged to make the world safe for democracy. What humbug! What rot! What false pretense! These autocrats, these tyrants, these red-handed robbers and murderers, the 'patriots,' while the men who have the courage to stand face to face with them, speak the truth, and fight for their exploited victims – they are the disloyalists and traitors. If this be true, I want to take my place side by side with the traitors in this fight.

Debs unflinchingly reprimanded what he considered to be the diabolical misdeeds of the capitalist class that started the war and dragged American workers to the trenches of Europe. He found it audacious that these American aristocrats justified their actions in terms of freedom. Debs warned his audience that "it is [the American aristocrat] who is a far greater menace to your liberty and your well-being than the Prussian junkers on the other side of the Atlantic ocean [sic]."[28]

Debs almost assuredly had financiers, trust controllers, and landlords in mind when he spoke of the American junkers. However, because he directly compared junkers

[28] Eugene V. Debs, "The Canton Speech," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks,* 245-246, 248, 266.

to plutocrats Debs blamed politicians for the ills of America as well. In the Canton speech he singled-out former President Roosevelt for harsh indictment. Debs mocked Roosevelt's trip to Potsdam some half-dozen years earlier to meet with the "Beast of Berlin" – Kaiser Wilhelm II. While in the company of the Kaiser, Roosevelt marveled at the German army, welcomed the Kaiser's entertainment, and claimed a great deal of respect for the patriarch of the Hohenzollern dynasty. All this occurred while German socialists remained incarcerated in the Kaiser's jails for advocating democracy in the face of Old World despotism. In regard to this circumstance Debs asked: "If Theodore Roosevelt is the great champion of democracy – the arch foe of autocracy, what business had he as the guest of honor to the Kaiser?" The answer for Debs was none, thus invalidating Roosevelt's claim that he was "friend of the common people and the champion of democracy." Debs added that he found it "rather queer" that a few years later the former president called on millions of American men to wage war in Europe against his "former friend and pal," while socialists who all along fought against the tyranny of the Kaiser were dubbed traitors as compared to the supposed patriotism of Roosevelt. The point here was not to completely equate Roosevelt and the Kaiser; rather, it was to demonstrate that the type of ancien regime despotism that manifested itself in the Kaiser's rule and was despised by Americans existed to a great degree within their own borders. Just as the Kaiser tolerated no dissension to his autocratic rule at the bequest of the junkers, the same occurred in the United States. The government of the capitalists crushed opposition, only they did so behind a mask of democracy. Debs soon felt the hand of government intolerance after he made his plea for true democracy.[29]

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[29] Ibid., 243-244.

In the middle of his remarks against the American junkers and their unjust war, Debs took time to pay homage to the workers of Russia who threw off centuries of Tsarist rule and stood at the gates of true democracy. Debs spoke with great esteem for the effort and courage of his Russian comrades as they "laid the foundation of the first real democracy that ever drew the breath of life in this world." The Russians were the "quintessence of the dawning freedom" because their "very first act...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 Russian people asked both sides in the Great War to join them in laying down their arms, the belligerents refused and chose instead to charge the Russians with cowardice and treachery. Debs scolded world leaders for missing "the supreme opportunity to strike the blow to make the world safe for democracy." For Debs this was all the evidence he needed to confirm his belief that the war was fought for a privileged few by the masses. It obviously was not about democracy, according to Debs, it was about money. Debs lauded Lenin and Trotsky specifically for saving the lives of millions of Russian soldiers and for rescuing Russia from the "appalling state of affairs the Czar and his rotten bureaucracy" had created. Debs looked to Russia with a great deal of optimism. He believed the seeds of democracy had been sown. The Bolsheviks slew autocracy and the bureaucratic mechanism that made it run. He of course was wrong. The Soviet Union became the type of government ownership without democracy that American socialists loathed.[30]

Debs hinted that some good might come out of the war experience as the United States was forced to experiment with more industries being controlled by government.

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[30] Ibid, 253-254.

The Indiana socialist noted that government took control of railroads for "more effective prosecution of the war." Privately run railroads failed to fulfill the needs of government during wartime. They needed something more efficient so the government ran it themselves. As part of the endeavor, McAdoo fired "all the high-salaried presidents and supernumeraries." Debs argued that this proved what socialists knew all along: publicly held firms were run more efficiently than private and business leaders were unnecessary in the operation of industry. This foray into government ownership by no means convinced Debs that socialism was on the horizon for the United States. As evidence he cited government warnings about food and coal shortages, yet 52 per cent of America's arable land was being held out of usage and the very land he stood upon covered tons of coal. The shortage emanated from private interests wanting to keep production low in order to secure a higher price. Over one half million American coal miners failed to find enough work, yet the coal was not mined. If the government truly worked on behalf of the people the miners would mine, the land would be planted, and profits would not be a concern. Instead, the government of the privileged controlled the economy for their own self-interest while workers suffered at home or died knee-deep in filth across the Atlantic.[31]

In many respects Debs' remarks signaled an end of an era. The United States passed from a youthful nation that cherished republican (or libertarian) ideals on both left and right, the difference being whether capitalism fit into the outlook. The right favored individual license with no government interference while socialists advocated public

[31] Ibid., 264-268.

ownership as a benign facilitator of political and economic progress. In place of these libertine outlooks emerged a more dominant state. State capitalism of the right secured dominance, influenced by any number of progressive-style reform movements. The critique on the left changed from a republican-based message to a Communist-based state socialism modeled on the Soviet Union. In the Canton Speech Debs remained his ever-optimistic self. He still held a strong belief in the people and the Russian Revolution seemed a fervent example of the viability of collectivism. Still, Debs' comments seemed an epitaph to American democracy as he understood it. The crisis of democracy that Treadwell Cleveland wrote about had passed, only democracy was the casualty. In September 1918, Debs addressed a jury of the people on the charges that he violated the Espionage Act that had been created by the government to stifle dissension during the war. In his plea to the jury, Debs evoked memories of the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, the war to end slavery, and the principles of freedom. He remarked that all people who fought against privileged classes were deemed treasonous, ridiculed, and silenced by authorities. Yet the march of human liberty continued against these forces. Debs imagined himself part of this tradition. Debs ended his address to the jury as follows:

> Gentlemen, I am the smallest part of this trial. I have lived long enough to realize 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 the court, though you may not be conscious of it. American institutions are on trial here before a court of American citizens. The future will render the final verdict.[32]

[32] Eugene V. Debs, "Address to the Jury," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks,* 281.

ownership as a benign facilitator of political and economic progress. In place of these libertine outlooks emerged a more dominant state. State capitalism of the right secured dominance, influenced by any number of progressive-style reform movements. The critique on the left changed from a republican-based message to a Communist-based state socialism modeled on the Soviet Union. In the Canton Speech Debs remained his ever-optimistic self. He still held a strong belief in the people and the Russian Revolution seemed a fervent example of the viability of collectivism. Still, Debs' comments seemed an epitaph to American democracy as he understood it. The crisis of democracy that Treadwell Cleveland wrote about had passed, only democracy was the casualty. In September 1918, Debs addressed a jury of the people on the charges that he violated the Espionage Act that had been created by the government to stifle dissension during the war. In his plea to the jury, Debs evoked memories of the Founding Fathers, the Constitution, the war to end slavery, and the principles of freedom. He remarked that all people who fought against privileged classes were deemed treasonous, ridiculed, and silenced by authorities. Yet the march of human liberty continued against these forces. Debs imagined himself part of this tradition. Debs ended his address to the jury as follows:

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[32] Eugene V. Debs, "Address to the Jury," in *Eugene V. Debs Speaks,* 281.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Who were the socialists? In this dissertation the argument has been made that socialists were modernized republicans who developed a moral critique of capitalist America expressed in a Marxist idiom. Whether analyzing past, present, or future, socialists continually espoused the themes of independence, democracy, virtuous individualism, and community. They held these concepts as ideals to be achieved, however they may have differed over tactics. This characterization differed from earlier scholarly treatments that tended to focus on what a particular group of socialists or specific individuals lacked. For example, studies of socialist administrations in cities typically depicted socialists as reformers, while studies of agrarian socialism struggled to say that farmers were at least as radical as socialists in cities. Intellectual studies demonstrated how Darwinism, pragmatism, or even republicanism corrupted the Marxism of American socialists. Specific socialists such as Debs, Hillquit, and Berger, all came across as not living up to the socialist ideal. Nobody, it seemed, was truly socialist. This begged the question of how those people managed to come together at all under a banner of socialism.

Historians have been posing the wrong questions and have thus obscured the meaning of socialism. In their pursuit of a usable past for themselves, radical historians of American socialism have sought to find out what went wrong within the movement at

the beginning of the twentieth century and apply lessons learned to their own movement. The quest of radical historians has been based on an assumed Marxism minimum for the Debsian Era socialists. Scholars attempted in different ways to find out why socialism failed in the United States by understanding what Debsian Era socialists got right and wrong in their Marxism. These historians in effect described the failings of Marxism, not American socialism. The failure of socialism was a self-fulfilling prophecy. After assuming the fatalistic ideology of Marxism as the basis of socialism, historians then inquired why their fate never materialized. This was the wrong question to ask because it missed the essence of American socialism, it marginalized the movement as a historic curiosity by focusing on its supposed failure, and it assumed Marxism as the core ideology of socialism. The more important question to ask – and the one asked at the end of this dissertation – was about the legacy of the socialist movement in twentieth century America.

My intention in this dissertation was not to show that socialism succeeded. However, dismissing socialism as an abject failure made socialists more into historical curiosities than important players in the development of American society. The legacy of socialism was one of the role of government in the management of society. For socialists, government was not supposed to be large, coercive, and prone to corruption. There were no interest groups in socialist society from whence corruption could emanate. Government was a benign facilitator of industry for the benefit of society. The people, through government, shared in the wonderful productive capacity of modern society. This outlook was very positive in nature. People were good. Good people did not corrupt government. That only happened when a competitive ethic created classes of

interest and put self interest above that of the community. In socialist society government did indeed have great power. But the source of that power was even greater – the people. The people could not corrupt their own government. It was only when special interests operated government for their own advantage that misery ensued. Regrettably, that was what happened during the twentieth century and that was not socialism or even socialistic. Progressive reformers, New Dealers, liberals of various kinds, and even conservatives today all manipulated government to be the incredibly large and controlling entity that it is today. Whatever their motives – mostly sincere but sometime diabolical – government has become an agency to curtail the abuses of capitalist society without destroying the competitive ethic of individual license that breathes life into it. This was the unfortunate legacy of socialism. Reformers used socialist means for liberal ends and created plutocracy to an extent that Debs and his comrades could have barely imagined. The significant leftist challenge offered by the socialists before World War I made reform on the part of capital more immediate. The only blueprint for change was collectivism. Liberals manipulated it – with the consent of the people – to the advantage of capital.

The politicians of the twentieth century should not be seen as acting solely in a despicable manner in the interest of business. Much legislation was passed for the benefit of all, even if it did not tear down capitalism. Certainly working in a coal mine is much safer in 2004 than 1904. Over the last century real income has risen in most industries, the work week has shortened, and minorities have access to more jobs. But this "progress" should not blind us to the continuing problems of the last century: an army of destitute homeless people, the necessity of unemployment to maintain capitalist

society, lack of certainty in continued employment, government operating primarily for business interests, the continued dual dependency of most women, and many more. The biggest failure of socialism is that a viable movement no longer exists to express the argument that capitalism exists as the root of these problems. There is no organized conscience on the left to push even modest reforms forward. The republican spirit of 1776 and 1912 has all but disappeared, only expressed in part by various environment, gender, and race based political parties. This was not a failure of the Debsian Era socialists, but of latter day radicals who put too much stock in the non-socialist Soviet Union or gave up in despair. This also speaks to the success of capital to effectively dominate what is seen as good and the American way.

Brian Lloyd began his book with a history lesson that was easily forgotten. He told the story of when the leaders of Europe met in Vienna in 1814-1815 they believed they had crushed the republican spirit that grew out of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Code. European heads of state worked feverishly to reestablish the old guard. The previous twenty-five years of violence, demands to crush the old order, and cries of liberty were whisked away to St. Helena along with Napoleon as the Bourbon monarch was restored to the French throne. It seemed the old guard won. Of course, they had not. The ideals of liberty promoted by the Estates General slowly gained ascendance across Europe throughout the nineteenth century, even if they took on another sinister look when the aristocracy of capital developed alongside the factory and manipulated government for their own ends. The point of the story was that the ideals of republicanism did not materialize quickly or with any certainty. The gigantic setback of 1815 was no different for the prospects of republicanism, Lloyd hoped, than World War I

or the collapse of the Soviet Union for the prospects of socialism. Lloyd maintained that the inevitable triumph of socialism happened after many ebbs and flows. Lloyd probably put too much faith in Marx and inevitability. For the final triumph to come, it seems to me, the voices of dissent must be heard again. The hegemonic grip of capital must be loosened by radicals who object to the human misery created by the system and offer solutions that are understandable and actually improve society.

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Abbreviations

RPL	*Radical Pamphlet Literature: A Collection from the Tamiment Library 1817 (1900-1945) 1970* – microfilm collection
SCTL	*Socialist Collections in the Tamiment Library New York University* – microfilm collection
SPAP	*Socialist Party of America Papers, 1897-1963* – microfilm collection

VITA (2)

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