SOCIALIST RULE

IN

MILWAUKEE, 1910-1912

by

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PREFACE

The Socialist movement in the United States experienced its greatest momentum during the Progressive Era when Americans were just beginning to regulate the capitalistic system. Consequently ardent Socialist leaders of the period expected that they might see their ideology effected within their own life span. Socialists advertised their patience, however; and their patience was bolstered by the belief that socialism was inevitable. Early Socialists could never have foreseen how a world war and a New Deal would "steal the thunder" from their own movement.

Since socialism was never accepted to any large degree in the United States, its existence rested within the minds of its leaders, and its study has been characterized by the intellectual approach. The times when Socialists actually won control of governments were few. But a study of these might serve to explain what socialism in America has meant. One of these instances occurred in Milwaukee during the years 1910-1912. During those two years Milwaukee's Socialists ended much of the corruption which had infested local government and they established a tradition of municipal honesty and efficiency which would characterize the city for years to come.

It would seem that the Socialists suffered defeat not because of their honesty or energy but rather because of their adherence to an ideology which became repugnant to the electorate. A common viewpoint holds that Socialists and Progressives worked hand-in-hand for change, the only difference between the two being that the Socialists believed in municipal

ownership while the Progressives did not. In a sense, this thesis attempts to repudiate that view. The great difference between Socialists and Progressives is illustrated by the former's disdain for Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and the latter's role in defeating socialism in Milwaukee in 1912. The Socialist administration was defeated precisely because its two-year term dispelled the idea that Socialists were simply radical reformers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

MILWAUKEE'S SOCIALISM

In a three-party race on April 2, 1910, the Social Democrats swept the city offices and Emil Seidel became the first Socialist mayor of a major American city. Even more startling, the Socialists elected twenty-one of the twenty-five aldermen. Victor L. Berger won election as alderman-at-large. In the fall elections of 1910, the Socialists captured control of the county board of supervisors, took twelve of the state assembly seats and two out of three state senatorships, and elected Victor L. Berger first Socialist member of the United States House of Representatives. These victories climaxed thirteen years of political efforts on the part of Milwaukee's Socialists. The party first appeared in the city in 1897 when the national organization was known as the Social Democratic Party. The first party candidate for mayor drew only 2,414 votes in 1898. By 1902 the vote increased close to 8,500. In 1904 the Social Democrats forced investigations of graft which implicated the Democratic administration -- and the party vote that year rose to 15,056. In each municipal election thereafter the Socialist Party's vote grew until in 1910, with 27,608, it constituted the plurality.

One man was instrumental in guiding Milwaukee's Socialists through those early years. Victor Louis Berger was born at Nieder-Rebach, Austria-Hungary, on February 28, 1860. He resided in that part of Europe until family financial reverses forced him to migrate to America. His departure prevented him from receiving degrees from the universities of Budapest and

Vienna. After his arrival in Milwaukee about 1881, he obtained a position teaching German in the public schools. By 1892 he had turned to journalism and politics. In that year he took over Paul Grottkau's Arbeiter Zeitung and renamed it the Wisconsin Vorwarts until 1904. From November, 1901 to May, 1902, Berger and A.S. Edwards edited the Social Democratic Herald, founded in 1898. From 1902 to 1913, Berger and Frederic Heath were its editors. The most influential paper published by Berger was the Milwaukee Leader which he started December 4, 1911. He continued as its editor and publisher until his death in August, 1929. He was most responsible for establishing the Socialist Party nationally, and he always sat on its National Executive Committee.[1]

A Stalwart Republican contemporary described Berger as a capable, intelligent man but one who was completely devoid of feeling for others. To a casual observer, especially to a native American, Victor Berger might very well have possessed little appeal. He was portly in bearing, ponderous in writing style, and dogmatically self-assured of his politics. Milwaukeeans casually knew that he ruled the inner circles of the Socialist organization, and his enemies compared his position to that of President Porfirio Diaz of Mexico. But Socialists themselves viewed Berger quite sympathetically. While some Milwaukeeans called him vain, his comrades thought of him as a daring leader fighting in the face of disadvantage; what others considered in him as ambition was interpreted by his associates as steadfast determinedness against a corrupt system. A month before the spring election of 1910, Berger's friends gave him a spontaneous gesture of affection and appreciation. February 28th was his 50th birthday, and the middle-aged work horse of socialism was spending the evening in a

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[1]Social Democratic Party, Vest Pocket Manual, Fall Campaign, 1912 (Milwaukee: County Campaign Committee of the Social Democratic Party of Milwaukee County, 1912), p. 17.

typical manner -- in this case, sitting in his den assiduously translating the party platform into German. Emil Seidel, chairman of the occasion, guided a group of party members to the side of the house and led a serenade. Berger was taken completely by surprise. The jovial group trundled off to Pabst Park where a large crowd was gathered, and Seidel presented the First Socialist of Milwaukee with a huge sheaf of carnations (bought by the party's central committee). Speeches and songs followed into the night.[2]

No man better spoke for the Milwaukee brand of socialism than Victor Berger. His hand penned extensive political tracts which appeared weekly on the front page of Milwaukee's Social Democratic Herald. Sometimes his columns furiously lashed against the evils of modern society which he considered as extensions of capitalism. Private ownership of the trusts, the practices of the street railway company, the conditions of life imposed upon workingmen and all the other degradations which Berger saw as extensions of capitalism were exposed. Not infrequently he devoted his energies to analyzing the nature of socialism itself. His thoughts in this regard best indicate how Milwaukee's Socialists differed from their comrades in other areas of the country.

At a time much later than the Seidel administration, Morris Hillquit, the Socialist leader from New York, referred to his Milwaukee friends as "practical" men "who believe in building modern sewers and showing the results right away."[3] Although Berger would not have liked the resultant

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[2]Ibid.; Frederick W. von Cotzhausen, Wisconsin's Social Democracy (Milwaukee, 1917), p. 80; Social Democratic Herald, March 5, 1910, p. 6.

[3]David A. Shannon, The Socialist Party of America: A History (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 217.

term of "sewer-Socialist," he never apologized for espousing practical programs. In his mind solid practical achievement never precluded revolutionary goals. Revolution had to be historical. If it was not, it was vulgar. In America it could not countenance dynamite or the riot as long as there was the ballot. Milwaukee Socialists carefully avoided identifying themselves with the firebrand types that were continually crossing over the Atlantic from Europe. In 1893 Daniel De Leon could not establish a branch of his Socialist Labor Party in Milwaukee because the city comrades felt that his organization smacked of the foreign and the (vulgar) revolutionary. Similarly Berger refused to endorse the formation of the International Workers of the World since that movement was opposed by the labor organizations whom he needed for support. A preface remark to the party platform which appeared in the first issue of the Vorwärts sums up the reason why Berger held to this practical and revisionist mentality: ". . . if you demand too much at one time you are likely to get nothing . . . ."[4]

Just as Berger's gradualist socialism was actually revolutionary in the long run, his tactics involved direct language, vituperative attacks and recommendations that some non-Socialists considered inflammatory. His suggestion which caused him the most notoriety was printed in the July 31, 1909 issue of the Social Democratic Herald. In forceful language he advised all workingmen of the possible necessity of backing up their vote with armed force. This "bullets and ballots" declaration branded Berger as an anarchist and, as what he would call, a vulgar revolutionist. In a rejoinder to the numerous attacks on his "bullets and ballots" article, Berger attributed himself the most traditional American in Milwaukee.

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[4]Marvin Wachman, History of the Social Democratic Party of Milwaukee: 1897-1910 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1945), pp. 10, 61; Thomas W. Gavett, Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee (Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 102-104.

After all, he said, did not the founding fathers preach that an armed people has always been a free people? Did they not incorporate a provision for a militia in the Bill of Rights? Surely Washington and Jefferson, men shaped by the values of the eighteenth century, had no conception of plutocracy or the proletariat. If they walked the earth more than a century later, the fathers would have rewritten the Bill of Rights to read "armed workingmen" instead of "militia." Berger carefully assured the public that the ballot was certainly more welcome than the bullet. Bloody revolutions would never exist if a desirable alternative was possible. The alternatives, seen by a few perceptive individuals, had been so consistently disregarded by great decision-makers that Berger realistically accepted violence as a possibility. "Evolution by right reason was not to be, because the ultra-conservatives would not listen on one side and the ultra-radicals on the other would have none of it."[5]

By placing himself somewhere in the middle of the radical spectrum, Berger tried to soften the impact of his revolutionary goals. In order to collect as many votes as possible in Milwaukee he sometimes appeared to compromise the issues to a degree which infuriated more doctrinaire party members outside the city limits. For example, he appealed to the Milwaukee business community a few days prior to the 1910 spring elections in a manner that was almost apologetic. Speaking to the majority of well-meaning capitalists, Berger said that only <u>some</u> members of big business were afraid of the Social Democratic Party -- only the "skinners and fleecers of labor . . . . " But to the other businessmen, he said that it must be clear that capitalism cannot be destroyed in Milwaukee alone, nor in Wisconsin alone. And when it is destroyed it will go gradually -- and

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[5]Victor L. Berger, <u>Berger's Broadsides</u> (Milwaukee: Social Democratic Publishing Co., 1912), pp. 205-208, 229-234.

even then, there will be remnants of it such as the feudal remnants that exist. Until the time when most of the people view capitalism as an outmoded institution, the Socialists "have no right to force [their] opinions upon an unwilling majority."[6]

Solidarity was characteristic of the Socialist organization and thinking. Better relations between Socialists and non-Socialists usually indicated a change of circumstance rather than of ideology. The Socialist victory in April, 1910 constituted a most significant change of circumstance, and the party leaders noticeably ceased in their efforts to placate big business or the middle class. Although the new administration won by only a plurality vote, Berger and others confidently believed that the irrepressible logic of history precluded future Socialist defeats. Consequently, there was no more explaining how harmless and distant socialism really was. There was no more bending over backward to demonstrate how red-blooded American socialism could be. Socialism had enveloped Milwaukee and it was there to stay. Berger plainly told the city that the primary work of socialism was to destroy capitalism. The workers of the world who struggle for this goal are real Socialists, he said, and anyone in the party for other reasons might as well leave. The former uneasiness over vote-getting gave way to an unbounded optimism which seemed to eschew hangers-on and sympathizers. In advocating a clean house, Berger appealed to the "24,000" Socialist voters in Milwaukee County. Since the support for Emil Seidel was not much more than that -- only 27,608 -- Berger felt that the party could afford to lose the sympathetic vote. The new mayor was equally indisposed to worry over the political future. Two months after winning the election, he too explained that the goal of socialism had always been

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[6] Herald, Dec. 3, 1910, p. 1; ibid., June 3, 1911, p. 4; Berger, pp. 3-6.

and would always be government ownership of the monopolies. Between the capitalist and the workingman, he said, stood the middle class from time to time alternating its alignment. No matter, said Seidel confidently: "You can buy us. We have a price. But the price that we ask is the whole system."[7]

The antipathy of American Socialists toward solving social ills by the regulation of capitalism derived both from Marx's idea of historical inevitability and also from hard practical experience. At the Grand Avenue Congregational Church in Milwaukee, Eugene V. Debs once said that Americans had lived in a "tramp" era since 1873: one citizen possessed a billion dollars, a few had a million, and the rest lived like tramps. Efforts toward regulation of capitalism had not changed things. By 1910 Berger expressed thorough dissatisfaction with regulation as a means to a better society. The Social Democrats had worked within the system for many years with only minimal results. Corruption still existed. The street car company still hedged regulatory laws and continued to kill and maim people on the public avenues. Years of effort had brought no reduction in street car fares. Legal delays allowed the gas company to continue charging the public exorbitant rates. The Standard Oil trust had been broken up in 1911, but Socialists noted that the process took four and one-half years and a half-million words of testimony. After all that work there were yet 10,000 other interstate combinations to be regulated.[8]

More than fare rates and street car conditions were at stake.

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[7] Herald, Dec. 3, 1910, p. 1; ibid., June 3, 1911, p. 4.

[8] The Milwaukee Journal, Oct. 7, 1910, p. 16; Daniel W. Hoan, The Failure of Regulation, a pamphlet published by the Socialist Party of the United States, 1914. A copy is located in the Hoan Pamphlet Collection in the Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Herald, Jan. 29, 1910, p. 1.

Socialists viewed capitalism as an institution which defiled the whole fabric of society, especially politics. Berger regarded Messrs. Gaynor, Strong, Low, and Hewitt as honest mayors of New York City who had become corrupted because they were forced to work with either Tammany Hall or the reformers which had both become identified with the capitalist system. At the local level Berger could point to an assortment of political evils. Charles A. McGee, for example, running for district attorney in 1910 on the Republican ticket, told the Grocer's Association that if elected he would prosecute peddlers in order to drive them out of business. He told the peddlers that they would not be arrested if found without a license providing that they voted for him. Men like McGee usually incurred no tremendous personal wrath from the Socialists. They believed that men like McGee were forced into deceit by the capitalist system. All men, not only politicians, were affected by capitalism. Criminals, according to the Socialists, were the product of the economic system; and crime would disappear as soon as the cooperative commonwealth replaced capitalism. Mayor Seidel regarded criminals as hospital patients who suffered from a disease foisted on them by society. Socialists liked to present various clergymen who stood in agreement, and Rev. Hiram F. Fairbanks was quoted as despairing over Christian education as a remedy for rising immorality. There has been Christian education for two thousand years, he said, but it had not solved the problem of poor wages which forced unmarried couples to live together. Thus even God in heaven was powerless as long as capitalism prevailed![9]

Corruption, crime, and immorality all were supposedly derived from

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[9]Herald, June 18, 1910, pp. 2, 6; ibid., Jan. 29, 1910, p. 1; ibid., Nov. 5, 1910, p. 7; Journal, Sept. 30, 1910, p. 5; The Milwaukee Leader, Jan. 25, 1912, p. 11.

capitalism. Besides these general social ills, the Socialists railed against one specific institution which was a direct outgrowth of capitalism and which controlled the everyday lives of millions of workers. The private ownership of trusts constituted the most pressing threat against the well-being of most people. The American economic system had advanced to a stage where a few interests controlled the basic industries. The resulting lack of competition allowed a few imaginative captains of industry to improve production methods and increase efficiency to an unthought-of degree. Production and high finance expanded hand in hand. Because of their natural drive for unlimited expansion, the trusts tended to direct profits into investments instead of sharing them with the laboring class. It truly seemed as if Marx's dire prediction were coming true: while the methods of production created an ever increasingly richer country, the daily fare of the laborer worsened.

The Milwaukee Socialists constantly pointed to the trusts as the single cause of the high cost of living. The Herald quoted O.C. Barber, multimillionare founder of the Diamond Match Company, as saying that living costs were high because the railroads extorted from the people, the trusts extorted from them, and the politicians hoodwinked them. There was no denying that the average man had a tough time in making ends meet. The Milwaukee Republican county chairman attributed the 1910 Socialist victory to this condition. Carl Sandburg, who in 1910 was an active Socialist and personal secretary to Mayor Seidel, estimated the average annual wage of the American worker to be $432.20 as compared with the $700 which a family needed for a comfortable living. The control of the trusts accentuated the precariousness of the average man's financial condition, for the trusts decided how much people were to pay for bread, for clothes, for rent, and every other necessity. And when it looked as if some kind

of legislation might alleviate the situation, the lobbying arm of the trusts rose to the occasion. The Socialists resented the committees of the Merchants and Manufacturers Association exerting powerful lobbies against child labor laws, home rule, and laws for protection of life and limb in factories.[10]

However much the Socialists may have resented the baneful effects of trusts, Berger acknowledged the need for them. Following Marx closely on this matter, Berger claimed that trusts were historically meant to monopolize production. Complete monopolies had their usefulness. Because they produced cheaply and avoided waste, they constituted the naturally evolved product of industry. To attempt to reverse this process by re-introducing competition into business, said Berger, would not only benefit no one but would also be well-nigh impossible. "We might just as well try to stop the Mississippi river from flowing to the sea and make it dissolve again into its component parts, -- into the Ohio, the Missouri, the Wisconsin, the Illinois, the Yellowstone, etc. The Mississippi would have to flow backward and uphill to do that."[11] In their inexorable march toward efficiency, the trusts and combinations would consolidate and become increasingly more valuable to their owners. Berger, like Marx, looked forward to the day when a small coterie of industrialists would confront an overwhelming army of righteous workers who would take control of the already perfected economic machine.

Berger's approach differed drastically from the Progressives' who preferred regulation rather than government ownership of trusts. Of course Berger equated this approach to reversing the flow of the Mississippi.

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[10] Herald, Feb. 5, 1910, p. 1; ibid., Oct. 22, 1910, p. 2; ibid., April 23, 1910, p. 6; Leader, Jan. 25, 1912, p. 1.

[11] Herald, Nov. 4, 1911, p. 1.

He warned that it could not succeed and would only lead to panics and ruin. "So much for the Taft-Wickersham-Bryan-Stanley idea of trust legislation." In place of the Sherman Act, Berger would have preferred government ownership of trusts when they owned, directly or indirectly, over 60% of the output of any industry. Accordingly he introduced such a bill into Congress on December 4, 1911. On the local scene the Socialist majority in the common council passed and sent a resolution to the President, the House of Representatives and the Senate of the United States which strongly condemned the opprobrious conditions imposed by trusts and which called for Congress "to proceed to take such steps and provide for such measures, as may be designed to bring under control and eventually into the possession of the people of the United States of America, through their government, all the trusts that are in control of the means, whereby the people must subsist."[12]

In Milwaukee the obvious effects of trusts were to be found in the practices of the telegraph company, the street car company, the electric light plant and the gas works -- all of which formed a part of the North American Securities trust. The Milwaukee Social Democratic city platform for 1910 began by identifying the trust question as the greatest problem in the United States. As much as the Socialists would like to have eliminated this greatest of all problems, they realized that the solution lay in the distant future. In the meantime they offered the voters such reforms as would eliminate the most pressing social evils. Consequently, the efforts of the Social Democratic Party in Milwaukee, from its inception through its entire history, concentrated mostly on solving the immediate needs of the community. In 1898, even before the Social Democracy held its first national convention, the Milwaukee branch offered a spring platform

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[12] Ibid.; a typescript of the resolution may be found in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

listing ten demands which indicated the practical nature of the party's concerns: abolition of the contract system for public works (and the eight-hour day), a rightful share of corporation profits, work for the unemployed, free legal services for the poor, free medical services, public baths and street closets, playgrounds, free school books, monthly winter concerts, and compulsory half-day holidays during elections. The 1902 platform concerned itself with the evils attending the abuse of local utility franchises. The 1910 platform, on which stood the victorious Socialist candidates, reflected even more practical considerations than any previous pledge. In addition to the already-mentioned planks, the 1910 platform included a call for city-owned public slaughterhouses, a municipal stone quarry, a municipal wood and coal yard, a municipal ice plant, suppression of prostitution, municipal plumbing, scientific disposal of garbage instead of lake dumping, school halls used for various public meetings, and union wages for all city employees. Two weeks after the publication of the 1910 platform, an article in the Herald listed the more practical and more easily obtainable goals as the "immediate benefits" of a Social Democratic administration. The identification of the Social Democratic Party with the most pressing needs of the majority of people is expressed by the preface to the 1910 platform:

> The Social Democratic party is the American political expression of the international movement of the modern working class for better food, better houses, sufficient sleep, more leisure, more education and more culture.[13]

From its inception Social Democracy in Milwaukee sheered off the tough layer of uncompromising dogmatism that was so easily worn by party members elsewhere. With Victor Berger's policy of gradualism, Milwaukeeans viewed the cooperative commonwealth steadfastly, but at a distance, as if

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[13] Wachman, pp. 22, 42, 69; Herald, March 15, 1910, pp. 1, 3; ibid., April 2, 1910, p. 4; ibid., June 4, 1910, p. 1.

it were seen through a tightly secured, sharply focused telescope. Because of its moderation, the Seidel administration quite easily satisfied itself with spending an enormous amount of energy pursuing measures that were not distinctly socialistic. In this respect the Socialists differed little from the progressive, reform-minded elements of society that became so powerful during the first years of the twentieth century as to divide the Republican Party. By claiming many of the same immediate goals, the Social Democratic Party and the Progressives established between themselves a relationship which would significantly influence the course of the Seidel administration and, in the end, contribute to the downfall of the Socialists in Milwaukee.

CHAPTER II

REACHING FOR THE VOTE

The cooperative commonwealth of Socialist ideology was not designed to accommodate big businessmen, the petty bourgeois class, or the private ownership of the means of production. It provided a Marxian heaven on earth for workingmen only. Consequently the Socialist Party felt entitled to lay a special claim to the workingman's vote during the interim period when the cooperative commonwealth remained in the future. The workingman, however, tended to vote for other candidates. The Socialists won the labor vote only by competing first with the Populists and then the unions.

Labor unions grew rapidly in Milwaukee from 1900 to 1907. During these seven years membership swelled to 13,000 men organized under sixty locals. The financial panic of 1907 cut the membership rolls by half, but the Federated Trades Council, the executive agency of the American Federation of Labor, remained intact. By 1910 the unions regained the majority of its lost members. By 1916 industries boomed due to wartime demands. If the Socialists desired the workingman's vote, they had to contend with the highly organized machinery that labor was fast acquiring. Carl Sandburg recognized the situation in 1903 when he wrote an article in the Social Democratic Herald which accused capitalists of blindness toward the basic needs of the working class. Power, he said, is the only weapon capitalists recognize; and labor possessed power in its fighting unity. During the 1900 elections the Milwaukee Socialists tried to tap some of this power by posing the question of why one part of the working class should vote against

the other. The appeal failed. The vote for Frederic Heath, Socialist candidate for mayor, reached only 2,584.[14]

The absolute need to fuse the causes of socialism and labor led Berger to develop his "Wisconsin Idea" of political symbiosis. He called for a two-armed labor movement: an economic trade unionism and a political Socialist Party. He denied any intention of molding the trade union into a political machine or twisting the Socialist Party into a trade union. However he sought out every possible interchange between the two by having Socialists become union members and union members joining the Socialist Party. Most Socialist Party members would have had to make no personal concession by joining the unions if they had not done so already. Socialists were already workingmen in fact. It is true that critics caused some embarrassment by pointing to the high percentage of educated professional men who occuppied the top positions in the Socialist Party around the country. Victor Berger, for example, was no workingman. Just about every other Milwaukee Socialist, however, held no white collar job. Daniel Hoan, the city attorney during the Seidel administration who ran for office against his wishes because he was the only decent lawyer in the party, was an exception. Out of 447 membership applications to the (Milwaukee) County Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party filed the year immediately following Seidel's term, only 22 came from people in non-workingmen's occupations, and many of these were clerks.[15]

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[14] Theodore Mueller, "The Milwaukee Labor Movement," a typescript in possession of the Milwaukee County Historical Society; Wachman, pp. 34-36; Herald, Sept. 3, 1902, p. 3.

[15] Herald, Feb. 5, 1910, p. 2; mimeographed membership reports may be found in the Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee Historical Society. The year following Seidel's administration better indicates the type of membership applicants since the Socialists regarded many of those hopeful of party membership from 1910-1912 as having questionable motives.

The question was not how to persuade Socialists to join the unions, but rather how to convince more union members to become Socialists.

In 1893 the Socialists made their first attempt to merge with the labor unions. In October of that year Milwaukee Socialists, then organized under the name "Socialist Labor Party," formed a cooperative ticket with the People's Party and the Federated Trades Council to do battle in the approaching municipal campaign. Because the resultant ticket leaned heavily towards Socialist principles, Berger found that he had to preach to the labor contingent who then favored populism. As the competition for the labor vote continued into the late 1890's, Berger and company proved to be the victors. By 1900 the Socialists almost completely controlled the Federated Trades Council. In 1901, the F.T.C. made the Social Democratic Herald its official organ, and a special labor committee reported that various union groups "recognized the Social Democratic party as the Union Labor party." The two organizations meshed so well that their platforms closely resembled each other. Even the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor included in its platform the Socialistic plank of collective ownership of the means of production. By 1910 the Social Democratic Party had succeeded in completely dominating the Federated Trades Council. Although the two organizations never fused, their leadership was almost identical. The men who ran the F.T.C. were also important in the Social Democratic Party. Brisbane Hall served as the headquarters for the Social Democratic party, and it housed the offices of trade union locals. The Social Democratic Herald preached the ideology of the red flag, and it listed activities of 130 unions around the city. Four top-ranking officers of the Wisconsin Federation of Labor were also Milwaukee Social Democrats. In no other city did socialism and the labor movement ally so closely. By dominating the union organization, the Socialists created a firm basis

of operation and a theretofore unsurpassed vote potential.[16]

Labor union support for the Socialists went far below surface recommendation. The practical ways in which labor subsidized socialism largely accounts for the Social Democratic Party's political success. For example, the F.T.C. established funds for lectures by Socialist state legislators who needed the money to complement their scant salary. The F.T.C. loaned the Herald $600 in 1908, $500 in 1909 and, at the beginning of 1910, owned shares of the Social Democratic Publishing Company. Later in 1910 the unions underwrote the bonds of the Socialist administration in order to dispel rumors of a collapse of the city's credit. During the next year, the F.T.C. gave vigorous support when the Socialists faced a political crisis. A new law eliminating parties from the election of judges and members of the school board had seriously weakened the Socialists' strength. The F.T.C. established a committee of fifteen to seek union support for the Social Democrats who were running for seats on the bench and school board. The recording secretary stood up and said: "They passed the nonpartisan bill, but we will get around it by having the committee talk at the union meetings."[17]

The relationship between labor and the Socialists was reciprocal. Even before Seidel was inaugurated, the disciplined and persistent Socialist minority in the common council guided to passage a bill favoring the unions. It was based on the idea that the trades unions acted as city agents and furthered the cause of the workingman whether he be a union man or not. Therefore in all cases where the city undertook work, directly or by contract, through the board of public works or any other department,

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[16]Wachman, pp. 11, 13, 37-40; Herald, Feb. 5, 1910, p. 5; ibid., June 10, 1911, p. 10.

[17]Gavett, pp. 98-99; Journal, March 16, 1911, p. 4.

organized labor was given the preference. The bill passed on January 31, 1910. A few months later the elected Socialists made the city officially support organized labor and the working class. All but two or three of the majority Social Democratic aldermen were union men. The Herald continued to publish union activities and, in one notable case, vigorously supported the long and bitter strike conducted by the International Seamans Union of America. In the notice published by the Herald, the first word demonstrated how intimately Socialists and unionists regarded each other:

> Comrades: The strike of the Sailors, Firemen and Cooks on the Great Lakes is still on. We appeal to all seafaring men to assist us in persuading seamen to stay away from the Lakes during this strike.
>
> Any reports that the strike has been settled are false.
>
> The Seamen of the Great Lakes are sticking together solidly, and will keep up the battle for freedom and decent conditions until the fight is won. "God Almighty hates a quitter." (So do we)
>
> Lend a hand, comrades, by inducing seamen to stay away from the Lakes while the strike is on.[18]

The administration came to the aid of labor when Milwaukee unions supported a garment strike in sympathy with the original agitation in Chicago. During the course of the strike the clerk of the Municipal Court issued a warrant for the arrest of two union men who had flung the term "scab" at someone who crossed the picket line. Socialist City Attorney Daniel Hoan recommended the dismissal of the suit in court and reprimanded the detectives for arresting workers simply for using the word "scab." The official sympathy extended to the strikers differed from the hostile attitude toward labor which most governments around the country displayed. The administration was also directly responsible for establishing the union eight-hour day for all city employees. The courts enjoined the first eight-hour measure on the basis that such a restriction on work would violate the

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[18] Herald, July 22, 1911, p. 2.

principle of awarding contracts to the lowest bidder. The Socialists solved the problem by passing a general city ordinance requiring an eight-hour day for all who worked for the city.[19]

The most significant effort made by the Seidel administration to further labor's cause was the attempt to unionize city workers. By a resolution passed in January, 1910, the unions had obtained a "preference" in city work. A few days after the spring elections, the Socialists introduced another resolution into the common council to employ union men exclusively on the Grand Avenue (now Wisconsin Avenue) viaduct. At that time the city was handling the project by direct labor, and the resolution would have in effect unionized the job. City Attorney Hoan, much as he would have liked to see the measure passed, counselled otherwise. Courts in the United States, he said, all agreed that a city administration must govern so that equal opportunity be granted to everyone. Local courts would have probably declared the exclusive employment of union men illegal. Consequently the plan was abandoned. Instead, the members of the Board of Public Works promised to raise the wages of iron workers on the viaduct from $3.00 to the union scale of $4.50 per day. Bridge Superintendent David McKeith agreed to employ union men wherever possible because they were better skilled and the work went better. The administration hoped that as many as 90% of those hired would be union men. It was willing to settle for that percentage rather than risk an injunction by the courts. The new plan would have worked successfully if all city work were done by direct employment. Unfortunately the Grand Avenue viaduct was the exception to a policy of handling most city projects through the contract system. Consequently the Socialists introduced another resolution in the

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[19]Daniel Hoan to J.J. Handley, Oct. 17, 1911, Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

common council which would have allowed all work to be done directly by the city. The motion needed a three-fourths vote, and the old party minority was able to kill it. Although the Socialists failed to unionize all city work, the union label appeared on all the printing done by the city, and the Purchasing Department bought union goods whenever possible. By attempting to move the unions into every branch of city work in which they were organized, the Socialists cinched the knot that tied the two groups together.[20]

In reaching out for the Milwaukee electorate, Socialists appealed to the workingman not only as a member of a union, but also as an individual. The workingman first returned a sizeable vote during the 1902 municipal elections where the Socialist candidate for mayor drew 8,451 votes as compared with 2,584 in 1900. During the next election in 1904, candidate Victor Berger almost doubled the total by attracting 15,056 votes. An orthodox Socialist would have explained the geometric rise in terms of the inevitable force of history moving toward its conclusion. He would have attributed growing Socialist Party power to the ever bettered education of the workingman who eventually would see that the political expression of the proletariat was socialism. Milwaukee Socialists thought in these terms and took a great deal of satisfaction in the knowledge that none of their candidates ever sought an office for its own sake. Unlike most old party politicians, Socialists asked to be elected for their principles.[21] Yet only the naive would have denied that other factors worked to the advantage of the Socialists. The general corruption prevalent in municipal politics during the first decade of the twentieth

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[20] Ibid.

[21] City of Milwaukee, Board of Election Commissioners, Report, 1935, p. 213; Wachman, pp. 53-54.

century influenced the workingman's vote as much or more than ideology. As early as 1903, Victor Berger voiced this condition. He questioned the value of the sympathetic vote which came from non-Socialists who were disenchanted with the corruption of the major parties. He doubted whether his own party could actually accomplish anything when surrounded by so much corruption; and he wondered if the better course was not to let the major parties remain in office until Socialist rule became a necessity.[22] Berger and other party members must have drowned these reservations under a wave of practicality, for the Milwaukee Socialists never failed to advertise themselves in terms which would appeal to non-Socialists. They promised honesty, efficiency, and municipal imagination just as strongly as they prophesied the cooperative commonwealth. An advertisement in the Herald which appeared near the 1910 fall election illustrates the blunt manner in which they catered to the average voter?

> As far as the election of county officials is concerned, we simply ask the voters of Milwaukee, without any difference of party, whether they want a county administration just as efficient as is our city administration . . . . The voters of Milwaukee -- even those who do not agree with the final aim of Socialism, but who want a progressive and up-to-date administration for Milwaukee -- know that they take no chance in making Milwaukee county Social-Democratic.[23]

The Socialists approved progressive goals in order to win over the worker who would not have ordinarily voted for a radical ideology. Even some spokesmen from the Catholic Church approved their methods, if not their ultimate aim. The Catholic Social Year Book for 1910 asserted that Catholics who voted the Social Democratic ticket did so not for the ultimate ambitions of Socialists, but rather because Socialists seemed to them to best represent the working people.[24]

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[22]Herald, Aug. 29, 1903 in Wachman, p. 51.

[23]Herald, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

[24]Ibid., Aug. 6, 1910, p. 2.

Growing Socialist strength in Milwaukee did not curb the corruption which existed in municipal affairs. In 1898 the city elected David S. Rose who stood on a progressive platform which condemned the abuses of the electric street railway company. During his first term, Rose abandoned his campaign promises by granting the railway a ten-year franchise laden with huge advantages to the company. Because Rose managed to appear all things to all men, his political dishonesty enabled him to win the mayoralty no less than five times. The corruption which existed during his reign was poignantly exposed in 1903 when grand juries indicted more than 70 aldermen and supervisors. In 1904 more investigations led to more grand jury indictments. On the Saturday before the election in 1904, the Journal printed a front page headline: "Most Powerful Member of Rose Machine Indicted on Charge of 'Grafting.'"[25] Although Rose won that year, the voters eventually saw through his sham progressivism and in 1906 elected the Republican candidate Sherburn M. Becker. At 29 years, Becker became Milwaukee's youngest mayor. Because of his energetic, witty, self-confident approach to campaigning, his opponents dubbed him "boy mayor." Events proved the term not wholly wrong, for his two-year tenure was not characterized by a high degree of maturity. Citizens often saw him as a spectator at fires. He participated in a number of stunts including the accompaniment of aged Edward Payson Weston from Milwaukee to Chicago. Weston was walking across the continent, but Becker only reached Racine where he received hospital attention for his feet. On the home front he expended his energies on a misguided campaign against sidewalk obstructions which involved his personal smashing of the clocks owned by recalcitrant jewelers.[26] In 1908 the Socialist candidate would have won had not the

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[25]Bayrd Still, Milwaukee: The History of a City (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1965), pp. 306-319.

[26]Ibid.

Catholic Church influenced the Polish sections of the city against him. Instead the city returned Rose again who ran on the cry of the need to establish a municipal lighting plant. For "all-the-time-Rosy" this victory marked the last. The grand jury scandals, begun in 1903, continued well into 1909; and the city during that period had grown to place increasing trust in the Socialists. At each election their vote increased until Seidel in 1908 ran a close second to the fading Rose.[27]

By 1908 the Socialist aldermen in the common council had established a credible reform record. Prestige built around Berger revisionism had grown to the point where Socialists felt that the hour of deliverance was at hand. As the Democrats and then the Republicans failed to supply acceptable mayors, Victor Berger eagerly anticipated the next election where his party would try especially hard to convince the voters of the necessity of impending socialism.

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[27]City of Milwaukee, Board of Election Commissioners, p. 213.

CHAPTER III

ELECTION OF 1910

Misrule in Milwaukee made itself as conspicuous upon the consciousness of the citizens who lived in the city during the first decade of the twentieth century as upon the historians who later recorded it. It was the openness of the corruption that benefited the Socialist Party. The Journal flatly declared Milwaukee's municipal affairs a mess: the street railways had disproportionately dominated city affairs; weakling officials pursued selfish ends instead of wielding power effectively; the civil service had been "outraged"; in short, Milwaukee had too long suffered under the "reign of ward heelers and cheap politicians of the powers that prey."[28]

The Socialists had cried the longest and the loudest against city mismanagement. When it grew too ominous for the city's tolerance, the voters inclined to the party that seemed most concerned about its eradication. Although Socialist candidates had steadily increased their vote since 1900, the first really hopeful indication that the city would adopt their position came in 1909. During the spring of that year, a special election for the position of alderman-at-large returned Emil Seidel to the office. For the first time, the Socialists advertised their candidate on the basis of the man and his record as well as his commitment to Socialist principles; for the first time, the Social Democratic Party carried a city-wide election.[29]

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[28] Journal, April 6, 1910, p. 6. [29] Wachman, p. 67.

As the 1910 municipal elections approached, Mayor Rose dropped his candidacy. In his stead, the Democratic Party nominated Vincent J. Schoenecker, Jr. Of all the candidates, Schoenecker possessed the most first-hand experience in municipal government. He had served nine years on the board of public works and was completing his second year as city treasurer. The Journal endorsed the personal honesty and integrity of Shoenecker, but noted that the weak spot in his campaign was to have been associated with Rose who appointed him to all his public offices. As a kind of concession, the Journal added that Shoenecker was not Rose's first choice for the Democratic candidacy.[30] The Republican Party nominated John Marshall Beffel, doctor of medicine and master of science. Beffel's claim to office derived from his position as physician. The only way to better the human race, he said, was "in wise and thoughtful excercise of the powers of the state, which stands for society as a whole . . . ."[31]

As in the previous election the Social Democratic Party nominated Emil Seidel for mayor. Other nominations went to Carl P. Dietz for comptroller, Charles B. Whitnall for treasurer, Daniel Webster Hoan for city attorney plus seven others for aldermen-at-large and three for the judiciary.[32] Seidel was a good choice since he spoke German and English equally well and was influential in labor circles. He was born on December 13, 1864 in Ashland, Pennsylvania, of Prussian parents. At the age of five Seidel's family moved to Milwaukee. At age thirteen he left school to work at a patternmaker's shop. In three year's time he became apprenticed to a woodcarver for whom he worked five years until 1885. During that time he helped organize a Milwaukee woodcarver's union of which he was

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[30]Journal, March 8, 1910, p. 3. [31]Journal, March 10, 1910, p. 4.

[32]Herald, March 5, 1910, p. 1.

secretary. When he was twenty-two years old he left for Germany in order to perfect himself in woodcarving and designing. After six years of study and work, he returned to America in 1892. In that year he was one of two men in his precinct to vote for a Socialist candidate. When the Social Democrats established a branch in Milwaukee, Seidel became a charter member. Soon afterward in 1904 he joined eight other Social Democrats as the first victorious candidates of the party for the office of alderman. The voters from the twentieth ward re-elected him in 1906, and in 1909 he filled the post of alderman-at-large.[33]

The Democratic Party candidate offered no real hope for vigorous administrative leadership. Although he personally favored home rule and the non-interference of public utilities in city affairs, Schoenecker operated under the old assumption which regarded municipal government as a semi-self-running operation. "I deem [the mayoralty] a laudable ambition," he said. ". . . I desire the honor of being mayor of Milwaukee."[34]

The Republican candidate, Beffel, represented the progressive element of his party and advocated many of the specific reforms which appeared on the Social Democratic platform. As a physician he was concerned with the health hazards which constantly threatened the well-being of the average worker. He advocated the largest measure of municipal home rule possible under the state constitution, a trial system for suspended police and firemen, the shortening of the city ballot, a publicly supported bureau of municipal research, the extension of civil service in city government, the elimination of partisan politics from municipal elections, efficiency in all departments, reorganization of the board of public works, a more

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[33]Journal, April 6, 1910, p. 1; ibid., July 19, 1910, p. 2; Leader, Feb. 27, 1910, p. 3.

[34]Journal, March 8, 1910, p. 3; ibid., April 1, 1910, p. 1.

equitable system of taxation, the elimination of long-term bonds for short-lived improvements, comfort stations, the initiative, referendum, and recall.[35]

In addition to the measures which appeared in Baffel's recommendations, the Social Democratic platform included a vast array of specific municipal projects. It called for a municipal slaughterhouse, stone quarry, wood and coal yard, ice plant, and medical dispensaries. It also demanded an eight-hour day for public works crews, provisions for the unemployed, greater and improved park lands, the suppression of prostitution, scientific disposal of garbage instead of lake dumping, free school texts, public use of school halls, free weekly winter concerts, union wages for all city employees, and a public holiday on election days.[36] Even though the platform on which Seidel ran was more advanced than the others, the Socialists were annoyed that the major parties had only recently adopted important measures such as home rule and control of the utilities -- measures which the Socialists had long espoused and which the old parties seemed to be using only for political advantage. One Journal cartoon caricatured the three contending parties all racing toward a valuable home rule package to claim it first. The Socialists saw themselves as unquestionably the first architects of home rule as well as the other important reform measures. The Journal indirectly backed them on this issue when it refused to analyse the Socialist stand on public utilities' regulation for the simple reason, the paper said, that their attitude was so well known already.[37] Baffel himself displayed a lack of understanding of the home rule issue by the way he phrased his position. He declared

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[35]Journal, March 8, 1910, p. 4. [36]Herald, March 15, 1910, pp. 1, 3.

[37]Journal, April 1, 1910, p. 1.

his support for the "largest measure of municipal home rule possible under the state constitution."[38] He thus fixed his point of reference on the wisdom of the state legislative body rather than on the needs known best by the city community. Real home rule would demand constitutional revision if necessary. Victor Berger recognized the shallow ring some of the proposals received from the candidates newly initiated into progressivism. He accused Beffel of making personal promises without the backing of his party which was hurriedly drawing up a formal platform that would, according to Berger, appeal to the reform-minded citizen only so far as to win his vote. When their platform was published, Berger was quick to accuse Beffel of eliminating the initiative, referendum and recall in order to placate the Stalwart faction of the Republican Party.[39]

The campaign of 1910 produced some of the political gimmicks prevalent in those days. Shoenecker was seen passing out free bars of soap. Beffel supporters gave away packages of "Bright Spot" tobacco with Beffel buttons fastened on the front. Although the Socialist candidates did not concern themselves with soap and tobacco, they worried considerably over opposition from the Catholic Church. During the 1904 election which returned Milwaukee's first Socialist aldermen, the Catholic Church was so fearful of the kind of radicalism that emanated from Europe that it supported corrupt David Rose. At that time Archbishop Sebastian Messmer forbade Catholics to vote for the Social Democratic ticket or belong to the Social Democratic Party. Polish priests actually invited Rose to speak from the pulpit on the Sunday before elections. The Church exerted itself with no less vigor against the Socialists during the 1910 elections. The Boston Pilot reported that Milwaukee in 1910 supported

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[39] Herald, March 12, 1910, p. 1.

26 German, 26 Polish, 1 Italian, 2 Bohemian, and only 19 English speaking priests. Since the anti-socialism spread by the English newspapers did not reach the non-English speaking members of the Church, priests, especially those in the Polish sections, took up the charge.[40]

Newspapers conducted the most effective anti-Socialist campaign. There were nine dailies operating in Milwaukee at that time: Free Press, Sentinel, Evening Wisconsin, Journal, Daily News, Germania, Herald, Norviny, and Kuryer Polski. The first five were published in English, the sixth and seventh in German, and the last two in Polish. The Socialists regarded all of them has having been hostile to their cause in varying degrees at one time or another. During the campaign, the anti-Socialist haranguing from the press was especially acute. According to Berger the press conducted "a campaign of abuse and vilification such as has never been seen in this city." The Free Press seemed to be the worst offender. In one issue it twisted Berger's "ballots and bullets" article into a form which made Socialists appear as blood-thirsty revolutionists.[41] Rather than concentrating on Seidel, most of the attacks centered on Berger because everyone knew that he had been primarily responsible for the Social Democratic Party both locally and nationally. If the attacks were not directed at Berger, they more than likely were aimed at a distorted and caricatured version of international socialism rather than the local men and issues. Beffel himself was not above flag-waving. Although he derived many of the planks he stood upon from the Socialist platform, he was able to make this toast at a Plankinton House dinner:

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[40]Herald, April 16, 1910, p. 7; Wachman, pp. 52-53; Boston Pilot quoted in the Herald, May 21, 1910, p. 3.

[41]After the elections, the Free Press publicly apologized for having misrepresented Berger's famous article.

> Gentlemen of the Republican party I wish to propose a toast - Here's to the stars and stripes, the best flag that ever flew over the home of man. Today another flag is flaunted in our faces - the red flag of anarchy; the red of the Jacobins of the French revolution; the red of the Commune of Paris; the emblem of an international organization of so-called Socialists.[42]

The Socialists fought back as best they could with their weekly newspaper, the Social Democratic Herald. In addition they augmented their campaign strength with a system of mass propaganda delivery known as the "bundle brigade." The Socialists had long recognized that one of the main obstacles to party growth was distorted information spread either intentionally or not. The party corrected misconceptions about itself with difficulty. It did not even own its own press until 1906. Until that time the Herald had to be printed by contract. Consequently the Socialists developed a volunteer system of mass delivery that was used at election times or during important events such as a strike or a sharp rise in prices. The method was first used in 1898. In ten years the system had been more or less perfected and began to be known as the "bundle brigade." Socialist Party members distributed campaign literature to homes throughout the city on a ward basis. A central city committee directed the whole operation. By 1908 it was so efficient that a piece of literature could be ordered and delivered to almost every house in the city, in the language the inhabitants knew best, within forty-eight hours. As many as 2,000 workers rose at 5 a.m. before work to cover their assigned territory. During the 1910 campaign, 75,000 pieces of literature reached Milwaukee homes on a single day. Since the work was done on a volunteer basis, that campaign cost the party no more than $5,000.[43]

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[42]Herald, April 9, 1910, pp. 1, 4; Journal, March 11, 1910, p. 4.

[43]Herald, June 18, 1910, p. 2; ibid., June 10, 1911, p. 3; Wachman, pp. 58, 62.

After the verbal guns of all sides had come to a rest, Socialists from all over the city congregated at the West Turner Hall for what they hoped would turn into their victory celebration. By 7 p.m. the hall was bulging, and Edmund T. Melms, father of the bundle brigade and Social Democratic campaign committee chairman, announced that returns would also be read at the Freie Gemeinde Hall a few doors to the south. Crowds of people congregated in the street as soon as the extra hall was filled. The people there made a marked contrast with the old Rose celebrators. Most of the men had brought their wives and sweethearts. Mrs. Seidel could be seen with a bouquet of flowers. She and her husband waited in the wings of the stage at the West Turner Hall as the election returns were shouted across the expectant crowd. All this time the crowd had periodically cheered the veterans of seven campaigns as they entered the throng and appeared on stage. As it became evident that he would win, Seidel left the wings and emerged on stage himself, but he would not make a speech until the political father of them all arrived -- Victor Berger. As Berger entered the hall, Seidel walked him up the aisle, arm in arm, both of them pressed by the burning, enthusiastic faces of fellow workers and old friends. As the two walked up the steps towards the platform, the hall roared with uncontrollable shouting. Seidel tried to speak, but the crowd screamed wildly for a full ten minutes. Seidel was visibly affected. When the crowd finally stopped, he began, but his voice choked and he appeared on the verge of tears. The quiet tenseness was broken by the sympathetic crowd who cheered anew, and there were not a few tears among them too. Finally Seidel gained control and said:

> When the campaign opened Victor Berger came to me and offered to bear the brunt of the abuse and vilification which we knew would be our portion. You all know how he has fulfilled his promise and tonight he stands here with us. What do you think of him?

Pandemonium overcame the crowd which could not do enough to show its appreciation. For ten more minutes the people stood on their feet screaming, waving flags, throwing hats, weeping, blowing horns, crashing cymbals and beating drums. When Berger finally spoke, he asked them to stand to take a "solemn pledge to do everything in our power to help the men whom the people have chosen to fulfill their duty."[44]

The people chose decidedly in favor of the Socialists for almost every office. By winning the seven vacancies for aldermen-at-large, the party received a huge mandate from the city. Instead of sitting as a minority, as they usually did, the Socialist aldermen in the common council totalled twenty-one as opposed to ten Democrats and four Republicans.[45] The county elections complimented the city's since the Socialists returned eleven victorious supervisors against three Democrats and two Republicans. Emil Seidel won, it is true, not by a majority vote but by a plurality: 27,608 for Seidel, 20,530 for Schoenecker, and 11, 346 for Beffel. However Seidel won by the largest plurality in Milwaukee's history, even beating Rose's 1898 record which he achieved by promising reform measures he never was to carry out. The Social Democratic ticket received comparable votes of confidence. In rounded figures Seidel himself received a plurality of 7,000, Whitnall 7,500, Dietz 6,500, and Roan 7,300. No party candidate for alderman-at-large received less than 26,400 votes.[46]

The mandate was plainly visible. To all first appearances, the cooperative commonwealth had taken root in the midwest. The Herald

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[44]Herald, April 9, 1910, p. 3; Journal, April 6, 1910, p. 8.

[45]The common council from 1908-1910 seated nineteen Democrats, six Republicans and ten Social Democrats.

[46]Herald, April 9, 1910, p. 1; Ibid., April 16, 1910, p. 6.

headlines read:

SOCIALISTS SWEEP MILWAUKEE!
Twelfth City of the United States is Carried by Social-Democrats by Biggest Plurality Ever Given a Mayoralty Candidate.[47]

Victor Berger, Emil Seidel, the Socialist Senator Winfield R. Gaylord and all the party regulars who had usually spent their energies criticising the parties in power finally had a chance for constructive work. Viewed in retrospect, it was the Socialist Party's first and last real chance in Milwaukee. After the 1910 fall elections which sent Berger to Congress, the party never again swept the city offices or controlled the common council or the county board of supervisors. Berger won a seat to Congress four more times, but the party never managed to elect a second Congressman. Furthermore, the number of offices won in 1910 was deceptive. Only eight of them extended for more than two years: Daniel Hoan's office of city attorney, one state senator, four aldermen-at-large, and two school board members.[48]

The party platform for 1910 concluded by reassuring the public that one election could not create socialism in Milwaukee but rather take one step forward, a milestone, toward collective ownership. The Socialists bolstered this realistic appraisal with the expectation of permanency in office. Since that permanency was never granted, their ultimate goals could never be realized. From a strictly ideological point of view, the Socialist administration from 1910-1912 engaged in an experiment of futility and frustration.

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[47] Herald, April 9, 1910, p. 1.

[48] Frederick I. Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of History, Harvard University, 1952), pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIALISTS IN ACTION

According to an analysis in the Herald, the Socialists won the election because their methods had been consistent, their policies and leadership unchanging, and their political tenets implacable to alteration.[49] A more realistic appraisal would have acknowledged that the Socialists had very well changed some of their proposals in order to attract an ever-expanding electorate beginning with the trade unionists and ultimately including Milwaukee's businessmen. Their persistent and energetic organizing techniques gave them a distinct advantage over rivals. A history of honest and efficient legislative performance in the common council favorably impressed responsible voters who felt confident that existing laws prevented the Socialists from enacting their more radical schemes.[50]

After election day, the political analysts of the city voiced socialism's good qualities which had been buried under the campaign verbiage only a few days before. From the revered sanctuary of "fashionable" St. James Episcopal Church on Grand Avenue, Rev. Frederick Edwards encouraged the new administration: "We don't believe the lies that are told about you."[51] Rev. Judson Titsworth of the Plymouth Congregational Church called Mayor-elect Seidel a "genuine exponent of the most modern and most scientific Socialism" which condemned that which

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[49] Herald, Feb. 11, 1911, p. 1. [50] Wachman, pp. 75-76.

[51] Herald, April 16, 1910, p. 4.

it was indicted for: anarchy, social levelling, and confiscation of property.[52] The Voters' League, a supposedly nonpartisan watchdog of municipal reform, created by prominent men in Milwaukee's business and professional circles in 1904 during the height of the Rose scandals, had never regarded the Social Democrats as a menace to local good government. Because it had often reported the salutary effects that the Social Democrats worked on the common council and board of supervisors, it held no significant reservations about the election results.[53] Even the Free Press, after it finished shielding Milwaukeeans from Berger's bullets, described the new municipal program as "at once sober, practical, enlightened and humanitarian."[54] None of the significant big business interests in the city appeared afraid that the new regime would or could disrupt the prevailing fabric of society. Perhaps a most significant comment on the state of affairs came from the financial community which represented an ideology directly contrary to that of the Socialists. After five months of the Seidel administration, Milwaukee's bonds sold in New York at a rate higher than those of other cities of the same class.[55]

With a quiet and reserved approval from non-Socialist quarters, the Seidel administration, under the motto "Milwaukee for the People," scanned the practical political arena in order to appraise how far the first Socialist steppingstone could be extended. Although they controlled almost every important office which was contested in 1910, the Socialists held little sway at the board of police and fire commissioners, the school

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[52]Herald, April 16, 1910, p. 4.

[53]Municipal Affairs, Jan. 1908, p. 2 bound in Milwaukee Voters' League, Miscellaneous Publications 1906-1925 in the Municipal Reference Library, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Milwaukee Voters' League, "The Milwaukee Voters' League, Resume of its Activities During its Existence 1904-1925," by Ovid B. Blix, p. 7, an undated typescript in possession of the Municipal Reference Library; Journal, April 6, 1910, p. 8.

[54]Herald, April 23, 1910, p. 4. [55]Ibid., Sept. 10, 1910, p. 4.

board, the city service board, the park board, the library board, the museum board, the auditorium board, and the office of the tax commissioner. They commanded an easy majority in the common council, but the old party aldermen could block any measure requiring a three-fourths or even two-thirds vote. The most serious restriction on administrative freedom emanated from the state legislature at Madison. According to the constitution, practically every new municipal ordinance had to pass through the state legislature where men who had little conception of the emerging urban problems in America passed judgment on the city's most minute operations such as automobile speed limits, public lavatories, and factory smoke regulation.

Significantly, Mayor Seidel's message to the first session of the common council on April 19, 1910 exhorted a strenuous effort toward home rule "before all things." Until home rule was achieved, the city's hands were tied or were at least weighted by the whim of the state legislature. Some of the measures advanced by the mayor which could be initiated without Madison's approval partially fulfilled the campaign promises but in no way contributed to the establishment of socialism in Milwaukee. Seidel called for decent working conditions, the awarding of city contracts to the lowest bidder, the immediate establishment of a bureau of municipal research, a cost-keeping system for every municipal department, an end to inefficiency in the department of public works, a strict enforcement of the liquor regulations relating to houses of ill-repute, an end to offices which duplicated work, and a major change in the manner in which the street railway company served the city.[56] At this first session, party organization manifested itself and proved to be a prophecy of the way in which the Socialist

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[56] "Mayor's Message, April 19, 1910," a reprint in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

majority would try to impose its will in the future. The council elected Edmund T. Helms, the father of the bundle brigade, as president and Carl D. Thompson as city clerk. After Seidel had read his message, Victor Berger, who had won an aldermanic seat, rose and moved to abolish the existing four-man board of public works and replace it with one man appointed by the mayor. The old board system had come under criticism in the past for its tendency to pass responsibility from one member to another, but Berger's swift action came as a surprise. The old party aldermen were visibly shaken by this haste, and they had nothing formulated to say on the subject.[57]

The first full session of the common council met a week later. Here again the Socialists demonstrated their determination to move on their projects with dispatch. The council created committees to direct the preparation of a home rule bill to be sent to the next legislature, to direct the drafting of an ordinance for a bureau of municipal research, to direct plans for public comfort stations and to obtain a reaction from the school board regarding the use of their halls for public dances.[58]

The most pressing problem of urban centers, whether controlled by Socialists or not, was the need for self-determination. In 1910 few large cities in the United States could function without the approval of their state legislatures. The western states were almost wholly farming regions when their legislatures were created and city charters were granted. As cities began to grow, the farming element which controlled the legislatures cast distrustful eyes on the growing metropolises from which came only "wild-cat currency, lightning-rod agents and fraudulent railroad promoters."[59]

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[57] Herald, April 23, 1910, p. 1. [58] Herald, April 30, 1910, p. 4.

[59] Ibid., Dec. 10, 1910, p. 1.

As the balance of social, cultural and economic power shifted toward the cities, the political control remained in the rural-minded legislatures. On January 31, 1846, the Wisconsin territorial legislature incorporated Milwaukee as a city under a special charter. The last general revision of that charter which affected the Seidel administration occurred in 1874.[60] The population of Milwaukee in 1910 was 373,857 as compared with 285,315 only ten years earlier. The growing divergence between the city's importance and its legal status had aroused the concern of various reform-minded groups. As early as 1902, the common council adopted a resolution calling for a memorial advocating home rule for Milwaukee. In 1910, the Journal termed the situation "unwise . . . shortsighted . . . and undemocratic."[61] Of all the groups, the Socialists became the most outspoken critics against the system which handcuffed municipal power. Since they advocated a program which demanded municipal autonomy even to the point of municipal ownership of utilities, the Socialists felt most frustrated by the prevailing system.

In response to the problem, the 1910 Social Democratic State Convention passed a resolution in favor of home rule because, it said, the legislature was not conversant with the problems of a big city, because the municipal corporations conflicted with the interests of urban citizens as a whole, and because the current system was susceptible to big businesses which could and did send powerful lobbies to Madison.[62] On December 5, 1910, the Socialist majority in the common council added its own plea to the legislature for complete home rule.[63] The most effective work for

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[60]City of Milwaukee, Municipal Reference Library, "History of the Milwaukee city charter," 1933, a typescript in the Municipal Reference Library.

[61]Journal, March 14, 1910, p. 6; ibid., Aug. 29, 1910, p. 10.

[62]Herald, June 18, 1910, p. 7. [63]Ibid., Dec. 10, 1910, p. 1.

home rule was done by the Socialists who had managed to win seats to the legislature. Although they had little direct relation to the Milwaukee common council, the state Socialist legislators made possible some of the advances carried out by the Seidel administration.

In 1905 the Social Democratic Party sent four legislators to Madison; in 1907, six; in 1909, four; and in 1911 two senators and twelve assemblymen. At that time the whole legislature numbered 100 assemblymen and 33 senators. The Socialist minority exerted a far greater influence in Madison than their number would indicate. Like their comrades in the Milwaukee common council, the state Socialists were the only group in the assembly which researched and voted as a bloc. They all lived together in a $25-a-month boarding house room where each had a bed and a chair. They all used the large table in the center of the room on which was always piled newspapers, legislative bills and reference books. In this caucus situation they used to debate their course of action for one or more days at a time.[64]

The fourteen Socialists at Madison introduced 260 bills and resolutions at the 1911 session of the legislature. Of these, 192 were killed, 148 passed, and of the latter, a total of 67 were enacted.[65] Many of those enacted bills and resolutions represented a step forward for home rule in Milwaukee. They included the right of the city to condemn property in order to plat and resell city land, the building and maintenance of public lavatories, the method of determining the necessity of condemning land for municipal purposes, and the right of the city to assess the cost of street sprinkling upon property owners. Although the Socialists

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[64] Ibid., June 10, 1911, p. 11.

[65] Social Democratic Party, Vest Pocket Manual, p. 51.

achieved a measure of success, all of their really Socialistic bills and resolutions were killed. The legislature voted down municipal ownership of dairies, savings banks, legal information bureaus, ice plants, slaughter houses, plumbing, and lodging and dwelling houses.[66]

One of the landmarks in the fight for home rule in Milwaukee occurred during the Seidel administration. The movement for a convention to create a new charter for the city began in 1907 when the common council authorized a charter committee made up of delegates at large to proceed with the work. However the resultant proposals were defeated by the assembly in 1909. By 1911 the legislature was again entertaining home rule motions -- this time, from three sources: the Progressive approach embodied in the Stern home rule bill, the Democratic Bodenstab bill, and the Socialist Gaylord bill. There was little difference between the three, yet the Socialists railed against the Stern bill for its alleged unconstitutionality. The Stern bill allowed the city of Milwaukee to change its own charter. Senator Gaylord charged that this would in fact allow the city to make state law and hence would be illegal. The Socialists in Milwaukee accused the Progressive elements behind the Stern bill of knowingly supporting a measure they knew would not stand. The state legislature accepted the Stern bill over the other two, and, prophetically for Gaylord, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin declared it unconstitutional in May, 1912. Due to the long process of charter making and the Stern bill blunder, Milwaukee received home rule long after the Seidel administration ended, and the Socialists felt thwarted in their plans.[67]

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[66] Ibid., pp. 59, 66.

[67] Journal, June 3, 1911, p. 6; Herald, June 17, 1911, p. 7; Ibid., July 8, 1911, p. 8; Social Democratic Party, Vest Pocket Manual, p. 59; City of Milwaukee, Municipal Reference Library, "Socialist representation in the common council of Milwaukee 1902 to date," 1934, p. 2, a typescript in the Municipal Reference Library.

Since the powers of home rule were unavailable, the Seidel administration was forced to concentrate on reforming existing social structures instead of adopting new ones. One institution operating within the city had long been the target of reform-minded politicians in Milwaukee and caused the Socialists special concern. For many years The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company (T.M.E.R.&L. Co.) had operated rather independently from the needs of the community at large. This railway company absorbed three other streetcar businesses in 1896. In 1910 it owned 396 cars, operated all the street rails systems in the city, owned the capital stock of the Milwaukee Light, Heat and Traction Company and controlled the Milwaukee Central Heating Company. The T.M.E.R.&L. Co. was owned by the North American Company which also controlled the Union Electric Light and Power Company of Saint Louis, the Saint Louis County Gas Company, the Detroit Edison Company, the United Railways of Saint Louis and the West Kentucky Coal Company.[68] The North American Company operated from New York and represented to the Socialists all the evils of trusts. Because of its size and influence the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. managed to extort a franchise from the common council so advantageous to itself that Mayor Rose had to sign the document behind locked doors. Its policy toward the community verged on "the public be damned," and its directorate and ownership resided outside the city of Milwaukee. Of 615 stockholders, only 92 resided in Wisconsin at the end of 1911.[69] To Socialists who envisaged an eventual municipal ownership of public utilities, the railway trust situation seemed especially intolerable.

The position of the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. relative to municipal regulation

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[68] Herald, July 30, 1910, p. 7; ibid., March 26, 1910, p. 2; Leader, Dec. 26, 1911, p. 1.

[69] Leader, Dec. 26, 1911, pp. 1, 10.

was summed up by its general manager John I. Beggs who noted that "common councils come and common councils go, but we go on forever."[70] Armed with this despotic attitude, "Butcher Beggs," as the Socialists called him, remained impervious to needed changes. He refused to add cars to the system so that regular repairs could be made. Streetcar wheels ran flat and slippery on the tracks because Beggs refused to regrind them periodically. Cars operated without power brakes, emergency tools or wheel guards. Beggs also neglected to install lifting jacks on each car as he had once promised. A hapless pedestrian who slipped under the wheels had to wait as long as an hour to be undone. Streetcars were killing about twenty-three Milwaukeeans each year and maiming numerous others.[71]

The grievances against the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. had mounted for several years and had aroused the anger of many sensitive citizens besides the Socialists. The civic-minded energies devoted against railway abuses were sustained over a long period of time; but progress came slowly. The suit entitled "The City of Milwaukee vs. The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company," begun in 1907, pressed for better service and fare rates. The court order issued in July of the year of the case was completely ineffectual. It recommended that the "Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company maintain in the future at least as good or better service than it maintained during the months of February and March, 1907." By 1910 the rates had not changed and people still packed themselves into the cars during busy hours.[72] Civic efforts to force track elevations at crucial thoroughfares began in the common council as early as 1897. In

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[70] Journal, May 26, 1910, p. 6.

[71] Herald, Feb. 26, 1910, p. 8; ibid., March 26, 1910, p. 4; Leader, Dec. 28, 1911, p. 7.

[72] Hoan, p. 38.

1902 a special committee handpicked by Mayor Rose returned an apathetic report on the situation. The scandals of 1904 goaded the committee into introducing a track-elevation ordinance into the common council, and in 1907 alderman Buech, a Social Democrat, demanded a progress report from the city engineer. As a result the common council passed a general ordinance for track elevation in 1908. Various federal and city conditions had to be met before the ordinance became binding. Beggs managed to retard the whole complex process so that by the 1910 elections, the situation looked hopelessly mired.[73] The frustration accompanying the lack of progress had created a crisis atmosphere. The progressive Journal lashed out viciously against the practices of the street railway as inhuman, indifferent to public sentiment, and as an unquestionable liability to the city. The paper openly accused the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. of controlling specific municipal departments and the Democratic Party generally. Railway abuse had become so intolerable that the Socialists' solution even seemed palatable. "In the face of continued municipal control by the public utilities," said the Journal, "municipal ownership becomes by far the lesser evil of the two."[74]

The street railway company met a stiffer municipal conscience in Mayor Seidel than in Rose or Becker. The first direct confrontation between the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. and the new mayor occurred a month after the elections over the granite block question. The street railway managers had learned from experience that wagons, in passing perpendicularly across the streetcar tracks, crashed down upon the adjacent cement and crested

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[73]Unidentified typescript report in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[74]Journal, April 1, 1910, p. 8.

a lot of repair work for the company. Consequently the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. had adopted the practice of placing large granite blocks one foot outside each railing. Wagon wheels thus came crashing down on city cement at no cost to the company.[75] When the new administration not only prohibited the car company from using the granite blocks, but also required that it maintain pavement between the double tracks, Superintendent Frederick S. Simmons, a representative of the T.M.E.R.&L. Co., said that his company would then have to determine which kind of cement would be used. Seidel replied by saying that the "street railway company has no prerogative," that it did not own the property in question and would have to comply with the city's decision:

> This is not a personal matter. I am here to present the people's case to see that what is right is done and that I am going to do. I am not after any person. I am not criticizing any individual. The whole system of doing this work is wrong and I am after that system.[76]

The Socialists would have liked to change the whole system by municipal ownership of the street railway company, but they knew that this was impossible in the forseeable future. As late as 1921, when municipal ownership became more legally feasible, a common council committee reported that the city could not acquire the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. because the bond limit had already been approached.[77] In 1910 regulation had to substitute for ownership. Accordingly the common council passed on May 9, 1910 a resolution authorizing City Attorney Hoan to investigate and, if necessary, draft ordinances pertaining to the installation of lifting jacks, cleaner cars, ventilation, air brakes, flattened wheels, the number of operational

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[75] Ibid., July 18, 1910, p. 2. [76] Ibid., May 11, 1910, p. 2.

[77] Street Railway and Electric Power Acquisition Committee report to the Common Council July 25, 1921, Acquisition and Control of the Street Railway, Electric Light and Power and Heating Utilities of the City of Milwaukee, pp. 15-16, in the Municipal Reference Library.

cars, and the shortage of seats during rush hours.[78] In June, Mayor Seidel recommended that the city prosecute the T.M.E.R.&L. Co to pay the annual $15 license fee for each car. The company had avoided payment since 1898 to the amount of $72,000. In August of the same year, Berger listed in an article three demands for the street railway company: that it issue transfers permitting a passenger to complete his destination on one fare; that it issue transfers either before or after the time of paying the fare; and that it eliminate a pedestrian hazard by removing snow from the tracks without piling it high on each side.[79] Perhaps the most pressure exerted by the Socialists came through their newspaper. While other organs of information complained of the streetcar problem, the Herald and its successor the Leader[80] approached it as a crusade. While other papers would report streetcar accidents, the Herald would often describe them. Sometimes the others would not even report an incident. When the Socialists became frustrated as the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. remained indifferent to reform, articles in the Herald became more violent:

> The next time a streetcar runs down a child and holds it under the murderous wheels to ebb its life out in most horrible agony LET THE PASSENGERS TAKE MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS![81]

The paper suggested that a group of bystanders might do well to overturn the car and remove the trucks by hand in order to reach a pinned individual. Because of this inconvenience, reasoned the Herald, the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. would eventually install lifting jacks.

The vigorous efforts of the Seidel administration resulted in a few improvements. After long delays, the courts finally forced the

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[78] Herald, May 14, 1910, p. 1.

[79] Ibid., June 11, 1910, p. 8; ibid., Aug. 6, 1910, p. 1.

[80] The Leader, a daily paper, succeeded the weekly Herald in December, 1911.

[81] Herald, May 14, 1910, p. 8.

T.M.E.R.&L. Co. to sprinkle its tracks to alleviate the dust nuisance. Such a law was first passed in the common council in 1904, whereupon the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. brought the matter to the courts on a writ of mandamus. Because of the inertia of old party city attorneys, the matter remained in court until Daniel Hoan forced a resolution of the question. The streetcar company appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in 1911. When that body also ruled in favor of the city, the case was closed.[82] In addition to sprinkling its own tracks, the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. installed lifting jacks in 100 of its more than 300 cars even before the pending common council ordinance passed. In August, the president of the company announced a plan where 100 cars would be refitted with air brakes each year for more than three years.[83]

Perhaps the greatest concession wrought by the Socialists was a change of attitude from the street railway. Whereas the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. under the direction of "Butcher Beggs" demonstrated no noticeable sympathy for public needs, the same company six months after the Socialists were inaugurated adopted a policy of reconciliation. In September, 1910 it announced a "campaign of information which it is hoped will result in a better understanding and a closer relationship between the public and the company."[84] This announcement signaled an end of an era of aloofness. The T.M.E.R.&L. Co. bought a large, square, four-column space in the Herald on September 24, 1910 and thirty-nine more times through November 25, 1911. These advertisements tried to explain the street railway's position on the controversial issues concerning the company. They

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[82] Ibid., March 19, 1910, p. 8; ibid., Jan. 14, 1911, p. 8.

[83] Ibid., July 16, 1910, p. 8; Journal, Aug. 5, 1910, p. 1.

[84] Journal, Sept. 6, 1910, p. 6.

also began to advertise pleasure trips to nearby cities and beaches at low costs. Two months after the advertisements began, the change of heart within the T.M.E.R.&L. Co. was assured with the announcement that Beggs was soon to be transferred from Milwaukee. By the beginning of April, 1911 he had left to become president of the St. Louis Car Company. Before he departed Beggs hurled a few biting comments at his enemies. The Herald replied in kind with the farewell: "Goodbye -- curses on you!"[85]

Public utilities, like the T.M.E.R.&L. Co., remained relatively immune from Socialist attacks because of the franchises they held. These companies were able to contract extremely advantageously with the city either because of their size and influence or because the city did not know the value of what it was giving away at the time. For example Pfister money was influential in procuring an extension of the street railway franchise.[86] The Milwaukee Gas Light Company received its charter from the state legislature to contract exclusively with the city in 1852 when no one thought that more than one enterprise would ever become necessary.[87] In the ensuing years, the company enjoyed almost limitless latitude in setting its rates. The state railroad commission reported that its average cost of operations for 1909, 1910, and 1911 amounted to 58¢ for every 1000 cubic feet. The company's sale price was 80¢ leaving a profit of 23¢ for every 1,000 cubic feet of gas sold.[88] The problem with rate evaluations was that no one knew even approximately how much profit large companies should make. The Socialists believed that one solution to the problem consisted in controlling the trust where its power began -- at

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[85]Herald, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 8; ibid., April 8, 1911, p. 9; Journal, Feb. 3, 1911, p. 1.

[86]William Hooker, Glimpses of An Earlier Milwaukee (The Milwaukee Journal Public Service Bureau, 1929), p. 55.

[87]Herald, Jan. 14, 1911, p. 4.

[88]Leader, Dec. 26, 1911, p. 1.

the franchise level. During the summer of 1910, Hoan's office worked on a model franchise which would give more control of public utilities to the city. This franchise simulated the ideal relationship between the city and street railways. It stipulated that the city may lease track operation rights to more than one company, that the company pave and repair the space between the tracks, that the company remove the tracks at its own expense when the city needed to make underground repairs, that the company sprinkle its tracks from May to October, that it remove snow near the rails, that the city may regulate many aspects of operations such as the installation of lifting jacks, the size of the cars, the kind of brakes, cleanliness, speed and schedules. Finally the model franchise provided for a board of arbitration consisting of three company men, three representatives of the employees and three members of the common council. The model franchise represented the Socialists' concession to reform methods. Rather than a Socialistic document, it was a compilation of the best features of the progressive franchises written the world over. It was meant as a source of information from which many different communities could draw and adapt to their own conditions. The model franchise was never used as a practical measure, for big business would not volunteer to contract for more privileges to the people at large than to itself. The document is most significant as a tribute to the idealism of Milwaukee's first Socialist administration.[89]

The new government enjoyed more practical success among the various municipal agencies. The public works department received much of the

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[89]"Model Franchise," a typescript copy in the Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Milwaukee Daily News, June 7, 1911, in the "Socialist Party in Milwaukee" clipping file in the Municipal Reference Library.

Socialists' reform energies. The administration demanded and eventually achieved a great deal more efficiency from the office of public works than ever before. A long history of graft and public waste belonged to that department. Controversies regarding its practices had prompted a common council inquiry and report as early as 1904. During those years the Journal helped push the agitation. In 1902 and 1903 it accused Mayor Rose of allowing the department to be dominated by an asphalt trust which prevented all competition in contract bidding. In 1903 it exhorted the honest businessmen of the city to "turn out the whole gang."[90]

When Seidel assumed office, the same conditions prevailed. The mayor acted quickly by reorganizing the whole department into five bureaus: street construction and repair, street sanitation, bridges and public buildings, sewerage, and purchases. The old department supported three joint chiefs who tended to juggle their responsibilities from one to another. Consequently Seidel created a new office occupied by only one man. To this position he appointed party member Harry E. Briggs on a temporary basis until a real expert could be found. On May 10, 1910, the mayor scouted the streets and alleys of Milwaukee. The next day he met with the council committee on streets and alleys. Out of these experiences, Seidel determined on the need for better paving, the adoption of new specifications regardless of other cities' methods, better workmanship, the abolition of granite blocks next to rail tracks, and the policy of holding construction companies strictly to their contracts.[91]

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[90] Paving report in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Journal quoted in an unidentified article in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[91] Journal, May 11, 1910, p. 2; Social Democratic Party, Municipal Campaign Book, 1912 (Milwaukee: County Central Committee of the Social Democratic Party, 1912), p. 87.

Two weeks later Seidel announced his toughened policy: any inspector of street repair work, he said, who approved of a "botch job" would be relieved of his duties. After two more weeks had elapsed, the mayor announced that Briggs' appointment was permanent since no better expert was available. Briggs was a capable man and claimed experience as an expert draftsman and mechanical engineer. In the subsequent months he performed better than even his comrades had expected. Both he and the Mayor could be seen periodically putting on overalls, boots, and rubber coats and descending into sewer tunnels to get a firsthand look. "This will last until the moon turns green," said Seidel, as he viewed one piece of work of which he especially approved.[92]

Ensuring good work in the public works department was a difficult task. A generally lax attitude toward inspection had resulted in numerous instances of faulty work especially in the severage bureau. Established construction companies which had contracted with the city for as long as nineteen years commonly mixed clay and sand into their cement. Manholes were found without foundations. Pipes which were simply thrown in trenches and not properly tamped soon cracked under the uneven pressure.[93] Some conscientious inspectors condemned such work when they found it. Others began to meet with the stern discipline of Commissioner Briggs. Within a month of his permanent appointment, Briggs discharged eight inspectors because they were incompetent. By the end of 1910, Briggs fired so many inspectors that the entire civil service list for the department had

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[92] Herald, May 28, 1910, p. 2; ibid., June 18, 1910, p. 5; ibid., May 27, 1911, p. 5; Journal, June 6, 1910, p. 1; ibid., April 19, 1910, p. 1; Leader, Dec. 14, 1911, p. 2.

[93] Journal, Nov. 22, 1910, p. 1; Herald, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 8; ibid., Dec. 17, 1910, p. 2.

become exhausted.[94]

While the sewerage bureau was insuring quality, the bureau of street construction was trying to eliminate the blatant graft which had existed for years. The Socialists imported an expert, Charles A. Mullen, from New York to become superintendent of street construction. Although Mullen was a Socialist, his party's opponents could not fault his qualifications. He had engaged in the paving business for thirteen years and was an independent contractor for three of those years. When he took office he immediately exposed some contractors who mixed sand into the concrete they used for city work. Shortly he was pointing to instances where company contract estimates were as much as double what they should have been. Soon he was advocating positive steps toward cost reduction. He argued that six inch pavement performed just as well as twelve inch roads and cost the city half as much. He advocated the elimination of the guarantee given by contractors for which they charged five cents per square yard. With conscientious inspection, he said, roads could be kept in repair for only one-eighth of one cent per square yard for five years. He also advocated the elimination of the binder pavement. This layer of the road was an antiquated device which originated in New York when the first pavements were made of granite and stone blocks at the base. This kind of material tended to form holes and depressions which had to be covered with a sheet of cheap material -- hence, the "binder" layer. Mullen dug up a piece of one of the oldest sections of pavement in Milwaukee, demonstrated that it was still in good condition, and pointed out that it did not have nor need a binder layer.[95]

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[94]Herald, July 23, 1910, p. 8; Journal, Dec. 5, 1910, p. 5; ibid., Dec. 2, 1910, p. 1.

[95]Herald, Aug. 3, 1910, p. 8; ibid., April 29, 1911, p. 19; ibid.,

Superintendent Mullen upset the old procedures most radically when he forced an end to the closed specifications system. "Closed specification" referred to the situation where only one company's construction material could satisfy the ingredients requirements, or "specifications," established by the city. In this case the only paving material which would satisfy Milwaukee's requirements was produced by the Trinidad Lake Asphalt Company which was owned by a trust called the Barber Asphalt Paving Company. Any construction company not connected with the Barber Asphalt organization did not even bother to bid for city contracts. When Mullen checked the city requirements he immediately understood their implication. He took a simple and direct action. He changed the specifications so that they not only required adequate materials, but also that they allowed more than one company to bid for contracts. Socialist aldermen had tried in previous years to effect this simple change only to see the measure vetoed by Mayor Rose.[96] Reform-minded citizens might have qualified this achievement by saying that the action had been advocated long and widely. Yet it is likely that the old party men would have remained inert about the matter had they kept the Socialists out of office.

Mullen's measures immediately lowered the cost of street paving. Previously the average cost had been $2.34 per square yard. The lowest and winning bid under the new specifications amounted to only $1.42. Significantly, the company which had made the lowest bid was the same which had usually done the job for almost twice the price only a year before. Real competition accounted for the difference. For that one job alone, the

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Aug. 27, 1910, p. 1; Journal, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 1; ibid., March 9, 1912, p. 1; unidentified typescript report in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[96] Herald, May 27, 1911, p. 10; ibid., June 3, 1911, p. 8.

city saved $54,893.64.[97]

By saving huge sums of money in street paving, the Seidel administration performed a service to the city which should have been the envy of any progressive party. The administration did not stop at that, though, and promoted another effort which better furthered Socialist principles. Under the guise of promoting increased efficiency, the office of the comptroller, headed by Carl P. Dietz, advocated the direct employment of labor on city paving projects. Dietz signed a memorandum on December 5, 1910 in which he analyzed the traditional contract system. In 1909 the city paid $293,221.77 for all paving, resurfacing and inspection. According to Dietz the direct employment method would have saved the city the contractor's profits, the cost of inspection, and the saving from a city-owned quarry, sand and gravel pit. He calculated the total savings at $123,148.95. This report was sent to the common council to induce that body to allow the city of Milwaukee to pave and improve streets by direct employment.[98] The Socialists had to prepare their case well, for the measure needed a three fifths vote instead of a simple majority. Dietz explained how the new system would be financially safe. Briggs tried to demonstrate savings of a quarter of a million dollars. Clifton Williams, Assistant Attorney, made a case for the legal right of the city to do its own paving. The Socialists drew upon practical arguments of economy and efficiency. The real issue, however, rested on whether the common council would adopt measures which leaned toward socialism. The opponents of the bill, the Republican and Democratic councilmen, knew the real issue at stake and had argued against the bill also on the grounds of practicability.

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[97] Herald, May 27, 1911, p. 10.

[98] Carl P. Dietz, pavement report in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

Faced with overwhelming research by Dietz, Briggs, and Williams, the old party men changed their argument to one of legality. They told the Socialist aldermen that they doubted that the measure would be constitutional. Alderman Berger stammered that the legality could be decided later in the courts and not in the common council chambers. But the old party men stood firm. Only one Democrat along with twenty-one Social Democrats voted for the measure. Ten Republicans and Democrats voted against the bill which then failed to pass by five votes.[99]

The Socialists' efforts in the area of paving received a further setback when Superintendent Mullen was forced to resign. Strong interests in the city opposed his activities, but his credentials were impeccable. His opponents finally stopped him with a technicality. A court injunction ordered the city to cease paying his salary since he had not lived in Milwaukee for a year as the civil service law required. The court ruled "that he lacked the essential qualifications of proper citizenship within this city to be elected or appointed to such office." By the time the issue reached the Supreme Court of Wisconsin, the injunction became more inclusive. The court then ruled that the administration had ignored civil service regulations when it appointed all five heads of the bureaus in the public works department. The Socialists had violated the letter of the law, but certainly not the spirit. Mullen resigned a few days after the Supreme Court ruling to accept another position with the Socialist government in Schenectady, New York.[100]

The administration enjoyed more success in a less glamorous yet

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[99] Journal, March 21, 1911, p. 7; Herald, March 25, 1911, p. 12.

[100] Herald, Jan. 7, 1911, p. 8; unidentified typescript report on the Mullen court decision in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Journal, Dec. 6, 1911, p. 8; ibid., Dec. 11, 1911, p. 5; Leader, Dec. 11, 1911, p. 2.

nonetheless important endeavor. The Seidel administration managed to improve the financial methods of the city. By stressing complete honesty and efficiency, the Socialists introduced sound business practices to an erstwhile sloppy government. In previous years municipal financial affairs were characterized by a casualness unbecoming to any corporation which handled millions of dollars each year. When Mayors Rose and Becker were in office, budget entries were vague to the point of meaninglessness. Appropriations were requested by most any employee on most any kind of paper and in unspecified sums. Leslie S. Everts, Deputy Comptroller and a non-Socialist, said that the original official copy of the 1910 budget "was found loosely rolled and somewhat crumpled in the rear desk of a drawer." These practices were eliminated by the Socialists. Everts' own 1911 budget filled a four-inch notebook and was indexed. Standard request forms required an indication of exact items to be purchased. Copies of the budget were kept for reference by the comptroller and also by each department head.[101]

Besides putting municipal affairs in order, the administration sought broad new solutions to urban problems. Soon after the 1910 victory, Victor Berger wrote to Professor John R. Commons at the University of Wisconsin asking for his opinions about the changing needs of a metropolis the size of Milwaukee. Commons wrote back immediately with specific proposals. He suggested a cost keeping system for the city as distinct from an accounting department. Accounting systems were useful to balance and to check against defalcations, he said, whereas the function of a cost keeping system was to analyze every step of departmental work and measure everything by a common unit of output. A cost analysis of gas production,

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[101] Herald, Aug. 13, 1910, p. 4; ibid., Nov. 5, 1910, p. 5; ibid., May 20, 1911, p. 8.

for example, would indicate how much was expended on labor, salary, management, depreciation -- per thousand cubic feet. Commons also explained how a monthly bulletin should delineate municipal operations both for the administration and for the public who would then know how well their government was working. Commons thought that the city should also engage in various types of social surveys which would serve as a basis for broad-ranged municipal planning. He had in mind a cost of living analysis which would bring farmers and consumers closer together, an investigation of the possibility of free legal aid, an unemployment study, statistics regarding poor relief, an analysis on the relationship between immigrants and their competition with resident labor, plus facts regarding industrial hygiene, boys' apprenticeships, housing and sanitation, and the condition of working women and children.[102]

Professor Commons accepted the invitation to act out his ideas. He headed the organization known as the Bureau of Economy and Efficiency. It began in October, 1910 as a municipal department. Commons had estimated a budget of $50,000 to bring definite results within two years. But the common council only granted him $5,000 for 1911. He went ahead on his small budget and hired experts for various special areas at relatively low salaries. The Bureau divided into six interests: organization, engineering, accounting, finance, taxation, and health and sanitation. Commons solicited the help of a few men who had organized the Chicago Bureau of Public Efficiency and the pioneer New York Bureau of Municipal Research which was then entering its seventh year. Commons' Bureau differed from those of other cities because it was the first of its kind to operate under the auspices of a municipality rather than a private organization.

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[102]John R. Commons to Victor Berger, April 11, 1910, Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

B.M. Rastall, the head of the business courses in the Extension Division of the University of Wisconsin, agreed to become associate director and compile the monthly bulletin.[103]

The first bulletin of the Bureau appeared in May, 1911 with the title "Plans and Methods." It announced eight issues in the press and twenty-five studies in progress. In the ensuing months, the Bureau found its chief work in the reorganization of various departments and the surveying of the entire municipal government. It reorganized the garbage collection system, simplified the method of assessing sprinkling costs, reorganized the tax forms, recommended the utilization of the by-products of the refuse incinerator for electric power, recommended the consolidation of the fire and police alarm systems, and tabulated the financial history of the city water works for the purpose of determining rates. Sometimes the Bureau's work yielded immediate practical results. One of its surveys discovered that 27% of the yearly water supply was lost somewhere in the pipe system. Engineers immediately set to work on the problem and soon found two leaks which disgorged 100,000 and 50,000 gallons of water daily.[104]

Projects which promoted economy in municipal government, such as discovering water main leaks, were the primary interest of the Bureau. A subordinate interest was entitled "the social survey." It included all those broad-ranged analyses envisioned by Commons such as research into free legal aid and the unemployment problem. One social survey report demonstrates the intent and method of the Bureau. In 1911 it published

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[103] City of Milwaukee, Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Eighteen month's work of the Milwaukee Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Bulletin No. 19, 1912, p. 36

[104] Ibid.; Journal, Dec. 31, 1911 p. 4; Leader, Jan. 3, 1912, p. 5; City of Milwaukee, Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Plans and Methods, Bulletin No. 1, 1911.

its report and recommendations on the newsboy in Milwaukee. The Bureau was concerned about the type of influences which affected the average newsboy who sold papers in the downtown district. These boys tended to loiter around saloons because of the relative ease in selling to customers under the influence of alcohol who seemed to be touched by the desire to "help the kid." Newsboys also sought the saloon for the prospect of larger tips, the warmth found there during winter, and the availability of food. Those boys who claimed no definite corner from which to sell all said that they would "quit sellin" if kept out of the saloons. Although the boys were not allowed to drink, they mingled freely with the rough crowds, and a few were known to have been removed from one of the toughest saloons in the city at 10:30 p.m. The real danger in this situation for the "newsy" was not the prospect of being sold liquor but rather the language and attitudes toward life he picked up in those rough places. The Bureau recommended that the city prohibit boys from selling in the downtown area and within one mile from the city hall, that the city should license newsboys and require them to wear badges, and that the city impose fines on managers and barkeeps who allowed boys to enter in or loiter around saloons. The Bureau hoped that these measures would keep Milwaukee's youth on home routes away from some of the evils of urban life.[105] The Bureau of Economy and Efficiency made numerous social survey reports until the end of the Seidel administration in 1912 when the Municipal Research Bureau under private auspices succeeded it.[106]

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[105] City of Milwaukee, Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, The newsboys of Milwaukee, Bulletin No. 8, 1911, pp. 70-71; Journal, Nov. 19, 1911, p. 10.

[106] Voters' League Sixth Biennial Report on City and County Administration and Candidates before the Primary 1914 in Voters' League, Miscellaneous Publications; Olson, pp. 208-209.

With the establishment of the Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, the Socialist administration demonstrated its concern not only for honest municipal government but also for the wide range of needs of the urban population. This concern was shared by other political groups such as the progressives, the reform-minded, and any person interested in government which served the people. The Seidel administration claimed the most concern because it stood on Socialist principles and had gone on record as saying that the city's biggest asset was its workers. Little was more important to the average worker than his physical well-being, and the Socialist health department made an effort to insure a sound body to as many people of the city as possible. Mayor Seidel removed the incumbent health commissioner, Dr. Gerhard Bading, because he had not cooperated with the state factory inspector, had failed to remedy unsanitary conditions in factories, and had failed to appoint competent men as meat inspectors. Berger remarked at the time that the Socialists wanted not only a physician but also a man who grasped the "sociological possibilities of the office."[107] Such a man was Dr. William Colby Rucker, a member of the United States Marine hospital and public health service. Mayor Seidel experienced difficulty in having Rucker released from the armed forces in order to come to Milwaukee. The surgeon general did not want to let him go. Dr. Rucker had been influential in arresting bubonic plague cases in San Francisco and had been in charge of controlling yellow fever in New Orleans. Seidel was so convinced of Rucker's desirability that he wired a plea to President Taft. Taft responded by giving Rucker to Milwaukee on a loan basis.[108]

Dr. Rucker met a serious medical problem in Milwaukee as soon as he

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[107] Journal, April 14, 1910, p. 10.

[108] Herald, June 18, 1910, p. 3; Journal, May 18, 1910, p. 3.

arrived. Impure water had caused an increased number of typhoid cases. In 1909 the number of cases of typhoid reported each month varied from as low as 17 to as high as 62. In January of 1910 the number of new cases stood at 115. By April, the election month, it was 153. May registered 209, June an astounding 286.[109] The upsurge of typhoid became known around the city and the situation approached epidemic proportions.

The Socialists did not cause the impurity in the drinking water. This had been a problem of Milwaukee's for more than twenty years. If anyone was to blame, it was the Rose administration. As the problems of water purity mounted, Rose should have taken steps to check the menace. Instead he was in the habit of diverting hundreds of thousands of dollars from the water fund into other projects. Since the city water department required no immediate expenditures, Rose capitalized on the situation and used the money in other areas in order to keep taxes down and himself popular.[110] In the long run, it was inevitable that the typhoid problem would catch up with the city. There was no other alternative. As the city grew, it dumped more waste into the Milwaukee, Kinnickinnic and Menomonee Rivers. The sewage plus the foul industrial wastes entering the Menomonee River valley caused an unpleasant odoriferous condition there. A flushing system which speeded up the river current assuaged the stench problem in the Menomonee valley, but it speeded the pollution to the bay area at an even faster rate. The flushing system was completed in 1888 and even then was opposed by many who felt that the city's rivers should not be used as sewers. By 1910 the saturation point had been reached. The bay became

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[109] City of Milwaukee, Health Department, Report, 1909-1910.

[110] Journal, June 17, 1910, p. 8; ibid., Feb. 17, 1912, p. 5.

so polluted that bacteria began to enter the city water intake pipe located only 3½ miles northeast of the mouth of the Milwaukee River.[111]

In the beginning of June Dr. Rucker ordered that a notice be printed in the papers in English, German, Italian, Yiddish, Polish, Slavonian, Croatian and Greek -- to boil all drinking water. By July he had arranged to chlorinate the municipal water supply. This measure arrested the typhoid which dropped to 117 new cases in August and only 29 in December.[112] At the end of 1910 Dr. Rucker's successful career in Milwaukee was cut short. A vicious and untrue scandal concerning his personal life enraged army officials in Washington who sent him back to the office of the surgeon general. His successor, Dr. F.A. Kraft, managed to keep the typhoid menace under control by periodically using the chlorination method during the warmer months of the year.[113]

Chlorination offered only a temporary solution to the pollution problem. A much larger effort was impending. Dr. Kraft favored an ozone purification plant costing $100,000. The long awaited sewage report, begun under the Rose administration, favored a much more comprehensive project. It recommended a gradual expenditure beginning with a water filtration plant and later including purification works and percolating filters. The report estimated that the whole system could be finished by 1950 for a total cost of $13,255,000.[114] Unfortunately for the Socialists,

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[111]John W. Alvord, Harrison P. Eddy and George C. Whipple, A Report to the common council upon the disposal of the sewage and the protection of the water supply of the city of Milwaukee April 25, 1911, pp. 5-6; Laurence Marcellus Larson, A Financial and Administrative History of Milwaukee (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1906), p. 141.

[112]Journal, June 1, 1910, p. 2; Health Department, Report, 1910, p. 26.

[113]Journal, Feb. 26, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Jan. 26, 1912, p. 1.

[114]Alvord, Eddy and Whipple, pp. 9-10.

the accumulated cost of a decent water supply, past, present, and future, became known just about the time the Seidel administration was busy advocating municipal projects which also required large expenditures. As a consequence the city became psychologically less disposed to Socialistic schemes.

In other areas, the health department took aggressive steps towards a healthier Milwaukee. Under previous administrations the five assistant physicians left no record of the work that they did. Dr. Kraft required a summary of each case they attended. During 1911 the department helped install for the first time a new invention which revolutionized public drinking facilities -- the "bubbler." These drinking fountains were installed in city parks and in hundreds of factories. Because the bubbler eliminated the transmission of dangerous diseases, Kraft announced that the "drinking cup is now a thing of the past."[115] Kraft's department also became very aggressive in the area of inspection. Late in 1910 he installed a factory inspection force in the department consisting of four men and one woman who among them completed 51,357 inspections in 1,147 different factories during 1911. At the outset the manufacturers resented this invasion, but by the end of the year they gave cooperation to the system because to everyone's benefit it removed workers from the factory who had tuberculosis and other contagious diseases.[116] Milk inspection proved to be the department's toughest problem. Contaminated milk was very dangerous since it could carry bacteria causing scarlet fever, typhoid fever, diphtheria, and tuberculosis. As the city grew milk inspection became a huge problem. Toward the end of the Seidel administration,

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[115] Herald, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 8; Leader, Jan. 8, 1912, p. 3.

[116] Social Democratic Party, Campaign Book, pp. 75-81; Leader, Dec. 28, 1911, p. 10.

Milwaukee was consuming 30,360 gallons of milk a day. Over 1,900 dairy farms within a forty mile radius supplied Milwaukee. Kraft announced that he would conduct a harder than usual fight against impure milk. Although he did revoke some licences when he found unclean conditions and did periodically close down restaurants for the same reason, his staff of four men could never insure proper conditions among all 1,900 farms. A bacteriological survey of milk taken in September, 1911, revealed an alarming situation. The agreed safe level of bacteria for every cubic centimeter of milk was designated at 250,000. Of the samples taken, 70% contained over 250,000; an alarming 40% of that contained over one million; and of that, 17% showed over five million.[117]

During the two years the Socialists were in power, the health department was concerned with the average workingman who did not have the money or the knowledge to avail himself of medical services. Seidel dismissed Dr. Bading because he was not concerned with expanding the department to meet this need. Berger said that he did not grasp the sociological possibilities. Dr. Rucker did grasp them. He understood the Socialist point of view when he said:

> The rich man can provide for his family the proper living conditions, but the poor man can't and it is the duty of the municipality to step in and help, not only for the protection of that one, but for all.[118]

Most of the efforts for the medical improvement of the working class were imaginative yet easy to effect. For example 1910 was the first year in Milwaukee in which the uniformed workers in the city did not have to wear their heavy coats and vests in the sweltering summer heat. Another

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[117]City of Milwaukee, Bureau of Economy and Efficiency, Health Department 1. Milk Supply, Bulletin No. 13, 1912, pp. 3-44; Journal, Nov. 9, 1911, p. 14; Leader, Jan. 24, 1912, p. 1.

[118]Journal, May 27, 1910, p. 3.

simple device was to open the weekly lectures on health to the public whereas before they were open only to the sanitary squad of the department. Soon after their election, the Socialists made good on one of the platform planks by working towards acquiring a municipal hospital which would render the same service to those who could not afford to pay as well as those who could.[119] Perhaps the most imaginative accomplishment was the creation of the Child Welfare Commission. This was the first of its kind in America and the first effort of any large city to meet the general problems of child life. It studied the milk supply, the institutional care of babies in Milwaukee, the legislation affecting babies, and it educated mothers in baby care. The work began July 1, 1911 within a thirty-three block area of a predominantly Polish section of the city. In only two months time, the child death rate of that area halved.[120]

The Socialists promoted the general health of the citizens by stressing the need for public parks. They resented the fact that average workingmen could not enjoy the natural benefits of sunlight, fresh air, and plenty of green surroundings. Because they were very conscious of environment, the Socialists saw a relationship between unhealthy surroundings on the one hand and crime and disease on the other.[121] They referred to parks as the lungs of the city. Urban areas needed breathing spots, they said, and parks breathed for the city to offset the congestion of the community which at its worst produced such "diseased lungs" as the Menomonee valley.

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[119] Herald, July 16, 1910, p. 1; ibid., Jan. 7, 1911, p. 1; Leader, Jan. 13, 1912, p. 3.

[120] Social Democratic Party, Campaign Book, pp. 182-183; Wilbur C. Phillips to Emil Seidel, June 27, 1911, Seidel Papers, Local History Room, Milwaukee Public Library; Child Welfare Commission Report to Seidel, Nov. 14, 1911, Seidel Papers, Local History Room, Milwaukee Public Library.

[121] Herald, Feb. 18, 1911, p. 9.

The Socialists justly complained about Milwaukee's park system. In 1910 Milwaukee owned the smallest amount of park acreage of any city of its size in the world. The common council did not appoint a park board until 1889 and did not buy park lands until the following year. By that time the acquisitions had to be in the outlying districts.[122] Milwaukee had succumbed to American nineteenth century attitudes which did not place an emphasis on beautiful and healthy cities. Alfred C. Clas was one person who was concerned. He kept abreast of developments in Europe and publicly advocated comparable reforms in Milwaukee. Largely due to his persistence, Rose suggested some reforms to the park board in his 1905 annual message. In 1907 the common council created the Metropolitan Park Commission which claimed as members Mr. Clas and Charles B. Whitnall, a Socialist.[123]

Charles B. Whitnall was elected as city treasurer along with the Seidel administration in 1910. Previously he had been a florist and a student of city planning. He became a member of the first branch of the Social Democratic Party in Milwaukee and for many years acted as its state treasurer. Whitnall exerted such a great influence on the park commission from the time of its inception that he in particular and the Socialists in general claim the title of "Father of Milwaukee's Park System." His ideas concerning city planning were visionary and designed to alleviate much of the evil effects of urban living. His ideas were incorporated into the Social Democratic platform. He advocated a civic center, a municipal terminal, tunnel systems for all gas, water and electricity, and neighborhood centers which would include libraries, reading rooms, bathing

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[122] Larsen, p. 143; Herald, Feb. 18, 1911, p. 1.

[123] City of Milwaukee, Board of Public Land Commissioners, Preliminary Reports of the city planning commission, November, 1911, pp. 3-5.

facilities, out-of-doors and winter kindergartens, playgrounds for larger children, and game rooms.. The most ambitious project was his scheme for city "parkways." These parkways would radiate like spokes from the central city. They would be as wide as 150 feet. A street car would run down the center and be flanked on both sides by grass and trees. Roads would be adjacent to the wooded section, and they in turn would be flanked by a narrower tree-lined parkway. On the outer extremes would be the sidewalks for pedestrians. The parkway scheme would have combined the best features of city transportation with safety and part of the aesthetic sense of country life.[124]

The parkway plan cost too much for the Seidel administration to finance. It would have involved tearing down expensive buildings to widen the most dense streets of the city. The administration made a different contribution to Milwaukee's park needs. During the late months of 1910 and the early part of 1911, Victor Berger was instrumental in acquiring for the city the rights to a 600 acre tract of land straddling the Milwaukee River for a six mile length north of present-day Riverside Park. This land was owned by several principals including August and Henry Uihlein, the Schlitz Brewing Company, the Blatz Brewing Company and the North Western Railroad. The area was ideal for factory sites, but Berger was determined not to make it into another Menomonee valley. He announced that Milwaukee would transform these 600 acres into one of the most beautiful parks in the country. In addition he planned to re-plat the extremities of the tract, sell them by lot, and thus bring a resemblance of country living to about 1,500 urban workingmen's families.[125]

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[124] Ibid., pp. 17-30; Social Democratic Party, Campaign Book, p. 21; Journal, May 21, 1910, p. 3; ibid., July 20, 1910, p. 2.

[125] Journal, June 6, 1910, p. 6; ibid., June 16, 1910, p. 5; Herald, Feb. 4, 1911, p. 4.

This park acquisition created the first warning signal to the Seidel administration that Milwaukeeans might not approve schemes which seemed perfectly necessary to the Socialists. In light of the evolution of urban needs up to the present day, the Socialists were completely justified in stressing a beautiful and healthy city; and in 1910, the Socialists themselves needed no assurance that their position was correct. The population of Milwaukee was not nearly so enthusiastic. The price of the park was $1,000,000 which was reasonable. However the opposition politicians, for purely partisan reasons, began to criticize the administration for extravagance and for high taxes that would follow such million dollar schemes. They demanded that the voters decide the issue by referendum, but the Socialists refused.[126] The cry of extravagance irritated a touchy issue. Although the Socialists had stressed economy and efficiency in municipal government, they felt little inclination to keep taxes down. If the Bureau of Economy and Efficiency or the Child Welfare Commission or the increased number of factory inspectors caused a tax increase, the people were getting their money's worth. However the people did not always see the question that way. and the old party men knew it. Mayor Rose had sustained much of his popularity because taxes remained low even as he helped poison the city waters. The Socialists assumed that the people did not care about low taxes when they ousted Rose and elected Mayor Seidel. That assumption would be tested strongly over issues other than the park question and would have a direct bearing on the Socialist Party defeat in 1912. Even at the beginning of 1911, the Socialists knew that the costs of some of their programs plus the widespread knowledge of the impending sewage report had made not a few citizens view the park

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[126]Herald, March 4, 1911, p. 1; Journal, Feb. 8, 1911, p. 8.

acquisition as an extravagance. The administration postponed the purchase, but Berger secured the land options by giving $25 to the owners as a down payment.[127] Because of political problems, the Seidel administration added no significant park acreage to the city's holdings.[128]

The Socialists' interest in city parks derived from their concern over the welfare of the working class. For the large part Socialists assumed that the upper class could take care of itself and that the working class should receive the attention of government. During its two year reign, the Seidel administration showed more concern for the welfare of the common urban dweller than any previous set of officials. This concern was expressed by the eight hour ordinance for all city employees, by the $2.00 a day minimum wage for municipal workers, by the policy of buying union made products, by the increased effort toward factory and food inspection, by the building of a municipal hospital and, elementarily, by the erection of the first public lavatory in the city.[129] In their concern over the average man, the Socialists became especially watchful for his physical well-being. For example the administration conducted a vigorous "sane Fourth of July" campaign in 1911. On the previous Fourth, fireworks claimed 215 lives, mostly youngsters, and blinded and maimed 5,000 more. To prevent this, the city sponsored all-day park activities including drills, exhibitions, games, band concerts, athletic events, folk dances, a reading of the Declaration of Independence, and controlled fireworks. As a result the 1911 Fourth was occasioned by only seventeen minor accidents and one fire call.[130] When reports came to

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[127] Journal, May 4, 1911, p. 1.

[128] City of Milwaukee, Board of Park Commissioners, Report, 1910-1912.

[129] Leader, Jan. 25, 1912, p. 1.

[130] Journal, May 27, 1910, p. 13; ibid., July 5, 1911, p. 3; Herald, June 17, 1911, p. 8.

Mayor Seidel that the garment worker strikers were being physically molested by the police, he sent a strongly worded note to Chief John T. Janssen. The mayor told him that no harm was to come to anyone not breaking the law; and he stated that officers who ignored that order would be held accountable.[131] An outmoded ambulance system also attracted Socialist attention. The administration tried to alleviate some of the discomfort caused by Milwaukee's old bumpy one-horse ambulance by replacing it with a four-cylinder, forty horse power machine, equipped for four patients and two attendants, complete with special springs, shock absorbers and heater. The new ambulance was especially intended for mangled factory workers transported from the outskirts of town.[132]

In 1910 factory workers were accidentally killed and maimed quite often. Many of those accidents could have been prevented by simple safety devices, and no one knew that better than the Socialists. In the fight for safety in the factories, the Socialist effort centered around one man: Dr. H.L. Nahin, a Social Democrat elected Milwaukee county coroner in the 1910 fall election. The coroner was responsible for investigating industrial accidents and making recommendations and censures when applicable. In previous years, the coroners had acted laxly. During 1910, 536 coroner's inquests only returned a few censures, and most of these were charged against the employees for negligence. During Nahin's first week in office he conducted three inquests which all resulted in censures against employers. Nahin continued a harder-than-usual policy towards industrial employers so that the percentage of censures in relation to the number of inquests during his office reached unheard-of heights. Of the railway inquests

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[131] Journal, Dec. 6, 1910, p. 12.

[132] Herald, June 10, 1911, p. 8.

conducted by him during the first six months of 1911, one-third of the verdicts censured the employer whereas all of the inquests during the same period in 1910 termed the cause of injury as accidental.[133] Nahin made positive recommendations to eliminate some of the conditions causing accidents. He suggested that iron partitions separate the piles of pulverized coal which used to slide down occasionally and smother workers who put out spontaneous fires in the bins. He favored some kind of fire-proof clothing for those men who charged coke ovens and constantly risked serious burns when great sheets of flame leaped out at them. He recommended longer levers near tanning vats so that workers would not have to lean so far over the edge and risk slipping into the hot liquid and being crushed by the revolving gear at the bottom. Just about every firm agreed to take his ideas into consideration. The Herald was moderately pleased when it noted that "the manufacturer is not a wanton killer of his fellow men, but simply too much immersed in money seeking to give thought of his own accord to such life and death matters."[134]

The administration was no less concerned over the type of social life available to the working class. The moving picture boom had come to Milwaukee and was very popular. By 1912 the city supported fifty moving picture theatres which drew a weekly attendance of 210,500.[135] The movie business was the single wholesome entertainment offered on a large scale to the general working population. Other, older forms of entertainment which were less wholesome and generally attractive to the working class worried the Socialists. One of these was the common dance hall.

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[133] Herald, Jan. 14, 1911, p. 7; ibid., Jan. 14, 1911, p. 8; ibid., Jan. 21, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Aug. 5, 1911, p. 5.

[134] Ibid., March 4, 1911, p. 10.

[135] Recreational Survey, Dec. 12, 1911, Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

In most cases the dance hall was connected with a saloon and more or less run by the saloon proprietor. In Milwaukee dancing usually received five minutes for every ten to twenty minutes of refreshment. Two thirds of those who attended dance halls were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five.[136] In general these places were vicious and harmful to the younger and less experienced participants. Those who frequented dance halls exposed themselves to corruption; those who did not had few other places to go.

The Socialists met the problem by inaugurating municipal dances at the recently built auditorium. They were designed especially for the working class. The admission price of only 20¢ covered all the expenses since thousands of dancers and spectators packed the auditorium which sometimes opened more than one floor and supported three or four bands at once. Whereas the auditorium had previously sponsored only higher priced events like business shows and expensive operas, the Seidel administration opened it to the "people."[137] The municipal dances were so imaginative, successful, and easy to effect that the grumbling against them came from people who were jealous of the Socialists' ingenuity or who would have opposed any and all measures they undertook. When representatives of the Catholic Church attacked the dances, the Socialists were glad to find a few priests who spoke out against this criticism. One priest suggested that his fellow clergymen visit the slums and private dance halls of the city as Mayor Seidel had done. They would then realise the necessity of taking steps "to remove, and save our girls and boys,

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[136] Ibid. [137] Herald, Dec. 10, 1910, p. 4.

physically, morally and mentally from the many alluring centers of hell."[138] In response to the attacks on the dances, the Herald published a satirical discussion between Casey and Flannigan, two imaginary Irish-Americans. "I see," said Casey, "that some iv th' rivirind fathers ar're beginnin t' knock th' municipal dances." They "nocked" them because the dance kept a young person awake until the "unholy an' dhisgraceful hour iv midnight . . . wreckin 'his consthitution wid pop an' peanuts . . . ." Casey continued to level sarcasm at the critics of the municipal dance:

> "Shud ye and yer wife entice yer thrustn daughter to be waltzed ar'round be some shiftless workin' lad iv good character who niver works more th'n six days a wake, an' who may assail her virtue be buyin' her cr'rackerjack an' chocolate candy befure ye'r very eyes?
>
> "Tis a dasprit chance ye'd be takin', Flannigan. Wud ye' not be doin' batther on a Sathurday night by sayin' t'her, 'Katy, I wish ye t'go this ev'nin' over t'th'shindig at Mike's place, just beyant th' city limits, where th' police dare not vinture an' ye may have innocent eyjyment wid th' gang iv young rowdies th't hangs out there.' There, afther formin' th' acquaintance iv Battle-Ax Mag a'her intimate friends, she may, wid th' gay abandon iv youth an' under th' stimmylatin' influence iv fusel oil cocktails, gallop sedately ar'round th' hall wid Timmy the Turk, th' ambitious an' industhrous young prize-fighter, t' th' simple an' enthrancin' strains iv a fiddle an' a concertina. Feelin' fatigued by the sivin or eight dhrinks she has had, she may raycuperate in his tinder care in th' privacy iv a convenient side room, rayturnin' home be daylight th' followin' mornin' wid th' innocent flush iv booze on her face an' her hair in charmin' disorder. There c'n be but wan choice for th' father who wud have his daughter grow to beauteous womanhood."
>
> "I see," said Flannigan, "but -- again -- why do they knock?"
>
> "I dunno," answered Casey, "I dunno. But wan thing I do know. Every knock is a boost -- for Mike's place."[139]

A more serious problem than the dance hall was prostitution. Socialists especially hated prostitution, not because they were moral crusaders, but because they saw it as a class-orientated social disorder. They contended that the economic system itself promoted prostitution. Working girls with a decent home life found, in many cases, that they

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[138] Ibid., Dec. 17, 1910, p. 8. [139] Ibid., p. 7.

could not earn an adequate wage. The Socialists argued that these underpaid women were very often forced into lives of immorality. The economic system dictated that girls break away from home and education in order to work. A lack of education among many of these bred a coarseness which would seek pleasures in cheap dance halls and dives. There they would meet coarse men shaped by the same rude system or, worse yet, the sons of the well-to-do who could afford automobiles to drive the women they met off to a life of immorality.[140] For the Socialists an attack on prostitution was an aid to the working class.

Milwaukee's city officials had done little to alleviate the problem. Mayor Rose was infamous for ignoring the red-light district located in the downtown area near the Milwaukee River. The situation was bad enough that the Socialists spoke freely of white slavery in the city. There were cases where young girls who answered newspaper advertisements for general housework learned that they were expected to give themselves to immoral purposes. One girl was forced to remain under those conditions when her prospective employer took away all her clothes and made her a virtual prisoner.[141] Police Chief Janssen was slow in cooperating with the Seidel administration. On July 6, 1910, the mayor wrote him expressing the administration's desire to enforce the law against liquor sales at places used for prostitution. The chief soon reported that such sales had subsequently stopped. However an unofficial band of observers, probably Socialists, reported that four out of five houses of ill fame they had visited offered to serve them beer from 50¢ to $1.00 a bottle. Fourteen "resort" keepers were eventually prosecuted for violation of the liquor law.[142]

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[140] Ibid., Sept. 30, 1911, p. 5. [141] Herald, March 11, 1911, p. 5.

[142] Social Democratic Party, Vest Pocket Manual, pp. 103-106; Leader, Feb. 12, 1912, p. 1.

In 1911 the administration began to assault the houses of prostitution directly. No one had attempted this before, and the hotel owners who operated immoral businesses had been used to a certain security. Some hotels felt especially confident since most of their patrons were well-to-do and influential.[143] On February 23, 1911, Mayor Seidel launched his attack which ended the complacency. By this time he had pressured the police chief into some kind of support. On the 23rd he ordered a notice printed in the Milwaukee papers:

> . . . hotels for transients and other resorts of immoral nature must cease to operate.
>
> The attention of patrons of these resorts is called to the statute of the state as well as the ordinances of the city, all of which prescribe severe punishment for offenses against public decency. Under these laws, single, as well as married offenders are punishable. Officers have been stationed to keep watch with strict orders to raid them and arrest all that might be found there.[144]

"Shady" hotel owners were so shocked that they called on the mayor the next day to learn just how great was the danger of police action. The danger was more than suspected. By October of that year, three hotels had been prosecuted. In May of 1912 most of the hotels in the red-light district received orders to vacate, and by June, 1912, the area was cleaned out.[145] The Seidel administration had performed a great service to the city generally and, according to the Socialist way of thinking, to the working class in particular.

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[143] Herald, Feb. 25, 1911, p. 10. [144] Journal, Feb. 23, 1911, p. 1.

[145] Social Democratic Party, Vest Pocket Manual, pp. 103-106; Journal, Feb. 24, 1911, p. 3.

CHAPTER V

MOUNTING OPPOSITION

Socialists in Milwaukee possessed a stronger concept of "party" than the Democrats or Republicans. Not only was socialism a political way of thinking, but it was also a way of life which eventually everyone was expected to accept. Socialist leaders concerned themselves with municipal efficiency not only because it helped the working class, but also because it helped the Socialist Party. The Party, the working class, and the good of the community were all equated. Emil Seidel expressed this relationship well when he wrote of the significance of the 1910 fall elections. After having won the municipal (spring) elections, the Socialists could not very well afford to lose the county and congressional elections only a few months afterward. Nor could they, said Seidel, afford many mistakes in government or afford not to give the working class the betterments that they had promised. "After having promised such improvements, if we then bungle the job, every such failure will be an injury to the cause of socialism."[146]

The Socialist Party delegated its authority from the state to the county level. The county contained regular branches of the party in the wards, cities, towns, and villages and also special branches according to nationality. Most of the affairs of the party were managed by the County Central Committee composed of one delegate at large from each branch and one

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[146]Undated, unpaged typescript, Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

delegate for every thirty-five party members. The Executive Committee composed of seven members of the party who had been part of the county organization for at least five years, wielded the most concentrated power. It supervised all affairs of organization, finance, propaganda and the press; it investigated all charges preferred in the County Central Committee against branch members, acted in emergencies between regular meetings, called special county meetings, and acted as trustees of whatever stock the County Central Committee bought.[147]

The power centralization of the Social Democratic Party appeared to many people, no matter what they thought of the idea of socialism itself, as undemocratic. When the Socialists won office, their inner sanctum decisions began to affect not only the party but also the common council and the generality. Every measure of policy in the common council, for example, had to pass the scrutiny of a Socialist Party caucus held every Saturday afternoon. One did not have to be an alderman to have a voice there; one only had to be a party member. Since the Socialists held a majority in the common council, most measures, even those submitted by non-Socialists, had to pass this screening process. Since the Saturday afternoon caucus was closed to non-Socialists, the public never saw the free debate and conflicting opinions among the members of the party in power.[148]

What irritated many non-Socialists from the outset was that the party of Victor Berger won office without a majority vote. It is true that the other mayors of Milwaukee had also won by a plurality, but the Socialists seemed to be an especially small plurality since so relatively

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[147] Herald, Dec. 10, 1910, p. 10; Constitution and By-Laws of the Social Democratic Party of Milwaukee, revised June, 1911, Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[148] Journal, Jan. 25, 1911, p. 3.

few Milwaukeeans were members of the Social Democratic Party. Many of the 27,608 votes for Seidel in 1910 were cast by people who were not party members but who were tired of the corruption that the Socialists promised to eradicate. Only Socialist leaders knew exactly how many party members lived in the county. Victor Berger spoke casually of the more than twenty thousand Socialist voters who elected Emil Seidel, but this figure was certainly too high. There were only about 80,000 party members in the whole nation in 1911, and it is not likely that one-fourth of them lived in Milwaukee.[149] The Journal estimated 8,000 party members in Milwaukee, but even this figure seems too high.[150] One indication of the true number may be derived from the record of the party dues. Members were usually required to pay 15¢ a month. The dues for Milwaukee County in 1910 amounted to $2,822.15. This would indicate only about 1,600 party members. Allowing for women members, who paid only 10¢ a month, and foreign speaking branch members, who paid only 15¢ quarterly, and also the unemployed, who were exempt, the total number of Social Democrats in good standing was probably no higher than 2,500.[151]

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[149]Report of the National Executive Committe, Dec., 1914, Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[150]Journal, Dec. 9, 1910, p. 8.

[151]Herald, May 14, 1910, p. 7; Minutes of the Sevens Point Convention, Nov. 4-5, 1911, Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society. The number of party members was so low partly because of the requirements for admission. All applications had to be endorsed by two members and then referred to a committee for investigation. Each applicant had to answer these questions: What is your idea of Socialism? Did you ever read our platform? Are you a subscriber to a Socialist paper? Of what paper, and how long? If you are not already a subscriber, are you willing to become a subscriber to one of the Party's local papers? Are you a citizen of the United States? Have you ever held any public office, if so, under what party, and when and where? Have you been in any way active for either of the old parties, or for any candidate of the old parties? If so, give particulars. Do you believe in splitting your ticket when voting? Do you object to a trade organization? Did you ever act as a strike breaker? Have you ever been convicted of any offense? Do you belong to any military organization? (Constitution and By-Laws)

When such a relatively small group of people exerted a direct and coordinated influence on municipal government, traditional American democracy seemed somehow thwarted. The Socialists were not embarrassed about their procedures since they considered traditional democracy and the old parties as outmoded institutions. They saw government as the province of socialism and not vice versa. For example, the County Central Committee collected a percentage of the salary of every elected or appointed official who was a party member.[152] This policy was enforced. Eleven months after the 1910 municipal elections, E.T. Melms, who acted as the Social Democratic County Organizer as well as president of the common council, wrote on County Central Committee stationery to inform Daniel Hoan that his dues were in arrears $125. Hoan's assessed contribution was $50 every month since May, 1910. Hoan replied that he had already paid $415 and was short only $35. Melms wrote Hoan again confirming the latter's computation and asked him to send all contributions to the proper office for entry. Thirty percent of the money went to the state fund, and the rest went toward the party campaign fund for Milwaukee elections. These assessed "contributions," based on the salaries of elected Socialist officials, were a step in making the government subservient to the party.[153]

As Mayor Seidel's term wore on, it became apparent that the Socialists were either more vicious than other politicians in promoting party interests or simply more candid about their activities. When they first assumed office, the Socialists gave the impression of fairness. They credited themselves with placing at least one minority party alderman on each common council committee in contrast to the old party members who, when the situation was reversed, tried to exclude the Socialists.[154]

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[152]Typescript signed by E.T. Melms, Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[153]Melms to Hoan, Jan. 27, 1911, in Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County

That fair impression evaporated when politics became rough. For example, when a Democrat in the common council charged Seidel with malfeasance in office, president Melms appointed an all-Socialist investigating committee. The action had no precedent, and Melms tried to justify it in the following way:

> I appointed all Socialists on the committee because experience in the past has taught us that the minority aldermen delay an investigation by their haggling, and we want to get to the bottom of this thing without delay.[155]

Getting "to the bottom" of things seemed to mean getting the Socialist way. This self-assuredness and confidence of position began to alienate public opinion. Milwaukeeans were displeased again when the Socialists gerrymandered the voting districts. City districts had been sorely in need of re-apportionment for several years. The Seidel administration quickly busied itself with the task. When the Socialists had finished the job, the city found that they had absolutely disenfranchised the anti-Socialist first and eighteenth wards by removing them from the fourth district and placing them in a new odd-numbered one which would not elect a representative until 1915. The Socialists advantaged themselves in sixteen of the nineteen assembly districts in Milwaukee county and five of the six senatorial districts. One of them had a bar shape, one a zigzag, and one resembled a half-moon. Madison registered widespread dissatisfaction with the re-apportionment, and charges of logrolling were openly made. The Journal lost all sympathy with Berger's crowd and appealed to both Republicans and Democrats to do something about them. The dissident voices were satisfied when Governor Francis E. McGovern,

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Historical Society; Hoan to Melms, Jan. 29, 1911, Hoan Papers; Melms to Hoan, Feb. 4, 1911, Hoan Papers.

[154] Herald, April 30, 1910, p. 4. [155] Leader, Dec. 7, 1911, p. 12.

a Progressive and no special enemy of the Socialists, vetoed the apportionment bill and called for a more equitable arrangement.[156]

The sentiment against the Socialist administration strongly influenced the 1911 spring elections. The most contested offices were seven vacancies for school commissioners. Since the 1909 elections, two Socialist commissioners, Frederick Heath being one, had resigned only to be replaced in each case by a Republican or Democrat.[157] Since the Socialists had complained loudly over those appointments, the 1911 election became an even more severe test for the administration's popularity. At the primary held on March 21, 1911, two of the four Socialist candidates were unexpectedly eliminated from the race. Surprisingly they were outvoted in some of their own strongholds: the 5th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, and 23rd wards.[158] Only two weeks remained before the election. If the other two Socialist candidates also lost, the administration knew that it would have cause to worry about the municipal election the following spring.

The Socialists faced an especially hard fight. A new nonpartisan majority vote law applied to the election. It provided that the primary would narrow the candidates to two for each office. After a referendum of their own, the Socialists submitted four candidates to the primary. The Republican and Democratic leaders coalesced and supported a ticket of men who were all of the Catholic faith. The supposedly "nonpartisan" campaign really consisted of one set of candidates whom everyone knew

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[156] Seventh Annual Statement of the Voters' League, 1911 bound in Milwaukee Voters' League, Miscellaneous Publications; Journal, July 1, 1911, p. 1; ibid., July 3, 1911, p. 6; ibid., July 5, 1911, p. 6; ibid., July 7, 1911, p. 8.

[157] Journal, Aug. 2, 1910, p. 1; ibid., March 20, 1911, p. 1.

[158] Journal, March 22, 1911, p. 1.

as Socialists and another set of candidates whom everyone knew as the Catholic ticket. Under the old system where parties formally nominated candidates, the Socialists could expect to win by a plurality. Under the new system, all the anti-Socialist vote was likely to go to the Catholic ticket.[159]

The Socialists were unhappy over the turn of events. They were willing to admit backing their own candidates, and they expected the other side to do the same. They especially disliked the anti-Socialist support given by the Catholic Church. Before the election, the Church seemed little concerned with the success of the public school system. Archbishop Messmer had opposed free text books for the public schools and seemed little disposed to support school bonds. All of a sudden the Church took an extreme interest because the ticket was Catholic. Archbishop Messmer enjoined the Catholics of Milwaukee not to read the Socialist Kuryer Polski or the Dziennik Varodowy (Chicago) under the pain of not receiving the sacraments. A circular with the Catholic ticket enclosed made its way around the city:

> Dear Sir,
> As citizens who recognize the danger of Socialistic supremacy in the schools or in any other function of government, we cannot urge you too strongly to vote for anti-Socialistic candidates at the election to be held Tuesday, April 4th.[160]

On election day, Catholic priests took an active part by bringing carriages full of women (who could vote for school board members) to the booths.[161]

Before the election, Mayor Seidel admitted that his party might very well lose. He probably did not envisage the disastrous two-to-one margin against his party that came on April 4th. Neither Socialist

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[159] Herald, April 8, 1911, pp. 1, 4. [160] Ibid., April 22, 1911, p. 9.

[161] Journal, March 23, 1911, p. 3; Leader, Feb. 12, 1912, p. 5; Herald, April 8, 1911, p. 4.

candidate for the school board won, and the party nominee for alderman-at-large also lost. They had been beaten by a fusion of the old parties allied with the Catholic Church. The sentiment against the Socialists was so strong that hardly a voice was raised questioning the merit of an all-Catholic ticket. One Episcopalian minister did speak on that point rather poignantly. He noted that under normal circumstances he would have expected to see newspaper headlines such as "Clean Sweep for the Papal Ticket" or "The Romanists Enter the School Fight and Win" or "Jesuits in Control of Our Public Schools."[162]

Mayor Seidel took weak optimism in the aftermath. He contended that the anti-Socialist combination was volatile rather than strong. It consisted, he said, of the "old time standpatters and progressives, reactionary and liberal, together with all the forces at the disposal of a part of the clergy. It is a ludicrous anomaly."[163] Ludicrous or not, the Socialists would have to overcome a huge vote deficiency if the opposition fused again in 1912.

The single issue which caused the greatest animosity between the administration and its opponents was the tax question. For many years the method of taxation was in dire need of reform. City assessments were never calculated on a 100% basis. Since they varied from 40% to 60%, the system was inherently unjust. Property had been assessed at less than the full value because the state tax had once been computed on the basis of county assessments. Hence the various counties were interested in keeping the assessments low. By 1909, however, the state formed its tax rate independently from local assessments. In 1910 the state levied a

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[162] Journal, March 28, 1911, p. 2; ibid., April 5, 1911, p. 1; Herald, April 1, 1911, p. 4.

[163] Herald, April 8, 1911, p. 7.

tax of twenty-one million dollars on the personal property in Milwaukee, but the city's low assessment indicated only seven million dollars. The system for assessing intangible personal property was especially weak. It was generally acknowledged that only a small percentage of the tax on items like stocks and mortgages was actually collected. Progressives like Governor McGovern advocated a state income tax which would eliminate the personal property tax altogether. The Socialists were especially distraught over the frequency of personal property tax dodging. They argued, with reason, that the rich hid their immense intangible assets from the assessor whereas the average man's personal belongings always found their way to the tax rolls. This inequality generally raised the taxes of everyone except the rich.[164]

By the spring of 1911, the state legislature had reformed the system somewhat. Assessments were to be made on a full valuation basis. The office of the tax commissioner, which was not controlled by the Socialists, worked on the revision of every city assessment since the early months of the year. In his second annual message to the common council, Mayor Seidel praised Tax Commissioner Frank B. Schutz for his work on the full assessment plan.[165] Although the work seemed to proceed smoothly, the Socialists watched these developments very closely. Any monetary question had become a touchy issue to the Seidel administration. Politicians had already complained about the high taxes for 1910, and the Socialists had to bother themselves by explaining how the previous administration was responsible for the 1910 budget. Anti-Socialists had already begun to charge the

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[164] Herald, Jan. 7, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Dec. 24, 1910, p. 1; City of Milwaukee, Municipal Facts. Digest of Taxation 1884-1909, comp. Edwin Hinkel (Milwaukee, 1909), p. 8; Journal, Jan. 12, 1911, p. 8.

[165] Journal, April 18, 1911, p. 1.

administration with extravagance. The administration countered by showing how various departments, like the purchasing office had cost a little more but had also saved enormous sums of money by new efficient methods. They also tried to show how reorganization had transferred more responsibility to certain departments which consequently needed more funds. These attacks had affected the administration to the point where it temporarily set aside the acquisition of the million dollar park. Finally, the Socialist defeat in the 1911 spring election made the administration watchful over any issue which might cause further unpopularity.

Trouble came fast. In the middle of June, 1911, Victor Berger accused Commissioner Schutz of urging his tax assessing department to increase the valuations of the workingmen's districts while keeping the assessments of the rich as low as possible. On July 8, 1911, City Attorney Hoan asked Schutz to see the assessment rolls of five wards. Schutz informed him that the tax rolls had not been completed or copied. Hoan managed to look at a few of the assessments outside of regular office hours and found enough discrepancies to cause him alarm. He determined that the Prospect Avenue area of the city was assessed no higher for its improvements and only 40% higher for its land than during the previous year. By contrast, he noted instances in three workingmen's wards where property had been assessed from 80% to 300% higher than during the previous year. Hoan promptly asked the state board of review to investigate the tax assessments.

During the following weeks, the Socialists launched a ferocious attack against Schutz. They pointed out specific instances where workingmen's homes had been assessed too high in contrast to lavish estates which had been assessed too low. They quoted numerous residents as saying that they never saw the assessor who raised the valuation of their

personal belongings. They drew caricatures of Schutz on the front page of the Herald which portrayed him as an obseqious pawn of "Big Business." The Socialists flatly accused him of prejudice against the working class.

None of the general charges leveled by the Socialists against Schutz was true. Schutz, a non-Socialist, was not conspiring against the working class. He simply differed from the administration's economic point of view. Seidel declared war against all tax dodgers in a speech a few days before the 1911 spring elections. Schutz was unimpressed with such zeal. He disapproved of the personal property tax which made dodging possible. He advocated the substitution of an income rather than a personal property tax. The Socialists favored the system as it was and preferred to pursue tax dodgers with a vengeance. The administration hired two tax ferrets in January, 1911, for the sole purpose of discovering tax dodging among the well-to-do. The Socialists also assumed that all questionable properties should be taxed. Of all the intangible personal property that tended to escape assessment, out-of-state corporation stocks held by residents of Wisconsin were usually among them. Seidel liked to quote the state tax commission's instructions to the assessors as demanding that such stocks be taxed. "It is the plain law of the land," he said, "and the law of common sense and justice that if there is any doubt whatever as to whether such stock or other property should be assessed, such doubt should be resolved against relieving this property from taxation."[166] A Socialist would naturally value the community's welfare over an individual's. To Schutz, this was not the "plain law of the land." When in doubt he tended to exempt personal property. He believed

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[166] Herald, June 18, 1910, p. 1; Hoan to Schutz, July 8, 1911, in Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Hoan to the joint meeting of the state board of review and the city assessors of Milwaukee, July 19, 1911, Hoan Papers.

that the assessment of bonds and stocks meant double taxation:

> . . . the thing which is the security for the credit is already subject to taxation; the stock certificate is merely the evidence of the ownership of property rights; to tax them, simply a transfer of credit, as is represented by the transfer of a stock certificate, is plainly an additional tax upon the owner of the property.[167]

Schutz argued that double taxation would only hurt the consumer in the long run. He demonstrated his point with a simple example: If A sells B a horse, B pays both the tax on the horse and also the tax that A will have to pay on the note B gives A. Taxing credits would also tend to hurt the average consumer by slowing down the economy when businessmen placed their monies in safe but non-productive depositories.[168] Schutz contended that the instructions to the assessors actually supported his position and not Seidel's. First he quoted the Wisconsin Statutes: "Stock in any corporation in this state which is required to pay taxes upon its property in the same manner as individuals' is exempt from taxation." He then quoted from the tax commission's instructions:

> The evident purpose of this exemption is to avoid the double tax burden which would result from taxing the property of a corporation and taxing also the shares of stock of the same corporation. The exact meaning of the expression "in this state" has not been passed upon by the courts, and until it has been judicially determined, some uncertainty must exist.[169]

In suggesting a state income tax as a substitute for the contemporary legal mess, Schutz promoted a progressivism which was rooted in Henry George's Single Tax. He was a hard thinking commissioner who simply differed from the Socialist position. He certainly was not an ignorant,

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[167] Sentinel, Oct. 24, 1911, a clipping in the Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Herald, April 22, 1911, p. 5.

[168] City of Milwaukee, Tax Commissioner, Report, 1910, p. 16.

[169] Journal, Oct. 24, 1911, p. 1.

biased sycophant of big business bent on destroying the Socialist Party. His many references to Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations in his 1910 report illustrate his laissez-faire attitude toward individual rights and the success of capitalism. This attitude was repulsive to the Socialists and helps to account for their vicious personal attack on him.

The Seidel administration would not have opposed Schutz so strongly had they not been fighting for their political lives. They were accused of extravagance in office and of raising taxes excessively. Both charges were false. Although the Socialists were not the professional administrators that their predecessors had been, their interest in honesty and efficiency in government had saved money and inaugurated social services that were unprecedented in the city. Their opposition accused them of raising the taxes $400,000 over the amount in 1910; and although this was true, it was not extravagant. Taxes had risen, for example, by $500,000 during the last year of the Rose regime and would rise $1,300,000 between 1913 and 1914 when the Socialists were out of power.[170] Tax increases meant nothing in themselves since the needs of the modern city increased each year. Milwaukee's taxes doubled from 1902 to 1911. Departments such as health, sewerage, and garbage disposal were spending more money per thousand tax dollars each year.[171] The tax rate was a better indication of the administration's fiscal responsibility. The Socialists increased the tax rate only .2 both in 1911 and 1912. It had increased .5 in 1910 and would increase .2 in 1913 and 2.5 in 1914.[172]

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[170] City of Milwaukee, Tax Commissioner, Assessments and Taxes 1901-1930, p. 17, Municipal Reference Library.

[171] Tax Commissioner, Municipal Facts, pp. 80, 87; Journal, Nov. 30, 1911, p. 4.

[172] Milwaukee, Tax Commissioner, Assessments and Taxes, p. 15. These figures are all based on the true values and account for the general rise in assessments in 1911.

From an accountant's point of view, the administration had achieved a creditable financial record. The average voter did not see the issues so minutely. He was greatly influenced by the cry of high taxes. The only way for the Socialists to combat this propaganda was to blame Schutz for assessing the city unfairly. If the Socialists could have convinced the average citizen that the rich man had profited to the disadvantage of the workingman, their battle would have been won.

In their campaign against the tax assessors, the Socialists proved that the methods which changed the old system to a 100% valuation were far from perfect. Schutz admitted giving his assessors the right to use their own judgment and the order not to consider property values under the old system. He did not use a comprehensive plan to fix the value of large buildings, nor did he use fire insurance appraisals as a guide.[173] But the Socialists could not disprove the crucial point -- that the 1911 assessments were the most fair ever compiled in Milwaukee. Never before had they even attempted to value all properties at 100%. Of course, the assessments were not perfectly fair. What the Socialists failed to concede was that the job handed to Schutz to complete in a few months was monumental. He and his small staff of twenty-eight men had to re-evaluate every bit of property in Milwaukee without reference to the old assessments which were grossly uneven. Seidel and others pointed to isolated cases where the poor had been over-assessed; but there were other instances where the unfairness also applied to the more wealthy. Several prominent property assessments in the fashionable eighteenth ward were lowered when the owners showed where bids for sale never reached the valuation or where they had recently bought the property for less than the assessment.[174]

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[173] Journal, July 19, 1911, p. 3. [174] Ibid., July 29, 1911, p. 4.

The situation was curious. The Socialists were not guilty of a large tax increase; and Schutz was not guilty of a bad job of assessment. Both the administration and the anti-Socialists backing Schutz may have realized each other's guiltlessness. But at that point neither cared for the issues. By fall, 1911, people began to yell about taxes, and both sides wished to steer the complaints to each other. Hundreds of individuals poured into Whitnall's treasury office where they demanded to know why their taxes were too high. Whitnall blamed it on the tax assessors, but the general feeling ran against the administration. One woman was almost in hysterics. "If my husband votes the Socialistic ticket," she cried, "I'll never forgive him." Seidel and Whitnall both charged that the newspapermen and the police officers, who were supposed to keep order, were mingling with the crowd to speak against the administration. Seidel asked the Socialist county sheriff to send over some of his men. The Journal noted that the treasurer's office finally had the curious sight of policemen watching the citizens, two deputy sheriffs watching the patrolmen, and two more watching the Journal reporters.[175]

On October 23rd, 1911 Mayor Seidel eliminated all chance of reconciliation by publicly denouncing Schutz. "I charge," he said, "that the present tax commissioner and many of the assessors are either grossly incompetent or are guilty of abbetting tax dodging."[176] The common council subsequently appointed a committee to investigate the charge filed by Helms against Schutz claiming that the latter knowingly allowed assessments which discriminated against small home owners. In a grossly unfair maneuver, the Socialist majority approved a five-man committee composed

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[175] Leader, Dec. 13, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Dec. 14, 1911, p. 1; Journal, Dec. 12, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Dec. 5, 1911, p. 1.

[176] Herald, Oct. 28, 1911, p. 5.

of their own party members.[177] Hoan produced the crucial evidence before the committee. He declared that his tax ferrets had uncovered four cases of estates whose out-of-state stocks worth $6,244,700 were not placed on the tax rolls.[178] On January 25, 1912, the all-Socialist committee upheld, as could be expected, the charge against Schutz in the most definite terms:

> The assessors of Milwaukee, with the knowledge of the former tax commissioner, and contrary to the letter and spirit of the instructions of the state tax commission, omitted from the assessment rolls millions of dollars worth of assessable property, thus wilfully or negligently favoring wealthy tax dodgers and placing a heavy burden upon the shoulders of the small home owners and other honest taxpayers.[179]

The Socialists' treatment of Commissioner Schutz was unjustified. There had been opportunities to object to his methods which the administration ignored. Mayor Seidel and the city clerk had the opportunity to contest any assessment as members of the board of review which handled tax complaints. Seidel had voted with the majority of the board on many of the complaints brought before it, and he raised no serious objection throughout the proceedings which took place mostly in July of 1911. Instead of working with the board, the administration secretly hired the tax ferrets which disclosed their findings only to support a formal charge against Schutz.

The non-Socialist aldermen were furious over the Socialists' methods. In retaliation they introduced a resolution to investigate the board of review. The committee reported back its findings so phrased as to exclude the participation of Mayor Seidel. A minority party member of the committee refused to sign the report as written. Alderman Joseph Carney, the leader of the opposition, filed formal charges against

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[177] Leader, Dec. 20, 1911, p. 1. [178] Ibid., Dec. 27, 1911, pp. 1, 10.

[179] Ibid., Jan. 26, 1912, p. 1; ibid., March 12, 1912.

Seidel for malfeasance in office and against Hoan for hiring tax ferrets with the contingent fund when they had been previously declared illegal by the courts. The administration again demonstrated its political arbitrariness by appointing the same all-Socialist committee, which had been used to investigate Schutz, to now look into Carney's charges.[180]

The rigid positions taken by each side plus the frustration experienced by the minority party eventually generated very heated interchanges in the council committee on taxes. Alderman Carney looked as if he would come to blows with a Socialist over the tax ferret issue. The committee had just indefinitely postponed a measure which would have allowed the minority party aldermen to learn by what authority the tax ferrets were employed, when Carney asked why the matter could not be brought onto the common council floor.

> "Because I'm not going to make daggers for my enemy to stab me in the back," said Socialist alderman Welch.
>
> "I don't stab you in the back," said Carney. "If I stab you, I stab you in the heart. You can't say I go behind your back to fight you. I do fight you and I shall continue to do so, but I will not stab you in the back."
>
> "But you expect us to open our vests and expose our bare bosoms so you can do it," said Welch.
>
> Carney charged that he had never been shown any courtesy by the administration which gave him no information. Another Socialist replied: "Hand it to you on a gold platter, is that what you want?"[181]

The administration had come off badly during the altercations. Their arguments generally failed to convince and their arbitrariness in the common council alienated much of the non-Socialist support they once enjoyed. The tax question seriously affected the 1912 elections which were only a few months away when the shouting in the council chambers finally ceased. As early as June, 1911, Mayor Seidel confided to a New

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[180] Journal, Nov. 7, 1911, p. 12; ibid., Nov. 21, 1911, p. 2; ibid., Nov. 27, 1911, p. 1.

[181] Journal, Nov. 14, 1911, p. 1.

York Socialist meeting that he feared that the party might lose in 1912. The Socialists in Milwaukee had been hurt by their opponents' cry of extravagance and high taxes. That old familiar campaign issue sent the same irresistible appeal to taxpayers as it usually seems to do. Whitnall expressed this sentiment somewhat bitterly:

> It seems strange how people will endure indirect taxation without question and rebel at one-quarter the amount when levied direct. Perhaps the "educational" influence of the press is as responsible for people not seeing facts as it is for their impulsive deference to fiction each election day.[182]

The pressure forced the Socialists to cut down the budget they had prepared for 1912 -- even eliminating $10,000 from the worthwhile Child Welfare Commission's $25,000 allotment -- with hopes of appeasing the taxpayers. During the 1912 campaign, the administration made a last attempt to present its side of the tax question with the help of projector and screen to simplify the issues.[183]

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[182] Ibid., June 29, 1911, p. 1; Twentieth Century, Nov., 1911, p. 47; Leader, Feb. 12, 1912, p. 9.

[183] Journal, Feb. 1, 1912, p. 1; ibid., Jan. 5, 1912, p. 10; Leader, March 13, 1912, p. 10.

CHAPTER VI

NONPARTISANSHIP, FUSION, AND DEFEAT

When Mayor Seidel won office in 1910, Milwaukee generally considered the Socialist Party as a reform organization which could never put its more radical plans into effect. Few were afraid to deal with Socialists since they had established a responsible record in city government. As Seidel's administration wore on, unforeseen bitter conflicts between Socialists and non-Socialists emerged. Both sides became intolerant of each other, and those who had once supported the Socialists became their avowed enemies. This bitter, intolerant attitude was rooted in the Socialist ideology. Although Berger's group was willing to compromise more extensively than most, Milwaukee Socialists retained a deep-seated antipathy to all classes other than the working class and all parties other than the Social Democratic Party. Mayor Seidel divided the whole of Milwaukee's citizenship into two groups: those who believed in Socialism and those who represented the "trusts, the monopolies, big business, gambling and vice, a servile press, grafters and bribe-givers together with those who allow themselves to be prejudiced by the interests."[184] His antipathy toward the latter class reflected deep personal feelings. He once said that capitalism had deprived him of his education when he was young and that he would never forgive the system.[185]

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[184]Seidel's defense of his administration, Dec. 1, 1912, p. 1 of the Forward, typescript in the Seidel Papers, Local History Room, Milwaukee Public Library.

[185]Journal, May 8, 1911, p. 5.

During his term of office, Mayor Seidel's actions revealed that his administration planned to work exclusively for the working class. As mayor he officially welcomed the annual hobo convention which was held in Milwaukee in 1911. When Theodore Roosevelt visited Milwaukee in 1910, Seidel refused to serve on the receiving committee because of the former president's "unscholarly and unfair position" in regard to Socialism.[186] Mayor Seidel, once elected, made the monied class quite uncomfortable. When the administration discovered the $200,000 deficit caused by Rose, Seidel publicly said that the "interests" rather than the working class would have to make up the difference.[187] This attitude prompted Hoan to employ tax ferrets to seek out intangible properties that big business was keeping off the tax rolls. Since only two tax investigators were hired, the city in fact promoted class prejudice, since two men could never hope to investigate more than a few wealthy individuals. The administration gradually demonstrated its lack of concern for certain elements in the city. For example, Health Commissioner Rucker issued orders to his department to be courteous to the poor and "the poorer the person, the more courtesy."[188] Non-Socialists who had voted for Seidel in 1910 found themselves torn between their attraction for the administration's municipal honesty and their disgust for its blatant renunciation of much of their way of life. Three manufacturers described their own emotional dilemma in a letter to Seidel which assured him of their vote in 1912 but pleaded with him to act as the mayor of the whole city and not just of his own party:

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[186] Ibid., Feb. 1, 1911, p. 1; ibid., Aug. 29, 1910, p. 1; ibid., Aug. 30, 1910, p. 6.

[187] Ibid., May 26, 1910, p. 5. [188] Herald, June 18, 1910, p. 1.

> In your speeches do not ruthlessly trample on many ideals that are dear to the average American heart, for you only wound without convincing. When you or your party attempt to shatter the Idols and dis-pell the halo, that has been placed by tradition and precept around the old Flag, Washington, Lincoln, etc., you shock without converting. I know you to be a kindly dispositioned man, one who would not willingly harm anyone, and yet some of your rather inflammatory public remarks, injured your interests among those who were your friends and supporters, but not of your party.[189]

Seidel's reply indicated that he missed the point. He told the three gentlemen that he was not concerned with votes but with impartial government. He also said that he was patriotic, and like many American patriots, he was and would be called a traitor by his contemporaries.[190] In other words, the mayor's only solace to the three distraught gentlemen was that his animosity to their class did not extend to them personally.

When the Socialist leaders spoke to the working class, their remarks did approach the inflammatory as the letter indicated. The Voters' League annual report in 1912[191] condemned the Socialists for not representing the whole city, for their secret committee meetings, and, above all, for spreading class hatred and division.[192] The Socialists said that they really hated no one, that the good men of the world were not lined on one side and the evil on the other. But at the same time, Milwaukee Socialists, like others around the country, believed that class strife was the stuff of history. To their way of thinking, class wars were the only kind of war which advanced the human race.[193] Mayor Seidel's

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[189] Three members of the J.L. White Manufacturing Co. to Seidel, March 27, 1912, Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[190] Seidel to E.L. White, undated typescript rough draft, Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society.

[191] This report seems to offer objective criticisms. The Journal headlined it as a "terrific indictment" of the administration while the Leader claimed that the report favored the administration. Both papers put objectionable observations of the League into small type while selecting only part of the report for easily readable print.

[192] Leader, March 6, 1912, p. 5. [193] Journal, March 6, 1911, p. 14.

Labor Day address to the workingmen of the city in 1910 could not have been made without his acceptance of the possibility of class war:

> Between you and your product there is a deep sea of tradition, superstition, falsehood, brutality, greed, perfidy and your own ignorance. Through the ages this mass has been added to by the judas priest and corrupt levite; by the domineering monarch and brutal nobleman; by the debauched legislator and the servile judge; by the greedy wagemaster and your own ignorance.[194]

When responsible observers became alarmed at the assumptions which underpinned the administration's thought, the Socialists became uncompromisingly rigid. Reacting against the Voters' League's objection to class discrimination, the Leader published this editorial:

> There will be no truce, gentlemen, with your masters until they and you are cast off the toilers' backs. You are not dealing with a "reform" movement or an aggregation of olive eating and coffee-drinking uplifters who congratulate themselves that they are emancipating humanity by partaking of frequent luncheons and listening to "experts" on municipal government.
>
> You are facing the men whom you have helped despoil and who at last are conscious that they have been robbed. Your enfeebled protest that they threaten our institutions is quite as futile as the Tory cry of treason that greeted Patrick Henry when he predicted the coming of the American revolution. You are, sirs, fighting for a cause that is lost.[195]

One of the serious failings of the administration was that it dismissed any position contrary to its own in an offhand and sometimes crude manner which it sometimes later regretted. One of the most striking examples occurred when Judge F.C. Eschweiler ruled that the public works supervisors had been appointed illegally. No doubt the real reason why the construction company interests brought the case to court was to eliminate supervisor Mullen who saved the city so much money at their expense. But it was also true that the Socialists had been careless in their regard for the civil service law. Instead of accepting the situation as it was, the Socialists accused the judge of making a political

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[194] Journal, Sept. 3, 1910, p. 14. [195] Leader, March 8, 1912, p. 12.

decision which was designed to help a beaten party. Seidel remarked that it was always possible in the United States to find one man on the bench who was dirty enough to perform a political trick. Understandably, Eschweiler filed a suit against Seidel for slander. The Herald accused the judge of acting "rawly" because he knew that juries would be sympathetic to his side. In the end, Seidel had to claim that he never made any malicious statement against the judge.[196] Here and especially in the common council the Socialists exhibited a lack of restraint which they had once demonstrated when they were a minority party. To them the days of proving themselves were over. They became condescending to a minority which viewed them as a temporary municipal experience. Their intolerance evoked a viciousness from the minority which had never experienced political domination. By the 1912 elections both sides stood unalterably opposed to one another.

During the 1911 spring elections, Emil Seidel recognized that all the factions in the anti-Socialist coalition were not compatible. He hoped that the dissident elements would render a united front impossible by the 1912 municipal elections. Perhaps his hopes might have been realized had not the anti-Socialists found a common rallying point. This common interest was known as "nonpartisanship." Progressives had for many years decried the use of the party system in local government. Local parties brought all the evils of the system without speaking to municipal needs. In Milwaukee the party system had meant plurality instead of majority rule. Advocates of nonpartisan municipal elections quoted men like David Starr Jordan and Charles Eliot as favoring the abolition of parties on the local level. Immediately after the 1910 municipal election, the Voters'

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[196]Unidentified July 3, 1911 clipping, Seidel Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Journal, Aug. 4, 1911, p. 8; Herald, Sept. 2, 1911, p. 11.

League took up the idea of a nonpartisan election. The members of the League explained that they were considering nonpartisanship on its own merits and not because the Social Democratic Party had recently won office.[197]

No matter what motivated the Voters' League, the Social Democrats stood quite opposed to nonpartisanship. The Socialists depended on a party system more than any other political group. Without it there would have been no Socialist movement. Victor Berger claimed that without parties the American political system would break up into cliques and specialized groups which would eventually prove insufficient to govern. Anarchy or monarchy would follow. He stressed that a party was the only institution which fixed responsibility, and a bad one was better than none at all. If a party became corrupt at least people could vote it out of office and elect a better one. To those advocates of nonpartisanship on the local level, who at the same time promised to influence the state legislature to grant more home rule, Senator Gaylord asked exactly what kind of "influence" could be exerted -- nonpartisan influence? The Socialists saw the nonpartisan movement simply as a device which could fuse all the dissident anti-Socialist elements together. The administration felt that the movement proved that there was an identity of interests among all those who sympathized with the capitalist system. There was, for the Socialists, no real difference between the Democrats and the Republicans or the Progressives and the "Tories" who all banded together when confronted with genuine opposition. The Socialists hoped that the voters would see capitalism thus unmasked, realize that the various groups which had appeared as if they were in conflict with one another were really all exploitive and, finally, turn to the one party which did not depend on capitalism.[198]

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[197] Journal, May 21, 1910, p. 1.

The view that nonpartisanship and fusion equivocated was not accurate. Nonpartisanship derived from a progressive atmosphere. In 1908 a Milwaukee city charter convention composed of delegates from all the parties submitted a nonpartisan bill to the state legislature. Powerful lobbies who were satisfied with the party machinery in power killed the bill in the lower house. In 1910 the same big interests were more amenable to the idea because the Socialists had assumed office. The issue then became complicated as two kinds of groups supported nonpartisanship.[199]

The Socialists had opposed the 1908 bill because it would have eliminated lever voting, plurality rule, and the party label on the ballot. When a similar measure was introduced in the 1911 state legislature, the Socialists could not count on big business to oppose it again. Supporters of the Bodenstab bill, as it was called, suspected that the Socialists were exerting behind-the scenes pressure when the assembly committee on elections reported for non-concurrence even though no arguments were heard against it in the hearings. By the time a newly phrased but similar bill reached the engrossment stage, rumors of Socialist vote-swapping were rampant. By the middle of June, 1910, considerable Socialist pressure, which probably included some logrolling, succeeded in defeating the nonpartisan bill.[200]

Milwaukee politicians who favored the bill petitioned Governor Francis E. McGovern to call a special session of the legislature. He refused and said that those politicians were of the same crowd who, because of his graft prosecutions, had worked against him when he ran for

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[198] Herald, July 22, 1911, p. 1; Leader, March 13, 1912, p. 10; ibid., Feb. 12, 1912, p. 8; ibid., Jan. 23, 1912, p. 8.

[199] Journal, Nov. 11, 1910, p. 10.

[200] Journal, April 22, 1911, p. 2; ibid., Jan. 5, 1911, p. 6; ibid., June 14, 1911, pp. 1, 2; ibid., June 9, 1911, p. 1.

district attorney in the Republican primary a few years before. The legal doors to nonpartisanship were thus shut; and had the nonpartisan bill been supported only by well-meaning progressives, the matter would have rested there. But McGovern was right. The old crowd was interested in using nonpartisanship as a tool. They would fuse all parties against the Socialists, legally or not, and call it "nonpartisan." The fusion movement took its origins from the day District Attorney McGee lost to the Socialist candidate in the 1910 fall election and called for an anti-Socialist coalition. A fusionist supporter wrote a letter in March, 1911, and was already using the term "nonpartisan." On January 13, 1912 the movement climaxed when twenty-seven people met in the Republican House and selected Dr. Gerhard A. Bading, the man Mayor Seidel had removed from office, as the nonpartisan candidate for the 1912 election. The committee of twenty-seven appointed a committee of five which in turn appointed a committee of one hundred to run the campaign. Doctor Bading, a Republican, would run under the Democratic heading on the ballot. At the select meeting of the twenty-seven, Joseph Carney was appointed the candidate for treasurer, and Louis Koteckl for comptroller. Soon afterward the Democratic city committee unanimously endorsed the nonpartisan ticket. In effect, twenty-seven men of the city had successfully by-passed the primary and were asking the people who would have regularly voted for a Republican or a Democrat to now vote for their candidate. The situation had reversed in two years. In 1910 the old party members argued that party regularity must be kept. In 1912 they ran a nonpartisan candidate on a Democratic ticket and asked for Republican votes.[201]

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[201] Journal, Dec. 21, 1911, p. 3; ibid., Nov. 9, 1910, p. 1; ibid., Feb. 14, 1912, p. 3; ibid., Jan. 25, 1912, pp. 1, 5; Leader, March 13, 1912, p. 4; ibid., Jan. 16, 1912, p. 1; ibid., Jan. 25, 1912, p. 3; ibid., Feb. 8, 1912, p. 10.

The nonpartisan candidates signed a pledge. They promised to refrain from taking any active part in state or national campaigns and to spend their time in the city's interests exclusively. They also promised to appoint city employees without respect to party and to restrain any part of the city administration from working for or against any state or national candidate or party. In short, the fusionist candidates promised to be nonpartisan. They ended their pledge: "We will be nonpartisan in deed as well as in word."[202]

Gerhard Bading represented a group which was both sincere in its professed idealism and also very callous in its efforts to depose the Socialists. The fusion they had accomplished was extra-legal and unrepresentative of the people. A vote for the nonpartisans might not have aggravated the conscience of the average citizen, but it should have caused influential institutions some pause. The Journal, for example, should have found it difficult to support Bading. It was Milwaukee's staunchest defender of progressivism and clean government. In the end the Journal backed the nonpartisans because of its opposition to the Socialists. In 1910 the Journal gave its wholehearted support to an "honest, progressive, enlightened, and efficient administration." It accounted the Socialist victory to the campaign zeal that emanates from reformers and not to the inevitability of history. When Berger proposed the re-platting of park lands for home use, the Journal referred to the "city as landlord" instead of "municipal ownership." When Mayor Seidel rendered his inflammatory Labor Day Speech, the Journal closed its eyes and called it "unique."[203] Eventually, however, the Socialists came to represent the

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[202] Journal, Jan. 27, 1912, p. 5.

[203] Ibid., May 28, 1910, p. 6; ibid., July 12, 1911, p. 1; ibid., June 3, 1910, p. 1.

unpalatable. They opposed the Stern nonpartisan judiciary bill in February, 1911; they used secret tax ferrets to plague a small segment of society; they excluded the public from their caucuses; and they were none too kind to the Journal itself. When Emil Seidel expressed concern over the 1912 elections, the Journal reported him as saying that he was afraid that the party "will" lose. The Herald answered that the word Seidel used was "may" and not "will." For this offense the Herald scourged the publisher of the Journal:

> If Lute Nieman believes with his hero Woodrow Wilson that "guilt is personal and not abstract," then Lute Nieman knows that in this case his mouth is the mouth of a coarse, deliberate liar and his newspaper is a prostitute of public intelligence.[204]

Most significantly the Journal came to view the Socialists as more interested in their own party than in the welfare of the city. At this point Progressives and Socialists parted ways, for only the Socialists saw the good of the community and of the party as identical.

When rumors of a fusion movement spread during the last part of 1911, the Journal came out against it if it were not also nonpartisan. Simple fusion engineered by a few people would grate against everyone's sensibilities, but somehow a sprinkling of nonpartisanship would make the whole maneuver more palatable. After the Beding ticket had been formed, the Journal lost all its scruples. It accused the Socialists of defeating the nonpartisan bill and forcing into existence the committee of twenty-seven. Thus the Journal argued flimsily that legal but undesireable conditions justified extra-legal solutions. Skipping over this point, the Journal concentrated on nonpartisanship. "Establish the principle first and build it up later," it advertised as it compromised. Later the paper admitted that some of the old Rose gang were involved in the non-

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[204]Herald, July 8, 1911, p. 5.

partisan campaign but had nothing to do with selecting the candidates, framing the platform or choosing the chairman of the campaign committee.[205]

The day after the Journal denied that the Bading ticket was designed to oust the Socialists, the nonpartisan platform was published and the opening statement read: "The paramount political issue in this community is anti-Socialism vs. Socialism." The document denounced the administration's hostile attitude toward business and commerce, its promotion of class hatred and its alleged inefficiency in office. Bading's campaign slogan stressed the financial issue: "A dollar's worth of service for every dollar of taxes."[206]

The Socialists used an interesting phrase in reference to their opponents: "The Non-Partisan, Bi-Partisan, Omni-Partisan, Re-Bunchocratic Ticket -- Anything-to-Beat the Socialists Side." Victor Berger returned from Congress expressing confidence over the elections. "We will win hands down. We will go through them like a 60 horse-power automobile through a little mud puddle on a good macadam road," he said.[207] The Socialists conducted the campaign in their usual manner. They spent $4,000 of their modest $10,000 fund on printed matter which the bundle brigade distributed. By the primary, the voter registration had jumped to an astounding 87,523, the largest in the history of the city. The election had stirred the interest of both sides. The day before the primary, an estimated 16,000 people packed the auditorium in the biggest Social Democratic mass meeting in the party's history. The editor of the Leader rejoiced: "They're on the run. They're beaten and they know it. Keep them on the run. Make defeat annihilation. After Waterloo comes St.

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[205] Journal, Nov. 13, 1911, p. 8; ibid., Feb. 8, 1912, p. 10; ibid., Jan. 22, 1912, p. 1; ibid., April 3, 1912, pp. 1, 6.

[206] Journal, Feb. 18, 1912, p. 3; Leader, March 1, 1912, p. 14.

[207] Campaign Book, p. 32; Leader, March 18, 1912, p. 1.

Helena."[208] When the primary ended, the optimism proved unrealistic. Although the Social Democrats received the heaviest primary vote ever received -- almost double the number of 1910 -- the combined opposition overwhelmingly overpowered them 40,897 to 17,745.[209]

After the primary the campaign tactics on both sides became more vicious. Dr. Bading charged that Seidel had withheld the sewerage report for one year because the administration was contemplating buying their million dollar park. He also raised the spectre of a typhoid epidemic and charged Health Commissioner Kraft with negligence in office. At the final nonpartisan rally in the auditorium, about 240 Socialists filed out the rear door in hopes of disrupting the meeting. In a moment thousands of American flags began to wave goodbye to the departees; the band struck up the Star-Spangled Banner; hundreds climbed to their feet and led cheers which lasted for a full five minutes; and Bading droned: "We are going to prove that our citizens are loyal to the city, the country, and the flag."[210]

The Socialists became the more desperate campaigners. Dr. Kraft entered the fight by announcing that the water was polluted. He was convinced, he said, that "someone" had sabotaged the mains because he was warned two weeks before that "when the campaign warmed up, something would happen to the city water." Later chemical tests showed that the

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[208] E.T. Helms, mimeographed report, Social Democratic Party Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society; Leader, March 18, 1912, p. 3; ibid., March 19, 1912, pp. 1, 10.

[209] Leader, March 19, 1912, p. 10; ibid., March 20, 1912, p. 1; Journal, March 20, 1912, pp. 1, 3. Bading received 26,207 and William J. Cary, a Democratic Congressman who contested Bading's right to the nomination, received 14, 875. After the primary, Cary threw his complete support to Bading.

[210] Journal, March 26, 1912; ibid., March 31, 1912, p. 1.

foreign matter in the water was only excess chlorine. Since only the Socialists had used chlorine in the city, they seemed to be the real culprits. During the rest of the campaign, the Socialists drew an unusually critical picture of their opponents. The Leader ran a series of caricatures of bandits, thieves and other assorted criminals -- the old Rose gang -- trying to break into the house of clean government. These despicable characters could be seen congregating in the dim lights of the Plankinton House bar: "All were there. It was interesting to look at their faces -- heavy, besotted, set faces. Faces that showed brute strength, unscrupulous ethics; faces that preached a boodle philosophy of life and citizenship."[211]

When the votes were counted, Seidel received a resounding defeat: 43,176 to 20,887. Victor Berger proudly pointed to the fact that his party drew 3,000 more votes than in 1910. One consideration, however, mitigated the Socialists' consolation. Due to the keen interest in the 1912 election, twenty-five percent more people voted than in 1910. In order to increase his strength in that proportion, Seidel would have had to draw 4,000 more votes than he did. This particular election was a repudiation of the Seidel administration. In pursuing economy and efficiency in government, the Socialists had alienated the city by their singleminded preoccupation with their own party. Perhaps this objectionable characteristic would not have led to political defeat had not the nonpartisan and tax reform movements come to a head in 1911. Whatever the reasons, Milwaukee would never again elect a complete Socialist administration. Although Socialist Mayors Hoan and Zeidler would occupy the first office of the city

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[211] Leader, March 18, 1912, pp. 1, 3; ibid., March 25, 1912, p. 5; ibid., March 20, 1912, p. 2.

for many years, neither the common council nor any of the departments would be dominated by their comrades. Consequently Socialists in Milwaukee never received the slightest chance to establish their cooperative commonwealth. The significance of the Seidel administration rests elsewhere, for never again would Milwaukee be satisfied with the kind of government which preceded it.

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