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The Davenport Socialists of 1920

WILLIAM H. CUMBERLAND

ONE OF Iowa's most astonishing political revolutions occurred on April 5, 1920, when the citizens of Davenport voted a Socialist administration into public office. The mayor, five of eight councilmen, and three of the four city officers carried the Socialist label. Furthermore, the Socialist triumph came during mounting fears of the Bolshevik threat in Russia and Eastern Europe which ushered in the ugly hysteria we know as the "Red Scare," and which inspired widespread disregard for civil liberties. This coincidence created for Davenport a red scare of its own.

Socialism was an important force in American politics during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The main thrust of the American Left—the Socialist Party of America (SPA)—formed in Indianapolis in 1901 through a fusion of trade unionists, Populists, Christian Socialists, and dissidents from Daniel De Leon's doctrinaire Socialist Labor party. The SPA housed a plethora of viewpoints, left to right, throughout World War I, but the reformist conservative wing, under Victor Berger of Milwaukee and Morris Hillquit of New York, dominated it. The symbol of Socialist unity and strength, however, was the party's perennial presidential candidate, Eugene V. Debs, who in the election of 1912 mustered over 900,000 votes. The Socialists had by then elected 1200 officials in 340 communities.¹

Also in 1912, an amendment to the Socialist constitution provided for the expulsion of any member who opposed political action or who advocated "crime, sabotage, or other methods of violence as a method of the working class to aid in

1. James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York, 1969), 103.

its emancipation; Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, "Wobblies") leader, Bill Haywood, was recalled from the party's National Executive Committee; and Americans elected Woodrow Wilson president on a progressive platform which contained many of the immediate demands of the Socialists. Many historians have therefore seen 1912 as the nadir of Socialist party strength because the withdrawal of the IWW robbed the party of some of its revolutionary ardor, and because Wilson's election was the apparent triumph of progressivism.² Actually, the party functioned effectively beyond 1912, in spite of internal dissent and government harassment of those who refused to support America's participation in World War I. The Socialists offered the only alternative for those Americans disenchanted with the war and did well in municipal elections of 1917 and 1918. Furthermore, in November 1918, Victor Berger was elected to Congress.

Postwar internal conflict, rather than the events of 1912 to 1918, precipitated the ultimate decline of the SPA, conflict between the left—bolstered by recent immigrants organized into foreign language federations—and the conservatives who had dominated the party since its founding. The proportion of foreign born in the party membership increased from 20 percent before the war to 53 percent in 1919, when three contending factions—Socialist party, Communist party, and Communist Labor party—emerged from the strife. The militant stance of the foreign-language federations, who were caught up in the spirit of the Russian Revolution, led them to reject the evolutionary approach of the long-dominant conservative wing of the party. The Left still existed in America, but it splintered, and disunity and government repression plagued it during the Red Scare in the last years of the Wilson administration.³ Although

2. David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (Chicago, 1967), 72. In 1905 labor radicals and left-wing Socialists who were dissatisfied with the craft unionism and moderation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) formed the IWW to wage class warfare against capitalists. Historians of the IWW deny that it advocated sabotage, however. See Fred W. Thompson and Patrick Murfin, *The I.W.W.: Its First Seventy Years, 1905-1975* (Chicago, 1976), 80-81, which the IWW published. Joseph Conlin also minimizes IWW violence in *Bread and Roses Too* (Westport, 1969).

3. In recent years historians have produced an increasing number of studies on the Socialist party in the United States. James Weinstein's work (see

the Socialist standard-bearer Eugene Debs garnered 900,000 votes in the presidential election of 1920, his percentage of the total vote cast was only half of what it had been in 1912. Many of the Socialist votes were protests against the wide-scale violations of traditional civil liberties which continued following the armistice, or were statements of sympathy for Debs, who still languished in an Atlanta penitentiary after his 1918 conviction for violation of the Espionage Act.⁴

The development of the Socialist party in Iowa coincided with its national growth. The Iowa party began in the coal mining town of Oskaloosa on August 10, 1900. One of the party organizers was John M. Work, who during his long career would be a consistent candidate for political office, a member of the party's National Executive Committee, and the National Executive Secretary from 1911 to 1913. He also worked on Victor Berger's newspaper, the *Milwaukee Leader*. Other founders of the Iowa party were Allen W. Ricker of Lone Tree, a former Congregational pastor, Populist agitator, editorial writer for the *Appeal to Reason*, and editor of *Pearson's Magazine*, a New York-based Socialist publication; and George Herron, the controversial professor of applied Christianity at Iowa College (Grinnell). All three undertook strenuous lecture tours across the state and contributed articles to the *Iowa Socialist*. The Iowa Socialist party waged many energetic campaigns during the early twentieth century, captured local governments in

fn. 1) and Sally M. Miller's *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, 1973) are both excellent. Both deny that the IWW's departure from the party or the apparent progressive victory in 1912 sounded the party's death knell. David A. Shannon, on the other hand, sees 1912 as the crest of Socialist strength before progressive reforms stole its thunder (see fn. 2). Ira Kipnis, in his more radical *The American Socialist Movement* (New York, 1952), charges that the IWW's departure in 1912 stole the party's zeal, morale, and numbers. Bernard K. Johnpoll and Lillian Johnpoll discuss the decline of the Left in *The Impossible Dream* (Westport, 1981), with conclusions closer to Shannon's than to Weinstein's.

4. The newest definitive biography of Debs is Nick Salvatore's *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, 1982). Debs was more radical than Berger but was wedded to the democratic tradition. Both Salvatore and Sally M. Miller (see fn. 3) see factionalism exasperated by the Russian Revolution as destroying the party. The Espionage Act under which Debs was imprisoned dated to June 1917 and gave the government power to censor and ban newspapers from the mails. It also assigned fines up to \$10,000 and up to twenty years imprisonment as penalties for those who obstructed the draft.

small coal mining centers such as Hiteman and Mystic, elected at least one member to the Muscatine city council between 1910 and 1922, and nearly captured the mayoralty of Burlington in 1914.⁵ The Socialist party also existed in Davenport since the late nineteenth century, although the few hundred votes it gathered each election posed no threat to civic stability. One early Davenport Socialist was a talented young author, Floyd Dell, while others were Fred Feuchter, a mail carrier and native German whom Dell described as a man of "wisdom and courage," and Michael J. Kennedy, a local orator who in 1920 became city assessor. Feuchter found Dell more "intellectual than proletarian" and encouraged the young man to pursue a career where he could use his "brains rather than his hands."⁶

A special set of circumstances prepared Davenport for its own red scare. A large German migration into Iowa's river towns had made Davenport one of the most German cities in America. By 1890, 10,143 or one-quarter of the population of Davenport was German-born. The Scott County census totals for 1915 showed 7,113 native Germans in a total of 11,267 foreign-born residents. Some of the Germans could trace their roots to the exodus which followed the failure of the liberal revolutions of 1848, or were the descendants of emigrants from the northern German provinces of Holstein and Schleswig. Davenport Germans were liberal, cosmopolitan, proud of their Turnvereins (athletic clubs), their music, their prosperous farms and businesses, their cultural accomplishments, and the contributions they had made to community and state. August P. Richter, editor of the German-language newspaper, *Der Demokrat*, was an able propagandist for German culture. Richter consistently stressed the liberal cultural achievements of the "forty-eighters" as well as those of the Swiss migrants of the same period, and asserted that these groups formed the basis of the large German population of the area.⁷

5. William H. Cumberland, "The Red Flag Comes to Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 39 (Fall 1968), 441-454. See also William Bowers, "Davenport, Iowa 1906-1907," *Annals of Iowa* 39 (Fall 1966), 363-387. The Girard, Kansas weekly, *Appeal to Reason*, was the Socialist organ which spoke to disillusioned Populists of the farmbelt.

6. Floyd Dell, *Homecoming* (Port Washington, 1969), 118-119.

7. *History of Scott County*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1910), 2:821; Iowa Ex-

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An uneasiness stirred beneath a surface exhibition of harmony and good will among Davenport citizens. Some objected to the free-thinking religious and moral views associated with German liberalism. Germans staunchly opposed prohibition, which was a bitter and divisive issue in Iowa towns and villages during the early years of the century. German Sunday parades, cliquishness, business success, and apparent political indifference all contributed to a segregated city with its fourth, fifth, and sixth wards predominately German. The Germans, as Richter pointed out, had settled on the west side of the city and Harrison Street formed a dividing line between the American and German districts. A tacit understanding developed that the German clubs—when marching “accompanied by music to their Sunday festivities—would not march further east than Harrison Street with their processions in order not to disturb their fellow citizens.”⁸

America's declaration of war against Germany in April 1917 soon inspired concern beyond such subtle prejudices or fears of parade noise. Americans expressed antagonism toward everything German. Tension erupted throughout Davenport and drove German Americans to establish a new rapport with the local Socialist party. By early 1918, *Der Demokrat* feared a backlash against everything German, and so adamantly opposed the Socialists. The editors were apprehensive that a German-Socialist alliance could provide the spark that would set off a conflagration. That disaster, *Der Demokrat* reasoned, would come if the Socialists, with German support, made a good showing in the April 1918 city elections. Whatever the provocations, insisted *Der Demokrat*, they were not worth contributions to a Socialist victory which would seem “an expression of disloyalty.” Davenport Germans who voted for Socialist

ecutive Council, *Census of Iowa for the Year of 1915*, 464, 486. For the heritage of the “forty-eighters,” see William Mark Friedberger's “Cornbelt and River City: Social Change in a Midwest Community, 1885-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Chicago Circle, 1973), 44-48, and Daniel J. Elazar, *Cities of the Prairie* (New York, 1970), 189. For August P. Richter's opinions, see *Geschichte der Stadt Davenport und des County Scott . . .* (Chicago, 1917), 405.

8. Richter, *Geschichte*, 410; Friedberger, “Cornbelt and River City,” 111. Ingrid Cumberland, a native speaker and teacher of German at Buena Vista College in Storm Lake, Iowa, translated newspaper accounts for this article.

candidates would appear as supporters of the enemies of the state. *Der Demokrat* urged its readers to cast their ballots for the new Citizens Ticket, a union of the two major parties formed primarily to thwart the growing Socialist tide and thus maintain the city's respectability. Davenport's other German-language paper, *Die Iowa Reform*, while less vitriolic, also urged the election of the Citizen's mayoralty candidate, Charles F. Littleton. Littleton, editorialized the *Reform*, was a sound businessman who would "recognize the full rights of every citizen."⁹

Fear of reprisal against those of German birth or descent, desire for a sound business administration, and suspicion of the motives of the Socialists (who were seen as radicals hostile to democratic government—the party of the Red Internationale) made the German-language press as bitter an opponent of the Socialists as were the English-language newspapers, the *Davenport Democrat* and the *Davenport Times*. Those who believed a little "radical blood" in offices and legislatures would "act as sourdough and bring benefits," warned *Der Demokrat*, erred when they assumed that the Socialists had no intention of overthrowing the system. Newspapers throughout eastern Iowa also expressed alarm over the Socialist menace. The *Burlington Daily Gazette* insisted that "Socialists and pro-Germans are so closely linked they are considered as one." The *Muscatine Journal* called the Socialists the "un-American Party." Although Harold Metcalf, Socialist candidate for police magistrate, urged against making loyalty an issue in Davenport, the Citizens Ticket bombarded its opponents with charges of disloyalty.¹⁰

The possibility of a Socialist electoral upset increased when hard-core Davenport Republicans spurned the Citizens Ticket and nominated their own candidates. Furthermore, the Socialist nominee for mayor was a popular physician, Clarence Barewald. Like other disgruntled Davenporters of German ancestry (both of Barewald's parents were German immigrants), the

9. *Der Demokrat*, 31 March, 3 April 1918; *Die Iowa Reform*, 4 April 1918. The German population in Davenport was large enough to support two German-language newspapers, and *Die Iowa Reform* served readers who preferred German type. See *History of Scott County*, 2:887.

10. *Der Demokrat*, 3 April 1918; *Burlington Daily Gazette*, 4 April 1918; *Muscatine Journal*, 1 March 1918; *Davenport Democrat*, 15 March 1918.

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physician was a recent convert to socialism. He had been a Republican until the beginning of the war, was a graduate of the University of Iowa Medical College, held membership in many civic groups and fraternal organizations, and had started his Davenport career in 1904 when appointed county physician. The responsibilities of that post included supervision of the county hospital and emergency work at the jail and police department. Barewald's association with Davenport's establishment did not temper his humanity, for he was known as a doctor with a conscience, who willingly treated poor working-class patients without charge. *Die Iowa Reform* acknowledged that Barewald was a man of ability, but feared that his election would bring renewed attacks upon German Americans.¹¹

In the spring of 1918, when the election took place, six prominent Davenport citizens of German ancestry were already under indictment for violating the Espionage Act of 1917. This act enabled the government to prosecute those who took a strong antiwar stance, thwarted the draft, or spoke or wrote critically of the war effort. None of the six were Socialists, but they had invited Daniel H. Wallace, founder and secretary of the antiwar League of Humanity, to Davenport on July 25, 1917. Wallace delivered a vigorous speech which included unflattering references to the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Allies, and American servicemen. He was almost immediately indicted, convicted, and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment at Fort Leavenworth where he died in the fall of 1918.¹²

Davenport also witnessed the spectacular trial of Lee Lang, radical agitator and writer of the *Muscatine Socialist*. Lang had been a chancre on the eastern Iowa body politic for nearly two decades for his aggressive pamphleteering and promotion of militant socialism in Muscatine. Lang's antiwar stance was well known, but he was charged with transporting liquor into a "dry" territory and selling it without a license. Hostility against Lang was so strong in Muscatine that the court moved the trial to Davenport. Unfortunately, like Daniel Wallace and the

11. *History of Scott County*, 2:958-959; Friedberger, "Cornbelt and River City," 258; *Die Iowa Reform*, 8 April 1918.

12. See Nancy Derr's "Iowans During World War I: A Study of Change Under Stress" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1979), 329.

Davenport six, the Muscatine radical drew Judge Martin J. Wade, a determined enemy of radicals and war protesters. Following Lang's conviction the judge pronounced the maximum sentence of two years and a \$5,000 fine. Judge Wade informed the court that he would rather see "a mad dog loose upon the streets," than see Lang's *Muscatine Socialist*, "a poisonous, vicious publication."¹³

Most Davenport Socialists endeavored to proclaim their loyalty and to disavow political extremism, and neither the moderate Barewald nor Harvard-educated Harold Metcalf could legitimately be accused of bolshevism. Metcalf, indoctrinated in Milwaukee with the reform socialism of Victor Berger, was a boyish, popular, charismatic lawyer and a warm supporter of Woodrow Wilson. Metcalf did not adopt an anti-war stance and was among the subscribers to a fund for the Scott County Council on National Defense. During the 1918 campaign in which he was a candidate for city attorney, Metcalf sought to allay fears of the possible nationalization of privately owned farms. Another Davenport Socialist, Charles Elwood, echoed Metcalf's support of the war effort by insisting that nine-tenths of the local Socialists believed that it must continue until the Allies achieved a democratic peace.¹⁴

Davenport's municipal government was the traditional mayor-alderman type with councilmen elected from six wards and two additional members elected at-large. Dominating municipal politics was a business and professional elite, some members of which were determined, after the declaration of war, to push Davenport's contribution to the Liberty Loan subscriptions, to entrench their own power, and to suppress dissent. They also provided the leadership for the American Protective League and the Greater Iowa Association, organizations which sought to enforce conformity in thought and action, to punish the disloyal, and to chastise the "slacker" elements in the community. Many in Davenport, among them Germans and Socialists loyal to the United States, found the oppressive tactics

13. *Muscatine Journal*, 4 January, 3 May 1918.

14. On Metcalf, see the Scott County Council of National Defense, *History of War Activities of Scott County, Iowa* (Davenport, 1917-1918), 202, and the *Davenport Democrat*, 3 March, 7 May 1918.

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of the superpatriots upsetting. This was the atmosphere of the elections of both 1918 and 1920.¹⁵

IN THE hotly contested April election Dr. Barewald lost to Charles Littleton by only twenty-four votes of 8,500 cast. The Socialists elected two men, George J. Peck and Walter Bracher, to the eight-member city council. Both of the new Socialist councilmen came from working-class backgrounds. Peck, who fancied himself the ideological leader of the party, had worked as a laborer in saw and flour mills and owned a cigar store and pool hall on Davenport's Rockingham Road. Bracher was a thirty-one-year-old employee of the Davenport Cigar Box Company. A Socialist candidate for alderman, auto shop mechanic George Koepke, barely missed winning election from the heavily German third ward.¹⁶

Fear arose that the business image of the city would suffer, and that some might question its loyalty to the war effort. The election had been so close, lamented the *Democrat*, that the city had suffered a disgrace which would not be "wiped out for many years." The German-language paper, *Der Demokrat*, expressed anxious hope that the bitter election would "bring no harm to the welfare and future of Davenport and particularly—Germanism." The editor felt that *Der Demokrat* had conducted a principled campaign and that the people "had spoken" although obviously they had not spoken well. *Die Iowa Reform* regretted that the establishment had made loyalty the main issue and that its attempt to place voting for Socialist candidates "on the same level with disloyalty if not high treason" had apparently backfired. Only the traditional anti-Socialist vote among Roman Catholics in the third precinct of the fifth ward had prevented a Barewald victory and an even greater calamity.¹⁷

The problems of Iowa's large German population increased in May 1918, when Governor William L. Harding issued his

15. Derr, "Iowans During World War I." 324-328; *Der Demokrat*, 8 October 1918.

16. *Davenport Democrat*, 12 December 1918; Friedberger, "Cornbelt and River City," 278.

17. *Davenport Democrat*, 7 April 1918; *Der Demokrat*, 7 April 1918; *Die Iowa Reform*, 7, 8 April 1918.

famous "Babel proclamation," which proscribed not only the use of German, but of all foreign languages. Harding scorned those who insisted that he had exceeded his constitutional powers. "I have," he said, "plenty of authority to issue the proclamation." Davenport Germans had switched from their traditional Democratic allegiance to support the "wet" Harding over the "dry" Democratic candidate, Edwin T. Meredith, in the gubernatorial election of 1916. Harding's proclamation made them feel betrayed which, combined with Democrat Woodrow Wilson's decision to wage war against Germany, caused their disillusionment with both major parties.¹⁸

Soon five women from Le Claire Township in Scott County received fines totalling \$225 when they challenged the proclamation by speaking German during a party-line telephone conversation. Increasing tension in Scott County led to vandalism of German cemeteries and the daubing of yellow paint on the houses of German Americans who criticized America's entrance into the war. Superpatriots in the business-dominated Greater Iowa Association (later the Iowa Chamber of Commerce) and quasilegal organizations such as the American Protective League and the local councils of defense continued to harrass Iowans of German descent whose support of the war seemed doubtful. Most galling of all to German Iowans was the German-American Patriotic Association which the Reverend J. C. Orth of Guthrie Center headed. Orth proclaimed that "so called neutrality is not acceptable," and those Iowa Germans not willing "to get aboard Uncle Sam's band wagon will be asked to leave the state."¹⁹

18. The statement from Governor Harding, dated 13 June 1918, is in Box 9 of the Herbert J. Metcalf Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Iowa City. See also John T. Schou, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa 1916-1920," (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1960), 153-155, 214-217.

19. *Die Iowa Reform*, 7 February 1918. *Der Demokrat* rebuked those "ashamed of the blood that flows in their veins and who put on a false mask in order to show their patriotism. . . ." Clipping, 8 October 1917, in the August P. Richter Papers, Iowa State Historical Department, Iowa City. Many German Americans supported the war and identified themselves with the establishment as members of the Liberty Loans courts and the American Protective League (APL). See Derr, "Iowans During World War I," 324-329. On the case of the five women, see *Davenport Democrat*, 13 June 1918, in Richter Papers, and Nancy Derr, "The Babel Proclamation," *Palimpsest* 60 (July/August 1979), 111. On the vandalism, see *Die Iowa Reform*, 12 September 1918.

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Meanwhile, schools dropped the German language and long-established institutions (churches, banks, insurance companies) dropped the "German" from their names. Davenport's Schuetzen Park became Forest Park and families anglicized their surnames. The small town of Berlin, Iowa, found "Lincoln" a more appropriate label for itself. The editor of *Die Iowa Reform* recoiled with horror and cited Goethe's warning: "Help me Master! For the Spirits which I called I cannot get rid of." The superpatriots, editor Adolph Peterson reminded his readers, were "the most dangerous agents of the emperor against whom we are fighting."²⁰ Before peace returned both of Davenport's German-language papers suffered devastating blows: *Der Demokrat* ceased publication altogether and *Die Iowa Reform* reduced from a semiweekly to a weekly.

Increasingly, Americans discovered that Socialists and Germans were, after all, bedfellows. Some made efforts to smear the Non-Partisan League with charges of disloyalty. The league, which advocated a mild brand of state socialism, had captured the state government in North Dakota and was a significant political force in several midwestern states from 1915 to 1922. Its opponents, who feared both labor and agrarian radicalism, used the war to charge with sedition those who questioned America's economic system.

While the Non-Partisan League never made great headway in Iowa, some feared that it might gain popular support among farmers. Woodworth Clum, a radical superpatriot and secretary of the Greater Iowa Association, led the attack against the league in Iowa. Clum traveled to North Dakota to study the activities of the league first hand. He accused the organization of disloyalty, of fomenting old prejudices between farmers and businessmen, and of selling out to the radical IWW. The league was allegedly spreading Socialist propaganda throughout Iowa. Not only had it purchased one-hundred automobiles for canvassing the state but "its paid agents," would "soon be attempting to collect \$16 from every man with a grouch against Iowa or the city man."²¹ The Iowa Bar Association invited one anti-league orator, Rome G. Brown, in June 1918, to speak; he

20. *Die Iowa Reform*, 12 September 1918.

21. *Iowa Magazine* (April 1918). See also *Muscatine Journal*, 17 January

scorned the "disloyalty of the Socialists," and insisted that the league's supporters were pro-German. The Non-Partisan League, proclaimed Brown, was honeycombing the state with "destructive propaganda." Iowans must bend every effort, Brown warned, or the Socialist league would "bring disgrace upon your great State." The Greater Iowa Association felt instrumental in keeping the influence of the league minimal in Iowa.²²

This concentrated attack upon Iowa's Left did not stem a growing liberal trend in several major cities in the state with strong labor movements. These communities did not bend easily to the excesses of the superpatriots, who to liberals seemed determined to consolidate positions of economic privilege even at the expense of civil liberties. Davenport, Sioux City, Clinton, Muscatine, and Burlington all felt the presence of organized labor, in some instances with substantial Socialist support. Sioux City's mayor, Wallace M. Short, won four elections with labor behind him and even survived a recall election forced upon him after his spirited defense of the IWW's rights to free speech. Socialist mayoralty candidates conducted vigorous races in Muscatine and Burlington. Socialist Joe Miller just missed carrying Muscatine by 200 votes of nearly 3,000 cast, and the Socialists did elect a councilman. Clinton elected a labor ticket in both 1920 and 1922.²³

Nevertheless, the state councils of defense and the Greater Iowa Association continued trying to ferret out disloyalty. In Davenport an attempt was made to embarrass and perhaps imprison Socialist councilman George J. Peck for violating the Lever Act. The Lever Act was a wartime emergency measure designed to conserve food and fuel, but the government continued to invoke it in 1919 when a serious coal shortage seemed

1918; *Burlington Daily Gazette*, 14 March 1918; and *Iowa Magazine* (December 1918).

22. *Iowa Magazine* (February 1920). Robert L. Morlan's *Political Prairie Fire* (Westport, 1955) is the best work on the Non-Partisan League. Morlan acknowledges that the league was never strong in Iowa, but confirms some of the best organized opposition existed there under the Greater Iowa Association (Morlan, 177-180). For Rome G. Brown's speech, see *Des Moines Register*, 29 June 1918 and the Metcalf Papers, Box 10, folder 4.

23. *Muscatine Journal*, 8 April 1918; *Clinton Herald*, 30 March 1920, 8 March 1922.

imminent because of widespread strikes in the mines. Peck had no intention of conserving coal in order to assist the mine owners, and so operated his business beyond the curfew. Otherwise, Peck argued, he would have been "scabbing against the miners." Consequently, Peck faced the prospect of a \$5,000 fine and two years in prison before a judge finally dismissed charges on the grounds that "no penalty was subscribed to the alleged offense."²⁴ Davenport's conservative business and civic leaders, who had pushed the loyalty issue to such extremes, feared that Peck—who wore a flaming red necktie to council meetings and announced that he would be a candidate for mayor in 1920—might somehow lead a red brigade into city hall. Peck constantly denounced the capitalist system and proposed a program for Davenport which included raises and holidays for working men, public comfort stations, and lower taxes. However, the party renominated Dr. Barewald, possibly because legal difficulties had compromised the more doctrinaire Peck and because the popular physician had come so close to winning in 1918.²⁵

Socialist chances in the election improved when the two major parties spurned their previous unity and dropped the Citizens Ticket. Editor Ralph Cram of the *Democrat* frantically reminded his readers that the Socialists had barely missed capturing the city government in 1918. Anxiety increased when the Socialists—campaigning on a platform of free textbooks, increased pay for teachers, and abolition of military training in schools—nearly doubled their previous vote totals in the 1920 school elections. The Democrats, led by lawyer and war veteran Glen D. Kelly, and the Republicans, guided by businessman Harry Jebens, attacked one another as well as the Socialists. The two major parties' failure to unite was catastrophic for them, because the Socialists not only got Dr. Barewald elected mayor but won five of eight council seats, two park commissioners' seats, and the offices of city assessor, police magistrate, and city clerk. Only the treasurer's office escaped the Socialist sweep.

24. *Die Iowa Reform*, 19 December 1919; *Davenport Democrat*, 7 December 1922, 8 October 1920.

25. *Davenport Democrat*, 8 May, 17 September 1919. Friedberger contends that the Socialists could have won with a working-class candidate, but they apparently had no confidence in that possibility. "Cornbelt and River City," 278.

Dr. Barewald's 5,009 votes nearly equalled the combined totals of Kelly and Jebens. "We won," cried an exuberant Harold Metcalf, "because we had something to talk about. The other fellows lost because they had nothing to talk about except themselves." An excited throng of Socialists procured a marching band and with Mayor-elect Barewald in the lead, staged a parade down Main Street. The new mayor told the crowd that he would remember this day "as long as I live." Several radicals in the crowd shouted, "Hooray for the Red and to Hell with the Greater Iowa Association."²⁶

Undoubtedly the Socialist victory resulted from the bitterness German Americans felt toward the Greater Iowa Association, the councils of defense, and the traditional parties who had acquiesced in their persecution. *Die Iowa Reform* (certainly aware of the "spirit" of the German population) noted that the Germans, who for several years the superpatriots had relegated to second-class citizenship, had now spoken at the polls as first-class citizens, "and with emphasis." *Die Iowa Reform* continued to berate the "narrow minded representatives of the Greater Iowa Association" who had portrayed the Socialists as the "greatest danger to the country." *Die Iowa Reform* attributed the Socialist victory, which the newspaper regretted, to the wickedness of the Wilson administration; to the outrages perpetrated against those of German ancestry by the "so-called National Verteidigungsräte, self-appointed judges," the American Legion, and "other haughty rabble"; to a high-handed and extravagant city administration responsible for high taxes and exorbitant streetcar fares; to the self-confidence which a man of Barewald's obvious caliber inspired; and to the feeling that the voters had cheated the popular doctor out of a victory in 1918. In any case, the Socialists had attained power "through the will of the people."²⁷

Other newspapers expressed similar sentiments. The *Des Moines Register* apparently picked up Metcalf's comments and attributed the Socialist victory to the excesses of superpatriots and candidates "who talked of themselves," rather than

26. *Davenport Democrat*, 22 January, 4 April 1920.

27. *Die Iowa Reform*, 9 April 1920. In *Iowa Magazine* (April 1920), the Greater Iowa Association warned, after the Davenport Socialists' victory, that

debating the issues. The *Muscatine Journal* asserted that the Davenport Germans had struck back against the element of the population "which was able to keep the recalcitrant in line during the period of the war." The *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette* observed the strength of labor parties across the state and suggested that the older parties "stop, look and listen." Election results such as those in Davenport, mused the *Gazette*, indicated that the war was over and that "Americanism" was no longer the issue; Iowans had become more interested in the cost of living than in international relations. Even the *Democrat* criticized the fanaticism of the superpatriots and printed excerpts from the *Socialist Tribune* which decried the mayor's unreasonable stance when the pro-Socialist machinists' union requested a parade permit. While the mayor reluctantly granted the permit, he barred the workers from delivering open-air speeches. *Tribune* editor Henry Gundling insisted that "every man who did not believe as the Greater Iowa Association did was branded as un-American."²⁸

The association organ, the *Iowa Magazine*, reprinted a portion of the *Tribune* in its March 1920 edition, referred to it as "the socialist and communist newspaper published in Iowa," and pointed out that the paper "enjoys special mailing privileges from the government it attacks."²⁹ Such criticism from the association was deeply offensive to those who felt that their loyalty was beyond question. A Davenport bond-broker, who was hardly a Marxist, maintained that he had voted Socialist because he was "sick and tired of the Greater Iowa Association's attack upon men who were good Americans."³⁰ Less charitable was Lafe Young's *Des Moines Capitol* which expressed shock at events in Davenport and warned that socialism was likely to "spread further into the State of Iowa." Young was not only the dynamic editor of the *Capitol* but the chairman of the State

unless it awakened from its "slumber" the nation would become "a pure democracy, governed by the rule of the mob, instead of developing to its highest efficiency the representative form of government which was the ideal of the authors of the constitution."

28. *Des Moines Register*, 7 April 1920; *Muscatine Journal*, 8 April 1920; *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, 5 April 1920; *Davenport Democrat*, 6 April 1920.

29. *Iowa Magazine* (March 1920).

30. *Des Moines Register*, 7 April 1920.

Defense Council and a charter member of the Greater Iowa Association. Membership in the state and local councils of defense, the American Protective League, and the Greater Iowa Association, often overlapped.³¹

Barewald upheld the backlash theory for the Socialist victory when he asserted that his election reflected a "general discontent against high prices and high taxes and a protest against un-American methods of suppression of speech, opinion and personal liberty."³² The Socialist winners, however, also possessed an efficient political organization which capitalized on burning local questions: a large bond proposal which the council had approved without a popular referendum; a boost in the streetcar fare from five to seven cents; the incumbents' failure to establish a program for financing city improvements; and general mismanagement. While the genuine radicalism of the Davenport Socialists may be debatable, they certainly rode to power on a "wave of protest."³³ Once they were in the saddle, *Die Iowa Reform* chortled, "let's see if they can ride."³⁴

MAYOR Barewald's inaugural address was reassuring to those who feared that the Davenport Socialists were "real" Bolsheviks. *Die Iowa Reform* found the mayor's speech "conservative and to the point," as he stressed harmony, traffic security, coal and ice for the small consumer, improved delivery of milk, child welfare, and low taxes. The *Reform* thought the Socialist council might win immediate popular approval if it could find a way to make the city's "abominable streets" passable.³⁵ Barewald pleased Davenport still further by expressing a desire to erase "the old hatreds and rancors," and by pledging a policy that would be "broad minded, tolerant and fair, thereby setting a lesson in good Americanism." He even warned his Socialist cohorts not to "crow over the victory," for he was not going to jeopardize the future of the party by resorting to the spoils system. It was a calm and comforting maiden

31. *Des Moines Capitol*, 8 April 1920; Derr, "Iowans During World War I," 328.

32. *Davenport Democrat*, 7 April 1920.

33. Friedberger, "Cornbelt and River City," 246; *Des Moines Register*, 7 April 1920.

34. *Die Iowa Reform*, 9 April 1920.

35. *Die Iowa Reform*, 23 April 1920.

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speech meant to foster support and heal still-festering wartime wounds. Barewald sounded a cautious note on public ownership of utilities, by asserting that while it was inevitable, it would be implemented only "when the people are ready to take up the work and are willing to pay the expense." Harold Metcalf, the new police magistrate, acknowledged that Davenport was not ready to accept a Socialist program and he disavowed any "rough shod" tactics. Although Metcalf looked forward to a municipal ice plant or municipal coal distribution, the application of socialism awaited a "highly developed cooperative and communal spirit."³⁶

Barewald's efforts to follow a moderate course similar to that of prewar progressives in order to win a consensus among Davenport citizens could not overcome the roller-coaster nature of the state's economy, or the extremists within the party. A struggle soon emerged between the Socialist administration and the Tri-City Traction Company, which, because spiraling inflation was reducing its profits and increasing its wages, demanded a ten-cent streetcar fare. One of the Socialist campaign promises had been to restore the five-cent fare from the seven cents charged in 1918. Postwar inflation also caused the police and fire departments to demand increased wages, and the trolley workers soon joined them. Mayor Barewald proposed a compromise measure—a cost-of-service plan—which would have enabled the company to continue as a private monopoly, but its operation would have been on a fixed income of 7 percent of the actual value of the property. This, as well as the seven-cent fare, the mayor's Socialist colleagues rejected. Undaunted, Barewald ordered an audit, which he hoped would determine the property values of the utility companies. Meanwhile, the traction company won the right in district court to charge a nine-cent fare pending final disposition of the case. Davenport soon witnessed the spectacle of City Attorney U. A. Screechfield arresting officials of the Tri-City Traction Company for violating the terms of the franchise (which called for a five-cent fare) and hauling them to the police station. Company president B. J. Denham continuously pointed to the utility's financial predicament and

36. For Barewald's maiden speech, see *Davenport Democrat*, 5, 7, 15, 22 April 1920; for Metcalf's comments see *ibid.*, 11 April 1920.

threatened to curtail service. The stalemate between the Socialist administration and the traction company remained unresolved for months.³⁷

When the postwar inflationary boom collapsed in mid-1920, construction dipped to one-half its 1919 level, farm prices dropped, and unemployment figures skyrocketed. The Socialists faced mounting debts and felt forced to raise taxes to their highest level in history and to eliminate some planned paving projects. Barewald's costly \$27,000 audit suggested an 8.9 cent fare was justified but did not convince the Socialist majority. New property valuations within the city did little to solve the growing financial difficulties, but indicated that both Mayor Barewald's and Fred Feuchter's homes had been undervalued.³⁸

Socialist leaders had anticipated that the municipal victory in April would provide a springboard to county and statewide success. Scott County Socialists attacked Warren G. Harding's "Normalcy," and called for socialization of natural resources, restoration of full civil liberties, and repeal of the Volstead Act. Vice-presidential candidate Seymour Stedman and wartime Socialist martyr Kate O'Hare came to Davenport to assist in the campaign. The state Socialist convention, with Harold Metcalf and Fred Feuchter on the platform committee, nominated George Peck for governor. Although the state convention rejected the inclusion of an antiprohibitionist plank, it echoed the Scott County Socialists' call for nationalization of natural resources and restoration of full civil liberties. It also advocated cooperatives, state-operated grain elevators and packing plants, state insurance for industrial accidents, elimination of injunction issuance in industrial disputes, and extension of home rule to towns and cities which would permit them to purchase and operate local utilities. Socialist efforts, however, fizzled as both major parties warned farmers that a Socialist victory might mean the nationalization of agricultural lands. The desire for normalcy was too strong and the Socialists received less support in both Scott County and the state. Although Peck received

37. *Davenport Democrat*, 28 June 1920, 20 July 1920, 19 May 1920, 24 August 1920, 2 December 1920.

38. *Die Iowa Reform*, 16 January 1920; *Davenport Democrat*, 17 February 1921, 30 July 1920.

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4,628 votes in Scott County, he ran 3,000 votes behind Eugene Debs's 16,000 statewide total.³⁹

By the fall of 1920, dissension had begun within Socialist ranks: rumor had it party radicals led by George Peck were sabotaging the mayor's program. On January 5, 1921, bold headlines in the *Democrat* confirmed the rumors: BAREWALD BREAKS WITH REDS! "The bow had been stretched too taut," mused *Die Iowa Reform*.⁴⁰ Barewald had wanted to resign a month earlier, but the party had resisted his efforts. The Socialist councilmen also spurned his attempt to call a council meeting on January 4, but the mayor was determined to make public his departure from Socialist ranks. He chided the radicals for their noncooperation and called Peck the leader of the extremists and a "real radical." The Socialists, maintained the irate mayor, had not "operated as city fathers of an American municipal community, but as the supporters of the wildly Utopian rules of the Soviet leaders of present day Russia—Trotsky and Lenin." Peck had been the "dictator and czar" of the local party and it was under his rule "that the people of Davenport had been living since the last election."⁴¹

Barewald's apparent return to sanity cheered Davenport's establishment. For *Democrat* editor Ralph Cram, the mayor's decision proved that he was a "loyal Davenport and American citizen first and a Socialist afterward." *Die Iowa Reform* believed the Socialists themselves had stepped into the trap they had set for the mayor.⁴² Members of the city's Rotary Club, during a luncheon at the Black Hawk Hotel, gave Barewald a wild ovation, a bouquet of white carnations, and a serenade delivered with the enthusiasm of a revival meeting. Across Iowa, the press applauded the return of the prodigal, which they assumed had "broken the right arm of the Socialist Party in Davenport."⁴³ The Socialists, meanwhile, accused their former standard-bearer of being a traitor to the party. Peck of-

39. *Davenport Democrat*, 4 July, 21 October 1920; *Iowa Official Register*, 1920-21, 421.

40. *Die Iowa Reform*, 7 January 1921.

41. *Muscatine Journal*, 7 January 1921.

42. *Davenport Democrat*, 5, 10 January 1921; *Die Iowa Reform*, 7 January 1921.

43. *Muscatine Journal*, 7 January 1921.

ferred the supreme insult: "Barewald has always been and always will be bourgeoisie."⁴⁴

Although he had resigned from the party, Barewald was determined to complete his term as mayor. As an independent representing the people of Davenport, he believed he could salvage his integrity and contribute to the city's welfare. Events soon indicated that too much rancor and self-aggrandizement persisted in the administration to achieve much that was concrete. The mayor, during his remaining year in office, faced two sensational challenges from his former colleagues. The first of these episodes occurred when a hidden dictaphone appeared in the chandelier above the mayor's desk in city hall. City electrician Harry Strong had placed it there on orders from Councilman Walter Bracher. Barewald initiated an investigation when he became suspicious of finger marks on the metal parts of the chandelier. Peck and Public Works Commissioner Sam Murray engineered a second episode, when they hired at city expense a former police detective to secretly probe the operation of the mayor's office for graft. The detective, Merrill F. Warnock, later confessed that Peck, Murray, and Street Commissioner James Selman had promised that he could have the police commissioner's post as a reward. Furthermore, the party planted spies among city employees.⁴⁵

Socialist prestige in Davenport received its *coup de grace* in December 1921, when Socialist councilman George J. Koepke charged commissioners Murray and Selman with waste and misuse of funds, charges that also implicated councilmen George Peck and Chester Stout. Detective Warnock, who Murray had hired for five dollars a day to spy on the mayor, bared the sordid details of Socialist intrigue. Not only had they paid him with city funds, they had let contracts at excessive cost to the city, and had hired Wobblies and imported workers for municipal construction projects instead of local residents. The furor which resulted from these revelations produced new party divisions between conservatives, led by Harold Metcalf, and the "radical" Peck faction. Much to Mayor Barewald's consternation, the investigation which might have led to criminal pro-

44. *Davenport Democrat*, 9 January 1921.

45. *Davenport Democrat*, 13 December 1921.

ceedings ended when the council voted to dismiss the case in return for Murray's and Selman's immediate resignations. Peck claimed victory, and asserted that the council obviously believed Murray and Selman innocent. Metcalf acknowledged there was no chance for conviction after Koepke, a key figure in instituting the charges, indicated his willingness to abandon the investigation if the officials would resign. However, Selman's and Murray's resignations meant little since they only had four days left of their terms in office.⁴⁶

Charges arose that an IWW union had begun in Davenport and that Peck, Murray, and Selman were members. The IWW did exist in Iowa, as its activities in Sioux City from 1914 through 1919 attest. Furthermore, in spite of a wartime government crackdown on the Wobblies, the union continued to grow, and reached a membership peak of 40,000 in 1923. Exaggerated fears of the IWW's presence and its proclivity to violence persisted, and in 1919 *Die Iowa Reform* proclaimed: "The American citizens of German descent surely have nothing in common with the IWW, and where anarchy should raise its head . . . will take up the fight against it." Some Wobblies attended the Socialist meetings at 607 West Fourth Street and in December 1921 produced IWW songbooks, "rendered a few impromptu selections," but were generally "not given much attention." There was an IWW presence in Davenport; the city apparently hired some Wobblies to work on construction projects and some distributed IWW literature. Selman and Murray may have intended to use the IWW to entrench their power base, but there is no indication that they belonged to the union. Nor does it seem likely that Peck, nominated for governor by the moderate Iowa Socialist party in 1920, had any connection with the organization.⁴⁷

THE SNIPING against the mayor, the charges of graft, and the seeming inability of the Socialist administration to govern effi-

46. *Davenport Democrat*, 21, 23 December 1921; *Die Iowa Reform*, 30 December 1921.

47. *Die Iowa Reform*, 21 November 1919; *Davenport Democrat*, 21 December 1921. For the IWW in Iowa, see Thompson and Murfin, *The IWW*; 111. For Sioux City's encounter with the Wobblies, see William H. Cumberland, "Wallace Short and the IWW," *Palimpsest* 61 (September/October 1980), 146-160.

ciently destroyed what remained of the party's prestige in Davenport. Socialist councilmen Feuchter and Koepke were appalled at the lengths to which the Peck faction would go in order to discredit the mayor. Feuchter, one of the founders of the Davenport Socialists, acknowledged that the party was dead. "We had the power and we lost it," Feuchter lamented. Henry Gundling, the able managing editor of the Socialist *Davenport Tribune*, resigned because he could not work with "the clique at city hall." Even Peck realized that his plots had misfired and that the Socialists' brief flirtation with power had ended ingloriously.⁴⁸

The election of 1922 confirmed the party's demise. The Socialists, desperately capitalizing on the new woman suffrage, selected Lucy Claussen as their mayoralty candidate. Dr. Barewald won the Democratic nomination amidst charges of opportunism, while the Republicans turned to another former mayor, Alfred C. Mueller. Davenport Germans had repudiated the Socialists, whose candidates polled only 1,377 of 14,500 ballots cast; the Republican Mueller won handily. George Peck did not seek reelection and Davenport had completely routed the Socialists from the city council. Police Magistrate Harold Metcalf, however, won again, and revealed his amazing ability to convince voters that he could rise above party quarrels and conduct his office efficiently.

Thus, the major triumph of Iowa Socialists came to an anticlimactic conclusion. *Die Iowa Reform* admitted that the Socialists had taken power with "high hopes and great promises," but that their era had been "brought bluntly and completely to a close by the voters." They had won, claimed the *Reform*, because of the excesses of the "one hundred percenters." Unfortunately, they had spoiled the opportunity, by manifesting "much inability, greed of patronage and hardly a trace of generosity in the interest of public welfare."⁴⁹ The result had been a crushing defeat and the leisure to ponder the principles in their party platform. The German-language press had always been opposed to the Socialists and its subscribers aban-

48. *Davenport Democrat*, 20 December 1921, 13 September 1921, 2 April 1922.

49. *Die Iowa Reform*, 7 April 1922.

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doned those whom they had voted into power. Davenport's Germans were not committed to the Socialist programs, and soon tired of the divisiveness and political turmoil which the new administration had created. Wartime persecution had fostered the German vote and while German Iowans were unforgiving toward the Democrats for the humiliations of the Wilson administration, they wanted a "return to normalcy" and voted Republican in 1922.

The Socialists also had problems with bickering in party ranks. Socialist gains might have best consolidated on the moderate course Mayor Barewald proposed, since no hard ideological commitment existed among those who had voted for party candidates. Radicals like Peck who were determined to complete the revolution antagonized both outside support and moderates within the party. Furthermore, labor, which had voted Socialist in two previous elections, abandoned the party in 1922. The Socialists also suffered from difficult economic times and the frequent attacks of a hostile press. They assumed power just as the postwar economic crisis broke, and inherited first a mounting inflation and then a recession with widescale unemployment. The party became trapped in campaign promises that it could not implement. Instead of cutting taxes, introducing economy measures, and improving services for the working class, the Socialists were forced to raise taxes to new heights. When unemployment figures plummeted, the Socialists tried a public works program financed by a \$475,000 bond issue. The program included a city pool, a new sewer system, paved streets, and a ring road around the city. Over 1,400 men received badly needed employment through the public works program. Nevertheless, these efforts to relieve unemployment won only grudging gratitude and no real political support; instead the Socialists were charged with hiring nonresident workers including members of the hated IWW.⁵⁰

The Socialists consistently failed to win press approval. The only Socialist newspaper in Davenport was the *Tribune*,

50. Records of the Greater Davenport Chamber of Commerce 1918-1969, 7 September 1921, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. See also Friedberger, "Cornbelt and River City," 287, and Thomas P. Christensen, "An Industrial History of Scott County," *Annals of Iowa* 22 (July 1940), 387.

founded in 1919, which party warfare soon wounded and which faced extinction by December 1921. Neither the English nor the German press praised the Socialists' plan to alleviate the suffering of the unemployed. It was, chided the *Democrat*, "a last minute attempt to show the constructive side of the Party."⁵¹ Debunkers attacked the Socialist program as costly and wasteful: the swimming pool was \$50,000 put into a hole in the ground, and eighteen civic organizations protested its location. A bitter Fred Feuchter charged that the capitalist press "painted the news."⁵²

Certainly, Iowans' basic conservatism, local and national hostility toward the Bolshevik revolution, continuing government suppression of radicals, and squabbling between the party's left and right wings, all contributed to the decline of a political force whose Americanism many people had come to question. By 1922 the Davenport Socialists had been reduced to their small prewar support. Neither Peck, Bracher, nor Feuchter chose to be candidates for reelection. Still, the Socialists had wrestled valiantly with the city's unemployment crisis and had made necessary civic improvements. The Socialist administration did not seem to frighten industry away from the city, since by early 1922, the Western States Portland Cement Company, a Good Year Rubber Company branch, and the Jersey City Cereal Company had either located in or were considering a move to Davenport.⁵³

Nevertheless, on April 20, 1922, the *Davenport Democrat* boasted: "The Scarlet Flag of Socialism was hauled down from the city hall last night." An editorial happily asserted that the party failed in Davenport "just as it had failed in Russia."⁵⁴ The Socialist offensive which had established a bridgehead west of the Mississippi in a political coup that sent tremors across the state, would quickly fade from memory, obliterated by new concerns and new promises.

51. *Davenport Democrat*, 4 August 1921.

52. *Davenport Democrat*, 17 November 1921 and Records of the Greater Davenport Chamber of Commerce, 17 November 1921.

53. Records, *ibid.*, 6 January 1922.

54. *Davenport Democrat*, 20 April 1922.

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