



A Frustrated Voice of Socialism, 1910-1919

JOHN E. HAYNES

“S ocialism is inevitable.” Thus believed the *New Times*, for many years the only English-language socialist newspaper in Minnesota. “Scientific Socialism,” as the paper habitually referred to its basic principles, proved that “the greater capitalists crush the smaller. The concentration of industry and wealth into fewer hands squeezes out millions of men. They drop into the working class. As a result the working class is now in the overwhelming majority. It is constantly growing in numbers. It is constantly growing in conviction that it is entitled to the full value of its labor. It is constantly growing in the determination to translate that conviction into political action and actually secure the full value of its labor. These numbers, this conviction and this determination make it invincible. Its triumph is inevitable.”¹

The *New Times* began publication in the fall of 1910, with the earliest extant copy dated November 25

¹John M. Work, “Cause and Cure,” *New Times*, Feb. 13, 1915, p. 4.

²For a history of the *New Times*, see Daniel C. Kallgren, “Joining the Socialist Press Army: *The New Times* of Minneapolis, 1910-1919,” graduate paper, University of Minnesota, Aug., 1989. *New Times* themes not discussed in this article include heavy coverage of foreign socialist movements, particularly the Russian one, its detailed exposition of mainstream Marxist theory and its polemics against syndicalism, the journal’s intense hostility toward American involvement in the Mexican civil war and World War I, its steadfast conviction that capitalism and capitalists were irredeemable, and its contempt for progressivism and nonsocialist reform politics.

that year. It appeared weekly until late 1918 when financial difficulty and government harassment contributed to occasional interruptions. Its last known appearance was in January, 1919. Although adhering to the Socialist party, the paper first was owned privately by The Workers Publishing Company, later The Workers’ Educational Association, and finally by The New Times Publishing Company. In its early years the *New Times* did not list an editor although Frank Finsterbach with the assistance of his wife Annah initially functioned in that capacity. In March, 1911, Alexis E. and Stella Campbell Georgian replaced the Finsterbachs. Alexis Georgian remained as editor throughout the remaining life of the paper; his wife, Stella Georgian, served first as literary editor and then assistant editor, and sometimes both were listed as editors. Both wrote news stories, Alexis appeared to write most editorials, and Stella authored frequent opinion columns outside the editorial page. When the Socialist party split over Bolshevism in 1919, Alexis Georgian adhered to the faction that founded the Communist Party of America. This essay will examine the causes contributing to the failure of the Socialist party’s agenda as reflected through the words of the Georgians and their newspaper.²

Dr. Haynes, author of Dubious Alliance: The Making of Minnesota’s DFL Party (1984) and an essay in the recent Minnesota in a Century of Change (1989), is a historian with the manuscripts division of the Library of Congress. This article is revised from a paper presented at the “Voices of Dissent” conference, St. Paul, May 20, 1989.



Alexis E. Georgian, about 1919

The *New Times* did not regard socialist victory as open to serious question. As one of its commentators wrote in 1916, "I am bold enough to believe that any honest investigator will agree with me that capitalism is a mere temporary makeshift, and that Socialism is to be its natural, necessary and inevitable successor." This same commentator wrote the year before that "to the scientific Socialist . . . Socialism is, not an arbitrary scheme or invention, but the logical, necessary and inevitable goal of economic evolution."³

As for the Socialist party's (SP) attainment of elective office, that was almost as sure as the guaranteed coming of socialism. In 1911, the *New Times* told party members that the electoral road to power was before them, stating "The United States is a popular government. All statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the people rule. Their will, as expressed at the ballot box, is approximately carried into effect." Three years later an editorial entitled "How to capture Minneapolis for the Workers," pointed out that "all that is necessary is to get in touch with them [the workers] and get them in touch with one another that they may become con-

scious of their number and strength. . . . The great majority of those—men and women—who are feeding and clothing the world are with us." By 1916, the *New Times's* associate editor claimed that "This political awakening of the laborers is alarming the capitalist class as nothing has yet done. They are few, the workers many. Once let the workers learn to vote for their own interests and elect their own representatives and the supremacy of capitalism will be at an end." "For the workers to secure political power is not difficult," an editorial assured readers, "it needs only that they unite consciously in one working class party for the definite purpose of securing political control." Thomas Van Lear, Minnesota's leading SP candidate, told his followers "No working class in history ever had the same political opportunity as we have on election day. One workingman's vote is as good as Rockefeller's and we are many and the capitalists are few."⁴

SOCIALISM'S coming did not occur within the time envisioned by the *New Times*. Nor did the party do very well in Minnesota elections. In 1912, the SP's gubernatorial candidate, David Morgan, received 25,769 votes, about 8 percent of the total, and came in fifth, behind the Prohibitionist, "Bull Moose" Progressive, Democratic, and Republican candidates. (Eugene Debs, the socialist presidential candidate, also received 8 percent of the vote.) This unimpressive performance was the *high point* of statewide socialist strength.⁵

Nor was there a socialist triumph in Minneapolis despite Thomas Van Lear's impressive victory in the 1916 mayoral contest. Van Lear was a socialist and ran as one, although the election and ballots were technically nonpartisan. His election, nevertheless, was a victory of socialism only in the narrow sense that he was a member of the Socialist party. In large part it was a personal win for a veteran municipal politician (Van Lear had run, and run well, in every election since 1910); it was also an expression of the reform sentiment dominating Minnesota at the time, but mostly it was the success of an aggressive (nonsocialist) trade union movement. If Van Lear's campaign had had significant socialist content, one would expect to find it in the *New*

³John M. Work, "The Socialist Party," *New Times*, Nov. 4, 1916, p. 2, and "Who said Rainbow Chaser," *New Times*, Mar. 13, 1915, p. 4.

⁴John M. Work, "Labor Day And Capital Day," *New Times*, Sept. 2, 1911, p. 8; *New Times*, June 20, 1914, p. 4; Stella Georgian, "Working Class Must Use Its Political Power To Further Its Own Interest," *New Times*, May 27, 1916, p. 1; *New Times*, June 3, 1916, p. 4; Thomas Van Lear, "Why the Working Class Should Control the Office of Mayor," *New Times*, Oct. 21, 1916, p. 1.

⁵*Legislative Manual*, 1913, p. 500.

Times, which was published in Minneapolis and had ardently promoted the mayor's electoral efforts. Furthermore, Van Lear and the paper were aligned in the often acrimonious factionalism of the Minnesota Socialist party. A close reading of the weekly shows that in 1916 Van Lear ran a largely reform campaign that used

"The *New Times* and Van Lear were part of the majority faction of the Socialist party in Minneapolis; however, this faction was opposed by a strong minority in the city and was generally in the minority at state SP conventions. *New Times* often attacked the state Socialist party leadership, and the latter repeatedly attempted, with little success, to sponsor a statewide English-language Socialist newspaper to contest *New Times*'s dominant position. For a comprehensive history of Van Lear's campaign, see David Paul Nord, "Minneapolis and the Pragmatic Socialism of Thomas Van Lear," *Minnesota History* 45 (Spring, 1976): 2-10. Nord sees more radical content to Van Lear's election in "Hothouse Socialism: Minneapolis, 1910-1925," *Socialism in the Heartland: The Midwestern Experience, 1900-1925*, Donald T. Critchlow, ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). The author's view is closer to the earlier Nord essay.

The official indicted was Night Police Chief Bert Wear. *New Times*, April 29, May 6, May 13, 1916, all p. 1; Dec. 4, 1915, p. 1.

many of the issues and much of the rhetoric typical of nonsocialist reform candidates of the era.⁶

From the time of its first publication in 1910 until about the middle of 1917, the *New Times* provided regular and heavy coverage of Minneapolis municipal affairs, on everything from a scandal in the city's water-meter department, deplorable conditions in the municipal jail, and inefficiency in the health department's fight against a diphtheria epidemic to the need for mandatory pasteurization of milk. Above all, the *New Times* stressed chronic corruption in the police department linked to gambling, prostitution, and illegal alcohol sales in the city's gangster-ridden entertainment district. In 1916 public attention to police department corruption was heightened by a grand jury's indictment of an assistant police chief for accepting bribes from saloonkeepers. Earlier the paper had asked "Is Police Force Too Busy Collecting Craft to Give Protection to City?"

In addition to these problems, Van Lear was able to use public disquiet over the city's trolley system as a steppingstone to victory in 1916. A year before Van Lear's campaign, the *New Times* had remarked that

The Twin City Rapid Transit Company's Nicollet Station car yard, about 1915



socialists were aware of the relative importance voters gave to the trolley issue in comparison with a broad commitment to socialism, stating "in the Twin Cities the Street Car problem interests everybody. Experience has shown that local issues will receive more attention from the general reader than any theoretical discussion of Socialism."⁸

Several factors came together to make the trolley issue a key one for the 1916 election. The Twin City Rapid Transit Company was hard pressed to provide adequate service to a rapidly expanding city, and its employees were highly dissatisfied with working conditions. Further, the franchise to operate the trolley system was to expire in 1923, but the company wanted to renegotiate and renew the franchise early. Its political maneuvering with state legislators and Minneapolis aldermen regarding early renewal ignited deep public suspicion and gave Van Lear a highly exploitable issue. When he accepted the SP's nomination, the *New Times* reported, "The most vital issue of the campaign, he [Van Lear] said, would be that of the street railroad franchise. It is a well established fact that the Twin City Rapid Transit company controls the present council." Van Lear stressed the trolley issue throughout the campaign, and on the eve of the election the paper stated "the chief immediate issue of the approaching municipal election is the question of the renewal of the Street Car Company's franchise." Further, Minneapolis trade unions, although predominantly nonsocialist, strongly supported efforts by the transit workers to organize a union; they were asserting a stronger role in municipal politics and found Van Lear's campaign a convenient vehicle for creating a labor-led municipal political coalition.⁹

Van Lear never hid his socialist convictions, but he also made sure Minneapolis voters kept his socialism in perspective. At the height of the campaign he assured voters that his election would not bring about radical changes. "Socialism," he said, "cannot be put into effect in any one city. Furthermore so long as national and state legislatures, and particularly the courts, are in control of the capitalists and the old party politicians, a municipal administration, even tho absolutely controlled by socialists, would be hampered and restricted in every way possible." Van Lear made his socialism a virtue in the context of Minneapolis city corruption and the wiles of the trolley company, urging voters to support him "if for no other reason [that] the common people ought to seize the office of mayor in order to keep this powerful office out of the hands and away from the influence of the corporation interests."¹⁰

When Minneapolis citizens voted in 1916, they voted for a mayor who would clean up the police department and keep the city council honest on trolley franchise renewal. Going into the election, the SP had



Thomas Van Lear, 1917

four adherents among the 24 Minneapolis aldermen and claimed one state legislator from the city. When it was over, the numbers remained unchanged. The only new offices the party gained were a seat on the school board and, of course, the mayoralty.¹¹

The *New Times* hailed Van Lear's victory as an "Epoch Making Struggle," but its commentary called the contest one of the "street car company against everybody else" and admitted that it "cannot be said to be a victory for Socialism in the sense that all of those casting their vote for the Socialist candidate for mayor, were also voting for a complete co-operative system of wealth, production and distribution." Editorially, the weekly boasted "Minneapolis has started on the road that leads in the ultimate emancipation of the working

⁸*New Times*, May 15, 1915, p. 1.

⁹*New Times*, Mar. 11, Oct. 28, 1916, both p. 1; see also other Van Lear statements, June 3, 10, 1916, both p. 4.

¹⁰Van Lear, "Why the Working Class . . ." *New Times*, Oct. 21, 1916, p. 1.

¹¹*Legislative Manual*, 1917, p. 388-397; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 8, 1916, p. 1. Lynn Thompson was the school board member.

class" but added "We must face the fact that the big and wonderfully gratifying vote for our mayoralty candidate is a shifting one. The Street Car Franchise issue was an important, perhaps even decisive, factor in his election. Two years hence when this question will probably be settled, large numbers of voters may go back to their old loves, capitalist party candidates." Two years hence, in fact, Van Lear failed re-election.¹²

The period of the Socialist party's rise and fall in Minnesota was one of political ferment and breakdown of established partisan alignments. The spirit of reform progressivism dominated both the Republican and the Democratic parties, and both were beset with factionalism. In 1912, when the national Republican convention renominated President William Taft, the majority of Minnesota's delegates bolted the GOP to join Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive party, and in the general election Roosevelt carried Minnesota with Taft in third place behind the Democrats' Woodrow Wilson. Voters returned Republican Adolph O. Eberhart to the governor's office, but with only a plurality of 40 percent of the vote. Prohibitionist sentiment was strong within both parties; it also produced independent tickets that combined prohibitionism with broad reform programs. In 1910, for example, four independent Prohibitionists had won election to the Minnesota legislature. (In the same election the SP put one member in the legislature.)¹³

Democrats were as plagued with factionalism as Republicans. Their dominant progressive wing was largely "dry," weakening Democratic voting habits among the mostly "wet" and large German-American constituency (hitherto a source of Democratic strength). Nationality tensions, a potent source of political division in ethnically diverse Minnesota, were further increased by World War I. By 1916, Governor Winfield S. Hammond, a Democrat, was questioning the patriotism of the German-American Alliance, the leading German ethnic organization in the state. In that year a brawl that broke out on the train carrying

¹²*New Times*, Nov. 11, 1916, p. 1, 4.

¹³*Legislative Manual*, 1913, p. 511, and 1911, p. 493-504; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Nov. 9, 1910, p. 1.

¹⁴See, for example, Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota, 1899-1918* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1971), 33-35, 98, 139-144.

¹⁵Despite its poor electoral showing, the Socialist party of the 1910s can be called a success in the sense that it took part in and contributed to the progressive ferment; the Socialist wing of the trade union movement pushed the unions in a more aggressive direction. Although the party functioned in this manner, it was not its intent to be little more than a leavening agent in reform politics or in the trade union movement. The party aspired to political power and thereby to a revolutionary transformation of economic, social, and cultural life.

Minnesota's delegates to the national Democratic convention amply illustrated Democratic factionalism. America's entry into the war in 1917 further eroded support by German Americans, as many of them blamed the Democrats' Wilson for getting the nation into war with the German fatherland. Even so, these unhappy German Americans did not find a welcome in the Republican party. Under Governor J. A. A. Burnquist that party adopted a stance of hyper-patriotism, harshly attacked German culture, and harassed anyone who failed to show sufficient enthusiasm for the war.¹⁴

This tumult was ripe for political realignment. The beneficiary, however, was not the Socialist party but the Farmer-Labor movement that ran its first candidates in 1918. The socialist role in this was principally in furnishing many trade union leaders who provided the urban and worker wing of the Farmer-Labor movement, including Van Lear himself. These Farmer-Labor socialists, however, had given up on the Socialist party itself; they wanted the Farmer-Labor movement to avoid the politically isolating mistakes of the SP.

IN THE MIDST of this political turmoil, why did the Socialist party win so few votes? One would think that the socialist call for economic justice would have been an appealing one. In time, the industrial and economic transformation underway in the United States would create a mass consumption economy that would give its citizens one of the highest standards of living in the world. In the 1910s, however, the affluent consumer culture of the future was only being born. Many workers lived lives of economic hardship, worked under dangerous and unhealthy conditions, and were subjected to arbitrary control by their employers. The rapid growth of industrial enterprise had delivered enormous power into the hands of capitalists, and the countervailing forces of a powerful labor movement and a regulatory state were only beginning to develop. The power of industrial capital was too new and too raw to have won legitimacy; the political ferment of the progressive period was largely an attempt by a variety of constituencies to come to grips with the economic and social disruption of early 20th-century industrial growth. The question, then, is why did most Minnesota workers vote for other parties, for the Republicans, the Democrats, the Progressives, and even for the Prohibitionists in greater numbers than voted for the Socialist party?¹⁵

The *New Times* wondered about that question from time to time. Its first answer was that workers were ill informed; the "Only Enemy Is Ignorance of Masses," and if only workers heard the revolutionary message, the SP would triumph. This stance was based on the *New Times*'s assurance that "To combat Social-

ism by argument or debate is worse than useless for this only stimulates an interest in the subject and the Socialist inevitably has the best of the argument. The only way left to its capitalist opponents is to prevent the spread of a knowledge of Socialism among the masses." This argument became strained after dozens of unsuccessful political campaigns and the circulation of thousands of pamphlets, books, journals, and newspapers. The paper's irritation with the "heedless throng" who failed to listen to the socialist message eventually became comments and cartoons on the stupidity and foolishness of workers.¹⁶

One cartoon showed a simpleminded-looking worker saying "I don't know nothin.' I don't want nothin.'" A front-page commentary during Van Lear's mayoral campaign by "A.L.S." ridiculed the worker who supported Van Lear's opponents as an ignorant "James Workstiff." He described the archetypical "Workstiff" as someone who "doesn't care much about the election. Thinks Brooklyn will win the [professional baseball] series. Doesn't know much about socialism, doesn't care anything about it. The Father [priest] says socialists are no good. Never read anything on the subject, and by god, he never will. Jim says, 'Them socialist is agin religion. I'm gonna vote for Nye, or, Langum' [Van Lear's opponents]."¹⁷

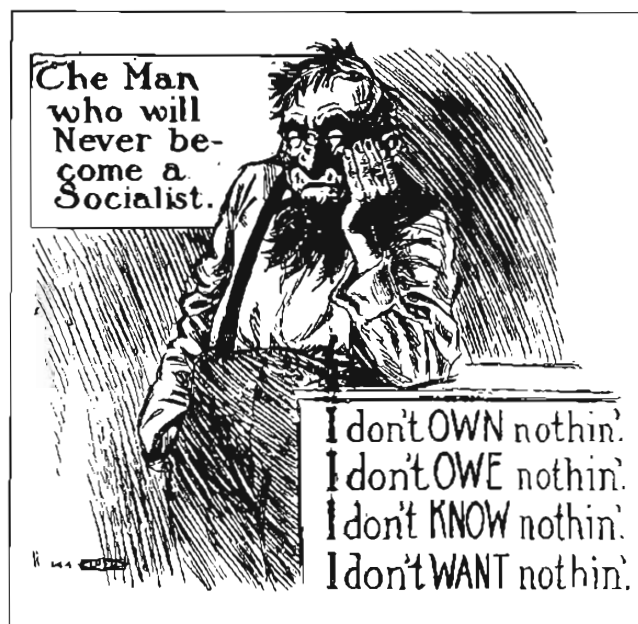
In 1912 socialists in the iron range mining town of Hibbing ran a slate of candidates for municipal offices. The *New Times's* weekly Hibbing column told citizen "employees of the Steal trust" that "you are in the majority. . . . don't be fooled" and asked "Why don't

you fellows wake up and strike a blow for freedom?" Hibbing workers, however, failed to respond; in the ensuing election, the highest socialist vote-getter received 201 votes of the 1,367 cast. The SP slate came in third behind the victorious incumbent administration and a second-place reformist ticket. In the eyes of many socialists, workers' ignorance allowed them to be manipulated.¹⁸

The *New Times's* Hibbing column commented "the wage slave boob who gets sore at the Socialists for showing him up as the tool he really is should get a few good books on Socialism and learn what its real aim is." Later, that column sarcastically and bitterly castigated those who failed to vote SP: "You wise wage earning opponents of Socialism, how do you like sitting down to a meal of slimy, cold storage beef for which you are compelled to pay fancy prices? You're getting just what you have been voting for—protection by the Republican party of the privileged ones. You fellows wouldn't vote Socialism. Oh, no. It's above you. It takes brains to understand Socialism—not a great deal—but just a little more than you meek sufferers seem to have!"¹⁹

IN 1915 an obviously frustrated editor described overhearing two workers on a streetcar talking heatedly about baseball. He commented "I know that these men are typical of the working class. Thousands may starve; yet they are interested in baseball. Little children may be enslaved in health-destroying factories; they worry about the score *What fools these workers are!*" In 1916 Stella Georgian, the *New Times's* assistant editor, wrote "such is the power of environment, the influence of our surroundings, that a curious psychology was induced in the workers themselves. They regarded themselves in the same way as they were regarded by the capitalist class. They *looked with contempt upon their own class*, admired the class above and strove even to enter that class by climbing on the backs of their weaker fellow-worker." Georgian's attribution of self-contempt does not reflect actual worker self-perception, although no doubt some did possess contempt for their class. Rather, it reflects *Georgian's* contempt for workers who have failed to carry out their historical mission of overthrowing capitalism. This is brought out in her further comment, "when the workers become conscious of this fact [that they control the production

This cartoon, captioned "Ever Meet this Chap?" appeared May 16, 1914.



¹⁶*New Times*, Sept. 2, 1916, Dec. 18, 1913, both p. 1, Jan. 16, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁷*New Times*, May 16, 1914, p. 1; A. L. S. [A. L. Sugarman?], "Periscope Observations," *New Times*, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 1. Sugarman was identified with the left wing of the Socialist party.

¹⁸*New Times*, Mar. 9, 1912, p. 1, 3.

¹⁹*New Times*, June 22, 29, 1912, both p. 3.

of wealth] they realize what a power they are in modern society. Their self-respect is awakened. They are no longer *cringing, servile slaves*.²⁰

A.L. Sugarman, shortly to become state secretary of the Socialist party, wrote that "so low has Labor sunk" that the typical worker was a shabby "*human wreck*," cringing before the plutocrat. This echoed a poem in the editorial column entitled "The Workers Unawake," which concluded that the working man

Praises the hand that robs him, kisses the
heel that leads him in the mire:
He—the most robbed of all—robbed of his
birthright of audacity—
a slave in soul too steeped to dream of aught
but slavery—
He—not the exploiter—is the heavy Ball
upon the Chain that clogs Humanity.²¹

MINNESOTA workers, in terms of their voting, were "the heavy Ball upon the Chain" that kept the Socialist party from the task assigned to it by scientific socialism. One need not, however, agree with those frustrated socialists who assigned the failure to workers' ignorance, foolishness, and debasement. A reading of the *New Times* suggests that its vision of American society and American workers was fundamentally at variance with and at key points offensive to the world view held by most workers. The themes observed in the *New Times* indicate a serious clash between the world as seen by the weekly and the world as seen and experienced by most workers.²²

The first areas one should look to are nationality, ethnicity, and patriotism. Many, probably most, of the Minnesota working class were of immigrant origin. This was reflected in the Minnesota SP with its Finnish, German, Scandinavian, Greek, Russian, Jewish, Hungarian, and Latvian socialist locals. Native speakers of English were a minority, and of the socialist newspapers published in Minnesota, the *New Times* was in

many years the only one in English.²³ We know that the immigrant experience was a defining phenomenon for several generations of Americans. Immigrants entering America did not simply drop their old nationality and adopt the customs of their new country. Instead, a complex interaction took place that changed everybody concerned. One of the most significant results of the process was the emergence of ethnic communities that, although partially integrated into mainstream American society, nonetheless had an internal leadership structure, developed an ethnic culture, and supported a variety of ethnic churches and other social institutions.

If one read only the *New Times*, one would never guess that any such process was under way even though its longtime editor was an immigrant from Russia. The paper, of course, noted the existence of the language locals of the Socialist party but seemed to view them as merely clubs of workers who spoke some other language than English. They did not have nationality or what today we would call ethnicity; workers had no country and they were, language excepted, interchangeable. In the period 1914 to 1918, an intense debate took place in American politics and in the press over "Americanization" and "hyphenism," the labels

The *New Times's* March 9, 1912, cartoon, entitled "Election Day in Hibbing"



²⁰Stella C. Georgian, "Working Class Must Use Its Political Power To Further Its Own Interest," *New Times*, May 27, 1916, p. 1, emphases added.

²¹*New Times*, Jan. 13, 1917, p. 4, emphasis added; Edgume Pinchon, "The Workers Unawake," *New Times*, June 20, 1914, p. 4.

²²For a broad-ranging discussion of the clash between the perception of the world of radical organizations and most workers, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: Aspects of the Intellectual History and the Historiography of Three American Radical Organizations* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981). This essay follows Kraditor's argument.

²³For an example of one foreign-language socialist paper, see Odd Lovoll, "Gaa Paa: A Scandinavian Voice of Dissent," *Minnesota History* 52 (Fall, 1990): 86-99.



"One Hand Steals the Miner's Freedom, While the Other Steals His Home," claimed the *New Times*, February 24, 1912.

under which nationality and ethnicity were discussed. This debate was particularly spirited in Minnesota, but the *New Times* neither took part nor made much note of its existence.

Some might conclude that the *New Times* was an English-language socialist paper with a predominately "old stock" American constituency, and it did not need to concern itself with ethnicity. The paper's obliviousness to ethnicity, however, reflected a widespread socialist attitude. Further, any movement that aspired to significant political power had to deal with ethnicity either by learning to play ethnic politics or, by way of playing them in a negative fashion, by arousing nativist constituencies in opposition to one or another of the emerging hyphenated communities. One certainly did not, as the *New Times* did during the 1916 campaign, casually stereotype Swedish immigrants who supported Van Lear's Swedish-American opponent, Otto S. Langum, as a dim-witted "Olaf Swanson" and attribute to the archetypical "Swanson" the remarks "I tank I vote for Otto, he bane gude Svede, and I tank we beat these har socialists." Nor, as the weekly's Hibbing col-

umnist did in 1912, did one refer offhandedly to the town's "codfish aristocracy," an apparent slighting reference to Scandinavian immigrants who often ate dried fish. The *New Times* was blind to worker ethnicity and thereby blind to a key factor in many workers' self-identify and voting choices.²⁴

The weekly's disregard for nationalism did not apply solely to immigrants. The *New Times* believed that international working-class solidarity was not merely desirable, it was a fact. As tensions in Europe built toward war, the *New Times*, unworried, said "it becomes evident that a general European war is almost an impossibility," explaining "growing class-consciousness and solidarity among the workers of all lands" was such that the workers would overthrow their governments before going to war. When the troops actually marched, the workers did not revolt and most of the socialist parties of Europe supported their respective governments. Initially, the *New Times* did not believe it. The August 15, 1914, issue said "censored reports from Russia, Germany, France, and Austria are giving out the impression that the Socialists have succumbed to the war fever and are supporting their respective governments. That these reports are absolutely false is indicated." When it became evident that Germany's socialist parliamentarians had voted for war credits, the *New Times* published a report, a false one as it turned out, that the Kaiser had executed a hundred of them and coerced the rest as the only reasonable explanation for what happened.²⁵

Even after it became clear that millions of workers were marching willingly to war, the *New Times* continued to believe that nationalism was a sort of illusion and that at any moment worker-soldiers of the belligerents would snap out of their trance and stop the war. It published stories suggesting that soldiers on both sides were fighting unwillingly in 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, and 1918. After the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the paper was even more certain that solidarity would prevail. As the Czarist army disintegrated, the weekly confidently asserted that the Germans would not dare advance into Russia because German soldiers would mutiny at this threat to the workers' revolution. "Perhaps the next few weeks will see the stirring sight of Russian and German soldiers marching side by side

²⁴A. L. S., "Periscope Observations," *New Times*, Oct. 7, 1916, p. 1, *New Times*, May 4, 1912, p. 3. For a more positive appraisal of *New Times's* treatment of ethnic issues, see Daniel C. Kallgren's "From Indifference to Reliance: The *New Times* of Minneapolis and the Socialist Foreign Language Federation Locals," graduate paper, University of Minnesota, Aug., 1989.

²⁵*New Times*, July 18, p. 4, Aug. 1, p. 4, Aug. 15, 22, both p. 1—all in 1914.

against the Kaiser and his little cohort of junkers.”²⁶ (Actually, the German army advanced, and the Bolsheviks were forced to sign the Brest-Litovsk treaty giving Germany control of the Baltic provinces, Poland, and the Ukraine.) There were two realities: the real world where millions of men had been killing each other because of their nationalism, and the *New Times’s* separate universe where workers had no country.

IF it was merely oblivious to immigrant and foreign workers’ nationality and culture, the newspaper was positively hostile to American nationalism. The *New Times’s* weapon against patriotism was ridicule. In 1911, the paper’s first opportunity to comment on July 4th featured an article saying that one of the “most ridiculous spectacles in the world” is “the working class of America on the Fourth of July.” The essay denounced the American Revolution and asserted that it had been undertaken principally by New Englanders in order to protect the slave trade. The next July 4th, the *New Times* mocked the holiday as a celebration of a war led by a few thousand “gentlemen,” called the founding fathers “smugglers,” described George Washington as a land speculator, and dismissed Thomas Jefferson as a slave owner and “unscrupulous land grabber.” Indeed, every July 4th seemed to be an occasion for the *New Times* to make clear its disdain for patriotism.²⁷

Nor was July 4th the only symbol of patriotism that earned the *New Times’s* scorn. The American flag? It was “a piece of cloth that represents the system that is oppressing us wage slaves.” As for the venerated Constitution, the paper highlighted a speech to the Minneapolis local where “Comrade Lucas proceeded to tear the constitution of the U.S. to pieces and lay open to the public the utter worthlessness of it.” Further comment appeared in a lengthy article excoriating the Constitution and stating “The Socialist Party should have no more respect for the Constitution than for [J. P.] Morgan’s instructions to his valet.”²⁸

As America began to be drawn into the European war, nationalist sentiment heightened. In late 1916, the *New Times*, perhaps uneasy about becoming the target of inflamed American patriotism, took a different tack. The journal published a ten-part essay on “Americanism and Socialism” by Edward Adams Cantrell. Cantrell said “Socialism is the most American thing in America today.” He hailed the nation’s heritage, commenting “Americanism is democracy in religion and politics. . . . No one can understand the genius of American institutions without keeping in mind that fact that the first and most fundamental expression of the American spirit came in an outburst of revolutionary thought and feeling.” Cantrell called on socialists to think well of the American Revolution because it promoted atheism, and he praised Thomas Jefferson as a revolutionary who attacked the churches. Cantrell discovered that if one looked at American history with the right perspective, one would find that many American heroes were implicitly socialists. He noted, for example, that “Abraham Lincoln, in his economic philosophy was thoroughly socialistic.”²⁹

America’s intervention in the war and the subsequent harassment and suppression of antiwar and dissident opinion also caused the paper to shift its attitude toward the once-scorned U.S. Constitution. In September, 1917, the *New Times* twice reprinted the Constitution under the headline “Know Your Rights.” One commentator wrote “The time has come for the people of this nation to know whether the Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the land.” Even the stars and stripes came in for a few good words in a story headlined “The American Flag Honored and Constitution Upheld” about a socialist picnic of the party’s 6th, 11th, and 12th-ward Minneapolis locals. Mayor Van Lear, speaking to the picnic crowd, stated that constitutional rights could not be suspended in wartime and denounced patriotic vigilantes as violators of legality.³⁰

Hostility to religion was another theme that ran through the *New Times*. Religion and church activities were important aspects of the lives of many workers, both old-stock and immigrant Americans. Often churches were major pillars of the developing ethnic communities. At no point in the existence of the *New Times*, however, can one find understanding or respect for religious belief.

In its early years the paper occasionally patronized religious sentiment rather than attacking it directly. In a 1910 essay, for example, it said “Jesus was a working man, and he represented the working people of his day,” and early in 1911 reported on a socialist lecture by Protestant minister William Backus, who called himself a member of a “creedless church” and saw Fabian socialism as the embodiment of Christianity. In a similar vein, it approved of a lecture by Rabbi Samuel N.

²⁶See *New Times*, Feb. 6, 1915, p. 2, Feb. 5, 1916, p. 4, Nov. 3, 1917, p. 4, Nov. 24, 1917, p. 1, Jan. 19, 1918, p. 4, Mar. 2, 1918, p. 1.

²⁷*New Times*, July 8, 1911, p. 1, 7; Edwin T. Harris, “Independence Day,” *New Times*, July 6, 1912, p. 1, July 4, 1914, p. 4, July 3, 1915, p. 4.

²⁸*New Times*, July 1, p. 3, Jan. 19, p. 2–3, June 24, p. 7—all 1911.

²⁹Cantrell, “Socialist Ideals in American Life and Literature,” *New Times*, Dec. 23, 1916, p. 1, Feb. 10, 1917, p. 1. Other sections of Cantrell’s essay appeared Dec. 30, 1916, p. 4, Jan. 6, 1917, p. 4, Jan. 27, 1917, p. 1, Feb. 24, 1917, p. 1, Mar. 3, 1917, p. 1, Mar. 24, 1917, p. 1, and Mar. 31, 1917, p. 4.

³⁰*New Times*, Sept. 22, 29, 1917, both p. 3; John Maddock, “The Great Political Crisis Is Here,” *New Times*, Sept. 29, 1917, p. 4; *New Times*, Aug. 25, 1917, p. 2.

Deinard, who explained that, properly understood, the Old Testament endorsed socialism. Socialists, the paper said, celebrated Christmas by "interpreting Jesus's life and work according to Socialist ideals." These attempts to define Christianity and Judaism as socialism in religious guise were even more artificial than the later attempt to make socialism the embodiment of Americanism. Equally patronizing was a Van Lear lecture to an audience of Baptists that religious belief was a "luxury" that should be indulged only after economic justice had been achieved. These discussions, so devoid of understanding of religious experience, were likely to offend rather than persuade.³¹

In any case, the *New Times* was more comfortable with direct attacks on religion as, for example, in its editorial that religious instruction was "injurious to the social life as well as to the individual" or in a front-page cartoon entitled "The Holy Trio" where three disreputable-looking figures were labeled "father, son and the ghost" and represented the plutocrat, saying "we rule you," the policeman, saying "we club you," and the priest, saying "we fool you." Three headlines of anti-religious stories—"Old Ecclesiastic Dope for Workers, Endure Hell here for Heaven Hereafter," "Catholicism, the Enemy of Human Progress," and "Religion Is Good Slave Doctrine"—catch the general flavor of the *New Times's* attitude. One story summed it all up in a statement that churches and clergy "have condemned, burned, and made life miserable for justice loving, and truth-seeking minds. They have and are still polluting the mind of unfortunate men, women and children, who fall into these black garbed, hypocritical monsters' traps."³²

Occasionally, the *New Times* attacks on religion were bizarre. In 1916, an editorial on "Why Workingmen Do Not Go to Church," asserted that workers were abandoning their churches in large numbers because the effort of those institutions on behalf of capitalism was making "The name Christian . . . a term of reproach." There are two notable aspects about this editorial: the assertion that workers were leaving likely was incorrect; and in the very same issue, the paper revealed that SP membership in Minnesota had fallen from 5,227 in 1914 to 3,547 in 1916, a 32 percent drop. One would think that the *New Times* would be more concerned about why workers were abandoning the Socialist party than advancing a polemical attack on religion.³³

Additional aspects of the *New Times's* world view show that, in part, it operated in a universe apart from that of most Minnesotans. Neither the paper nor the Minnesota Socialist party, for example, ever successfully came to grips with prohibitionism, a powerful force, politically more successful than socialism. The implementation of prohibition, both through locally

enacted law and through federal law, had far greater impact on most workers than any socialist program.³⁴

Prohibitionism's appeal did not fit into the paper's way of looking at the world. It did not appear to be a capitalist issue because traditional radical thinking tended to hold that alcohol, like religion, was one of the opiates that capitalists used to tranquilize downtrodden workers and reconcile them to their exploitation. Brewers and distillers were seen as capitalists who directly exploited workers by selling the tranquilizer. Most socialists, however, did not regard consumption of alcohol as a problem in and of itself. As one Minnesota leader put it, "prohibition is not a revolutionary issue." Yet, to many socialists, if prohibition was not a working class issue, it had to be a capitalist issue; but why would capitalists want a sober working class? In the years from 1910 to 1914, as prohibitionism gathered political strength, the *New Times* mostly ignored the issue; its few comments tersely indicated disapproval. A political movement, however, holds itself aloof from a major public controversy only at a cost. In 1914 the paper published a letter from David Morgan, the Socialist party's 1912 gubernatorial candidate, who warned that the party's electoral prospects were being weakened by most socialist candidates' misunderstanding of prohibition's appeal.

In 1915, when Minneapolis faced a referendum on prohibition, the *New Times* started paying more attention to the issue. It decided that prohibition was a capitalist ploy and the Prohibition party "a bourgeoisie party of petty politicians." A. L. Sugarman, a frequent contributor, wrote that prohibition "is at best a superficial reform, emanating from the capitalist class and its paid retainers, and not affecting the structure of society. Yet so many workers are being fooled into believing that it is of great importance, that the question cannot entirely be ignored. The movement is being pushed by social reformers, whose chief task has always been to blind the working class to real issues."³⁵ The view that prohibition was little more than a red herring designed

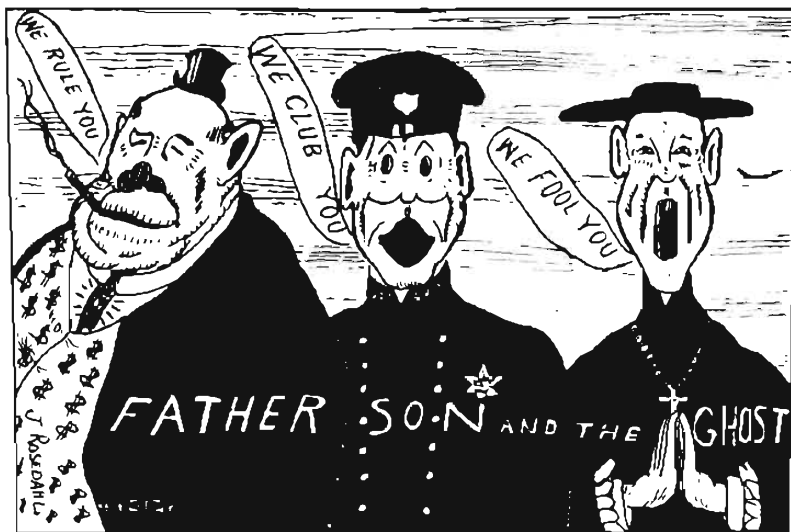
³¹Frank Finsterbach, "The Manger and the Palace," *New Times*, Dec. 22, 1910, p. 1; *New Times*, Feb. 2, 1911, p. 2-3, Feb. 16, 1911, p. 3, Dec. 29, 1910, p. 2; Feb. 3, 1912, p. 1.

³²*New Times*, Sept. 26, 1914, p. 4, Jan. 25, 1913, p. 1, Nov. 20, 1913, p. 4, Nov. 27, 1913, p. 1, Oct. 2, 1915, p. 1, and Lida Ross, "Humanity's Stumbling Block," *New Times*, May 12, 1917, p. 3.

³³*New Times*, May 27, 1916, p. 2, 4. The paper's story on the membership drop suggested that inefficiency in the state party office was responsible.

³⁴Here and below, see A. L. Sugarman, "Prohibition: Wrong in Principle and a Failure in Practice," *New Times*, Aug. 21, 1915, p. 4; see also Jan. 26, 1911, p. 4, Mar. 16, 1912, p. 2, June 20, 1914, p. 3.

³⁵*New Times*, Oct. 2, p. 4, Aug. 21, p. 4, both 1915.



"The Holy Trio" cartoon that appeared in the January 25, 1913, issue of *New Times*

to lead workers astray was held by few beyond the socialist hard core, however, and Minnesota's intense debate on the issue proceeded without significant participation by socialists.

THE *New Times* extended to the woman's movement of the 1910s its unshakable view that all issues of importance were class issues. The Socialist party supported suffrage, but it was not a priority issue to Minnesota socialists. "Apart from the ballot, there is no woman problem," the *New Times* editorialized. "The problems to be met are those equally confronting men and women and must be overcome together." As to the political fight over the vote for women, the paper took the view that "the present suffrage movement is, however, dominated and controlled by bourgeois middle class elements" and was being used to divert attention from the SP. As in the case of prohibition, the paper treated a debate of great moment to a large number of Minnesotans as a political sidelight.³⁶

Another target of the *New Times* was the Boy Scouts. In the 1910s, the movement was still young and had not yet become as American as "Mom, apple pie and the flag," but it was already well on its way to that status. Between 1911 and 1915, the paper published 11 harsh attacks that claimed "the plutocrats of America

invented and are promoting the scout organization for the purpose of defeating the world-wide movement for peace" and "the Boy Scouts of America are taught and are expected to kill father, mother, brother, sister or any one else in obedience to their superior." The weekly asserted that scouts were trained to break strikes and prominently reported that socialist-led Machinist Local 477 passed a resolution denouncing the Scout movement as "immoral" and constituting a "wholesale murder machine."³⁷

The *New Times's* view of the Scout movement again suggests a distorted grasp of American society. So did its views on marriage. The *New Times* in 1917 carried a column by George A. Lenser entitled "Free Love and Marriage" in which free love was endorsed. Lenser remarked that "marriage is a barbarian institution . . . a degenerating relic."³⁸ Most Minnesota workers married, and it is doubtful that they or their wives shared the view that they were participating in a "barbarian institution." The family was central in most workers' lives, and there is every reason to believe that most were appalled by such views.

UNTIL late 1916, the *New Times* had adhered to the moderate wing of the Socialist party and frequently carried articles rejecting or denouncing the use of violence to promote its causes. Under the pressure of war, however, the Minnesota SP grew more radical, and such views slowly gained prominence in the paper, expressing ideas that were likely highly objectionable to most Minnesota workers.

In late 1916 the *New Times* published a letter from A. L. Sugarman that disagreed with an earlier commentary denouncing the Industrial Workers of the World's philosophical support for violent confrontation. Sugarman argued "an occasional stick of dyna-

³⁶*New Times*, Mar. 19, May 16, 1914, both p. 4. In its early issues, the weekly printed a "Co-Workers" page devoted to women's concerns, but this feature had a short life.

³⁷R. A. Dague, "Is the Boy Scout of a Military Nature," *New Times*, Dec. 30, 1911, p. 7; see also April 1, 1911, p. 2, May 13, 1911, p. 5. Other anti-Scout stories can be found April 8, p. 4, April 22, p. 1, Sept 16, p. 4, Oct. 21, p. 1, Dec. 2, p. 3, all 1911, and Mar. 26, 1914, p. 4, Mar. 13, 1915, p. 4, June 19, 1915, p. 1.

³⁸*New Times*, Mar. 3, 1917, p. 2.

mite, used wisely can accomplish great things for the working class" and said "this is the attitude of an ever-increasing 'left wing' of the American Socialist movement." In a second letter, Sugarman again endorsed dynamite and said "emery dust in vital parts" was an excellent way to conduct a strike. He signed his letter "yours for direct and political action and intelligent violence when necessary." When a moderate socialist protested that Sugarman had praised ordinary criminals, he replied "Mr. Carton says that I sympathize with crooks. I do. I still hold that the criminal is far more courageous than the worker who submissively starves. He [the criminal] is courageous. He defies all society. He acts to preserve himself." Sugarman went on to call for "revolutionary ethics," and commented "right and wrong are entirely relative terms; the working class must develop a code of ethics all its own."³⁹

Nor were Sugarman's views unique. Alfred Tiala, soon to become a socialist hero for refusing conscription, wrote that the "standard of right and wrong is a set of arbitrary rules. . . . Legality is nothing less than a bowing to the tyrant of orthodox ethics. . . . What I advocate is that the revolutionary workers disregard entirely the universal standard of ethics as if it did not exist at all and formulate one for themselves which will meet the situation. . . . This new standard should be comprised with only the end in view that it be a benefit to the revolutionary movement regardless of how drastic may be its results as concerns the exploiters of the workers. . . . In the meantime the situation justifies any methods that produce the desired results for the working class. . . . Why should the workers have scruples in regard to the methods used[?]" Later, Tiala, as had Sugarman, portrayed ordinary criminals and revolutionary socialists as sharing certain values.⁴⁰

Sugarman, it must be remembered, was not some crank letter writer. His words appeared frequently in the *New Times*, he was an acknowledged socialist spokesman, and in 1917 he was elected state secretary of the SP and subsequently won a recall referendum aimed at his removal from office.⁴¹ But the significant point is that the majority of Minnesota workers were law abiding and, in contrast to Sugarman's view, did not regard criminals with sympathy or admire their courage or see themselves as lacking courage.

A READING of the *New Times* suggests that the Socialist party in Minnesota made only limited inroads into its chosen constituency because its view of the world was in key respects unacceptable to the great majority of workers. The political ferment of the period, the popularity of progressivism, and the attraction of voters to the emerging Farmer-Labor movement's

economic radicalism indicate that the SP's failure was not due to the unwillingness of voters to try new political alignments or their lack of receptivity to a critique of capitalism.⁴² The problem was that the Socialist party asked voters for a lot more than giving up old political loyalties and using the power of government to change the economic system. The SP explicitly and implicitly expected voters to give up their flag, give up their churches, put aside any particular national or ethnic cultures, and take on the persona of THE WORKER. Minnesota workers, however, only on occasion thought or behaved in the fashion that the *New Times* thought they should.

The *New Times* made clear that a worker's only significant characteristic was his status as a proletarian, and this status alone explained everything of significance about his life. Whether a worker's economic status should be regarded as the overwhelming fact of his life is an ethical question. Whether he did regard himself in that fashion, however, is a historical question. The evidence is that Minnesota workers, and American workers generally, did not. The other parts of their lives involved family, church, politics, ethnic institutions, a myriad of voluntary activities and organizations, and, increasingly over time, the consumption of consumer goods made possible by economic growth. In 1912, the *New Times* had asserted that religion was a luxury, with the socialist cliché "All Issues are Class Issues."⁴³ The Socialist party's trouble was that most workers never saw it that way.

³⁹*New Times*, Nov. 25, p. 3, Dec. 16, p. 5, both 1916, Jan. 27, 1917, p. 3.

⁴⁰Alfred Tiala, "On Right and Wrong," *New Times*, Feb. 24, 1917, p. 2. Tiala was one of the first Finnish radicals to join the American Communist party and was the CP's first Finnish organizer. *New Times*, July 14, 1917, p. 2.

⁴¹In 1917, as part of the federal campaign against antiwar agitation, Sugarman was convicted of inciting mutiny and insubordination in the armed forces.

⁴²The Farmer-Labor movement was explicitly anticapitalist although its alternative, the co-operative commonwealth, was never clearly defined. The F-L movement's (ambiguous) radicalism, however, was confined to the economic arena; it did not attack religion, mock patriotism, romanticize criminals, or denounce marriage. Although not a "dry" movement, Farmer-Laborism took in supporters of the prohibitionist National party. The last F-L governor, Elmer Benson, was a teetotaler, and strict control of alcohol retained a measure of support in the Farmer-Labor Association until the late 1930s.

⁴³*New Times*, Feb. 3, 1912, p. 2.

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