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## Rebels of the New South : the Socialist Party in Dixie, 1892-1920.

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**REBELS OF THE NEW SOUTH:  
THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN DIXIE, 1892-1920**

A Dissertation Presented

by

BRAD A. PAUL

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 1999

The University of Massachusetts/Five College  
Graduate Program in History

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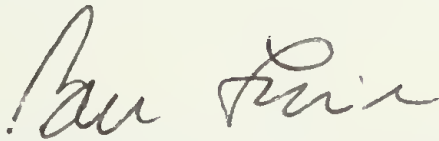
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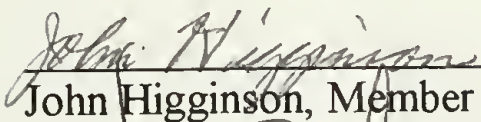
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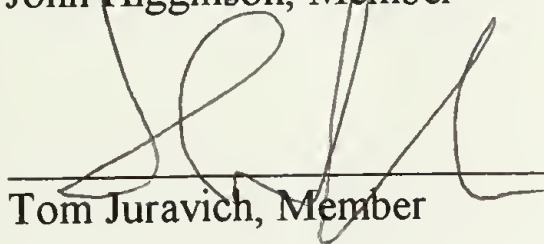
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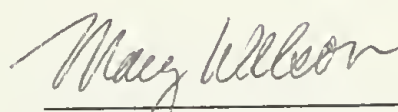
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Tom Juravich, Member



Mary Wilson, Department Head  
Department of History

To the Memory of  
Eva Florence Potts (1912-1998)



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Over the past several years my personal and professional debts have far exceeded any reasonable line of credit. On so many occasions I have enjoyed the good fortune of being in the just the right place to benefit from the guidance and inspiration of a wonderful collection of friends, mentors, and colleagues.

Faculty, staff, and students at three universities contributed to my work. This study began a few short city blocks from where the opening scene of the dissertation takes place, Atlanta, Georgia. At Georgia State University I was humbled by the mighty editorial pen of Merl Reed and taught how to “plow new ground” by John Matthews. In their respective seminars on American labor and the New South they inspired me with an all too rare combination of encouragement, challenge, imagination, and good humor. The Department is equally lucky to include Mohammed Hassen Ali, Ian Fletcher, and Chuck Steffen, first rate scholars who I am lucky to claim as close friends. Gary Fink, Jacqueline Rouse, Bob Dinwiddie, Les Hough, Tim Crimmins, Edwin Gorsuch, Cliff Kuhn, Ronald and Mary Zboray, Diane Willen, Hugh Hudson, Brad Bond, Todd Lee, Chris Lutz, David Barry, Deanne Michael, Steve Sabol, Rob Paige, Michael Rogers, Ted Kallman, and Ken Work together formed a momentous team.

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of me this past year is my office neighbor, Alejandro De La Fuente, who can testify to my whereabouts on most Saturdays, Sundays, late nights and early mornings. As I approached the stretch run, he offered tremendous moral and intellectual support and his extra strong Cuban coffee may have provided the critical edge needed to complete this study. A big cheer goes out to my Tampa friends, Golfo Alexopoulos, Carolyn Eichner, Ross and Tami Bannister, Joe Costa, and all the crew at El Circulo Cubano. Deserving of special praise are Paul Dosal and Ann “MOB” Shuh who possess unequalled generosity and kindness. Together we have established something of a UMass beachhead here in the Bay area, and they have made my stay in Tampa not only possible, but one filled with many great moments (“or something”). They have my deepest gratitude.

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at Indiana State University and Gene DeGruson of Pittsburgh State University. They stand out for their tremendous help, suggestions, and enthusiasm. Their command of archival material, knowledge of American socialism, and expressed interest in my research played a giant part in the completion of this dissertation.

Ultimately, any successful undertaking depends on a solid foundation independent of the workplace and I'm lucky to have a widely-scattered group of friends who collectively provide just that. Brett Martin, Angela Faye, Rob Wilbanks, Marc Brazeau, Brad and Beth Clarke, John Krebs, Cathy Cragg, Bob Gouveia, Jeff Roche, Shahar Kazara, Sean Van Tuyl, Evelyn Hammond, Sandra Mortal, Fred Karnas, Marcos Anselmo, Mica Walker, Indanel Anjiadia, Caitlin Carvalo Bosco, Joe Lowndes, Ben Schick, Priscilla Yamin, Robert "Jr." Lloyd, David Yunis, Sylvia Cedeno, Lindsay Ayers, Claire Pereirra, Scott, Steve, and Jill Schaffer, Rehana Kapadia, Solomon "Lelo" Keith, Colleen Thompson, Anthony "Bankie" Johnson, Howard and Liz Jackowitz and David Roland form a terrific group of friends who contributed mightily to anything I've accomplished. My brother, Chris Paul, "the Clarence Darrow of Cartersville, Georgia," and sister-in-law, Marcia, are especially appreciated. Besides always asking about the "Untold Story" they have repeatedly offered shelter to this nomad and sacrificed their own space in order to store the tools of my trade—an enormous book collection. Two

of my favorite people, Robert Frank, a great writer and an even better person, and Helena Viegas, one of the most genuine souls I know, provided extra motivation by demonstrating a real interest and confidence in my research and progress.

Finally, my parents, Gordon (“Mr. Marketing”) and Gloria (“Buck”) Paul, have given me much more than I deserve. Undoubtedly bemused by my unusual ways, they have nevertheless always managed to show great tolerance and understanding. My Mother has no equal in the human decency category. Her heart of gold has always served as a wonderful example and reminder of the important things in life. Similarly, my Father’s influence can be found throughout the dissertation, and much of this work bears the stamp of his character. His work ethic, generosity, and loyalty approximate much in the stories and spirit of the Southerners who I write about.

The dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Eva Potts, my friend and “rebel of the New South,” who is dearly missed. Most every evening and for many years, I would join Eva on the front steps of our apartment building on North Highland Avenue in Atlanta, share a beer and talk. There, we would “waste a lot of time” discussing the changing face of the neighborhood, local gossip, the Braves, the Georgia Bulldogs, and “fancy food.” Although quite modest, I could occasionally get her to walk me through parts of her own history. Her memories



and experiences alone could serve as a decent chronicle of southern working-class life, but what Eva most taught me, which no amount of schooling or books could hope to equal, was the importance of life's subtleties and the value and meaning of everyday stories. Whenever I needed a "good take," I'd talk to Eva. I hope this dissertation reflects those lessons learned.

## **ABSTRACT**

### **REBELS OF THE NEW SOUTH: THE SOCIALIST PARTY IN DIXIE, 1892-1920**

SEPTEMBER 1999

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Directed by: Professor Bruce G. Laurie

Following the collapse of the insurgencies of the 1880s and 1890s, many former populists and Gilded Age radicals linked up with the region's new industrial workers, farmers, small businessmen and political organizers to fashion a socialism cast in a southern idiom. Armed with this heritage, the Socialist Party of America (SPA) would go on to occupy an important piece of a larger pattern of resistance movements that swept through Dixie between the 1880s and World War I. The SPA, not unlike the People's Party, Farmers' Alliance, Union-Labor, and the Greenbackers, provided something of a panacea for those marginalized either materially or philosophically by the New South creed.

This study examines Socialist Party activity in the American South from the 1890s to 1920 and considers how the social, political, and economic character of



the region in turn shaped the emergent socialist message. Explored is the formation of socialist politics, particularly through the links between the labor movement, agrarian radicalism, and the party's diverse membership. Played out in the region's manufacturing zones, developing coastlines, and in rural stretches were the tensions of industrialization, civic boosterism, and political disfranchisement as confronted by a vision of an alternative New South, anchored in the remnants of populism and fueled by socialist organizing efforts. In examining the one-party South, disfranchisement, and the poll tax, historians have accounted for the exclusionary and anti-democratic character of institutional politics but have slighted the independent political and cultural movements created by those very dispossessed. Indeed, New South industrialism and social change challenged conventional political relationships. The ballot box included union elections, and the South's power brokers just as often assumed the identity of an industrialist as they did political boss. Located in the union halls and workers' libraries, on city street corners, and in the region's mines, mills, and fields were southern politics of a different variety. By embracing socialism some Southerners created a community of adherents otherwise impossible in the alienating world of Democratic politics.

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## INTRODUCTION:

### WHY IS THERE NO SOCIALISM IN SOUTHERN HISTORY?

*At the call of an idea they had left their forests,  
their clearings, the protection of their rulers,  
their prosperity, their poverty, the surroundings  
of their youth and the graves of their fathers*

Joseph Conrad,  
*Lord Jim*, 1900

Despite the recent achievements of labor and social historians to expand the traditional range of inquiry when examining political and cultural movements, the study of American socialism remains essentially locked into a success/failure dichotomy. From Werner Sombart to Aileen Kraditor, notions of failure have been central to historical accounts of the socialist movement in America.<sup>1</sup> Scholars both

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Sombart, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (New York, 1906); Erik Olssen, "The Case of the Socialist Party that Failed, or further reflections on an American Dream," *Labor History* 29 (Fall 1988): 416-449; Gerald Friedberg, "The Socialist Party of America: Decline and Fall, 1914-1918," *Studies on the Left* 4 (Summer 1964): 79-89; Aileen Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917* (Baton Rouge, 1981); Leonard Rosenberg, "'The Failure' of the Socialist Party of America," *Review of Politics* 31 (July 1969), 329-52. Bernard and Lillian Johnpoll, *The Impossible Dream: The Rise and Demise of the American Left* (Westport, 1981); It is useful to consider economist Stephen Cullenberg's observation that historical expectations of socialism as an anti-capitalist alternative have been so unrealistic that anything short of achieving heaven on earth is readily dismissed as failure. Stephen Cullenberg, "Socialism's Burden: Toward a 'Thin' Definition of Socialism," *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (Summer 1992), 64-83.

sympathetic and hostile have generally accepted the “failure” of socialism in the United States as a given and then simply attempted to offer the proper explanation. In this debate, organized resistance to capitalism is characterized either as “foreign” to the nation's liberal consensus or the victim of state orchestrated repression. Unfortunately, neither explanation affords an accurate glimpse of the imprint socialist ideology and activity left on the lives of both its believers and detractors, as well as on institutional politics.

Largely excluded from the literature has been the actual experiences of Socialist Party members. Reducing their personal and political contributions to American history to the narrow question of success or failure seems myopic and ahistorical. While the party ultimately failed to secure a permanent place in national political life, it did enjoy electoral success in hundreds of communities and trade-union bodies. Socialism did not “fail” the people of Milwaukee, Schenectady, Reading or Bridgeport, but rather helped shape political life in those communities.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, socialism did not fail in the “little Milwaukees” of the

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<sup>2</sup> On socialist administrations in these communities, see Daniel Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment* (Westport, 1974); Thomas Gavett, *The Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee* (Madison, 1965); Douglas Booth, “Municipal Socialism and City Government Reform: The Milwaukee Experience, 1910-1940,” *Journal of Urban History* 12 (November, 1985), 51-74; Bruce Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (New York, 1975); Richard Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany, 1989).

South such as Girard, Alabama, or Gulfport and Lakeworth, Florida. Only by examining these type of episodes can a proper understanding of the party's contributions be achieved.

Historian Eric Foner offers a fresh approach. He suggests the debate over the demise of socialism typically rests on notions of American exceptionalism and embrace a range of ahistorical assumptions.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, many scholars have simply dismissed socialism as inherently hostile to a supposed “true” and conservative character of American workers. Selig Perlman’s job consciousness theory has ultimately been interpreted by many to suggest that radical ideology and economic struggles operate exclusive of each other.<sup>4</sup> But the experience of American workers should at the very least reveal the persistence of ideology as a shaping factor in economic life. Declaring the triumph of bread and butter unionism simply ignores a rich socialist tradition in many of America's trade unions. We need not “radicalize” Perlman to prove that socialist workers could also be pragmatic and effective trade unionists. Indeed, as Bruce Laurie discovered in the intellectual

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, “Why is there no socialism in the United States,” *History Workshop Journal* 17 (Spring 1984), 57-80.

<sup>4</sup> Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1970, reprint of 1928 MacMillan edition).



heritage of American labor leaders, socialism often lingered in the trade-union radicalism of the late nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Sean Wilentz joins Foner to suggest that explaining socialism's failure due to the supposed stabilizing influence of America's liberal tradition or an absence of class conflict and ideology is not only inaccurate, but also obscures the episodes in which socialism actually existed in the United States.<sup>6</sup> While Milwaukee has always commanded special attention from scholars interested in American socialism, the experiences of other communities with left-wing political movements have generally received scant attention.<sup>7</sup> Through regional and local case studies, however, a broader view of SPA activity and its adaptation of particular cultural and regional forms can be achieved. Economic diversity, ethnic

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent debate on American exceptionalism and the writing of labor history see Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 26 (1984): 1-24; Nick Salvatore, "Response," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 26 (1984): 25-30; Michael Hanagan, "Response," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 26 (1984): 31-36.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment* (Westport, 1974); Thomas Gavett, *The Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee* (Madison, 1965); Douglas Booth, "Municipal Socialism and City Government Reform: The Milwaukee Experience, 1910-1940," *Journal of Urban History* 12 (November 1985): 51-74; Sally Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, 1973).

and racial composition, and political and cultural traditions helped shape distinct regional identities of the party.<sup>8</sup> Henry Bedford's *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* and Frederick Barkey's study of the Socialist party in West Virginia both offer an outstanding blend of regional and political history that manages to explore the particulars of each state's socialist activity without losing focus on the larger movement.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Errol Stevens and John Walker have looked at socialism in Elwood, Indiana, and Dayton, Ohio, respectively, and concluded that citizens in those communities saw the party as an instrument to protect a way of life and resist technological dislocation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Sally Miller, *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Twentieth-Century American Socialism* (New York, 1996); Michael Brodhead and Clanton Gene, "G.C. Clemens: The 'Sociable Socialist'," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1974): 475-502; Howard Lynn Meredith, "Agrarian Socialism and the Negro in Oklahoma, 1900-1918," *Labor History* 11 (Summer 1970): 277-84; Melvyn Dubofsky, "The Origins of Western Working Class Radicalism, 1880-1905," *Labor History* 7 (Spring 1966): 131-55.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Frederick Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* (Amherst, 1966); Frederick Allan Barkey, "The Socialist Party in West Virginia from 1898 to 1920: A Study in Working Class Radicalism," Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Errol Wayne Stevens, "Labor and Socialism in an Indiana Mill Town, 1905-1921," *Labor History* 26 (Summer 1985): 353-83; John T. Walker, "Socialism in Dayton, Ohio, 1912-1925: Its Membership, Organization, and Demise," *Labor History* 26 (Summer 1985): 384-404.

The study of southern socialism suffers the dual burden of American exceptionalism and southern distinctiveness. Historians have generally accepted the absence of socialism in the South as an article of faith and treated the very notion of southern socialism as an oxymoron. Regional, labor, political, and radical historians have for different reasons failed to recognize the oppositional socialist culture that existed in the region. In general, the standard accounts of the Socialist party have overlooked regional case studies. Indeed, David Shannon and Ira Kipins focus on the national movement and its leading personalities, electoral campaigns, and ideological development, and only occasionally provide a glimpse of Party activity at the grass roots.<sup>11</sup> Works by Paul Buhle, Daniel Bell, and Anthony Esposito have concentrated on the intellectual and theoretical underpinnings of socialism in the United States, thereby largely placing regional issues outside the scope of their investigation.<sup>12</sup> James Weinstein's superb study pays greater attention to regional peculiarities and examines southern socialists to

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<sup>11</sup> David Shannon, *The Socialist Party in America* (New York, 1955); Ira Kipins, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York, 1952); Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States* (London, 1987); Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Princeton, 1967); Anthony Esposito, *The Ideology of the Socialist Party of America, 1901-1917*; Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922* (Baltimore, 1997); Robert Hyler, *Prophets of the Left: American Socialist Thought in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, 1984).



a greater extent, but it stresses southern racism, as does Philip Foner's otherwise ground-breaking *American Socialism and Black Americans*.<sup>13</sup>

For their part, Southern historians who attempt to explain the dramatic changes in the region have quite properly focused their studies on the dominant themes of single-party rule, white supremacy, and economic transformation. Any attention given to southern varieties of radical political culture has revolved around Populism and what Wayne Flynt has characterized as a “bumper crop of demagogues.” But while C. Vann Woodward's dynamic thesis remains fundamentally sound, Edward Ayers's fine work demonstrates that in southern history an entire range of social, cultural, political, and economic subtleties needs excavating. Clearly Woodward's contention that writers have “uncritically accepted the stereotype of a reactionary South” in their assessment of progressivism seems equally applicable to southern socialism. In examining the one-party South, disfranchisement, and the poll-tax, historians have accounted for the exclusion of blacks, women, workers, and radicals from institutional politics but have slighted the independent political and cultural movements created by those very dispossessed. Certainly the politics of class, race, and region unfolded

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<sup>13</sup> James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York, 1967); Philip Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans* (Westport, 1977).

and were contested in settings far more varied and dynamic than the received wisdom indicates. Indeed, at the dawn of the twentieth century the New South hardly experienced a unifying ideology or clear regional identity.

While the Socialist Party functioned as an important cultural and economic movement, perhaps its commitment to the ballot box as a vehicle for change helps explain its marginal status in southern history. J. Morgan Kousser's work on the one-party South portrayed the effective political barriers, legal and otherwise, that Democrats enacted after Reconstruction to prevent any viable anti-Democratic movements in the region. Through the poll tax, disfranchisement, corruption, and intimidation, "Redeemer" and "Bourbon" Democratic regimes effectively exerted control over the electoral apparatus in the New South, reinforcing and sustaining the region's one-party tradition.<sup>14</sup>

The Populists, who offered a brief but formidable challenge to Bourbon control, have justly received great attention from southern historians interested in political opposition movements.<sup>15</sup> As Stephen Hahn, Barton Shaw, and others have

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<sup>14</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, 1974); Frederic Ogden, *The Poll Tax in the South* (Tuscaloosa, 1958).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Palmer, *"Man Over Money: " The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill, 1980); C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938); Barton Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys: Georgia's Populist Party* (Baton Rouge, 1984); Robert McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A*



demonstrated, the dramatic rise and fall of populism and the People's party provides a window for examining the possibilities presented by radical movements organized around biracial coalitions, sustained by particular customs and cultural traditions, and defined by resistance to the intrusion of market relationships. The collapse of Populism and the fine-tuning of disfranchisement at the turn-of-the-century, however, did not spell the end of oppositional politics as often portrayed in the historical record. To be sure, the political fallout of the populist revolt and the cementing of Jim Crow altered the rules of engagement dramatically. But as Historian Samuel Webb has shown, the South experienced a certain continuity of anti-Democratic movements even after the demise of Populism. Webb locates a tradition of protest in northwest Alabama linking Independents to Populists to Progressive Republicans.<sup>16</sup> While he does not concern himself with socialists, but rather reformers who rejected the reactionary policies of the Bourbons and adopted programs akin to northern progressives, his work demonstrates that organizational

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*History of the Southern Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill, 1975); Steven Fahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: The Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York, 1982); Gerald Gaither, *Blacks and the Populist Revolt: Ballots and Bigotry in the "New South"*, (Tuscaloosa, 1977).

<sup>16</sup> Samuel L. Webb, "From Independents to Populists to Progressive Republicans: The Case of Chilton County, Alabama, 1880-1920," *Journal of Southern History* 59 (November 1993): 707-36.



alternatives, worthy of the historian's attention, existed for southerners who rejected Democratic dominance.

Similarly, socialists in the New South often received their political baptism in the prior insurgencies of the Greenbackers, the Knights of Labor, Farmer's Alliance, the United Mine Workers, or People's Party.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this great variety of southern resistance movements established a political, social, and geographic pattern of radicalism inherited by socialists at the turn of the century. In lieu of the monolithic narrative of socialism that has too often shaped scholar's understanding of the party, an alternative interpretation might be forwarded. Following the collapse of the insurgencies of the 1880s and 1890s, many former Populists and Gilded Age radicals linked up with the region's new industrial workers and socialist organizers to fashion a radicalism cast in a southern idiom. That is, socialists in the South, not unlike their comrades in Milwaukee, in the logging and mining camps of the far West, or among immigrant workers in the urban

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<sup>17</sup> An exhaustive historiography exploring the end of Reconstruction and the rise of the one-party South exists. A few of the works that explore independent political and economic activity include Melton McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Greenwood, 1978); Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Berkeley, 1960); Albert Kirwin, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (Lexington, 1951); Edward Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976).

Northeast, appealed to certain regional codes and cultural variants in the building of their party and movement.

As various local studies have proven, the industrial model of the Socialist Party's formation is only part of that movement's development. In the American Southwest collective protest took the form of an agrarian radicalism informed by the socialist rhetoric of class struggle rather than the old populist and Farmer's Alliance appeals to property rights, reduced freight rates, and a fair price. The Socialist Party of America would exert significant influence particularly in Oklahoma, building on the region's populist heritage while appealing to farmers and tenants not to defect to the Democratic Party.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Louisiana, a radical agrarian tradition yielded to limited socialist influences, where in the northern section of the state Populist strongholds existed in the 1890s. Elsewhere in Louisiana, however, an alliance between farmers and laborers broadened the base of party support and created an atmosphere that gave birth to the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW), a biracial union in the state's pine region, and aided

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<sup>18</sup> Garin Burbank, *When Farmers Voted Red: The Gospel of Socialism In The Oklahoma Countryside, 1910-1924* (Westport, Connecticut, 1976); James R. Green, *Grass Roots Socialism: Radical Movements In the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the oil fields, the rice paddies, and along the docks of New Orleans.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous journal articles have looked elsewhere in Dixie to uncover a radical heritage. Socialist communities pre-dating the formation of the SPA have received considerable attention. Southern utopian, religious, socialist, and single-tax communities are at the center of several interesting studies. These works confirm and reinforce a southern homegrown radical tradition that extends to populism and the SPA.<sup>20</sup> George Pozzetta, Gary Mormino, and Durward Long have explored in rich detail the radical work culture of Tampa's immigrant cigar

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<sup>19</sup> Grady McWhiney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study of Rustic Radicalism," *Journal of Southern History* 20 (August 1954): 315-36; Merl E. Reed, "Lumberjacks and Longshoremen: The I.W.W. in Louisiana," *Labor History* 13 (Winter 1972): 41-59.

<sup>20</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *A Socialist Utopia in the New South: The Ruskin Colonies in Tennessee and Georgia, 1894-1901* (Urbana, 1996); Lori Roberts and Bill De Young, "Socialism in the Sunshine: The Roots of Ruskin, Florida," *Tampa Bay History* 4 (Spring/Summer 1982): 5-20; Mary Louise Bennett, "Ruskin: Ware County's Vanished City," *Georgia Review* 5 (Summer 1951): 192-99; Francelia Butler, "The Ruskin Commonwealth: A Unique Experiment in Marxian Socialism," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 23 (December 1964): 333-42; Charles Kegal, "Earl Miller's Recollections of the Ruskin Cooperative Association," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 17 (March 1958): 45-69; For a colorful description of the Ruskin experiment in Tennessee see "Ruskin, The Colony Where Labor is King," *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, November 6, 1897; Robert S. Fogarty, *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History* (Westport, 1980), 161-62, 217, 223; Paul and Blance Aylea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954* (Tuscaloosa, 1956); Paul Gaston, *The Women of Fairhope* (Athens, 1984).



workers.<sup>21</sup> Waiting to be told are the stories of Atlanta's Jewish comrades, Birmingham's German carpenters, and pockets of radical Italian and Scandinavian workers who built small socialist enclaves shaped by cultural forms. However, native born workers with "no tradition of radicalism" often constituted the core of the membership organized into SPA locals. George Green and Ray Robbins in their work on Florida have found the SPA's support extended beyond Tampa's immigrant communities to include former populists, tenant farmers, and industrial workers. Similarly, Stephen Cresswell's study of Mississippi socialists pushes eastward James Green's southwest agrarian thesis and reveals the rich forum that the state party provided its primarily white, rural, and native born membership.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> George E. Pozzetta and Gary Mormino, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985* (Urbana, 1987); Pozzetta, "Alerta Tabaqueros! Tampa's Striking Cigar Workers," *Tampa Bay History* 3 (Fall/Winter 1981): 19-29; Durward Long, "La Resistencia: Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History* 6 (Fall 1965): 193-213; Long, "The Open-Closed Shop Battle in Tampa's Cigar Industry, 1919-1921," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47 (October 1968): 101-121; Long, "An Immigrant Co-Operative Medicine Program in the South, 1887-1963," *Journal of Southern History* 17 (November 1965): 417-34; Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta, "The Reader Lights the Candle: Cuban and Florida Cigar Workers' Oral Tradition," *Labor's Heritage* 5 (Spring 1993): 4-27.

<sup>22</sup> George Green, "Florida Politics and Socialism at the Crossroads of the Progressive Era, 1912," M.A. Thesis, Florida State University, 1962; Ray Robbins, "The Socialist Party in Florida, 1900-1916," M.A. Thesis, Samford University, 1971; Stephen Cresswell, "Grassroots Radicalism in the Magnolia State: Mississippi's Socialist Movement at the Local Level, 1900-1919," *Labor History* 33 (Winter 1992): 81-101; Cresswell, "Red Mississippi: The State's

Thus, scholars have begun to establish that people channeled through the party myriad agendas, and that region, ethnicity, gender, race, and religion became more fundamental to socialism's attractiveness than previously assumed.<sup>23</sup> What might be concluded is that in the South the ideology of socialism operated as an organizational tool with specific cultural experiences shaping its ultimate form. Some Southerners in embracing socialism created a community of adherents otherwise impossible in the alienating world of Democratic politics.

This study examines the Socialist Party of America's activity in the Southeast. While the main focus is on Alabama, Georgia, and Florida, with occasional references to Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, and the Carolinas, the

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Socialist Party, 1904-1920," *Journal of Mississippi History* 50 (August 1988): 153-71.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Miller, *Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in Early Twentieth-Century American Socialism* (New York, 1996); Paul Buhle and Georgakas, eds., *The Immigrant Left in the United States* (Albany, 1996); Mary Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Madison, 1983); Francis Robert Shor, *Utopianism and Radicalism in a Reforming America, 1888-1918* (Westport, 1997); Jacob Dorn, *Socialism and Christianity in Early Twentieth Century America* (Westport, 1998); On the intellectual journey and "conversion" experience of a southern socialist see, Robert McMath, Jr., "From Captain of Industry to Sergeant of Socialism: William Greene Raoul and the Management of Southern Labor," in Wilford Moore and Joseph Tripp, ed., *Looking South: Chapters in the Story of a American Region* (Westport, 1989), 171-89. In looking at southern communism Robin Kelley found steeped in the folk and religious culture of Alabama sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and industrial workers the means to organize a radical movement. Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990).



geographic and organizational scheme is based on regions rather than states. Part one, "The Landscape of Southern Socialism" examines three zones of the American South and explores how the social, political, and economic character of these areas in turn shaped the socialist message that emerged. Chapter 1 traces the formation of a southern left, particularly through the links between labor and political insurgencies of the 1890s and the Party's urban membership. Played out in this setting were the tensions of industrialization, civic boosterism, and political disfranchisement as confronted by a vision of an alternative new South, anchored in the remnants of populism and fueled by socialist organizing efforts. Set against the backdrop of Birmingham and Atlanta we witness most strikingly the clash of political and cultural values that marked the New South and its attendant growing pains. In chapter 2 the road leads into the southern countryside and satellite communities and examines the world of small farmers, tenants, farm hands, and craft workers in an area that includes north Florida, south Georgia, and southeastern Alabama and Mississippi. These southerners most directly inherited a history of agrarian radicalism which formed the basis of their socialist faith. This sub-region also hosted some of the most dramatic and significant episodes in biracial organizing and electoral maneuvering, especially along the shores of the St. John's River in northeast Florida. Chapter 3 looks at a portion of the South that



defied both the emerging capitalist ethos and the agrarian tradition. The Gulf coastal plain encompassed the South's most economically, politically, and ethnically diverse sub-region. Moreover, the area's particularly strong links with international commerce fostered possibilities for a truly alternative southern political culture. From Mobile, Alabama, to Tampa, Florida, socialist organizing drives alternately tapped into both a frontier and internationalist spirit in challenging Democratic hegemony.

Section 2 of the dissertation considers the surprisingly close relationship between the southern labor movement and socialist activists. While political corruption and Democratic machine dominance severely limited socialist electoral aspirations throughout the South, AFL trade union bodies provided a rich forum for advancing the party's faith.

Finally, Section 3 traces the collapse of the SPA amidst the pressures of wartime hysteria. Ironically, the emergence of Americanism in a region guided by the fierce politics of sectionalism formed the basis for the attack on socialist legitimacy.

Viewed broadly, the Socialist Party in the American South occupied an important piece of a larger pattern of resistance movements that swept through Dixie between the 1880s and World War I. As Jack Temple Kirby observed,

“despite Democratic hegemony from the 1870s [forward], the South was seldom solid.” Certainly the fractured and contentious nature of southern politics during this period conditioned the possibilities, limits, and character of such insurrections as populism and socialism. The language and program of the SPA set it apart from its populist brethren in important ways, but in their crusade for economic justice and by challenging the one-party South these two movements plowed through common ground. That historians have largely failed to explore the party's activity in the South demonstrates at best a narrow interpretation of political culture and at worst an uncritical acceptance of a mythic southern homogeneity. Not only were socialists active in the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but they influenced their communities and for a brief period constituted a common presence in the region's social and political fabric. To understand its meaning we must look at individuals like coal miner William Mailley who championed the Populist cry of the 1890s and would later find in the Socialist Party a new forum to channel his discontent over the course of southern political life. The SPA, not unlike the Populists, the Farmers' Alliance, Union-Labor, and the Greenbackers, provided something of a panacea for those marginalized either materially or philosophically by the New South creed.<sup>24</sup> In recounting these stories this

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<sup>24</sup> On the New South creed and its intellectual architects, see Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970).

dissertation suggests some new ways to view the South as both a region and political definition.



## CHAPTER I

### “THE WONDER OF OUR AGE:” INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE ORIGINS OF SOUTHERN SOCIALISM

*The exigencies of pioneering frequently leave  
small choice of methods or occupations.*

Manufacturers' Record,  
January 12, 1905

*A city for sale and soon to perish if it finds a  
buyer.*

Sallust,  
*The War with Jugurtha*, 41 B.C.

On the evening of August 17, 1903, in the city of Atlanta, J.L. Fitts, a twenty-seven year old South Carolinian, mounted a box on the corner of Broad and Marietta streets to speak to a gathering crowd of several hundred on “the great question of socialism.” As Fitts began his address, Atlanta Police Chief John W. Ball stepped up and asked to see his permit to speak. Fitts, who the day before circulated a flier throughout the city proclaiming his intention of challenging the city ordinance, responded “if I have no permit then am I to consider myself under arrest?” Chief Ball, perhaps playing to the crowd as well as his superiors, answered in the affirmative and arrested Fitts as several onlookers chanted “free

speech! free speech!” The episode predictably and immediately aroused Atlanta's political circles and the city press. The next day the *Atlanta Journal* described Fitts as a “rabid socialist,” and Dr. Amos Fox, chairman of the Board of Police Commissioners, testified at the sentencing proceedings that the “citizens of Atlanta did not want Fitts' sort, any how.” Fitts in his own defense asked “shall we, who built the streets be deprived of their use for lawfully assembling to discuss our conditions and needs?” Unimpressed with Fitts' argument, Mayor Evan P. Howell, acting as recorder, imposed the maximum sentence of thirty days on a chain gang.<sup>1</sup> Only a month earlier, socialist John M. Ray encountered similar opposition in Birmingham, Alabama when he and another party organizer were arrested despite assurances from the police commissioner that they would be allowed to speak on the city streets.

Socialists had been active in the South for at least a decade as participants in a variety of insurgent movements, but the arrest of Fitts and Ray came at a time when the newly formed SPA had initiated an aggressive campaign to organize the region, particularly in industrializing centers such as Atlanta and Birmingham. The hostile reaction of officials in Atlanta and Birmingham to the increased visibility

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<sup>1</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, August 19, 1903

of socialists caused one sympathetic newspaper editor to wonder “what is the meaning of all this persecution? Are there some interests that are getting uneasy?”<sup>2</sup>

These “interests,” of course, comprised the business and political elite of the South who still remembered the not too distant Populist onslaught, and had no enthusiasm for any challenge to their authority. But just as southern industrialists were trying to make the South safe for capitalism, undercurrents of discontent stirred in such disparate groups as the remnants of the Populist Party, renegade socialists, an increasingly important trade-union movement, as well as progressives and their leaders such as Hoke Smith of Georgia, Sidney Catts of Florida, and South Carolina demagogue Cole Blease.<sup>3</sup> Across the South people searched for the proper outlet to channel their frustration and cast off what C. Vann Woodward described as a “political nihilism” that plagued the region following the insurgencies of the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Southern Socialist*, September 1903; William Mailley to John M. Ray, Nashville, Tennessee, April 7, 13, 15, 1903, Mailley Letterpress Books, Socialist Party of America Papers, microfilm edition, reel 1, (hereinafter cited as SPA/reel number).

<sup>3</sup> See C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (LSU Press, 1951); Dewey Grantham, *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge, 1959); Wayne Flynt, *Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney Catts of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1977); C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938).

<sup>4</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 105, 289.



By the mid 1880's the enthusiasm sustaining New South boosterism and the development of distinct manufacturing zones obscured the difficulties faced by the region's economic architects in absorbing a rural proletariat into the centers of Birmingham, Atlanta, Augusta, Jacksonville, and Chattanooga. While mill village paternalism and the maintenance of rural traditions signified one delicate attempt to modernize the South along conservative lines, regular politics were filtered through new considerations in the southern city. In Atlanta and Birmingham political bosses confronted manufacturing interests, and the concentration of workers in great industrial ventures such as coal, steel, and textiles complicated traditional lines of authority.<sup>5</sup> While this New South of urban growth and economic integration struggled through its infancy, opportunistic political forces vied to harness the uncertainty of it all. To many southerners the fading days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century approximated a fiery cauldron of political upheaval, class conflict and racial strife.

In the South the genesis of radical politics as embraced by socialists passed through and built upon several transitional stages. During the 1880s radical politics were characterized by a series of abbreviated agrarian and Independent movements which, in the main, maintained an intellectual link to the land and challenged

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<sup>5</sup> James Curtis Ballagh, ed., *The South in the Building of the Nation: Economic History, 1865-1909*, Vol 6 (Richmond, 1909).

Bourbonism in a number of settings.<sup>6</sup> The southern farmer, who by the mid 1880's, saw his political faith cut up by broken promises, sought cooperative solutions through the Agricultural Wheel and the Farmers' Alliance. But such agrarian radicalism also found willing listeners in the industrial sectors of the southern economy. While the appeal of anti-industrial organizations suggest rural southerners feared the collapse of a particular way of life, their urban cousins shared similar uncertainties tied inextricably to the same shifts in the economy and politics.<sup>7</sup> The radicalism that played out in the countryside cannot be separated from the urban discontent that drew inspiration from this shared history and impulse.

In a similar vein, this period witnessed remnants of Radical Republicanism merging with reform elements to give rise to a certain fusion politics, organized around issues of labor, the tariff, agrarian grievances, and corruption. As mid-size and growing towns such as Jacksonville, Florida became centers of shipping and manufacturing there emerged correspondingly strong Independent political

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<sup>6</sup> Robert C. McMath, *Populist Vanguard: A History of the Farmers' Alliance* (Chapel Hill, 1975); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (Oxford University Press, 1976); Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), 244-57.

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Saloutos, *Farmer Movements In the South, 1865-1933* (Lincoln, 1960), 60-68; Albert D. Kirwin, *Revolt of the Rednecks: Mississippi Politics, 1876-1925* (Lexington, 1951), 40-49

movements.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in Augusta, Georgia as well as Memphis and Nashville, Tennessee, the same dissenting voices that once rose up against the cozy alliance between political and railroad interests now challenged those city's "rings." While never fully realized these alliances, coalitions and disparate voices collectively formed the cornerstone of an alternative political voice in the Gilded Age South. Fused under the banner of Workingman, Citizen, and Republican tickets, such independent and populist voices not only emerged as a common feature on election day ballots, but also exhibited an important counter-trend to the increased concentration of capital and extended social hierarchies so successfully marshaled by the Democratic machinery.

Born out of Knights of Labor and Farmers' Alliance locals such anti-Democratic forces challenged, in the interest of the "laboring element," the "money power" believed to have dominated southern political life. At the turn of the 1880s, Knight affiliated publications such as Atlanta's *Working World* and the Birmingham district's *Labor Union*, *The Arbitrator*, the *Alabama Sentinel*, the *Laborer's Banner*, and the *Tariff and Labor Advocate*, each, at turns, endorsed

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<sup>8</sup> Edward Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893* (Gainesville, 1976), 96-129; *Manufacturer's Record*, January 9, 1908; James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City* (University of North Florida Press, 1991).



independent political tickets.<sup>9</sup> While independent movements were usually issue-specific and assumed different forms across the South they suggest a shared dissatisfaction with the region's politics. Even as the Knight's could be cautious of party and electoral strategies, the flowering of such anti-Democratic tickets forecast the shifting terrain that southern politics assumed on the eve of populism. They further reveal that the Democratic party, hardly a monolithic entity in its own right, faced critical challenges as it set out to consolidate its political base. And as southern Democrats oscillated between reform and reaction in their exercise of power the resonance of these protest traditions provided a useful entry point first for populists and eventually socialists, providing them with valuable political currency to distribute to discontented farmers, industrial laborers, and progressive reformers.

Certainly the "Alliance yardstick," labor assertiveness, and the populist revolt put the conservative South on notice. But the playing field of southern politics was dramatically altered with the invention of the white primary, the poll tax, and the disfranchisement conventions that followed on the heels of these uprisings. Beginning in the 1890s southern states, one by one, implemented measures to narrow the electorate and severely limit the viability of non-

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<sup>9</sup> *Labor Union*, November 27, December 11, 1886; *Tariff and Labor Advocate*, February 28, 1887.

Democratic voices.<sup>10</sup> But despite Democratic consolidation something of a political vacuum existed following the collapse of populism. As historian Edward Ayers correctly notes, “the ideas and spirit of populism remained alive in the South long after the death of the party.” Indeed, the insurgent politics of region and class proved rather complementary to the socialist appeal and related efforts at building an effective political movement. Out of the restless independent and third party insurgencies that briefly erupted in the 1880s and 1890s only to then fade away an authentic southern radicalism was created, providing a useful set of traditions harnessed by the SPA in the early 1900s. Under the banner of socialism, veteran labor radicals, former populists, progressive reformers, and grass roots field organizers forged their own experiences and traditions into the SPA machinery in devising a critique of the region's Bourbon directed politics.

To better understand the world southern socialists attempted to create we must first examine the society they occupied. In trying to make their own new South, socialists were confronted with the more familiar New South of extractive capital, regional boosterism, single party rule and Jim Crowism. In Birmingham, Atlanta and, to a significant degree, Augusta, booster politics became an

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<sup>10</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, 1974), 139-182.

instrumental force in the development and growth of manufacturing. As capital descended and as deals were brokered amidst a new, unfamiliar commercial-civic culture, the locus of power centered on the Chamber of Commerce, real estate interests, and promotional newspapers securely within the fold of the Democratic Party. Other small business owners, shopkeepers, and skilled craftsmen felt squeezed by a business and professional class that shaped and directed this transformation. As the social and economic structure of the community changed so too did its politics. While Democratic and socialist membership might overlap in social and fraternal orders such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the Red Men, Odd Fellows, or ethnic organizations like the Irish Democratic Club, the German-American Union, or the Jewish Literary Society, business and political fortunes ultimately were determined by links to outside, or nonlocal sources.<sup>11</sup>

Located just a few miles outside of Birmingham, Alabama, Red Mountain provides a ideal watchtower to survey the surrounding countryside. To the west were the edge of the great Warrior coal field while in the other direction lay the

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<sup>11</sup> On the dynamics of urban politics in Birmingham and Atlanta see Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville, 1977); Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Charleston, Nashville, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Eugene Watts, *The Social Bases of City Politics: Atlanta, 1865-1903* (Westport, Conn., 1978); *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, February 22, March 9, 1903.



Coosa and Cahaba fields.<sup>12</sup> In all, the Birmingham district covered some 8,000 square miles and included the city and portions of Bibb, Jefferson, Shelby, Tuscaloosa, and Walker Counties. Blount, Cullman, Etowah, Marion, St. Clair, and Winston counties included substantial coal deposits, but were not officially considered part of the “District.” Founded in 1871, the city had been transformed, in less than thirty years, from a sleepy, agricultural crossroads into a major coal producing region that promised to be the “Pittsburgh of the South.” So rapid was the pace of change that historian Gary Kulik observed “few cities in the world industrialized more quickly than Birmingham.” For men like Henry DeBardaleben, T.G. Bush, and T.T. Hillman, described by one contemporary as “born and bred in a blast furnace,” Birmingham presented an opportunity for amassing great fortunes.<sup>13</sup> Richard Edmonds, president and editor of the *Manufacturer's Record* perhaps best captured the enthusiasm the region generated describing the District

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<sup>12</sup> In 1905, the Warrior coal fields covered 8,000 acres while the Cahaba and Coosa struggled through their infancy with a modest 4,050 and 1,750 acres respectively. Red Mountain alone contained red fossiferous ore that extended ten miles northeast and fifteen miles southwest of Birmingham. *Manufacturers Record*, January 16, 1905.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Fuller, “Henry F. Debardeleben, Industrialist of the New South,” *Alabama Review* 39 (January 1986), 3-18; Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (Birmingham, 1910), 285, 287; *Manufacturers' Record*, January 5, 16, 1905.

as a “picture of progress and prosperity, a moving panorama, the wonder of our age.”

Seizing the high risk opportunities presented in the aftermath of the panic of 1873 men like Debardeleben's partner, David Roberts, who had important ties to London banking houses eager for American investment, began the early stages of industrial development. But through the early 1880s a still developing rail network, limited fixed capital, and a lack of clear state policy, kept the mining industry of Alabama localized and in the hands of a few highly speculative investors.<sup>14</sup> In 1886, as the nation's railroads finally adopted a standardized-gauge track, Birmingham began to experience a boom as northern investors, regional boosters, and liberal investment laws combined to consolidate existing enterprises and construct a burgeoning coal empire in the Deep South.<sup>15</sup> The zeal to invest was swift. The Birmingham district counted thirty-three separate coal companies and

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<sup>14</sup> Debardeleben purchased the Eureka Coal Company for a mere \$160,000 and Memphis financier Enoch Ensley bought into Pratt Coal and Coke for \$600,000, payable over six years, Justin Fuller, “Henry F. Debardeleben, Industrialist of the New South,” *Alabama Review* 39 (January 1986), 5-8; Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (Birmingham, 1910), 285, 287, 330-32; *Manufacturer's Record*, January 5, 16, 1905; *Alabama Consolidated Coal and Iron Company, Annual Reports, 1905*, BL-HBS; Smith, *Geological Survey Pt. II*, 61

<sup>15</sup> Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (New York, 1986), 158.

by 1895 produced over 5,700,000 tons of coal, by 1900 output nearly doubled to impressive 9,000,000 tons.<sup>16</sup> But overexpansion, competition, and speculative markets meant that within a few years the highly capitalized Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company, Alabama Steel and Wire, Alabama Consolidated Coal and Iron, and Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron came to dominate the region, shaping the economic, social, and political life for generations.

C. Vann Woodward once observed the “vision that inspired the southern businessman was a South modeled upon the industrial Northeast.” Certainly the triumph of these four coal companies and the speculative land grabbing by British trade associations meant that by the early 1900s, southern coal and iron had assumed a distinctly northern and foreign character.<sup>17</sup> Incorporated in 1899, under the laws of the state of New Jersey, Sloss-Sheffield owned over 63,000 acres of coal land and 48,000 of ore land in Jefferson, Walker, Blount, Fayette, Marion, Franklin, St. Clair, Bibb, Shelby and Etowah Counties.<sup>18</sup> The company's first board

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<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Geological Survey, Pt. II*, 61; *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, July 14, 1900. The rise of the District's steel industry accompanied the boom in coal and by 1900 Birmingham pig iron had been sold in every state of the union and in eighteen countries including England, Germany, Italy, India, and South Africa, *Manufacturers' Record*, January 16, 23, 1905.

<sup>17</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, January 3, 1906, August 22, September 12, 1907.

<sup>18</sup> *First Annual Report of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company, 1900*, 6. Capitalized with a stock of \$5,000,000, Sloss-Sheffield's charter authorized the



of directors counted eleven New York investment bankers and two members from Birmingham.<sup>19</sup> The Alabama Company, eventually bought out by Sloss in 1924, had a board of ten members, entirely from outside the Birmingham area and headquartered in the Union Trust Building of Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Tennessee Coal and Iron emerged out of a consolidation of Tennessee Coal and Railroad and Enoch Ensley's Pratt Company. Capitalized at an astounding \$10,000,000, TCI, led by John H. Inman, "one of New York's boldest and most unscrupulous speculators," would eventually become the dominate company in the district.<sup>21</sup> That is until the panic of 1907, when J. Pierpont Morgan brokered a deal for United States Steel Corporation to buy out TCI for the princely sum of \$35

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company to purchase and sell steel and iron; mine coal, limestone, dolomite, and marble; acquire mineral lands; purchase railroads, bridges, buildings and other structures necessary for business. Among the company's arsenal were six blast furnaces (4 in Birmingham, one each in Florence and Sheffield), 1100 beehive coke ovens, ten railroad locomotives, five mine locomotives, fourteen railroad cars, fifteen miles of standard gauge track, sixty-two miles of narrow gauge track, as well as "other property." *Manufacturers' Record*, February 20, 1905; William Morris Imbrie and Company, "Report on Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company" (New York/Chicago, 1918), Records of the Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Co., Proxies/Miscellaneous files, BL-HBS.

<sup>19</sup> *Sloss-Sheffield Annual Report, 1900*/ BL-HBS.

<sup>20</sup> *The Alabama Company Annual Report, 1916*; *The Alabama Company Annual Report, 1918*/ BL-HBS.

<sup>21</sup> *Engineering and Mining Journal*, November 5, 1892; Fuller, "Henry B. Debardeleben," 9.

million in U.S. Steel bonds. With that purchase Birmingham's civic boosters could hardly contain themselves, anticipating an "iron-age millennium."

If Birmingham fueled New South industrialization then Atlanta provided the ideological guidance. Between 1880 and 1910 Atlanta's population skyrocketed from 37,409 to 154,839 as the city became an important transportation hub and textile manufacturing center with the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills and Exposition Mills serving as the anchor industries.<sup>22</sup> But it was the legacy of Henry Grady's promotional genius and the "Atlanta Spirit" that held deep resonance for the South's political and economic architects. Atlanta did not hope to compete with Birmingham's industrial might, but rather carve out a niche in textiles and small scale manufacturing like the Southern Saw Works.<sup>23</sup> In Atlanta's two daily newspapers, the *Journal* and *Constitution*, one could read about the virtuous New South and the promise offered to willing speculators. Moreover, the *Journal*, owned by Georgia's Democratic leader, Hoke Smith, also made it clear that the

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<sup>22</sup> On Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills see Gary Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914-1915: Espionage, Labor Conflict, and New South Industrial Relations* (Ithaca 1993), 13-20; The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills records are housed at the Price Gilbert Memorial Library, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta. For a review of the collection and company history see Robert C. McMath, Jr., "History by the Graveyard: The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Records," *Labor's Heritage* (April 1989), 4-9.

<sup>23</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, December 26, 1907.



politics of race, class, and party would not interfere with the creation of a sound business environment.<sup>24</sup>

The “Atlanta Spirit” gave birth to a new class of political and business leaders intellectually removed from the old regime. As historian Donald Doyle discovered, Atlanta’s upstart Chamber of Commerce took a central role in shaping economic and civic activity, particularly after 1900. The Chamber scattered promotional guides throughout the nation heralding Atlanta’s industrial advantages, pressed the city to establish its own freight bureau, and championed a bond campaign to improve the water and sewer systems.<sup>25</sup> This type of business progressivism alternately allowed civic and commercial elites to tap into popular sentiment and satisfy their public face, while at the same time maintain crucial links to outside sources of capital.<sup>26</sup> Carefully blending the language of boosterism with the promise of economic growth and conservative positioning on race,

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<sup>24</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 136-58; Charles Garofalo, “The Atlanta Spirit: A Study in Urban Ideology,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 74 (Winter 1975); Garofalo, “The Sons of Henry Grady: Atlanta Boosters in the 1920s,” *Journal of Southern History* 42 (May 1976), 187-204; On Grady see Harold Davis, *Henry Grady’s New South: Atlanta, A Brave and Beautiful City* (Tuscaloosa, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities*, 143-44.

<sup>26</sup> *Manufacturers’ Record*, August 8, 1907, April 11, 1912, January 2, 1913.



Atlanta's emergent elites effectively bought position within the community and marginalized many critics.

In contrast to their reckless image, many foes of the "New South Creed" were small businessmen and skilled workers cut out of the bargain by recent shifts in the southern economy. In 1903, the *International Socialist Review* published an article by Dr. I.M. Rubinow on "The Industrial Development of the South" which concluded that cheap labor, lack of worker organization, an absence of state labor legislation, and the influx of northern capital made "trade union and socialist agitation the most urgent order of the day." Three years later, Georgia socialist J.B. Osborne described the South as "a bulwark of capitalism and the most important field for socialist propaganda and organization." Osborne and Rubinow agreed that the dramatic, but surely incomplete, social transformation of the South from an agrarian, slave based economy to industrial capitalism had brought with it corresponding changes in the regions political ideals. In Osborne's estimation the southern farmer's voice "has been silenced in the South; the rule of capital is now complete."<sup>27</sup>

"Socialism in the South—in Dixie! Well who would have thought such a thing possible?" A Birmingham citizen, F.X. Waldhorst, posed the question in the

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<sup>27</sup> J.B. Osborne, "Socialism in the South," *International Socialist Review*, September 1906.

fall of 1903 at a time when the state of Alabama could count twenty Socialist Party locals. Indeed within a year after the formation of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) in 1901 secretary William Mailley wrote Buel Andrus, a Birmingham carpenter, that he was “particularly anxious” to organize the South.<sup>28</sup> By the fall of 1902 many former Populists, Knights, and Alliance members drifted into the ranks of the SPA and re-tooled their adversarial language to express a new collectivist vision. An assortment of former People's Party activists and labor radicals discovered socialism as the new outlet for their political voice. John Ray, the socialist speaker arrested on the streets of Birmingham, had been active in the North Carolina Knights of Labor since the early 1880s. Originally from Massachusetts, Ray had been a strong advocate of biracial organizing during his time in the Knight's. Following a brief stint in his home state as part of the Haverill socialist municipal government, he returned to the South as an organizer for the SPA.<sup>29</sup> In Jefferson County, Alabama, a socialist carpenter named Clarence Spencer figured prominently in Birmingham's radical political circles. In 1895

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<sup>28</sup> William Mailley to B. Andrus, Birmingham, Alabama, March 27, 1903; Mailley to C.H. Spencer, Bessemer, Alabama, February 25, 1903; Mailley to George Smith, Cardiff, Alabama, February 13, 26, 1903, SPA/1.

<sup>29</sup> On Ray's activity in North Carolina and Massachusetts see Melton Alonza McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, (Westport, 1978), 45, 48, 116-17, 136-37, 152-53.

Spencer was elected as an alderman in the neighboring industrial city of Bessemer as part of a Republican-Populist supported Reform Ticket.<sup>30</sup> For the balance of the 1890s Spencer remained active in city, state, and labor politics and would eventually help organize the area's first SPA chapter. In 1903 he once again tossed his hat into the electoral mix, this time as a candidate on the Bessemer Socialist ticket along with other former People's Party members.

Other early leaders of the Birmingham Socialist local included Buel Andrus, R.A. Statham, William Mailley, Thomas Freeman and Z.T. Albright, who had each been active for many years in political and labor circles and had, in the 1890s, championed the call for area workers to embrace populism. Andrus, president of the Carpenter's local and member of the Farmers' Alliance, served as secretary of the Birmingham Trades Council in 1890 and pushed for closer ties between the city's craft unions and the District's United Mine Workers locals.<sup>31</sup> Albright, a Confederate veteran, abandoned the Democratic Party in 1892, reasoning that the “only thing the Democrats give the people is everything the hen lays except eggs.” With his faith in the party of his kinsman thoroughly shattered, Albright discovered populism and implored fellow citizens to “unite against the

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<sup>30</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, September 14, 1895.

<sup>31</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, December 20, 1890.



color line” and “bury the hatchet of former years.” Statham, a UMW organizer and veteran of many campaigns and labor wars floated in and out of the Knights, the People's Party and various fusion tickets before joining the SPA.<sup>32</sup>

In the coal fields of Alabama socialist organizers also attracted converts. The scene had become familiar as troubles marred the Birmingham District during the strike of 1894. On an early April morning in the mining camp of Adger, coal miner James Codey, his wife, and their four children were awakened by eight armed deputy sheriffs and ordered to vacate their company house in the Blue Creek mining camp. After Cody's belongings had been removed and the house secured the morning sweep moved on to the home of William Mailley. While working around Mailley and his mother, deputies emptied the house of its effects and then retired for the day, seemingly exhausted by the “usual exercise of evictions.” The following day, officers in the service of coal magnate Henry DeBardleben, continued to remove striking miners and their families throughout the afternoon. But as these workers were, in the words of one striker, tossed into the “wilderness of cruelty, tyranny, and selfishness” sympathetic citizens like Dick Parsons rose to their defense. Parsons owned a parcel of land in the area and offered it up to the miners who erected several crude shanties. Within a few short

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<sup>32</sup>*Alabama Sentinel* January 11, 1890; *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, March 17, 1894.

weeks the miners had constructed the new town of Minersville, just outside of Adger, and had applied to Washington for a post office.<sup>33</sup>

Minersville represented a meeting point of race, ethnic, and class collaboration. Cody, a seventy year old Confederate veteran, Stoves, “the most respected miner in Alabama,” and Mailley, UMW organizer, vice president of the Birmingham Trades Council, and eventual national secretary of the Socialist Party joined together with black, Italian, and Scottish workers in this oasis in a common cause that pitted the union against the “Czar of Alabama.” At certain moments Alabama miners transcended the color line and responded to such conditions with militant strike action and aggressive biracial unionism.<sup>34</sup> In the face of Jim Crow and at the point of production workers challenged the structural underpinnings of the New South. And yet these episodes were not always simply movements for “stomach equality,” as many of the important leaders of these labor conflicts adopted a radical political dimension that sought to extend the struggle beyond the coal fields. When in the hands of socialist directed locals in coal camps such as

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<sup>33</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, June 16, 1894; William Mailley, “Alabama: A Slave State,” unpublished typescript, n.d., 6-7, Socialist Collection in the Tamiment Library, 1872-1956, microfilm edition, reel 66.

<sup>34</sup> On a superb study of the complexities of biracial unionism in the Alabama coal fields see Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (UNC Press, 1998).

Blocton, Cardiff, Lewisburg, Belle Ellen, and West Pratt militant strike action and biracial unionism represented a broader critique of New South politics and its principles of economic and social organization.<sup>35</sup>

At the turn-of-the-century, organizational drives in the mining communities of Blocton, Belle Ellen, Lewisburg, West Pratt, and Cardiff gave the Socialist Labor Party, the Social Democracy, and, finally, the SPA, a significant degree of support among coal miners. In Blocton, a community established by the Cahaba Coal Mining Company and located in north central Bibb County, a German local with an English-speaking SLP organizer, took hold in 1897.<sup>36</sup> Down the road in Belle Ellen, an English local had a German organizer. Small wonder that when both locals faded in 1900 a frustrated SLP national committee concluded “when trouble came, neither section seemed to know where it was at.” But ultimately socialist miners and organizers, such as R.A. Statham, owed a great deal of their success to a willingness to work within existing AFL unions regardless of ethnic or racial composition. Indeed, miners elected Statham as SLP and UMWA organizer

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<sup>35</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, February 5, March 5, 19, April 2, 9, 30, July 9, 1898.

<sup>36</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, June 19, July 3, 1897; *Tenth National Convention of the Socialist Labor Party, 1900*, Socialist Labor Party Papers, microfilm edition reel 35 [hereafter SLP Papers/reel #]; Stuart Harris, *Alabama Place Names*, (Huntsville, 1982), 172.



for Cardiff, a town near Birmingham founded by Sloss-Sheffield Iron and Steel Company.

Viewed together, the UMW and socialist locals in Cardiff exhibited a dynamic social and political community among the region's most active and radical. Discussions at mass meetings in the mining village frequently addressed the need for class and race cooperation, and in 1898 Cardiff miners elected three white and three black delegates to the state miner's convention in Birmingham. Furthermore, two black miners, George Tannihill and Primus Hutchison, served on the local union's executive board.<sup>37</sup> Reflecting a community built on worker camaraderie, Cardiff miner's established a reading room, debating club, and a social center. Shared community and work experiences perhaps put a premium on personal loyalty. The *Birmingham Labor Advocate* noted that Robert Williamson and David Brown, both longtime residents and Cardiff's SLP candidates for the state legislature, would sweep an upcoming election. "[I]f they were as well known everywhere else as they are in this quiet little burg, it would be useless for any one to run against them."

Significantly, SLP organizational efforts in the Birmingham mining region did not reflect the dual unionism of national party leader Daniel De Leon's

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<sup>37</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, June 18, 1898.

Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance (STLA).<sup>38</sup> In the mining district organizational conflicts between the AFL, Social Democracy, and SLP normally evoked little more than rhetorical volleys in the labor press. In Birmingham, an ultra-orthodox revolutionary faction of the SLP did on occasion attack moderate and reformist elements within that party, but the general sentiment of the state's radicals looked favorably upon socialist growth in all of its forms.<sup>39</sup>

In Alabama, the growth of socialism among miners and carpenters clearly influenced the pages of the state's labor press whose editor ran columns favoring municipal ownership, obliteration of the color line, and support for Eugene Debs

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<sup>38</sup> The Socialist Labor Party's trade-union philosophy is discussed in Carl Reeve, *The Life and Times of Daniel De Leon* (New York, 1972), 49-67; Alter Rosenthal, *The Differences Between The Socialist Party and the Socialist Labor Party: Also Between Socialism, Anarchism, and Anti-political Industrialism* (New York, 1908); Alexander Trachtenberg, ed., *The American Labor Year Book, 1916* (New York, 1916), 89-93. Biographies of De Leon include Arnold Petersen, *Daniel De Leon: Social Architect* (New York, 1941); Socialist Labor Party, *Daniel De Leon: The Man and His Work: A Symposium* (New York, 1919); L. Glen Seretan, *Daniel De Leon: The Odyssey of An American Marxist* (Cambridge, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, June 19, 26, July 3, 1897, March 5, 1898; Harry R. Engel to Henry Slobodin, August 14, 1899, Socialist Collection in the Tamiment Library, 1872-1956, microfilm edition, reel 4. On the SLP hard-line faction's fight against reformism see Stephen Coleman, *Daniel De Leon* (Manchester, UK, 1990), 53-78.

and his national cooperative plan.<sup>40</sup> In 1895 the United Confederate Veterans and the Winnie Davis Wigwam hosted a crowd of over 4,000 people gathered to celebrate Debs' release from Woodstock jail. It was described as the "most successful meeting which organized labor has ever held in Birmingham." The Pratt Mines band provided musical entertainment and Trades Council vice president William Mailley as well as local officials of the ARU delivered "rousing speeches." Two year's later, the *Birmingham Labor Advocate* declared it "the duty of the workingmen to unite under the banner of socialism and work for the cooperative commonwealth."

The southern banner of socialism stretched one-hundred a fifty miles to the east to the city of Atlanta and on to Augusta, where Socialist Labor Party (SLP) members set the radical political agenda, controlling the Federation of Trades and the labor press in both cities. Atlanta SLP members S.M. White, president of the Allied Printing Trades Council, and William Strauss of the tailors union, were among the "old guard" of that city's labor movement.<sup>41</sup> White, who helped launch

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<sup>40</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, February 5, April 2, March 5, 1898, January 28, 1899. On the SDA cooperative colony plan see Bernard Brommel, "Debs' Cooperative Commonwealth Plan for Workers," *Labor History* 12 (Fall 1972): 560-69.

<sup>41</sup> *Journal of Labor*, May 6, 1899, April 7, June 9, 1900; *Atlanta Journal*, July 3, 6, 7, 1897.



the Atlanta Federation of Trades (AFT) in 1890, organized an SLP branch in 1897. Within two years he and Strauss had become the dominant personalities in the city's labor circles. White edited the *Journal of Labor*, the official organ of the AFT, and Strauss won election as federation president.<sup>42</sup> Under their leadership, the AFT campaigned tirelessly for improvements in working conditions at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills, for equal suffrage, and for greater statewide cooperation among laborers.<sup>43</sup> In Augusta, a city with a rich history of militant labor activity including the textile strike of 1886 orchestrated by the Knights of Labor, socialists Andrew Mulcay headed the Federation of Trades, J.A. Mette published the *Voice of Labor*, and A.J. Seddon led the sizeable Painters and Decorators Union.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the formation in 1899 of the Georgia Federation of Labor, marking the birth of the state's modern labor movement, largely resulted

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<sup>42</sup> *Journal of Labor*, May 6, 1899, April 7, June 9, 1900.

<sup>43</sup> *Journal Of Labor*, May 20, 27, June 3, 17, 24, July 15, 1899, June 2, July 14, 1900.

<sup>44</sup> *Journal Of Labor* April 22, December 23, 1899, June 30, 1900; Merl E. Reed, "The Augusta Textile Mills Strike of 1886," *Labor History* 14 (Spring 1973): 228-46; Richard German, "The Queen City of the Savannah: Augusta, Georgia During the Urban Progressive Era, 1890-1917," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1971; Julia Walsh, "'Horny-Handed Sons of Toil': Mill Workers, Populists and the Press in Augusta, 1886-1894," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 81 (Summer 1997), 311-343.

from the influence of Atlanta's and Augusta's socialist trade union leadership.<sup>45</sup>

The SLP organization operated concurrently with similar efforts by the Social Democracy, which established branches in Atlanta, Augusta, Macon, Blocton, Lewisburg, West Pratt, Birmingham, and the Tennessee Social Democracy fielded a complete statewide ticket in 1900.<sup>46</sup> In Augusta, leaders such as J.A. Mette and A.J. Mulcay belonged to both the SLP and the SDA prior to the formation of the Socialist Party. Instrumental in the formation of an SDA Atlanta branch were J.B. Osborne, a traveling salesman, a critic of Tom Watson, and popularly known as “the blind orator,” A.E. Seddon, a minister active in the AFT's Southern Co-operative Association; and William Dodson, proprietor of Dodson Printing Company.<sup>47</sup>

Seemingly absent from southern socialist politics in the 1890s was the type of internecine warfare that characterized the SLP, Debsians, and AFL unions at the

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<sup>45</sup> *Journal of Labor*, April 22, 1899; Mercer Evans, “The History of the Organized Labor Movement in Georgia,” unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1929, 210.

<sup>46</sup> *Journal of Labor*, July 31, 1897; “To the Voters of Tennessee,” candidates and platform of the Social Democratic Party of Tennessee, SPA/111; “Tennessee leadership and Membership,” vertical File, Eugene V. Debs Collection, Indiana State University.

<sup>47</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, September 6, 1897; *Journal of Labor*, April 22, 1899; *Atlanta City Directory*, 1897, 1903, 1906.

national level. Within the Georgia labor movement the differing ideological tendencies of the SLP, the Social Democracy, and the pure and simple unionism of the AFL co-existed in relative harmony. While Atlanta's S.M. White had publicly distanced his SLP from J.B. Osborne's group, AFT and GFL policy during White's period of influence reveals a willingness to work with a range of political ideas within organized labor.

Similarly, in many instances, old Populist strongholds became recruiting grounds for SPA organizers. Former Populists and Farmers' Alliance members proved invaluable at securing meeting space and assisting in organizing activity. Some Populist newspapers such as the *Grander Age* and the *People's Protest* switched their editorial stance to reflect a new faith in socialism.<sup>48</sup> In Florida, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi Populists critical of fusion with the Democratic Party defected to socialism. As historian Norman Pollack suggests there had always been socialists within populism, and until fusion with the Democratic Party

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<sup>48</sup> William Mailley to McDuff Brothers, Patton, Alabama, February 13, 1903, William Mailley to C.H. Spencer, Bessemer, Alabama, February 25, 1903, William Mailley to J.A. Larue, Bessemer, Alabama, March 10, 1903, William Mailley to W.S. Moore, Sanford, Florida, February 13, 1903, SPA/1; *Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, Chicago, Illinois, May 10-17, 1908*, Third Party Presidential Nominating Conventions, Proceedings, Records, etc, (Brookhaven Press, Lacrosse, WI) reel 5; Stephen Cresswell, "Red Mississippi: The State's Socialist Party, 1904-1920," *Journal of Mississippi History* 50 (August 1988), 153-71; Sheldon Hackney, *From Populism to Progressivism in Alabama* (Princeton, 1969), 115.



“avowed socialists regarded populism as a suitable expression of their goals.” In Pollack's view, “until 1896, there were populists holding socialist views while remaining consistent populists.”<sup>49</sup> Stephen Cresswell and George Green locate populist cum socialists in Mississippi and Florida, respectively, and James Green and Garin Burbank's work on the Southwest, too, considers a link between populism in that region and an emergent socialist movement. They found, however, that where the agrarian radicalism of the populists looked to form a South-West alliance, and appealed to property rights, reduced freight rates, and fair prices socialists championed the rhetoric of class struggle. Certainly, populism did not simply resurface in the years after its collapse redefined as socialism, but the faction that did join the Socialist Party appear to have been the greatest proponents of a farmer-laborer alliance in the 1890s and their presence gave experience, credibility and authenticated the socialist appeal.<sup>50</sup> As J.A.

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<sup>49</sup> Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America* (Cambridge, 1962), 90-91, 99.

<sup>50</sup> *Southern Socialist*, September, 1903; Theodore Saloutos downplays the connection between populism and subsequent left-wing movements suggesting that those who left the Populists after fusion represented a minority position within the Party, Theodore Saloutos, “Radicalism and the Agrarian Tradition,” in John M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipsett, eds. *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism* (New York, 1974) 134-47. It should be noted, as Lawrence Goodwyn observed, in the land of “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman, “effective demagoguery had destroyed the coherence of the reform movement.” South Carolina socialists, not unlike their Populists and Farmers Alliance forebears, had

Bodenhamer, erstwhile secretary of Georgia's People's Party, lamented to Watson, "most of the leading Populists of this section are [now] socialists."

Following the collapse of farmer-worker insurgencies in the 1880s and 1890s a political void threatened to render collective resistance permanently marginal to the New South experiment. For many southerners, socialist politics in the late 1890s and early 1900s provided a bridge between the fading prospects of Populism and the coming challenges of a new industrial order. Militant trade unions, nervous craft workers, and small business operators, entertained socialist positions through political action, mass meetings, speeches, strike action, and radical newspapers in an attempt to make sense out of the dramatic changes in the South.

Communications among southern socialists usually revolved around Party publications, both local and national. *The Appeal to Reason*, the most widely circulated national socialist paper, reached readers in the fishing village of Bokelia, Florida, the mill town of Columbus, Georgia, and the Scandinavian community of Silverhill, Alabama.<sup>51</sup> The *International Socialist Review*, the

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very limited success in organizing a strong state organization. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment In America* (Oxford, 1978), 197.

<sup>51</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 48-49; *Appeal to Reason*, December 26, 1908, January 6, 1912; Harris, *Alabama Place Names*, 149.

**Table 1.      Occupations of Socialist Candidates in Birmingham and Atlanta  
Municipal Elections, 1900-1914**

<b>Birmingham:</b>		<b>Atlanta:</b>	
Attorney	1	Bookkeeper	1
Bookkeeper	1	Carpenter	4
Carpenter	10	Collector	1
Contractor	2	Printer	6
Machinist	2	Jeweler	4
Miner	2	Tailors	3
Pressman	1	Glass Worker	2
Printer	2	Machinist	3
Prop Jewelry Co.	1	Shoemaker	2
Prop. Food Store	1	Minister	1
Prop. Drug Store	1	Salesman	2
Roller	2	Prop. Print Co.	1
Shoemaker	1	Prop. Lunch Counter	1
		Mill Hand	2
		Editor	1

*National Rip-Saw* and the *Chicago Daily Socialist* also attracted a southern readership. But southern party members also put out their own news sheets. Bessemer socialists published the *Southern Socialist*. In Jacksonville, Oscar Edgar, the future agricultural editor of the *Florida Times Union*, started the *Florida Socialist* in 1904. Tampa socialists produced and read the *Advance* and the *Beacon*. Mississippians enjoyed the *Grander Age* and the *Mississippi Socialist*, whose office was mysteriously burned to the ground one evening, while Georgia's



faithful kept up with the news in the *Mirror*.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the *Nashville Labor Advocate* and the *Chattanooga Labor Leader* regularly featured a “Socialism” column written by the *Leader's* editor, A.C. Reimbold, a carpenter and SPA stalwart. Memphis socialist Edwin Dalstrom served as editor of the *Memphis Social Democrat* which sponsored a visit in 1907 by Emma Goldman, who delivered a speech entitled “Viva la Commune” and Augusta's *Voice of Labor* and *Labor Review* and Atlanta's *Journal of Labor* were at different periods of time guided by socialist editors.<sup>53</sup>

In the early 1900s, socialist-sponsored publications, co-operative stores, libraries, debates, and socials gave many workers an ideological, social, and economic stake in communities that increasingly lost their autonomy and local character in the wake of regional industrialization. In numerous southern towns, often named for the founding company or industrialist, a sense of futility characterized political life. In building an alternative socialist culture based on cooperation and rooted in republican notions of fairness in the work place and

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<sup>52</sup> *Southern Socialist*, (Bessemer, Ala.) July, September, 1903; *New Mississippi Socialist*, (Kilmichael, Miss.), November 15, 1916; “Socialist Periodicals List,” Vertical File, Eugene V. Debs Papers, Indiana State University; *Tampa City Directory*, 1912; *Florida Times Union*, July 6, 1904; *Atlanta Journal*, July 4, 1906.

<sup>53</sup> “Viva La commune,” pamphlet in Edwin Dalstrom Papers, MVC/MSU.

social equality, the SPA provided its members with an important, if short lived, respite from the political alienation they experienced in the New South. Attempts to transform a collective social community into formidable political opposition proved to be a far greater challenge.

Throughout the South, the fortunes of labor radicals and reform movements in large measure pivoted around the disfranchisement conventions. In Alabama, Spencer, Andrus, and Albright, who had all aggressively campaigned for the People's Party and its gubernatorial candidate, Ruben Kolb, were now confronted by the grim realities of a marginalized electorate. Perhaps more than anyone William Mailley knew full well the limits of socialist organizing in a region hostile to the vote. But he also understood the traditions, possibilities, and important political value the South held for SPA advance. Like Eugene Debs, and perhaps because of the disappointments he experienced first hand in Alabama politics, Mailley saw elections and campaigns largely for their educational value. By 1903 he had left Birmingham and moved on to Chicago to direct the Socialist Party's field work as national secretary. "Particularly anxious" to organize the South, he unleashed a drive to blanket the region with socialist speakers just a year after the Alabama constitution effectively disfranchised what would have been many of the

party's natural supporters.<sup>54</sup> Under Mailley's direction leading southern socialists such as Max Wilk of Augusta, J.L. Fitts of South Carolina, and F.X. Waldhourst of Birmingham hoped to organize strong locals, field municipal tickets where viable, and link the party to trade union bodies as the basis of the southern strategy.

As the early stages of the southern campaign unfolded, the growth of the movement greatly inspired some party workers. One overly enthusiastic comrade reasoned that “in a few years the Bourbon Democrats will have to speak of the solid South, conditionally, for the Socialists, to use the slang phrase, will puncture the Southern Democracy.” That the Socialist Party ultimately failed to mount a successful challenge to Democrat control of the South should not completely render such sentiment hyperbolic. Despite the barriers to electoral politics socialist candidates achieved a modicum of success in several southern states. Although party victories remained few and relatively isolated, the presence of any opposition whatsoever proved sufficient to startle the ruling class.

The election in Shelby County, Tennessee, spoke to the fear that many Democrats held of a perceived socialist threat. Following the county election in

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<sup>54</sup> William Mailley to Buel Andrus, Birmingham, Alabama, March 27, 1903; Mailley to George Smith, Cardiff, Alabama, February 26, 1903, Mailley Letterpress Books, SPA/1.



1908, the SPA's state secretary commented on the reaction to the Socialist Party's strong showing at the polls: "we made the Bourbons hustle as they have not hustled since the war. They had to call out the police force to beat us. The order went out at 3:00 PM that every policeman had to vote or the Democrats would lose the race for Attorney General. This showing is most remarkable when we consider that the working class is practically disfranchised."

The Tennessee comrade had reason to be ecstatic over a rare opposition party challenge, but his acknowledgment of the difficulties presented by disfranchisement highlights the limited party advances in the South. Even when blessed with a large membership and community support the SPA had no guarantee of electoral success. The Birmingham local, for instance, claimed over six hundred members including "a large number of business and professional men," but the leadership did not "for business reasons let it be publicly known." Recognizing the difficulty of making any political advances as long as the poll tax and other barriers remained, socialists staged a rather methodical, direct and ultimately ineffective attack on institutional exclusion.

In Atlanta, J.B. Osborne, spoke out regularly against disfranchisement and could point to thirty-three separate arrests for public disorder as testament to his

effectiveness.<sup>55</sup> Osborne, a former labor leader, Populist, and veteran of Coxey's Army, had in 1906 been nominated on the Socialist Party ticket for governor of Georgia.<sup>56</sup> During the course of the campaign party leaders invited the Democrat nominee, Hoke Smith, to a debate. Dr. George Ehrhorn of Augusta challenged Smith to meet with Osborne in Atlanta at the largest auditorium that could be secured and argue the issues of disfranchisement and freight rates. The Socialist Party offered to cover all the event's expenses. Smith, then engaged in some rather fierce intra-party politics at the Democrat state convention in Macon, refused, perhaps wary of the political astuteness of debating a man who prided himself on having been arrested thirty-three times.<sup>57</sup>

Stories such as these were not uncommon throughout the South. Stephen Cresswell's study of Mississippi socialists explores the impact of disfranchisement on socialist political fortunes. He concludes that the disfranchisement of working class whites in all likelihood prevented a socialist electoral breakthrough in Jones County. Cresswell correctly observes that socialism could be expensive business.

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<sup>55</sup> *Atlanta City Directory*, 1903, 1906; *Atlanta Constitution*, August 25, September 9, 10, 15, 1906.

<sup>56</sup> Barton Shaw, *The Wool-Hat Boys*, 67, 168; *Atlanta Constitution*, May 10, 1894, July 5, 1906; *Atlanta Journal*, July 4, 1906.

<sup>57</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, September 20, 1906.

Poll taxes, not to mention Party dues should a *voter* also wish to be a *member* of the Party, diminished the attractiveness of casting a socialist ballot. Similarly, the central focus of electoral politics in the South had traditionally been the white primary. Membership in the Socialist Party eliminated participation in a process that almost always produced the winning candidate in the general election.<sup>58</sup>

The 1906 platform of the Socialist Party of Georgia reflected some of these hurdles. It called for the “abolition of tax qualification for citizenship,” declared the party “opposed to Negro disfranchisement,” and in favor of an “amendment to state election laws by which the Australian ballot system be put into operation.” Socialist Party members from Lansing, Tennessee, to Fairhope, Alabama, routinely flooded the Party press with letters that spoke of the “poll tax evil,” intimidation, and open voting as effective tools used by elites to frustrate socialist electoral ambitions. But grand intentions to “go after that outrage, the poll tax and lead the good fight” often resulted in strikingly hollow results.<sup>59</sup> If poll taxes and disfranchisement campaigns did not curb socialist aspirations, sometimes good old

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<sup>58</sup> Cresswell, “Red Mississippi,” 153-71; Cresswell, “Grassroots Radicalism,” 81-101.

<sup>59</sup> *Party Builder*, November 12, 1912; Information Department to E.A. Ruge, Fairhope, Alabama, *Party Builder*, November 20, 1914; Socialist Party *Weekly Bulletin*, January 21, 1911, clipping in SPA/4; *American Socialist*, November 14, 1914.



fashioned corruption did. In Augusta, Georgia, John Allen Mette apparently never stood a chance in his 1906 bid to become mayor. Mette, editor of the *Voice of Labor* and former Socialist Labor Party member, had joined the Socialist Party of America in June but entered the July mayoral primary ostensibly as a Democrat. If Mette concealed his socialist connection, his platform did not. Calling for municipal ownership and boasting of a new combination of voters that "hell itself cannot beat," Mette secured a respectable 660 votes to the incumbent, Mayor Allen's 2,400. Mette's support may very well have been stronger, however, as rumors of vote buying were rampant. The *Augusta Chronicle* reported on election day that votes sold for \$10.00 "and in some key wards as much as \$20.00."

In the New South, elections provided an exercise in political consolidation, not democracy. J.B. Cameron, the state secretary of the Louisiana SPA, observed that in New Orleans socialist candidates fared well "wherever [the party] had poll watchers, but commissioner's usually omit [socialist] votes...the results [are] never known." But on these few occasions, the SPA challenged the prevailing power structure governing the South and brought to the region a bold new social and political presence. More importantly, the early stages of SPA organizing and electioneering laid the groundwork for future victories. Building on these initial efforts, and consistent with the experience of the national party, the southern wing

of the SPA would enjoy its zenith in the years 1912-1916. In these years, sobered by the realities of southern electoral politics, a more seasoned organization would effectively shift its strategy to work within the structure of established trade union bodies.

## CHAPTER II

### HARVESTING DISSENT: SOCIALIST PARTY ACTIVITY IN THE AGRARIAN SOUTH

*The People of this graft-ridden country are ripe  
for the gospel of socialism. Without the South  
we can never attain socialism and God knows  
there is no section in which it is more needed.*

George Brewer,  
"Awakening in Dixie," 1911

*The place for the factory is by the side of the  
farm.*

Manufacturers' Record,  
July 3, 1913

In 1899, William Mailley left behind the coal fields of Alabama and the machine shops of Nashville to serve as the SPA's national secretary.<sup>1</sup> As an organizer for the UMW, People's party stalwart, and editor of two labor journals, Mailley witnessed firsthand the region's industrial uncertainty and complicated politics of class, race and party. Having participated in a mass revolt against

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<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Constantine, *The Letters of Eugene V. Debs, Volume 1, 1874-1912* (University of Illinois Press, 1990), 157-8; After leaving the South, Mailley made a detour to Massachusetts, where he was active in the town of Haverill's Social Democratic movement before serving briefly as state secretary of the SPA. Henry Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* (Amherst, 1966), *passim*.



southern Bourbonism he believed that the SPA could maintain, build upon, and rearticulate the region's fragile populist impulse, even amidst a sea of industrial progress, urban growth, and sharpening disfranchisement.

In the spring of 1903, under Mailley's eager direction, the national office sent organizers into the nervous communities of the South where the SPA located and harnessed an admixture of willing converts among the skilled workers, small shop owners, and factory hands threatened and displaced by economic and political shifts.<sup>2</sup> As examined in Chapter One, Birmingham, Atlanta, and Tampa attracted the most members, while Jacksonville, Nashville, and Augusta could boast some of the most active and militant organizations. While socialists in the manufacturing zones of the South responded to economic and social dislocation by embracing third partyism and trade unions as vehicles for change, their country cousins found themselves caught between the demise of populism and the industrial movement recasting much of southern life and politics. Accordingly, socialist hopes for an alliance of country and city obscured much about the southern landscape and what it offered for those seeking radical social change.

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<sup>2</sup> William Mailley to Buel Andrus, Birmingham, Alabama, March 27, 1903; Mailley to George Smith, Cardiff, Alabama, February 26, 1903, Mailley Letterpress Books, SPA/1.

In response to the insurgencies of the 1890s, the Democratic party tilted toward populism, incorporating much of its demagoguery and nativism in the process. In addition, voting qualifications and a host of ballot laws drastically shrunk the size of the socialist constituency and made it very difficult for third party tickets to sustain any relevance, particularly in rural areas.<sup>3</sup> While urban socialists retreated into workplace radicalism to accomplish what politics had largely failed to deliver, rural radicals faced precious few alternatives as they were squeezed by Democratic maneuvering and eroding economic prospects.

Jack Temple Kirby reminds us that in spite of industrial momentum and shifting patterns of economic growth, the South remained overwhelmingly rural in the early 1900s.<sup>4</sup> As southern industrialization developed unevenly the rural stretches of the region were subjected to different lines of development and investment sources. While the cotton plantation South, farm tenancy, and

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<sup>3</sup> J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven, 1974), 45-59, 63-82, 84-103; Peter Argersinger, *The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics* (Lawrence, 1995); Wayne Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa, 1989), 256-77; V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York, 1949).

<sup>4</sup> Kirby notes that farmers outnumbered industrial workers until the 1940s, and an urban population did not constitute the majority until the 1950s. Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (LSU Press, 1987), xiv.

sharecropping fueled the economic engine driving southern agrarian capitalism, ample sources for speculative wealth immune from the reaches of the planter class existed outside the Black Belt.<sup>5</sup> In the early 1900s numerous large land holding companies from New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and London looked beyond King Cotton and pioneered the banks of the St. John's River in north Florida, a stretch of row crop land in the south Georgia countryside, and the lowlands of southern Mississippi. Between 1903 and 1913, save for the Panic of 1907, the Chambers Land Company, Deer Creek Cotton Estates, Model Land, and Bergtrom of New York, among others, purchased enormous tracts of premium territory in the South's truck farming zones, piney woods, and alluvion lands, transforming the economic structure and culture of these small, rural areas.<sup>6</sup>

The maturation of the coal, steel, and textile industries provided the wedge needed for high finance, and technological innovations such as refrigerated freight

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of "planter persistency," class formation, and political alliances in the Black Belt and Piedmont, see Jonathan Weiner, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860-1885* (Baton Rouge, 1978); Dwight Billings, *Planters and the Making of a "New South: " Class, Politics, and Development in North Carolina, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, 1979); Broadas Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore, 1921); On Mitchell see Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within: From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South, 1919-1945* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 58-82.

<sup>6</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, October 12, 19, November 2, 1911, January 16, 23, 30, February 6, 20, July 3, 1913; *St. Augustine Weekly Record*, November 6, 13, 1903.



cars improved market accessibility. Success, however, ultimately rested on solid ties to banking houses, shipping magnates, and politicians. The Chambers Company's purchase of 50,000 acres at \$40 per acre along the shores of Lake Kissimmee in the central Florida artesian belt established the pattern many followed.<sup>7</sup> Companies like Chambers structured their investments to seek returns on either high-quality farm land, timbering rights, or prime real estate its pure speculative value.

One of the more curious early land pioneers was Connecticut born diplomat, explorer, and businessman Henry Sanford. In 1870, Sanford purchased from the state of Florida twenty-three square miles of land nestled along the shores of the St. John's River. Two years later, surrounded by newly planted orange groves, a town bearing his name incorporated. By 1880, Sanford joined Scotsman William MacKinnon in organizing the Florida Land and Colonization Society, which stretched over a 10,000 acre and eight county-wide area.<sup>8</sup> As a long time supporter of Chester B. Arthur, Sanford moved against the grain of southern politics and tried to establish the Republican Party in Florida along conservative,

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<sup>7</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, January 16, 23, 1913.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Florida Land Colonization Society, 1880-1888, Henry Shelton Sanford Papers, General Sanford Memorial Library, Sanford, Florida, box 56, [hereafter Sanford Papers box#].

white lines. He further turned tradition on its head and advocated southern black emigration to Africa as a means to solve the South's "labor problems," eventually importing Swedish laborers to work his own central Florida land.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Sanford viewed the South as a piece of a larger puzzle and in between development projects he served as a delegate of the American Geographical Society to King Leopold's African International Association, designed to "open up equatorial Africa to civilizing influences." He cemented a close relationship with the Belgian king by attending the Berlin Conference and lobbying Congress to recognize Leopold's hold on the Congo. Utilizing these connections, he later established the Sanford Exploring Expedition and sent two steamers to the Congo in hopes of developing commercial interests there.<sup>10</sup>

L.F. Dommerich of New York, W.C. Comstock and C.H. Morse of Chicago, and W.C. Temple of Pittsburgh followed Sanford's investment lead and, after acquiring prime vegetable and citrus fruit growing land, sub-divided their holdings into plots for diversified commercial agriculture, home construction, and

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<sup>9</sup> "Petitions from Swedes, 1881," and "Swedish Immigrants, 1871," Sanford Papers/box 55.

<sup>10</sup> "Berlin Conference, Instructions, 1883-1884," Sanford Papers/box 31; "Africa International Association, Declaration, 1884," Sanford Papers/box 30. On Sanford's dealings with King Leopold, the Berlin Conference, and commercial activity in the Congo see Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Hedonism in Colonial Africa* (New York, 1998), 75-87.

land leasing. In a few short years, these men transformed a sleepy back-country stretch of swamp land into thriving citrus groves, a prosperous celery delta, and a booming real estate market.<sup>11</sup> Anticipating the Florida land boom of the 1920s, demonstration farms throughout Florida and south Georgia became a common feature of the new agriculture. Trains carrying bankers and real estate agents from New York, Ohio, and Virginia arrived almost daily, showcasing “the vast sections of well cultivated, drained and fertile land” in small crossroad towns like Cairo, Fitzgerald, Moultrie, Palatka, and Hastings.”<sup>12</sup>

These efforts at “colonization” shifted structures of ownership and wealth in some rather dramatic ways. The process of transforming garden market and localistic production into a large commercial enterprise did not come about without great social costs. As Southern agriculture boomed, small farmers and tenants were increasingly disassociated of their modest holdings, and local merchant power compromised. A new system of “power farming,” characterized by experiments with mechanized cultivation and a reliance on farm wage-labor replaced traditional relationships. In addition, private capital combined with state

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<sup>11</sup> *Sanford Herald*, January 3, September 2, 1913; *Manufacturers' Record*, August 10, 1911.

<sup>12</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, August 15, 1907, October 19, November 16, December 7, 1911, January 30, February 20, 1913; *St. Augustine Weekly Record*, January 2, November 6, 1903; *Hastings Herald*, August 16, 1918.



and local government to develop and extend rail lines, build “good roads,” and expand small-town distribution centers in the formation of mass commercial markets.<sup>13</sup> Concentrated land holding of this magnitude provided the necessary structural basis for the political and social transformation of southern agriculture. To be sure, while the new cities of the South wrestled with the impact of industrialization, the rural areas of the region became something of a laboratory for alternative forms of social organization, not only for big landed interests, but for socialists and agrarian radicals as well.

Small farmers gripped by the tightening force of land enclosures and restrictive covenants had few alternatives in the South’s truck markets. Raising staple crops such as cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, corn, and tomatoes typically required a full season of labor-intensive work just to get the land cleared and in proper condition. In the second fall, seed planting would be staggered between October and December. In the first few seasons farmers simply hoped to have enough fruits and vegetables for home use. With more mature ground to work and depending on the yield, “communications” with merchants could eventually be established. Small farmers, whose success already depended on a delicate combination of time, weather, hard labor, and luck, saw their fortunes further

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<sup>13</sup> *Manufacturers’ Record*, November 2, 1911, March 27, July 3, 1913; On the rise of interior towns see Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South*, 39-43.

compromised as large, outside interests gobbled up fertile land and converted the structures of cultivation and distribution to accommodate mass markets.<sup>14</sup>

Squeezed off the land and starved of any real hope, many “truckers” explored radical approaches to solve their plight. Seizing on this political capital, the SPA harnessed dissent and designed a variety of creative measures to address the problems of farmers. In the process, the party helped redefine the economic and political possibilities of rural life. Southern socialists discovered co-operative stores, social land management, experimental farms, and biracial political and economic alliances in their efforts to secure a foothold on the changing landscape. The SPA would, however, face severe challenges as it tried to organize those parts of the South which, in spite of big capital’s efforts to modernize, remained largely isolated and tied to the politics and rhythms of the old order.

W.C. Bohannon of St. Louis, presumably a skilled and capable organizer, was one of the first party activists sent to “invade” Dixie and “present socialism to the Southern people.” Bohannon, a telegrapher, seemed well-suited to face the challenges of field work given that he “enjoyed the distinction of having been fired by Western Union more than any other man, and always for talking politics.” But his tour through Mississippi and Alabama was abruptly cut short a few months

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<sup>14</sup> *St. Augustine Weekly Review*, August September 10, 1903.

into the schedule after the national office determined “a northern man is handicapped in missionary work in the extreme south [sic].” Bohannon was then re-routed through northern Tennessee and Kentucky, as the SPA subsequently chose to use speakers and organizers “acquainted with local peculiarities.” Regardless of whether provincialism shaped the possibilities of winning the South for socialism, the national office eventually determined the best SPA local was one that was self-organized. Within a few short years, the party’s leading organizers in the region, Thomas Freeman, Max Wilk, and J.L. Fitts, each hailed from the South.<sup>15</sup>

A major consequence, however, of these “local peculiarities” was that the party was presented with a dualism it was never quite able to reconcile. In 1911, George Brewer accompanied Eugene Debs on a tour of the South and observed a section of the country gripped by extreme poverty and “pitiable ignorance among both whites and blacks.” Brewer attributed the region’s backwardness to “politicians and grafters [who] have had the [S]outh by the throat ever since the last gun was fired at Appomattox and the soldiers of the gray laid down their arms.” Brewer, like many voices in the party, maintained that the ills of capitalism and the South in particular, would be wiped out with the arrival of socialism. Such

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<sup>15</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, June 8, 1912; *International Socialist Review*, September, 1912.



a transformative schema, however, ignored the region's incomplete jump into industrialization as well as its explosive race politics and complicated class lines. Most significantly, the collectivist language that played so well within the party's union base seemed to have been in tension with the SPA's agrarian and petty bourgeois following. As Garin Burbank observed in his study of Oklahoma, "propertyless people are not necessarily proletarians working beside each other in great factories." To be sure, the SPA often struggled to finesse the language of collectivism and what such ideas might mean to small, independent farmers and producers in the South.

Alarmed at the level of agricultural concentration, not only in the South but throughout the nation, the SPA adopted a farmers program at the party's 1912 convention. As expected, the formulation and shaping of the convention's final report stirred lively debate over the question of land ownership and title. Southern delegates, especially M.L. Fritz of Mississippi and C.C. Allen of Florida, argued against the more radical proposals of confiscation and collectivization because such measures belonged to the "future commonwealth." Southern socialists instead called for the state to take over only land held out of use and in turn rent such holdings to landless farmers. Eventually, when the total rent paid equaled the value of the property the tenant would acquire the right of occupancy. Southerners were

equally adamant that the more ambiguous notions of “public” and “social” ownership replace any mention of “nationalization” of land, farm machinery, or transportation<sup>16</sup>

The positions socialists argued and debated that year anticipated a reawakened assertiveness by Southern farmers. In January 1913, the Florida Citrus Exchange withheld that season's fruit harvest from shipment north as an act of protest to the low prices they were offered for the crop.<sup>17</sup> Such withholding campaigns were an attempt to renew the largely unsuccessful tactics of the state Farmer's Unions and cotton producers a few years prior.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the impulse highlighted the sense of frustration that many southern farmers experienced despite assurances their grievances received a public hearing through the Wilson administration's support of rural tariff and credit demands. Within this whirlwind of dissent, the SPA began to take an active stance toward co-operation with farmers' movements. The Georgia Federation of Labor, under SPA member and federation president S.B. Marks's leadership, began to make overtures toward

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<sup>16</sup> *Third Party Presidential Nominating Conventions, Proceedings and Records, The Socialist Party National Convention, May 16, 1912*, microfilm edition, reel 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, Jan. 4, 1913.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Saloutas, *Farmer Movements in the South, 1865-1933* (Berkeley, 1960), 205, 212.

labor-farmer alliances. Max Wilk, the Georgia party's most committed organizer and the GFL's longtime representative to the Farmers' interest section of the state labor body, took the lead in orchestrating this cooperation.<sup>19</sup> Sensing the "harvest ripe" with Southern farmers prime for collective action, socialist in Tennessee, Mississippi, and North and South Carolina exerted considerable effort to harness farm protest into the fold of party doctrine and activity.<sup>20</sup>

Along the way, the SPA managed to attract a band of small farmers, field laborers, craft workers, and shop machinists as the rural South underwent a transition to a mature market economy. The party enjoyed a following in remote areas the People's Party had penetrated earlier. Deep into the piney woods of the Florida Panhandle and neighboring southern Alabama, socialist locals at Chipley, Bonifay, and Bay Minette, all lumber and turpentine towns, housed a strong sentiment from the rebellions of the 1880s and 1890s. Lonnie Weeks, leader of Florida's Populist Party and gubernatorial candidate in 1892, hailed from Bonifay. SPA locals appeared there in the subsequent years by harnessing the same populist sentiment that attracted men like S.P. Sayre, a cabinet maker and carpenter, who at

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<sup>19</sup> *Party Builder*, September 6, 27, 1913, March 7, 1914, October 18, 1913; *Macon Industrial Journal*, July 20, 1913.

<sup>20</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, December 26, 1908, August 2, 1913; *American Socialist*, December 5, 1914.



turns counted himself a republican, greenbacker, union laborer, populist, and finally socialist.

Chiple, named in honor of a railroad baron by the same name, sat at the crossroads of the Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad and for a time bustled with activity from its saw mills, lumber yards, corn and cotton fields, and pecan groves. Two major outside interests, the Southern Land and Timber Company and J.P. Williams Land Company, joined Sheriff C.G. Allen as owners of the vast majority of the prime acreage in and around the town. An active Board of Trade looked to cash in on the land grabbing and solicited local sellers of "homes, farms, and stock and timber lands." An SPA local formed, filling the vacuum for those felt squeezed by rural and economic isolation. Local organizers cited many more at-large members and sympathizers, but complained loudly about the barriers presented by the poll tax, intimidation, and other political disfranchisement efforts.<sup>21</sup> Bay Minette's socialists condemned the poll tax and residency requirements and were eager to forward their program of bringing "more power to localities," establishing a road tax on land, and limiting the use of the southern

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<sup>21</sup> Federal Writer's Project, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (New York, 1939), 445; *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 85; *Party Builder*, July 5, August 30, 1913, January 24, 1914.

institution of convict labor for public works projects with the “value of their labor paid to any dependents.”

Whether comprising new converts to the cause or old comrades, socialist locals began appearing in seemingly unlikely places throughout the rural South from Boonville, Mississippi, to Blue Ridge, Georgia, and from Decatur, Alabama, to Hastings, Florida. The SPA may not have overthrown Democratic authority, but in the small towns and villages of the South, agrarian socialists attempted to craft a pragmatic political critique and at times introduced a new arena of struggle. In south Georgia, northwest Alabama, coastal Carolina, the Tennessee mountains, and along the banks of the St. John's River, hotbeds of party activity emerged. Party locals tended to be as eclectic as the villages and cities in which they were founded.

As sand clay roads, highly capitalized river engineering projects, and an increasing number of rail lines linked the wiregrass country of south Georgia to outside markets, a correspondingly strong socialist campaign took hold.<sup>22</sup> Suffragists Mildred and Mary Hicks organized the Bainbridge local, which from 1917-1918 led the state's anti-war efforts. Waycross, Thomasville, and Tifton comrades infiltrated the machinist locals in the repair shops of the Atlantic Coast

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<sup>22</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, November 14, 1907, October 19, December 21, 1911.

Line, the Seaboard Air Line, and the Georgia Southern and Florida railroads. Valdosta claimed the distinction of having the first local chartered in Georgia, in 1902, followed by Colquitt, Moultrie and Tift.<sup>23</sup>

In Lawrence County, Alabama, “a traditional center of political insurgency,” the towns of Moulton and Spruce Pine, the latter with a population of only 50 in 1905, sprouted SPA locals. Prior to any socialist activity, Lawrence County had forty chapters of the Agricultural Wheel, and attempts to form a Union-Labor Party were noted in the late 1880s.<sup>24</sup> J.T. Dennis, a farmer and former Republican, formed a socialist local in Hanceville, Alabama, a way station for the surrounding countryside. The old unionist strongholds of the state also provided grist for the mill as voters elected socialist school trustees, justices of the peace, and village constables.<sup>25</sup> More organization took root in Cloverdale, home to a tannery located five miles northwest of Florence, and in Sterrett, a town on the

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<sup>23</sup> Reorganization of Bainbridge Socialists (typescript), Mildred Hicks Papers MS 77-243, Box 3, Folder 3, Special Collections Department, Woodruff Library, Emory University (EmU); Max Wilk to Carl Thompson, SPA/4; *Proceedings of the Georgia Federation of Labor, 1916*, Southern Labor Archives (SLA), Georgia State University; William Mailley to Robert Wright, Valdosta, Georgia, February 12, 1903, SPA/1; Mary Raoul Millis to Clarence Senior, June 18, 1932, Raoul Family Papers MS 548, EmU.

<sup>24</sup> Flynt, *Poor But Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, 246.

<sup>25</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, November 16, 23, 1912.



Central of Georgia Railroad. Its population of one hundred and fifty people found employment in "a lumber company, a bottling works, four general stores, [and] a cotton gin."<sup>26</sup>

Scattered throughout the South were small villages like Tracey City, near Chattanooga and site of a bloody convict labor riot in 1892. Socialists organized among the miners and non-company merchants there and elected Lee Bouldin to the city assessor's office.<sup>27</sup> Socialists in the Carolinas hailed from Raleigh, Greensboro, Aiken, Columbia and from the coastal low country of Georgetown and Aurora.<sup>28</sup> Over fifty chapters of the SPA dotted rural Florida from Pensacola to Key West. While the party's strength rested in Tampa and Jacksonville, members included tenant farmers in the tobacco and cotton regions to the north, timber workers in the piney woods of the Panhandle, physicians in Orange City, lawyers in Longwood, pineapple growers in Fort Pierce, cabinet makers in

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<sup>26</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America for 1914*, (Girard, Kansas, 1914) 9, 29; Alyce Billings Walker, ed., *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South*, (Originally compiled by the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, 1941, Revised 1975) 44, 243; W. Stuart Harris, *Alabama Place Names* (Huntsville, 1982), 154.

<sup>27</sup> *Appeal To Reason*, August 22, 1908; Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism In The United States* (New York, 1910), 283-84; Pete Daniel, "The Tennessee Convict War," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34 (Fall 1975): 273-292.

<sup>28</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 5, 21, 40, 61, 68.

Bonifay, and small businessmen along the developing Atlantic and Gulf coastlines.<sup>29</sup>

In hundreds of farming communities and satellite towns, socialists negotiated both the limitations and possibilities of rural life by creating new forms of social and economic organization. One such effort occurred in the southern Mississippi lowland town of State Line, just a stone's throw from the Alabama border. In 1911, roughly thirty socialists banded together to hold the title to 600 acres of land inside the limits of the Greene County line with the intention of establishing a non-profit, worker-controlled enterprise. An installment-based membership fee of \$100 was assessed and the group took over an existing store, making its tools and implements available to all co-operative workers.<sup>30</sup> Comrade George Coleman described the movement as "simple, voluntary cooperation, holding nothing in common with communism or with the old community plan." Rather, farming was to be done both "collectively and individually, to test which [was] the most satisfactory." All decision making was in the hands of "collective management," and the co-operative's officers, like Coleman and F.F. Clark, were

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<sup>29</sup> A.N. Jackson to Carl Thompson, May 27, 1913, SPA/4; *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 20, 30, 41; Miscellaneous correspondence regarding dues and subscriptions found in multiple issues of the *Party Builder*.

<sup>30</sup> *Appeal to Reason-California Edition*, September 9, 1911.

subject to recall. No stocks or bonds were issued and no wages paid, but rather “labor deposit checks” accounted for time served. All production was orchestrated for use value, not profit, notwithstanding the establishment of a fifteen percent “collective extension” and five percent educational and sick benefits fund.<sup>31</sup>

Socialist farmers in Lucknow, Alabama, Cayce, South Carolina, Kinderloo, Georgia, and Ruskin, Florida, founded similar co-operative stores and communal land buying schemes.<sup>32</sup> These ambitious applications of cooperative and communitarian efforts established both a vehicle and model to build an alternative economy based on reciprocal non-market relationships. Furthermore, such ventures became host centers for a socialist culture that included newspapers, debating societies, dances, picnics, and public lectures addressing political, social, and moral questions. Adorned with red banners, the Dixieland steamer gathered party members from Jacksonville, Orange Park, Palatka, and other towns up and down the St. John’s River and transported them to the frequent socialist picnics

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<sup>31</sup> *Appeal to Reason-California Edition*, July 8, September 9, 1911; *Appeal to Reason*, December 28, 1912.

<sup>32</sup> *The Co-Operative Consumer*, 4 (August, 1918), 123; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *A Socialist Utopia in the New South: The Ruskin Colonies of Tennessee and Georgia, 1894-1901* (Urbana, 1996), 161; *Florida Times Union*, April 25, 1909; Lori Robinson and Bill De Young, “Socialism in the Sunshine: The Roots of Ruskin, Florida,” *Tampa Bay History* (Spring Summer 1982), 5-20.



and fish fries held on the Reed Plantation co-operative of Green Cove Springs.<sup>33</sup>

Given the absence of real political democracy in the South, the party's cultural agenda was particularly important as it suggested that socialism was something more than voting and that self-organization marked a path of deliverance.

In challenging the social and economic underpinnings of the rural South, the Socialist party also unavoidably confronted "the Negro question." Although the SPA national executive committee had given greater priority to the organization of African Americans, "progressivism for whites only" subjected both black and white socialists in the South to the same racist and nativist appeals that plagued the Populists twenty years earlier.<sup>34</sup> Charges of "socialist race mixing" made organizing across race lines a dangerous proposition. Furthermore, the labor movement, where socialists had their greatest strength, remained institutionally suspicious of integrated unions and could offer little inspiration for challenging the status quo in southern race relations.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Florida Times Union*, March 26, 1906, May 25, 1908, April 25, 1909.

<sup>34</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 369-395.

<sup>35</sup> The most significant biracial organizing in the rural South took hold in the piney woods of northern Louisiana. See James Green, "The Brotherhood of Timber Workers, 1910-1913: A Radical Response to Industrial Capitalism in the Southern U.S.A." *Past and Present* 60 (August 1973): 161-200.

Internal racist opposition approximating a Jim Crow socialism compounded the party's difficulties as well. In 1905, the national executive committee refused to charter the Louisiana state party which called for separation of the races even as such a position ran counter to much of the activity of its own local organizers. To be sure, many socialists in the South like E.F. Andrews of Montgomery, Alabama, feared a "repetition of the terrible Reconstruction experience" if the party preached social equality.<sup>36</sup> Anti-corruption crusader, J.P. Marchant, editor of the *Chattahoochee Workman* and socialist mayor of Phenix City, Alabama, attacked the "competitive system" and challenged local elites and "their henchmen," but mirrored the racial positions of the Democrats and progressive reformers.<sup>37</sup> In a nasty letter exchange, Georgia socialist William Greene challenged the mayor's racism to which Marchant volunteered that he favored a "pure white society" and would support Democratic candidates before Republicans, i.e., the party of African Americans.<sup>38</sup> In such unlikely moments, the Socialist party provided a home for racists firebrands who, for either political or idiosyncratic reasons,

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<sup>36</sup> Eraste Vidrine, "Negro Locals," *International Socialist Review*, January, 1905; E.F. Andrews, "Socialism and the Negro," *International Socialist Review*, March 1905.

<sup>37</sup> *Phenix-Girard Journal*, September 11, 1909.

<sup>38</sup> *Phenix-Girard Journal*, September 15, 18, 1909, January 28, 1910.

rejected the Democrats but, restricted by the nuances of southern electoral politics, had little, if any, institutional alternative.

Many southern socialists resisted the old appeals to race hatred and chose instead to follow Eugene Debs' call to elevate the class struggle and obliterate the color line.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Freeman, Farmers' Alliance member, populist, and state secretary of the Alabama Socialist Party, called on socialists to organize black workers, and he invoked populism as a worthy model of racial cooperation.<sup>40</sup> The Socialist Party of Tennessee also took a strong stand on race. It declared that racial superiority had been "injected into the minds of white wage workers by the capitalist class to keep workers divided," and urged "negro workers, and those of other races, to unite with the Socialist party as the only avenue of abolishing wage slavery and the solution to the race question." Citing his own "duty to the colored race and the Socialist party," John Baxter, a former slave holder from Tullahoma, renounced his participation in the old regime and called on fellow socialists to rise above the region's race barriers.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Eugene V. Debs, "The Negro in the Class Struggle," *International Socialist Review*, November 1903; A.T. Cuzner, "The Negro or the Race Problem," *International Socialist Review*, November 1903.

<sup>40</sup> Philip Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans* (Westport, 1977), 241-42; *SPA Proceedings*, 1908.

<sup>41</sup> *International Socialist Review*, April 1904.



The SPA's efforts to contend with the South's racial politics revealed the complexities and mixed attitudes developed regarding black socialist membership. In different settings and at particular moments, southern white socialists alternately welcomed African American comrades in defiance of law and custom, capitulated to the region's racism and refused black membership, or attempted to strike a middle ground designating separate locals in accordance with Jim Crow. In Georgia, the state party declared itself "against Negro disfranchisement" during the 1906 gubernatorial campaign, and the party included black at-large members and an all black local near Waycross. J. Max Barber, editor of the Atlanta-based *Voice of the Negro*, called upon black readers of his journal to support the Socialist Party in the 1904 presidential campaign.<sup>42</sup> Mississippi's state secretary reported 150 black members organized into separate locals, however, because they were "not permitted to join white locals," and South Carolina's small party viewed it "unwise to allow negroes [sic] to join" due to extreme race prejudice throughout the state.<sup>43</sup> Florida and Tennessee were the two most active state bodies open to black membership, with both integrated or sizable segregated locals in both states.

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<sup>42</sup> *Voice of the Negro*, June 1904.

<sup>43</sup> Ida M. Raymond to Information Bureau of the Socialist Party, June 1913, SPA/5; Cresswell, "Red Mississippi: The State's Socialist Party, 1904-1920" 164; William Eberhard to Carl Thompson, Chicago, Illinois, May 15, 1913, SPA/4.

Historians of the Socialist Party have relied heavily on a 1913 survey of southern state parties conducted by the national office reach their conclusions about white southern socialists and the willingness to organize black members.<sup>44</sup> But a simple reading of state secretary reports ignores other important evidence and considerations. In a region keenly sensitive to local autonomy, most party activity ran through local chapters. Furthermore, a good deal of SPA activity in the South was shaped by local circumstances, attitudes, and politics, at times leaving state organizations peripheral to decision making and policy formation. Indeed, “hidden” from the formal record are some significant episodes of biracial socialist activity in the rural South.

In the Summer of 1913, the spark of socialism found dry grass along the shores of the St. John's River. In St. Augustine's municipal elections, party activists and black voters joined together to challenge that city's Democratic machinery, while in the nearby agricultural community of Hastings, African American farmers and farm hands pledged to the party in significant numbers. Down river, the towns of Longwood and Sanford elected SPA justices of the peace, and black and white workers jointly managed the Seminole Co-Operative Mercantile Exchange, a non-

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<sup>44</sup> James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York, 1967); David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London, 1994), 143.

profit, worker-owned resource to provide farmers in surrounding communities with an alternative market and means of credit.<sup>45</sup> In the nearby town of Longwood, W.R. Healey, justice of the peace and vice president of the Florida State Federation of Labor in 1903, organized black locals in Orlando, Longwood, and Ocala while serving as SPA state secretary.<sup>46</sup>

The small agricultural community of Hastings, Florida, developed by the Model Land Company, hosted perhaps the most ambitious SPA organizing effort aimed at black workers in 1913. The party local was organized and headed up by a local black woman and included thirty-four African American members who would also establish a “thriving co-operative store.” Florida state party secretary, A.N. Jackson, a carpenter from Jacksonville believed that strong racial prejudice in northeast Florida made blacks extremely suspicious of whites and that they would be more likely to join if recruited by “one of their own.” What factors account for the large membership is unclear, but evidence suggests that the same forces that pushed small white farmers off the land in and around Hastings were at play in

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<sup>45</sup> A.N. Jackson to National Secretary, May 27, 1913, SPA/4; *Party Builder*, August 23, October 25, December 13, 1913; *Sanford Herald*, September 2, 1913; *The Co-Operative Consumer*, 4 (August, 1918), 123.

<sup>46</sup> Foner, *American Socialism and Black Americans*, 131; *Report of the Secretary of State of Florida, 1909-1916*; *Proceedings of the Florida State Federation of Labor, 1915*.



drawing in black socialists. In 1903, C.L. Colee, a civil engineer employed by the Model Company, laid out a hundred and fifty acre tract of land subdivided into plots for buildings, streets, and parks. Small farms were sold and cleared, paving the way for “companies representing thousands of dollars of capital.” Valued at \$40 per acre, the land around Hastings was quickly converted into prime commercial farmland, anchored by an unlikely Irish potato crop. In an effort to provide a work force for these new farms and dispense with “transients” and “tramp” labor, Model Land established a “Negro settlement.” It would appear likely that the membership of the Hastings SPA local came from among the farm hands and tenants brought in to harvest this new land. Perhaps most telling in understanding the gravitation toward radical politics is the close proximity of Hastings to St. Augustine, where a series of events surely challenged the blueprint of southern social control.

When the oldest city in the United States held municipal elections in 1913, only forty-eight votes prevented a socialist victory. In a highly contested campaign, the socialists, led by the popular and influential David L. Dunham, challenged Democratic control in every ward in the city on a platform calling for municipal ownership and honest government. Democrat Amos Corbett's narrow victory sent chills through the ranks of his party. The “severe test” posed by the

SPA called into question the strength of the local Democrat organization and the continued effectiveness of its white primary.<sup>47</sup>

Ironically, when the *St. Augustine Record's* victory celebration editorial claimed that the Corbett administration was closely identified with the business community and old family structure of the city, that observation would have been equally applicable had the socialists won.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, the roster of local socialists reads like a virtual "who's who of St. Augustine families." Names like Speisseger, Manucy, Meitin, and Dunham ranked among the most respected names in the city's social and business community. The SPA's nominee for treasurer, T.J. Speisseger, came from an established family. His father, Thomas W. Speisseger, moved to St. Augustine from Charleston, South Carolina, after the Civil War and opened a successful general store.<sup>49</sup> Candido Meitin, president of the Meitin-Havanna Cigar Manufacturing Company, served as second ward alderman as part of a "Citizen's Ticket" from 1902-1903, and Edgar Manucy, socialist nominee for municipal judge, hailed from a prominent and pioneering family that produced one

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<sup>47</sup> *St. Augustine Record*, June 18, 1913.

<sup>48</sup> *St. Augustine Record*, June 18, 1913.

<sup>49</sup> "Speissegers in Business Over One-Hundred Years," *St. Augustine Evening Record*, January 18-19, 1968, clipping in Speisseger Family File, St. Augustine Historical Society (SHS).

of the town's most visible local historians who helped guide the St. Augustine Historical Society.<sup>50</sup>

The most intriguing socialist figure was David L. Dunham, who at the time his death in 1922, ranked “higher in the esteem and respect of his fellow citizens” than anybody in the city, according to historian George Chapin. Dunham's parents, Mary and David Ross Dunham, had settled in Florida in 1830 and the son spent his whole life in St. Augustine. At age fourteen, he worked as a railroad rodman on a surveyor crew, and in 1861, at age twenty, he enlisted in the Second Florida Regiment of the Confederacy. Dunham fought in fourteen battles and was wounded on three occasions. At the battle of Gettysburg, he was captured and held prisoner. Following the war, he returned to St. Augustine and served as a U.S. deputy marshal, then a circuit court clerk, spending thirty years in the county courthouse.<sup>51</sup> Dunham also tried a brief stint at farming, but not unlike his father,

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<sup>50</sup> *St. Augustine City Directory, 1911-1912*; *St. Augustine Evening Record*, June 21, 1911; Manucy Family File, SHS; Thomas Graham, “St. Augustine Historical Society, 1883-1983,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 64 (July 1985) 1-31. *Saint Augustine Weekly Record*, October 16, 1903; Meitin was defeated in the 1911 mayoral election by Democratic stalwart Dewitt Webb by a vote of 481-269; *St. Augustine Record*, June 20, 1911.

<sup>51</sup> Miscellaneous clippings from Dunham Vertical file, SHS; *St. Augustine Directory*, 1885-1886; Voter Registration Book, Ward No. 3, St. Augustine, Florida, 1916, SHS. Dunham's son, David R. Dunham, would later make a name for himself as one of the town's most prominent attorneys and co-founder of the St. Augustine Historical Society; George Chapin, *Florida Past, Present, and Future*,



who forty years earlier found citrus a risky long-term investment and abandoned the idea, he moved on to other more stable ventures. By 1916, the Dunham family entered the hotel business, operating the Dunham House which remains today as a city landmark. Like many of his comrades in the movement, his personal, familial, and social credentials were impeccable. In politics, however, he distinguished himself from the St. Augustine elite. Like most of his generation, he had been a life-long Democrat and remained loyal to that party. But in 1907, Dunham embraced the SPA as the only organization capable of alleviating society of the “political corruption” and ensure the “well being of the masses.”<sup>52</sup>

While party torch bearers such as Dunham and Speisseger came from prosperous and highly influential family backgrounds, the bulk of the local socialists remained firmly within the ranks of the city's working class. Among twenty-three party members identified, twelve worked as machinists, carpenters, and blacksmiths in the machine shops of Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad. Other occupations included a fisherman, barber, jeweler, painter, carpenter, and a police patrolman, Ephraim Lucas, who narrowly missed being elected chief of police in 1911. These individuals often exercised influence at their

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*1513-1913: 400 Years of War, Peace, and Industrial Development* (Chicago, 1914), np., photocopy in Dunham Vertical File, SHS.

<sup>52</sup> Chapin, *Florida Past, Present, and Future*, np (photocopy).

various work sites where, despite a fiercely anti-union atmosphere fostered by Henry Flagler and his supporters, craft unions in the city enjoyed a high level of organization dating back to the heyday of the Knights of Labor. By 1911, St. Augustine's trade unions included the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA), the Cigar Makers International Union (CMTU), and other locals of the painters, plasterers, plumbers, printing pressman, and typographers.<sup>53</sup>

What made St. Augustine's comrades one of the more intriguing groups of socialists in the southeast was their apparent willingness to confront racial, ethnic, and class barriers in a manner totally at odds with the region's political and social mores. St. Augustine functioned under a rigid hierarchy built on racial, ethnic, and religious codes. Historian David Colburn identifies four distinct groups as defining the social and political life of the city: the "old English," who traced their residency to pre-statehood; the Minorcan community; "workers," apparently

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<sup>53</sup> *St. Augustine Directory*, 1911-12, 1914, 1916, 1918; David Colburn, *Racial Change and Community in Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980* (Gainesville, 1991) 16; Jonathan Garlock, ed., *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, Connecticut, 1982) 50. On Henry Flagler's labor policy and workforce composition on the Florida East Coast Railway see Henry Marks, "Labor Problems of the Florida East Coast Railway From Homestead to Key West, 1905-1907," *Tequesta* 32 (1972): 28-33; and George E. Pozzetta, "A Padrone Looks At Florida: Labor Recruitment and The Florida East Coast Railway," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54 (July 1975): 74-84.



meaning working class whites; and African Americans. In at least two and possibly three of these categories, the social lines blurred. While Minorcan elites exercised considerable influence in the town, some members of that ethnic grouping could just as likely be included among wage laborers and craftsmen. Similarly, African Americans enjoyed a degree of political mobility and economic latitude vis-a-vis Minorcans that made social and political distinctions somewhat more tenuous. In religious matters, an adherence either to Catholicism or a Protestant faith often challenged clearly defined social categories. Consequently, race, religion, ethnicity, and class were somewhat intertwined in St. Augustine, often undermining consensus and facilitating political opposition. It would be a mistake, however, to paint the city as exceptional to the region. St. Augustine certainly should be included in the fold of the Solid South where Democratic hegemony characterized the St. John's River area of northeast Florida and dictated a strict racialized code of behavior. What political power African Americans could achieve had almost always been contested. The assassination of black city council member John Papino in 1902 testifies to the deadly opposition radicals or reformers often faced in their attempt to confront the color line.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Colburn, *Racial Change and Community in Crisis*, 13-21.



In a few remarkable instances, however, socialists challenged this code by directing their appeals and winning their greatest support from the town's fourth ward, a largely African-American community. In the elections of 1911 and 1913, an alliance of party stalwarts and African-American voters nearly brought the SPA to power. The socialists had made a concerted effort to capture the office of the mayor and chief of police by concentrating their campaign in the third and fourth wards. Many of the party's candidates came from the third ward, and a fair showing in that part of town combined with a fourth ward plurality offered a proper strategy for electoral victory. In virtually every contested position, the socialists won the fourth ward.<sup>55</sup> “[M]any of the colored voters are casting their ballots for the socialist candidates,” fumed the Democrat press during the 1911 campaign. The complaint seemed to confirm the SPA strategy to gain black support for its ticket.<sup>56</sup> In the two elections of 1911 and 1913, the “negro” fourth ward voted in favor of the socialist candidates by an almost two to one margin. Nevertheless, the *St. Augustine Record*'s observation that “qualified” African Americans voted against the white primary nominees reminds us that the effective

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<sup>55</sup> *St. Augustine Record*, June 20, 21, 1911, June 18, 1913.

<sup>56</sup> *St. Augustine Record*, June 20, 1911.

disfranchisement of many black voters may have made the critical difference in preventing a socialist electoral victory.<sup>57</sup>

The relative failure of the party as a whole to organize or forge common cause with African Americans in any significant degree, however, did not always result solely from race baiting or the racism of white socialists. In many cases, the cause was black indifference and loyalty to the Republican Party. Tennessee's secretary expressed the difficulties the party faced as the "majority of negroes are stand pat Republicans." To be sure, the pressure on African Americans to hold the Republican line in the South undercut the already delicate political positioning of socialists. Regardless of the motives behind black electoral support of socialist candidates and participation in the co-operative schemes, biracial political coalitions did exist in defiance of Jim Crow. If such modest efforts by the SPA to engage in biracial, social, and political experiments failed to undermine Democratic authority, episodes such as these can broaden our understanding of how individuals may have imagined a political culture as an alternative to the one-party South.

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<sup>57</sup> *St. Augustine Record*, June 21, 1911, June 18, 1913.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GULF COAST SOCIALISTS: TOWARD THE MAKING OF A NEW SOUTH

*This is the age in which hills can look down  
upon the mountains.*

Jose Marti  
"El Poema de Niagara," 1883

From the New Orleans waterfront to the Atlantic and Caribbean gateway of Key West, the Gulf Coastal plain represented one of the most active zones of socialist activity from 1907 to 1916. There socialists would enjoy a degree of community organizing, electoral success and political autonomy that largely escaped them in the Black Belt, the upper reaches of the Piedmont, and in the urban industrializing zones of the South. In spite of the relative neglect exhibited by the SPA's national leadership during this period, over twenty-five locals dotted the coastline and at least five towns elected socialist majorities to public office. Situated between the major port cities of the Gulf were a string of small towns with traditional economies that in the early 1900s fell under siege to large aggregates of outside capital. In response, skilled workers from the lower middle class rallied to a kind of home-grown socialism that was neither modernistic nor traditional, but rather a blend of past and present policies aimed at preserving a



way of life rooted in localistic small business. Gulf socialism did not derive from abstract ideology or dogma, but rather from the promise to protect ordinary people from the disruptions of capitalism and help them achieve a better life.

By the turn-of-the-century the Gulf Coast had become increasingly linked to the outside world. Tampa, Mobile, New Orleans, and Pensacola had emerged as important port cities of international economic significance propelled by tobacco, sugar cane, timber, and a burgeoning shipping industry. United Fruit's steady diet of banana boats from Central America, timber from the western part of Louisiana, and sugar cane from the lowland parishes created a constant bustle along the New Orleans waterfront. Similarly, Mobile and Pensacola both served as launching pads for Panhandle timber, naval stores, tobacco, cotton, and corn destined for such far off markets as Hamburg, Germany.<sup>1</sup>

Commercial steamers like the *Capella* on which British journalist H.M. Tomlinson made his home for two years were a constant presence along the Gulf waters. Crisscrossing the Gulf, the Caribbean, and the ports of South and Central America Tomlinson observed the admixture of economic and social activity where sea and shore met. "Strangulated" by the fumes of sulphur Tomlinson experienced Tampa as a "noisy city, large, hasty, makeshift standing of depots, railway sidings,

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<sup>1</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, January 23, 1905.

cigar factories, wharves, and huge elevators. A town spontaneous, unexpected and complete, with a hurrying population in its sidewalks, pushing to secure a foothold in life.”

The Gulf was opening for business at a moment when the South experienced the tightening grip of one-party rule, where Jim Crow held hostage people's freedom and aspirations, and where land grabbing and industrialization challenged local control. In this way, developing markets and the South's own radical traditions blended together to foster a socialist critique of capitalism. But Gulf Coast socialists in drawing on that same myriad of social and economic influences that H.M. Tomlinson observed looked beyond the region for ideological inspiration and political solutions. In the Gulf, commerce, politics, environment, even ideas about race quite often revealed themselves in a rather different light. Unlike the upper reaches of the American South, a certain international character dictated the social and political landscape of the region. In many cases class politics could be forged out of cultural traditions shaped by ethnicity and language. Clearly the Gulf presented a decidedly different look than much of the South. Irish, Italians, and Creoles contributed to the makeup of New Orleans whereas the “immigrant world” of Ybor City included Italian, Spanish, and Cubans. In and around the Mobile Bay area Irish, Scandinavian, and German enclaves flourished

and Key West's Caribbean influence could be seen through the sizeable Cuban and West Indian communities. Even "Anglo" towns such as Gulfport, Florida, were originally established by Bahamian "Conchs" and Florida "Crackers," hardly the stuff of the Cavalier myth.

These immigrant communities not only brought certain counter-hegemonic political traditions to the shores of the Gulf. They also transplanted to the South the nationalist struggles of their homelands. The war for Cuban independence witnessed workers volunteering for the fight en masse and the formation of over forty patriotic clubs on the heels of Jose Marti's arrival in 1891.<sup>2</sup> In addition to organizing workers around certain political causes these struggles also provided for some socialists a means to understand southern conditions. Louisiana radical Covington Hall devised a southern nationalism that saw the region as "a colony, which, like Ireland, needed national liberation." Similarly, George D. Brewer saw southerners turned into "industrial slaves ever since the last gun was fired at Appomattox and the soldiers of the grey laid down their arms." But whereas Hall and Brewer's critiques may have been steeped in Old South trappings and

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<sup>2</sup> With equal vigor, Tampa's Italian labor radicals organized around anti-fascist activity in the 1920s. See Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*, (Urbana, 1987) 79-81.



Confederate romanticism, other socialist organizers like Giovanni Vaccaro, J.L. Fitts, and Max Wilk fashioned an internationalism out of these foundations.<sup>3</sup>

While these racial, ethnic and economic boundaries set the Gulf Coast apart from its other southern neighbors in important ways these same features often produced particularly strong political reactions. To be sure, the maintenance of machine dominance and the correspondingly "high rate of lynchings" and disfranchisement kept the region securely within the Democratic fold.<sup>4</sup> This, coupled with the social and economic influence of populism, shared organizational patterns established by the Knights, and electoral limitations dictated by southern politics helped to define and shape a particular brand of socialism. Indeed, Gulf Coast party members were perhaps best situated of any of the South's socialist to interpret the range of post-populist alternatives.

Beginning in the late 1880s the Gulf Coast played host to a great variety of social, economic, and political experiments that ran counter to the New South Creed and would provide fertile ground for SPA organizing efforts. The single-tax community experiment in Fairhope, Alabama, the Oyster Man's Co-operative, the

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<sup>3</sup> David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (London, 1994), 154-55; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World*, 123-124, 146; *Party Builder*, November 20, 1912; *Appeal to Reason-California Edition*, March 11, 1911.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 156, 298-99.

Florida Co-operative Colony and the Koreshan Unity of Cyrus Teed betrayed a cast of characters that at turns sought to express their respective social visions through New South boosterism, utopian enterprise, and radical millenarianism. Similarly, within that range of alternatives were some that featured socialism as the driving ideology, such as the socialist colony at Ruskin, Florida, and the organizationally linked labor and electoral politics of the SPA. Viewed together these stories help reveal another South that challenged the primacy of one-party, Democratic rule, the command of capital and, by extension, white supremacy. A glimpse into this world can help us learn more about how southern socialists forged these tensions into an authentic political critique informed by their own New South.<sup>5</sup>

Area socialists inherited a pattern of political opposition that reached back to the Knights of Labor. In Mobile, Knight office seekers were elected to numerous local positions in 1887. The city included several locals as did Battles Wharf, located on the Eastern side of the Bay just a few miles south of Fairhope.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Gaston, *The Women of Fairhope* (Athens, 1984); Paul and Blance Aylea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954* (Tuscaloosa, 1956); William Warren Rodgers, *Outposts on the Gulf: Saint George Island and Appalachicola From Early Exploration to World War II*, (Pensacola, 1986); Elliott Mackle, "Cyrus Teed and the Lee County Elections of 1906," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, [], 1-18; Lori Roberts and Bill De Young, "Socialism in the Sunshine: The Roots of Ruskin, Florida," *Tampa Bay History* 4 (Spring/Summer 1982): 5-20; *Manufacturers' Record*, July 25, 1907, December 28, 1912.

Further inland both black and white turpentine workers at Bay Minette, Citronelle, and Perdido joined the order. To the west Biloxi hosted aggressive Knight's of Labor locals and down shore in Florida, lumber and mill workers, stevedores, and carpenters formed local assemblies in Millview, Molino, and Pensacola; workers in Tampa and Ybor City drifted into the labor organization shortly after the arrival of the cigar making industry in the mid-1880s and Key West numbered some seven locals operating in the tobacco trades.<sup>6</sup>

But with the agrarian turn to politics in the early 1890s Knight activity along the Gulf Coast gave way to populist campaigns and third partyism. Along the coast in Pensacola local socialist leaders George Smith, an "old soldier," and E.O. Spare, a bookkeeper and salesman, were both former Republicans converted after reading the Socialist Party press.<sup>7</sup> New Orleans native Jopse Hosli and Joseph Richardson, an electrical engineer converted to socialism after hearing Big Bill Haywood speak were Democrats in their previous political lives.<sup>8</sup> And Sumner Rose, the grand man of Mississippi socialism, who published an anti-fusion

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<sup>6</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 229-230; McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 43-44, 66-67; Garlock, ed., *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor*, 3, 7-8, 48-50.

<sup>7</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 89-91; *Party Builder*, March 14, 1914.

<sup>8</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 48, 82.



populist newspaper in Biloxi, the *Grander Age*, later redefined his own politics as well as the papers along socialist lines. Rose, who became one of the SPA's most important southern organizers, was elected as a city alderman on the socialist ticket in 1910, riding the popular support of the local party's campaign against the town's draconian vagrancy law.<sup>9</sup>

Collectively these stories suggest a range of anti-Democratic tendencies existed within the Gulf Coast region. For many dissenters the years following the populist uprising were lean ones; disfranchisement campaigns and race based and anti-labor terror cast its ugly shadow, making political organizing difficult at best, dangerous in most cases. For southerners like J.J. Howard, who had passed through both the Democratic and Republican parties on his road to socialism, joining a third party dedicated to the ballot box, in a region hostile to dissident politics, required a tremendous leap of faith. Adding to these problems of course were the extreme economic hardships suffered by farmers, laborers, and many professionals. During the 1890s the north Florida and south Alabama countryside and dependent ports experienced the uncertainties of a rather fragile cotton market, the devastating freeze that swept the citrus crop in 1894, and the Panic of 1893-95.

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<sup>9</sup> Cresswell, "Grassroots Radicalism in the Magnolia State: Mississippi's Socialist Movement at the Local Level, 1910-1919," *Labor History* 33 (Winter 1992), 90-93; *Appeal to Reason-California Edition*, February 25, 1911.

Southerners responded in different ways to these political and economic challenges. While many retreated into the relative safety of a non-political life, others embraced almost any outlet that might challenge southern elites and the party that maintained their dominance. Positioned as it was as an alternative to both the destruction of the old order and the uncertainties of the new, the Socialist Party offered to some southerners a new approach. By interpreting their own economic and political experiences in the region through the lens of socialism, Gulf Coast southerners sought to claim a stake in their own history.

If 1912, as some historians have argued, marked a watershed year for American socialism, then the Gulf Coast matched this energy with its own vibrancy and political culture. On the Eastern side of Mobile Bay, in the town of Fairhope, citizens elected socialist J.S. Johnson mayor and Baldwin County sported four active locals, all fielding a complete ticket in the 1912 fall elections. From Escatawpa, Mississippi to Gulfport, Florida SPA candidates had made modest breakthroughs in the period 1910-1915 over Democratic control of local electoral machinery.<sup>10</sup> Addressing the received wisdom that Woodrow Wilson's progressive posture, patronage, and ties to the region might diminish radical

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<sup>10</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 19; *Appeal to Reason*, November 23, 1912.

aspirations the *Birmingham Labor Advocate* declared that socialism in the South was growing by "leaps and bounds."

In 1913, Mobile, Alabama police arrested machinist William M. Doyle on a trumped up charge of violating a city ordinance regulating public speaking. Though first acquitted, the irascible socialist was subsequently fined \$10 after it was determined that the presiding judge at the hearing had settled the case by simply tossing a coin. Certainly the arrest of a socialist speaker on the streets of Mobile elicited considerably less emotion than the J.L. Fitts and John M. Ray episodes in Atlanta and Birmingham some ten years earlier. Indeed, the event unfolded as a mere sidebar to the everyday politics of a region that had been set in motion over the previous two decades. But while the reaction of city authorities to socialist activity illustrated a desire to control the flow of dissident activity, the rather casual judicial response also highlighted both the smugness of the Democrats as well as the presence radicalism assumed in the region's political culture.

Organized within a Carpenter's local in 1904, Mobile's Socialist Party routinely held meetings throughout the Bay area, agitated among workers in the city's shipyards and fielded a municipal ticket each election. It also hosted Eugene Debs's presidential campaign appearance at the Monroe Park Theatre in September



1912. Doyle's arrest, however, brought into sharper focus a year of weekly street meetings conducted to confront the "questions of the day" and challenge citizens to consider the meaning of the South's rapid development.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Doyle's plight might be easily dismissed as simply another example of incidental southern justice were it not for a series of parallel meetings that year of another Mobile group with its own blueprint for transforming the region.

Founded in Mobile in 1907 the Gulf Coast Development Association (GCDA) sought to develop the area by brokering land deals and encouraging migration from Apalachicola Bay, Florida, to Pearl River, Mississippi, a "stretch of land that reverberates with its own emptiness." Led by G. Grosvener Dawe and William R. Snyder the GCDA formed sub-committees on railroads, electric railways, fisheries, manufacturing and trade, town improvement, education, immigration, and internal improvement legislation.<sup>12</sup> With the stated aim of "developing resources and populating the territory" the GCDA hoped to function

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<sup>11</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, March 22, December 6, 1913; *Fairhope Courier*, September 6, 1912; "Lecture Trip Schedule and Materials," Vertical File, Eugene V. Debs Papers, Indiana State University, Special Collections. Doyle would later resurface in Birmingham labor circles and was author of the Labor Council's controversial anti-war resolution in 1917.

<sup>12</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, August 8, 15, 22, 1907. The Southern Cities Corporation would replace the GDCA in 1912, *Manufacturers' Record*, November 7, 1912.

as something of a clearing house for outside investment. Similar development alliances such as the Gulf Coast Lumber Association and the Gulf Coast Land Association followed quickly on the heels of the GCDA.

The virginal territory that was the Gulf clearly inspired dreams on a grand scale for visionaries of all stripes. Economic pioneers saw in the land unlimited potential for vast fortunes, particularly with the Gulf's numerous bays, naturally deep harbors and its close proximity to the shipping lanes of Cuba, Latin America, and the Atlantic. Even a casual reading of the *Manufacturer's Record*, reveals that many investors had hedged their bets on the strategic importance of Gulf in anticipation of the completion of the Panama Canal and the expected boon it was bound to deliver to southern ports and commerce.<sup>13</sup> Some capitalists, driven by the slightly more altruistic aims of agro-business saw land colonies, demonstration farms, and model corporate villages as particularly suited for the region, even as it often meant dissociating small growers from their land. Still others, including socialists, labor radicals, followers of Henry George, and various utopian schemers were energized by the belief that a "new" South, free from the "general rottenness

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<sup>13</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, September 12, 26, 1907, November 21, December 19, 1912

and corruption of the old parties,” might be established on this frontier.<sup>14</sup> Some socialists saw deliverance in self-organization that aimed to harness the areas growth for collective prosperity. This clash of visions, played out as a lively affair, ably demonstrates the tensions and conflicts that shaped and defined the Gulf coastal plain in the early 1900s.

Socialist organizers pinned their hopes of any dramatic political breakthroughs in the Gulf's two most dynamic cities, New Orleans and Tampa. These twin pillars of the Gulf held much in common; intricate racial politics that could frustrate Jim Crow's designs, a recent history of labor strife, and a shared economic basis of tobacco and shipping. Animated by the political flashpoints of biracial unionism along the wharves and levees of the Crescent City and the radical labor culture of Tampa's Italian and Latin cigar makers, militant workers had sporadically challenged the South's conservative power brokers and its color line. Socialists, of course, rightfully saw an opportunity to link these same struggles with the Party's aspirations.

Tampa served as the political anchor for Bay area socialists tied to the labor movement with peripheral activity in the socialist town of Gulfport, the Ruskin colony, and among the farmer-socialists of Manatee county. The City of Tampa

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<sup>14</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, July 25, 1907, November 14, 21, 28, 1912; *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 41.



possessed all the ingredients to garner NEC favor and J.L. Fitts, one of the party's leading organizers, spent considerable time in the area. Tampa Bay's economic activity, of course, centered on cigar making in the factories of Ybor City and West Tampa. Ybor City, founded as a company town in 1885 as the brainchild of Spanish businessmen Vincente Martinez Ybor and Ignacio Haya, marked the culmination of an exhaustive search up and down the Gulf Coast, including visits and surveys to Galveston, Mobile, and Pensacola, for a suitable environment to implement their corporate vision. Coupled with the Plant railroad system, a humid climate favorably suited for the storage of tobacco leaf, and an eager local board of trade Ybor City and West Tampa quickly supplanted Key West, New York, and Philadelphia as the center of cigar culture. The factories that quickly dotted the local landscape would be filled with immigrant workers that brought with them not only their labor, but also radical ideas about work and organization.<sup>15</sup>

As recent work on Ybor City has already shown, a dynamic radical work culture took hold in that part of Florida. A combination of radicals, native-born whites and blacks, and Italian and Cuban immigrants, gave Tampa the largest concentration of socialist workers in the entire southeast. The city became a battleground between the radical ideologies of the Industrial Workers of the

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<sup>15</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World*, 64-70

World, the socialists, the anarchists and the syndicalists on the one hand and the harsh and often deadly reaction of the conservative, elite establishment, on the other. The 1910 lynching of two striking cigar workers, Angelo Albano and Castenge Ficarrotta, and the 1912 beating and jailing of SP candidates Franklin Pimbley, a deputy sheriff, and C.C. Allen at election day polling stations reveal a pattern of anti-labor and anti-radical vigilantism that continued in Tampa well into the 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

Though tobacco was clearly king in Tampa, central Florida phosphate, lumber, citrus, and cattle also moved across the state and through the city's port. A sampling of the port's weekly registry illustrates its tremendous amount of international commerce. The British steamship *Ilford* loaded 3,000 tons of phosphate was destined for Hamburg, Germany via Savannah as the ship *Wanderer* set off for Dublin; Steamships from Italy and Norway passed through the port, returning from Honduras. The schooner *Persis A. Colwell* left for Philadelphia, Havana, and Boston with a cargo of cyprus lumber. The organizational requirements of this international trade fell into the hands of men

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<sup>16</sup> Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 97-142; Robert Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South: Tampa, 1882-1936*, (Gainesville), 1985, esp. 31-54, 96-97; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, June 5, 1912; Janet Snyder Matthews, "'He has carried his life in his own hands': The Sarasota Assassination Society of 1884," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 58 (July 1979), 1-21.

like J.W. Morris, Lloyd's agent for the Tampa district and the foreign counsels of France, Britain, Italy, and Cuba who helped orchestrate an export market of phosphate and pine lumber for such far off locals of Japan, Liverpool and Plymouth, England, Cette, France, and Antwerp.<sup>17</sup> In addition, seafood, sponges, palmetto-brushes, and even pineapples and sugar cane from nearby Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades passed through Tampa in route to foreign and other domestic markets. There on the docks, in the shipyards and at the rail depots of the city port Party members like William Crawford, Albert Thomas, Joseph Parsons, and Walter Murrell, who nearly missed being elected county sheriff in 1912, found work as ship builders, freight agents, and engineers.<sup>18</sup>

Tampa's socialist community mirrored the complexity of that city's ethnic and social makeup. Italians, Cubans, and native-born American interpreted labor and political radicalism through their own cultural lens. Leftist publications, street meetings, lectures, debates, and ideological positioning reflected the vast array of attitudes, beliefs, and organizational schemes running through Tampa's various neighborhoods, particularly Ybor City and West Tampa. Whereas syndicalists and

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<sup>17</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, August 5, 12, 19, 1912.

<sup>18</sup> *Tampa City Directory*, 1915, 1917, 1918; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 5, November 8, 1908, September 15, November 6, 7, 1912; *Artisan*, June 23, 1917.



anarchists tended to congregate within the Italian and Latin communities from which they were born, Socialist Party members came from a wide cross section of the Bay area's population. Italians, Latins, and Anglos alike attended local party meetings. And while party locals tended to be organized along these ethnic lines Tampa's radicals found common ground in their critique of the conditions in the factories and what they viewed as an inherently corrupt political system.<sup>19</sup>

New Orleans, too played a similar role as something of a way station for radicals from the Louisiana countryside and nearby Mississippi. But whereas Tampa owed much of this heritage to syndicalist, anarchist, and other left-wing tendencies popularly associated with immigrant workers, the strength of the Democratic Ring, the sustained appeal of the Republican Party to black workers, and the destructive infighting among left and right factions of the Socialist Party stifled the movement in city politics. While, in large measure, the strength of the

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<sup>19</sup> For an outstanding study of Afro-Cuban radicalism in Tampa see Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (Verso, 1998), 232-57; On Tampa radicalism see Durward Long, "La Resistencia: Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History* 6 (Fall 1965), 193-213; George Pozzetta, "Immigrants and Radicals in Tampa, Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (January 1979), 337-48; Pozzetta, "Alerta Tabaqueros! Tampa's Striking Cigar Workers," *Tampa Bay History* 3 (Fall/Winter 1981), 19-29; Nancy Hewitt, "The Voice of Virile Labor: Labor Militancy, Community Solidarity, and Gender Identity among Tampa's Latin Workers, 1880-1921," in Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, 1991), 142-167.

SPA in Louisiana could be found in the old Populist strongholds of the hill parishes and among the lumber workers of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers, New Orleans remained an important arena of struggle for socialist organizers.<sup>20</sup> Covington Hall, the colorful wobbly, poet, labor agitator, editor of the *Lumberjack* and *Voice of the People*, and national secretary of the United Sons of Confederate Veterans described in his unpublished *Labor Struggles in the Deep South* the rich battleground New Orleans became in the late 1890s and early 1900s.<sup>21</sup> The Marine Transport Workers, IWW, the SLP, the SPA, and militants within the AFL such as

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<sup>20</sup> James Green, "The Brotherhood of Timber Workers, 1910-1913: A Radical Response to Industrial Capitalism in the Southern U.S.A.," *Past and Present* 60 (1973), 176-95; Merl Reed, "Lumberjacks and Longshoremen: The IWW in Louisiana," *Labor History* 13 (Winter 1972), 41-59; Grady McWhiney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Early Twentieth Century: A Study of Rustic Radicalism," *Journal of Southern History* 20 (1954), 315-336; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 87-88, 185-86.

<sup>21</sup> Covington Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South," (Unpublished Manuscript, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library), 137; On Hall see David Roediger, "'Gaining a Hearing for Black-White Unity: Covington Hall and the Complexities of Race, Gender, and Class,'" *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working-Class History* (London, 1994), 127-180; Roediger, "Covington Hall: The Poetry and Politics of Southern Nationalism and Labour Radicalism," *History Workshop Journal* 19 (Spring 1985), [ ]; James Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 209-16, 223-25; Merl Reed, "Lumberjacks and Longshoremen: The IWW in Louisiana," *Labor History* 13 (Winter 1972), 41-59.

the Brewery Workers all vied for recognition as the leading left-wing voice in confronting both the city's ruling elite and conservative trade unionists.<sup>22</sup>

While the urban bookends of Tampa and New Orleans, marked as they were by sharp labor conflict, southern racial politics, and experiments in biracial unionism, proved to be the most explosive sites of Gulf Coast Party activity it was in the remote, largely rural coastal areas that some of the most creative efforts at crafting a new southern political identity frequently emerged. Removed from the strikes, riots, and lynchings that so dramatically animate the history of New Orleans and Tampa were many less sensational, but equally important episodes of southern attempts at building an alternative in the tiny coastal villages, rural outposts, and largely forgotten world of the Gulf of Mexico shoreline.

While the lion's share of the Party dues paying members could be found in Tampa and New Orleans a detour to the Gulf's more remote outposts like Garniers, Cedar Key, or Bagdad uncover men like J.J. Howard who found meaning in the socialist appeal, even as they were largely removed from the reach of the Party's

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<sup>22</sup> Hall, "Labor Struggles in the Deep South," 54-56; Grady McWhiney, "Louisiana Socialists in the Early Twentieth Century," 320-24; On labor politics in New Orleans Eric Arnesen's study stands out for its complex treatment of biracial unionism and machine politics, *Eric Arnesen, Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Urbana, 1994).



concerted organizing efforts.<sup>23</sup> Howard and his comrades in the surrounding island communities of Cayo Costa and Pineland fed their political appetites by reading the *Appeal to Reason* as well as locally produced socialist newsheets like Tampa's *Beacon*, the *Advance News*, and the *Cayo Costa Courier*.<sup>24</sup> A native of North Carolina, Howard resettled to the Gulf Coast of Florida and joined the Party in 1911 at the age of fifty-nine. In Florida he found work as a fish house laborer on the tiny island of Bokelia, situated at the mouth of the Tarpon rich waters of Charlotte Harbor and Gasparilla Sound. Similar grueling and unrewarding work took place in the fish and oyster shucking houses, the boat yards, the palmetto-brush workshops, the cigar and box factories, or on the docks.<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, for many socialists on the Gulf Coast political identity and ideology were forged to some extent by tremendously difficult environmental features operating as, what historian Walter Rodney called in his study of Guyana,

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<sup>23</sup> William Mailley to E.B. Sanders, Charlotte Harbor, April 14, 1903; Mailley to H.F. Thompson, Goodland, February 13, 1903, SPA/3; *Party Builder*, September 13, 1913, January 3, March 14, 1914.

<sup>24</sup> *Who's Who In Socialist America*, 48-49; Federal Writer's Project, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (New York, 1939), 384, 398, 427; Frank Oppel and Tony Meisel, ed., *Tales of Old Florida* (Secaucus, 1987), 12; "Socialist Periodical List," Vertical File, Eugene V. Debs Papers, Special Collections Department, Indiana State University; *Party Builder*, June 28, 1913.

<sup>25</sup> J.C. Privett, *First Annual Report of the State Labor Inspector*, 1914 (Tallahassee, Florida), 14-15, 22-23; *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 48-49.

“internal constraints on [working-class] development”.<sup>26</sup> In a world connected by river steamboats and treacherous waterways, the Florida Gulf coast and its immediate agricultural interior presented both possibilities and limitations for visionaries of all stripes—boosters, adventurers, utopian thinkers, rural romantics. Three communities, that had to literally be dredged and carved out of the wilderness, the socialist municipality of Gulfport, Florida, the single-tax colony of Fairhope, Alabama, and the agriculturally rich expanse of Manatee County, Florida, reveal a political and economic path that some southerners chose to follow at the turn of the century.

In 1884, Hamilton Disston, a man of great wealth and vision from Philadelphia, set out to build his dream city on the southern tip of Hillsborough County, Florida. Disston owned thousands of acres of land in the area and his connection to northern capital and its local agents, George Gandy and H. Walter Fuller, led him to believe that construction of a newly planned railroad would almost certainly extend to Disston City and help create a boom town that he

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Rodney, *A History of the Guyanese Working People, 1881-1905* (Baltimore, 1981), 1-51; Other works which explore the relationships of physical environment, systems of labor, and class formation include Charles Joyner, *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana, 1984), 41-90; Charles Van Onselen, *New Babylon: Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*; John Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labor Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907-1951* (Madison, 1989), 31-57, 130-52.

promoted throughout the United States and overseas.<sup>27</sup> Disston had reason to be confident. Three years earlier he had purchased over four million acres of state land for a mere million dollars in an attempt by Governor William Bloxham's administration to clear the indebtedness of the graft-ridden Internal Improvement Fund.<sup>28</sup> Modest as it may have been by comparison, Disston's vision collapsed, however, as soon as the first railroad ties were instead diverted in the direction of nearby St. Petersburg, effectively rendering land around Disston City as peripheral to the burgeoning growth of the Tampa Bay area.<sup>29</sup>

Disston's friend, Frank Davis, made a brief attempt, in 1906, to develop Disston City as a home for Civil War veterans. Despite Davis's best efforts, the cool response from former soldiers made the towns name, Veteran City, seem

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<sup>27</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, December 26, 1912.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Bonaparte Broward: Florida's Fighting Democrat* (Gainesville, 1950), 56-57.

<sup>29</sup> Gulfport Historical Society, *Our Story of Gulfport, Florida*, (Gulfport, 1985) 25; For background on Disston and his ventures see Pat Dodson, "Hamilton Disston's St. Cloud Sugar Plantation, 1887-1901," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 49 (April 1971), 356-69; Edward C. Williamson, *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age, 1877-1893*, (Gainesville, 1976), 73-78; T. Frederick Davis, "The Disston Land Purchase," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 17 (January 1939), 200-210; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World*, 46-47; For a closer look at west Florida's development see Raymond Arsenault and Gary Mormino, "From Dixie to Dreamland: Demographic and Cultural Change in Florida, 1880-1980," in Randall Miller and George Pozzetta, ed., *Shades of the Sunbelt: Essays on Ethnicity, Race, and the Urban South* (Boca Raton), 143-60.



strangely inappropriate. The unincorporated area, however, benefitted from great natural resources and an expanded regional economy promised to attract new investors and residents. Indeed, like so many foiled speculative ventures of the New South period failure itself often produced a community reaction that paradoxically might have challenged the very philosophy behind these schemes. Such was the case with Gulfport. On October 12, 1910, the City of Gulfport was incorporated on the site of Disston City. Quite unlike Hamilton Disston's plan to extend the New South of Henry Flagler and William Chipley to the Florida Gulf Coast, the founders of Gulfport embraced an entirely different vision. Of those residents who met near Boca Ciega Bay at the casino located on the dock of the Electric Railroad Company, and voted for incorporation, several, including the elected mayor and city council, were members of the Socialist Party.<sup>30</sup>

A village of ship builders and fisherman, Gulfport embodied a Florida frontier spirit where "sea smart Conchs met wood wise crackers." First mayor Elmer E. Wintersgill and his brother Lester had resettled to Gulfport from Jacksonville in 1907. Ship builders by trade, the brothers invested in a variety of schemes from farming and real estate to operating a boat service that carried

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<sup>30</sup> *Our Story of Gulfport*, 17, 25, 79; *Appeal To Reason*, November 23, 1912; *St. Petersburg Daily Times*, November 8, 1912; Ray F. Robbins, "The Socialist Party in Florida, 1900-1916," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Samford University, 1971) 51.

passengers to the nearby barrier island of Pass-A-Grill. Other local Party members included city Alderman Joshua White, a native Virginian, also a ship builder and owner of a grocery store, and council member Henry Slaughter, born in Madison, Florida, a boatman and farmer. Elisha Weathers, born in Augusta, Georgia settled in Disston City in 1901. In between, he performed as a tightrope walker and magician in a traveling circus, fought in Cuba during the Spanish-American War, and worked as a millwright and carpenter.

While the immediate world of Gulfport shaped the local Party's interpretation of socialism, developments in nearby Tampa Bay certainly helped give these ideas special relevance. Increasingly, the town's pastoral ideals were challenged as it struggled with the pressures brought on by a real estate boom in nearby St. Petersburg and commercial manufacturing and shipping in the Tampa Bay area as a whole.<sup>31</sup> Gulfport had existed in its various municipal forms as a small sea-side village whose roads were paved with crushed oyster shells and houses were built on stilts for easy mobility atop river barges. Furthermore, craft workers and truck farmers there drove the largely self-sufficient local economy.

Against this backdrop Gulfport's socialists recognized the area's transformation and did not resist area growth out-of-hand, but rather sought to

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<sup>31</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, December 26, 1912.

embrace it as a source for their prosperity. As historian Gary Fink found among Atlanta's trade unionists, workers could be “city builders, too.” But certainly civic boosterism in the hands of socialist architects assumed a different quality. The Wintersgill administration oversaw a greatly enlarged municipal water works, expansion of the trolley lines to connect the town to St. Petersburg, and the establishment of a Citizen's Ice and Cold storage.<sup>32</sup> Management of the town's growth relied on the rather pliant notion that some investment was better than others. Enthusiasm for progress was restricted to the kind of growth that promised more wealth secured in the hands of Gulfport citizens.

Ultimately, Gulfport's socialists solved the tensions between tradition and modernization by embracing both. While the class politics of nearby Tampa undoubtedly influenced ideological position on certain issues, Gulfport largely escaped such struggles. Instead, a particular understanding of socialism served as a protective device from the perceived threat of industrialization, unchecked growth, and “outside” influence. Gulfport’s economic engine of shipbuilding and fishing rested in the hands of the very citizens who pledged their political faith in the ideology of socialism. As their own bosses this village of shipbuilders saw in socialism a means to maintain their independence from the corrupting influence of

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<sup>32</sup> *Our Story of Gulfport*, 17-25.



capitalism. Theirs was a socialism dedicated to maintaining an existing order not overthrowing one.

While Gulfport's leaders sought to achieve an often uneasy blend of socialism and controlled growth, the "radicals" of Fairhope, Alabama pursued a strikingly different path. Indeed, at the heart of the town's political origins was a philosophy that rejected the kind of speculative growth the Gulfport's leaders were forced to confront and at times embraced. Nestled on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay followers of the English theorist Henry George founded the tiny village of Fairhope as a single-tax colony.<sup>33</sup> The single-tax origins of the town undoubtedly offered something of a haven for Southern dissenters of diverse ideological leanings, including socialists in the Mobile Bay area who gravitated toward the colony and would help shape its character and history. In the surrounding countryside of Baldwin county, where Satsuma oranges, cattle raising, and turpentine production formed the backbone of economic activity, socialist locals were active in Bay Minette and the Scandinavian community of Silverhill.<sup>34</sup> Baldwin county socialists would routinely host social events such as community

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Gaston, *The Women of Fairhope* (Athens, Georgia, 1984); Blance and Paul Alyea, *Fairhope: The Story of a Single Tax Colony, 1894-1954* (Tuscaloosa, 1956).

<sup>34</sup> *Fairhope Courier*, January 10, 17, 1913, February 14, 1913.

fish fries, dances, and socials. And when Eugene Debs made his occasional electoral swings through Mobile, the local party organization hired out a special boat to take enthusiasts across the bay to hear their leader speak.<sup>35</sup>

While the relationship between single-taxers and socialists were cordial there existed significant differences. During the mayoral campaign of 1912 the *Fairhope Courier* took the Socialist Party to task for injecting “partisan politics” into the contest. While socialist candidate J.F. Johnson was a member of Fairhope’s board of directors, some feared a shift in the balance of local power toward the SP under a Johnson administration. Believing that the socialists might wrestle control of the Colony's affairs into the town of Fairhope's jurisdiction, single-taxers nominated a “citizens ticket” led by I.M. Pilcher. Though Johnson was elected, he appeared to have possessed little in his own political faith that pitted the single-tax and socialist doctrines against one another.

One of Johnson's first acts was the purchase of a citizen's steamer, the *Apollo*, to replace the burned out *General Lee*. Among the most important undertakings, however, was the continued development of the People's Railroad, a publicly owned and cooperatively managed line that proposed to connect the town's wharf to the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, some fourteen miles away.

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<sup>35</sup> *Fairhope Courier*, October 11, 18, November 1, 1912; January 10, February 7, 14, December 12, 1913.

Nearby Silverhill and Robertsedale also contributed to this effort, which offered citizens “membership” at \$5 and the right to vote for the Railroad's board of directors. Indeed, during the first few months his socialist administration's handling of municipal rent, wharf receipts, and new building, were marked by a “harmony between the town and colony.”

If Gulfport and Fairhope represented insular communities shielded from the politics of the region than the good folks of Manatee County, Florida, offered a dramatic episode for socialist advance in the South, where from 1906 to 1908 Andrew Jackson Pettigrew represented the district in the Florida House as a member of the Socialist Party of America (SPA). When Pettigrew arrived in Manatee County in 1883, one observer described it as “a region perpetually breathed upon by the airs from Araby,” i.e., a tropical paradise, and as frontier of unlimited possibilities for both capital and labor.<sup>36</sup> Bradenton like the rest of the state, during the Gilded Age, experienced a massive influx of northern capital. Henry Flagler, William Chipley, Hamilton Disston and Henry B. Plant had begun to build financial empires in a state that seemed to present few barriers to the pursuit of personal fortune. Manatee County, however, remained largely on the periphery of such development, removed as it was from the nascent

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<sup>36</sup> George M. Barbour, *Florida For Tourists, Invalids and Settlers*, (New York, 1882), 11.



industrialization under way in nearby Tampa. The shipping and timber industries of northern Florida and the cigar factories of Tampa lay a world away from the Manatee County “frontier” where commercial fishing and a budding citrus industry breathed economic life into the towns of Bradentown [Bradenton], Sarasota, and Terra Ceia.

Born in Illinois in 1845, to a South Carolinian father and a mother from Kentucky, Pettigrew and his family migrated to Kansas shortly before the Civil War where they remained until making a final move to Florida, in part out of concern for the health of son John.<sup>37</sup> Once in Bradentown, Pettigrew first worked as a common laborer, or as a nett-man, in an orange grove and used his schooner “Cecilia” to open a small freight hauling enterprise while his Swedish-born wife, Christine, set up a home-operated mail order business.<sup>38</sup> Together they eventually accumulated enough savings to purchase forty acres of land on Warner's Bayou along the banks of Tampa Bay, where he built a home, “Carmel,” cleared the overgrowth of the densely thick Florida fauna, and created a citrus nursery,

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<sup>37</sup> *13<sup>th</sup> Census of the United States, 1910; Census of the State of Florida, Manatee County, 1885.*

<sup>38</sup> *Census of the State of Florida, Manatee County, 1885; 13<sup>th</sup> Census, 1910; Manatee River Journal, December 20, 1917; Joe Warner, The Singing River: A History of The People, Places and Events Along The Manatee River, (Bradenton, Florida, 1986), 10.*

described by a as a neighbor as a “perfectly cultivated citrus grove of clean and vigorous growing trees.” There he began experimenting with varieties of fruit rumored to be unsuitable for the area. Pettigrew's grandson later recounted with some pride how A.J. had successfully developed a blue plum and a sand peach apparently so delicious that he “actually made money [on them].” All told, he could boast of having developed over sixty varieties of fruit, which twice earned him first place at the annual State Fair in Tampa in 1905 and 1906.<sup>39</sup> Certainly Pettigrew's success garnered him the respect and confidence of his peers in the business community. In addition to lengthy stints with the Manatee County Orange Growers Association and the Florida Horticultural Society, he was also elected President of the county Board of Trade in 1889.<sup>40</sup> But if A.J. Pettigrew won respect by working hard and living in much the same manner as his Bradenton neighbors, he certainly embraced a far different political creed that rejected their routine acquiescence to the Democratic Party. Indeed, Pettigrew, who certainly would have been remembered as one of the county's more successful nurserymen,

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<sup>39</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 17, December 15, 1905, November 16, 23, 1906, October 18, 1907.

<sup>40</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, June 27, August 25, September 6, 1889, May 1, 1903.

joined the Socialist Party and left a far more complex legacy of both accomplishment and failure.

The same year that Pettigrew's citrus nursery delivered the prize at the state fair, Bradenton socialists enjoyed perhaps their finest hour with Pettigrew's defeat of Democrat John Graham in the state elections of 1906.<sup>41</sup> Manatee County's election of A.J. Pettigrew to the state legislature seemed unusual given the Democratic Party's grip on electoral machinery, but even within the context of socialist politics the victory was something of an oddity. Manatee socialists had built a respectable organization in the years leading up to Pettigrew's victory. Having elected a street commissioner, justice of the peace, former county surveyor, and with board members of the local growers association among the party faithful, Manatee socialists had a track record of public service that gave them confidence in their program and prospects.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, local socialists had engineered several municipal campaigns prior to the big push in 1906. Pettigrew in

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<sup>41</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, December 7, 1906.

<sup>42</sup> For a look at the founding membership, their occupations and social position within Manatee County see Pamela Gibson, "The Practical Dreamers: The Founders of The Socialist Party in Manatee County," Florida, 1904, Unpublished Typescript, 1989 (Manatee County Public Library); *Manatee River Journal*, November 16, 1906, May 3, 1907; *Report of the Secretary of State of Florida, 1907-1908*, (Tallahassee, 1908), 87; *City Directory of Bradentown, 1916-1917*; *Manatee General Directory, 1897*.



his run for the legislature in 1904 lost to A.J. Cornwell but secured majorities in three local precincts, Manatee, Sandy and Venice.<sup>43</sup>

But Manatee County socialists functioned in a world seemingly hostile to socialist political activity. Earlier, while area farmers occasionally organized around certain grievances such as increased rail and canal freight rates populism apparently had not penetrated the area to any significant degree. Notwithstanding the important role secret societies often played in small southern towns the county lacked any significant organizational history or labor militancy save for a small local of the hod carriers and carpenters' and joiners' unions. A manufacturing base was virtually non-existent, and small independent farmers, not tenants, generally worked the land. In addition, the county had no significant immigrant population and blacks were largely disfranchised.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the party in Manatee

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<sup>43</sup> Gibson, "The Practical Dreamers," 34; *Manatee River Journal*, November 18, 1904.

<sup>44</sup> The Florida Secretary of State listed out of a total population of 8,530, 2,110 males of voting age for Manatee County in 1905: 1505 white and 605 African Americans. Of these 160 whites and 28 black voters were listed as foreign born. Not surprisingly, the two precincts with the highest percentage of African Americans of voting age had correspondingly the lowest percentage of ballots cast per voter. The Palmetto precinct with a 49% black voting age population counted a 28% voting rate. Only 18% of Ellenton's (61% majority black) voters cast their ballots. Pettigrew won both of these districts... *Report of the Secretary of State, 1905-1906: Appendix Extracts From the Third Census of Florida taken 1905* (Tallahassee, 1906); *Manatee River Journal*, November 9, 1906.

County lacked any of the elements supposedly needed for a socialist electoral victory: an industrial proletariat, displaced agricultural workers, and immigrant or racial alliances informed by radicalism. Indeed, no readily identifiable group or coalition could be harnessed to challenge Democratic dominance. Yet Pettigrew's 1906 election victory over Democrat John Graham, a well respected Bradenton capitalist, indicates that the party appealed to a much broader constituency than the standard historiographical profile of industrial worker or intellectual.

Socialist Party leaders, of course, largely rested their hopes on an industrial working-class, but Manatee County's SPA membership, and indeed the state Party as a whole, seemed to have come largely from the ranks of skilled and semi-skilled craftsmen, farmers, professionals, and small businessmen like A.J. Pettigrew. While socialists hoped to stir up a militancy among organized workers, a significant number of its members remained unaffected by the debates raging within the Party over the best tactics to capture the labor movement. To some extent, Manatee socialists were less concerned with abolishing wage-slavery than escaping from its reach. Indeed, the *Chicago Daily Socialist's* declaration that Pettigrew had been elected by the "intelligent farmers" of Manatee County seems for the most part a fair representation.<sup>45</sup> To be sure, socialism in Bradenton

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<sup>45</sup> *Chicago Daily Socialist*, November 13, 1906.

occupied a world far removed from Mable Dodge's famous New York salons. Instead, the life stories and political education of Manatee Party members read like stock characters from a Jack London novel with an almost classic frontier-like mythology serving as the source of their socialist convictions.

Local party chairman Furman Chairs Whitaker's life story provides a useful thread for the area's history. In the early 1850s his father, one of the original pioneers arrived in what was then known as the Sarasota district, acquired several acres of cheap land and purchased two slaves. While the district did not possess a large slave population it remained a "Confederate stronghold." Born in 1856 on the shores of the Manatee River at Branch's Fort, site of a terrible outbreak of Yellow Fever in 1887-1888, Whitaker knew tragedy and triumph, privilege and ostracism. As a youngster the family home burned to the ground during the Third Seminole War and shortly thereafter Whitaker survived a hunting accident with the help of Jeffrey Bolding, the family's former slave. In and around these events he married Nellie Abbe, the daughter of Sarasota's first postmaster, attended and graduated from Hahneman Medical College in Chicago, and built a home on Manatee River complete with what was rumored to have been the first telephone line on Florida's west coast.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gibson, "The Practical Dreamers," 17, 23.



But Whitaker's story also further reveals a political component that betrays a life more complex than the simple tale of a rugged individual on the frontier. Shortly after returning to Bradenton from Chicago Whitaker established a family medical practice and quite possibly became involved in gun running to Key West during the early stages of the Cuban independence struggle.<sup>47</sup> But Whitaker recognized that horticulture, "the great source of wealth," provided the vehicle for the ambitious of Manatee County. He slowly divested himself of his medical practice in favor of a twelve acre orange grove and sixty acres of "excellent virgin hammock" on the island of Terra Ceia.<sup>48</sup> These connections drew Whitaker into local politics as he became involved with the county Democrats, principally through the Board of Trade, and the local Fruit and Vegetable Grower's Association.<sup>49</sup>

Another prominent socialist, Axel Broberg, a Swede rumored to be the son of a nobleman, was active in Democratic circles since 1888 when he was elected county surveyor. As Broberg went about plotting the land development, he rubbed

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<sup>47</sup> Gibson, "The Practical Dreamers," 21, 23-24; Joe Warner, *The Singing River: A History of the People, Places, and Events Along the Manatee River*, (Bradenton, 1991), 90-92.

<sup>48</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 16, 1906.

<sup>49</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, July 8, 1904, May 3, 1907.

elbows with the area's largest growers as well as those just starting out in the business. Similarly, socialists James Felts, William Drumwright, and Ernest Kretschmar, owned modest amounts of land. The balance of the socialist local included blacksmiths, bee keepers, boat builders, and carpenters. Pettigrew came from this circle that owned their own tools, a modest amount of land, possessed a means of transport, typically schooners, for access to markets, and held minor elected positions in local politics, and more importantly in the Growers Association and Board of Trade.

If socialists constituted a significant part of the local political and economic leadership it would be misleading to suggest Manatee Democrats conceded any ground on account of this presence. Only a week before Pettigrew's election a rock throwing mob attacked a socialist meeting at Terra Ceia, and Democrats were widely suspected of election day improprieties.<sup>50</sup> While one Florida historian explains Pettigrew's success as merely a protest vote attributed to an anti-Graham campaign orchestrated by muckraker Claude L'Engle of the Tallahassee *Sun*, this assessment ignores other more important evidence.<sup>51</sup> John Graham enjoyed the support of three newspapers, the *Bradentown Herald*, the *Manatee Record*, and the

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<sup>50</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 2, 9, 14, 23, 1906.

<sup>51</sup> William T. Cash, *History of the Democratic Party in Florida* (Tallahassee, 1936), 121; Robbins, "The Socialist Party in Florida," 27.

*Manatee River Journal*, while Pettigrew drew votes largely from the outlying citrus growing and cattle raising areas of Manatee County. Graham won majorities in both Bradenton and Sarasota, the two largest districts, but Pettigrew pieced together a victory with support from the island community of Terra Ceia, opposite river from Bradenton and home to some of the areas most productive groves, and other rural precincts of Ellenton, Palmetto, Mitchellsville, Oak Hill.<sup>52</sup> That L'Engle's hostile editorials carried great weight within political circles is certain, but the notion that the Tallahassee *Sun*, a newspaper published some three-hundred miles to the north, could single-handily influence Manatee County's voting behavior seems improbable. L'Engle's own self-congratulatory writings on the subject have done little to detract from that myth.<sup>53</sup>

More important to Pettigrew's success were the concerns of farmers, ranchers, and small businessmen that their livelihood may have been adversely affected by "progressive boosters" and land speculators such as John Graham, H.

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<sup>52</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 9, 16, 23, 1906; *Manufacturers' Record*, December 26, 1912.

<sup>53</sup> *The Sun* (Tallahassee), November 24, 1906; *Manatee River Journal*, November 2, 9, 1906; on Claude L'Engle see Joel Webb Eastman, "Claude L'Engle, Florida Muckraker," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 45 (January 1967), 243-52.



Walter Fuller, and A.F. Wyman.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, socialist political ascendancy arrived in opposition to this emerging class of developers and in the midst of a surge in Manatee County's population, which more than doubled between 1900 and 1910, jumping from 4,663 to 9,550.<sup>55</sup> The population boom reflected a sea change in the Manatee's economic direction. As large land-holding companies proceeded with "colonization" work throughout the Florida west coast and as the state's Internal Improvement Fund sought to raise revenue through the sale of top grade land at bargain prices, large local growers led by Fuller, president of the Board of Trade and Wyman, president of the local Grower's association moved to advance their political and economic agenda. The county Democrats, Board of Trade, and Grower's Association pursued efforts to expand the rail lines, widen the canals and open-up Manatee for business.<sup>56</sup>

Furman Whitaker maintained a seat on the Board of Trade, but by 1906 socialist's like Broberg and Pettigrew lost their position at the table of local power and its attendant political patronage.<sup>57</sup> In this respect, Garin Burbank and James

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<sup>54</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 16, December 18, 1906.

<sup>55</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, December 26, 1912; *Manatee River Journal*, November 17, 1910.

<sup>56</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, July 18, 1907, December 26, 1912.

<sup>57</sup> *Manatee River Journal*, November 16, December 7, 1906, May 3, 1907.

Green's respective studies of Oklahoma socialism which articulate a "gospel of the land" and its radicalizing potential are instructive. Pettigrew and his followers, like the farmers of the Oklahoma countryside and the populists of the 1890s, may not have directly experienced the encroachment of industrial capitalism, but they could look across Tampa Bay to that expanding urban area and see a potential threat to their way of life. Socialism to Manatee's citrus farmers and craftsmen meant a kind of anti-monopoly, a way to protect their own land, labor and status from the control of large capital and outside interests.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, third parties and sometimes the Democrats fulfilled the role of an anti-monopoly force, but this was decidedly not the case in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and particularly in the South. In some respects the SPA's goals closely mirrored the demands of the populist movement a decade earlier, but the collectivist language and focus of their vision cast a creative blend of socialism and other radical traditions. Submitting the party platform to the 1904 Florida SP convention in Orlando, Pettigrew quoted Thomas Jefferson on the nature and abuse of power before declaring "monopolies and the private ownership of industry unendurable."

Manatee socialists sought to build a new political model on the "frontier," in which collective prosperity and individualism went hand in hand and where all

citizens shared in the benefits of “pure democracy.” Their political platform called for “abolishing the wage system, substituting private ownership of machinery and all means of production and distribution with majority rule,” and popular management of “all things which people depend on for living.” To borrow a phrase from historian Richard Judd, Manatee socialist's wished to claim “an island of authority in a sea of bourgeois power.”

If Pettigrew's election gave the Manatee County socialists some hope of reclaiming Eden, his two years in Tallahassee, despite some progressive achievements, most certainly revealed the limits of electoral politics. The candidate stood alone in the state legislature, facing the contempt and skepticism of a “yellow dog” media such as the *Kissimmee Valley Gazette*, which confidently predicted Pettigrew would “find it a hard matter to get any of the iridescent dreams of his impossible party enacted into law.” Cognizant of the fact that the cooperative commonwealth would not arrive in Florida during his tenure, Pettigrew pursued what essentially amounted to a reformist agenda, winning him the support of his old friend Claude L'Engle. Several local studies of socialist municipal administrations have shown that the radical road is often paved with compromise, and Pettigrew must have found himself in an even more precarious



position than fellow socialists in Milwaukee, Schenectady, or even Gulfport, Florida where, at least, a cast of supporters existed to help initiate reforms.<sup>58</sup>

Undaunted by the overwhelming challenge, Pettigrew entered the 1907 legislative session with a bold and ambitious plan to “advance the interests of the people with direct legislation.” In a session pre-occupied with Governor Napoleon Broward's proposal to drain the Everglades and render it as “fertile as the Nile” and a corruption scandal involving the Internal Improvement Fund, Pettigrew took an active role in the proceedings.<sup>59</sup> He introduced resolutions that reflected the Socialist Party's national program such as the direct election of U.S. senators by the people and a national income tax, but these proposals in their journey from committee to committee brought forth little comment from fellow representatives. Nevertheless, the lonely socialist from Bradenton caused quite a stir when he offered a bill to radically restructure the jury system. Pettigrew proposed that legal

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<sup>58</sup> Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities*, (Port Washington, New York, 1975); Richard Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany, 1989); Melvyn Dubofsky, “Success and Failure of Socialism in New York City, 1900-1918: A Case Study,” *Labor History* 9 (Fall 1968) 361-375; Sally M. Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920*, (Westport, 1973).

<sup>59</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, July 18, October 31, November 14, 1907; Samuel Proctor, *Napoleon Broward: Florida's Fighting Democrat*, (Gainesville, 1950). For coverage of the legislative session see issues of the *Sun* April 1-May 23, 1907.

verdicts be rendered by a majority vote: on a jury of twelve, nine members in agreement would be sufficient to render a legal verdict, while a jury of six would require four votes.<sup>60</sup> The proposal received the support of political watchdog Claude L'Engle, who called the bill a “different and good idea” and the logical “extension of the democratic theory of majority rule.”

In the same spirit, although probably considerably more constitutional, Pettigrew pushed for a popular system of initiative and referendum that surprisingly gained wide support but lacked the necessary three-fourths majority to pass the house. He reserved his most animated and memorable moment, however, for a debate on child labor laws. During arguments Pettigrew took to the floor and without uttering a single word imitated a boy in a cigar factory gasping for fresh air, as astonished house members looked on. His unusual pantomime performance apparently had its desired affect as the house passed the proposed bill by a vote of forty-four to seven.<sup>61</sup>

Pettigrew's time in Tallahassee undoubtedly advanced the cause of certain reform interests, including his support of child labor laws, temperance initiatives and open government, placing him securely in the fold of what Bruce Stave calls

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<sup>60</sup> *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Session of 1907*, (Tallahassee, Florida, 1908) 449, 591, 727, 900, 1285.

<sup>61</sup> *Morning Sun*, May 26, 1907.

“socialism as progressivism.” In 1908 Manatee socialists would again back Pettigrew in his campaign for governor against Arthur Gilchrist as he received about six percent of the vote and four years later when he made a unsuccessful bid for State Commissioner of Agriculture.<sup>62</sup> What alternative course might there have been for Florida's lone socialist representative is open for speculation. But while Pettigrew struggled to advance a reform agenda in Tallahassee, his fellow socialists in the trade-union movement were busy capturing leadership positions in several important unions. Hailing from Manatee County, Pettigrew took perhaps the only avenue to power available, but within the labor movement, socialists won elections that they could never duplicate in the political arena. That socialism had to operate on two fronts demonstrates not only the intransigence of Democratic control but the recognition by socialists themselves that the road to power passed through difficult terrain.

From the late 1890s until the outbreak of World War I renegade street speakers, mutual aid organizers, militant unionists, and elected officials together provided the groundwork for imagining and realizing a new South. That “Jimmy Higgins” attempted to translate the struggles of the Gulf Coast along Socialist

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<sup>62</sup> Ric A. Kabat, “Everybody Votes For Gilchrist: The Florida Gubernatorial Campaign of 1908,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 67 (October 1988), 184-203; *Report of the Secretary of State of Florida*, 1909, 1912-1913.



Party lines is certain, but the relative neglect and misreading of southern politics by the national leadership severely limited the Party's fortunes. In the Gulf, like the rest of the South, reliance on the ballot box to advance socialism, severely handicapped the movement. The few instances where socialists managed to overcome disfranchisement, the poll tax, and other Democratic electoral engineering, while remarkable and important to remember, suggest more about class forces in those communities than any significant challenge to the one-party South.

Despite the fate of earlier insurgent movements the Party's understanding of southern politics seemed frozen in the heyday of populism, guided by the belief that a poor Georgia farmer and a Cuban cigar maker merely had to cast the same ballot to effect change. Gulf Coast socialists knew better. So, while they campaigned vigorously for Eugene Debs as well as their own local candidates they also recognized the growing influence of northern and international capital. The playing field had become increasingly complicated as new powerful figures in the region assumed their place aside racist demagogues and old line Bourbons.

To be fair, the Party viewed its mission in the South as largely educational as it attempted to build a national following, but the range of radical cultures that existed throughout the Gulf presented an unrealized potential for advancement and

growth. While the Party co-existed and occasionally found common ground with other more non-statist forms of socialism the lack of a unifying principle to bring together and support these local resistance movements proved costly. At the very least, that many SPA members existed on what Carlos Schwantes has in another context called a “wage-workers' frontier” should have alerted the Party to consider alternative means of organization.<sup>63</sup>

For some, however, the local successes and international character of Gulf Coast socialist activity hinted at a means for the Party to assume a significant role in the politics of the New South. If socialists couldn't dramatically alter the face of electoral politics, they could try and direct their energy at the engine driving the system. So while an unprecedented rise of mills, mines and factories fueled the New South experience an equally profound change was taking place in the workers who tended these same machines.

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<sup>63</sup> Carlos Schwantes, The Concept of the Wagerworkers' Frontier: A Framework for Future Research, *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (January 1987), 39-56.

## CHAPTER IV

### **“WE MUST HANG TOGETHER OR WE'LL HANG SEPARATELY:” THE SOCIALIST PARTY AND SOUTHERN WORKERS**

*Iron sharpeneth iron*

Proverbs 27:17

Working people in the New South have so often been painted by the broad brush stroke of conservatism and acquiescence that the phrase “cheap, docile labor” has been thoroughly implanted in the psyche of students of southern history. The underlying assumption regarding southern workers has been to dismiss them as somehow uninterested hillbillies, unable to embrace politics or at best conservative and incapable of self-organization of the workplace. While many historians have recently challenged notions of southern distinctiveness and explored the militant and often bloody struggles to establish southern unionism, few have examined or conceded any socialist presence.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Erik Olssen's

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<sup>1</sup> In 1978 Melton McLaurin correctly observed that labor historians “virtually ignored the South.” His book on the Knights of Labor was instrumental in opening up an area that has since developed into a major sub-field. See Melton McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South* (Westport, Connecticut, 1978); Two recent edited collections showcase the range of scholarship exploring southern labor history, Robert Zeiger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, (Knoxville, 1991); Gary Fink and Merl Reed, ed., *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa, 1994).



contention that “in all regions *but the South*” socialist and radical working class coalitions took hold is indicative of the prevailing assumptions regarding the region and its workers.<sup>2</sup> In the South, however, the Socialist Party's construction of an alternative political culture found its greatest success in the trade union movement and by the turn of the century, southern workers in several important occupations embraced the SPA as a vehicle for industrial and political deliverance.

The SPA exercised considerable influence in the region, particularly among unions of carpenters, machinists, and miners and in the central labor unions and trade federations of Tampa, Birmingham, Jacksonville, Augusta, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. Socialist workers and organizers were active participants in the Pensacola and Augusta street car strikes of 1908 and 1912 respectively, the 1908 miner's strike in Alabama, the 1913 building trades strike in Birmingham, and the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill strike of 1914, to name but a few.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, throughout

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<sup>2</sup> [italics added] Erik Olssen, “The Case of the Socialist Party That Failed, or Further Reflections on an American Dream,” *Labor History* 29 (Fall 1988): 416-49.

<sup>3</sup> Wayne Flint, “Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 43 (April 1965), 315-32; Gary Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike of 1914-1915: Espionage, Labor Conflict, and New South Industrial Relations* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1993); Richard Straw, “The Collapse of Biracial Unionism: The Alabama Coal Strike of 1908,” *Alabama Historical Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1975), 92-114; *Appeal to Reason*, August 8, October 24, 1908; *Journal of Labor*, October 4, 11, 1912, June 5, 12, 1914; *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, May 23, 30, 1914; *Augusta Chronicle*, September 26, 27, 28, 29, 1912.

the region Party members were elected to union leadership positions, introduced socialist resolutions in local, state, and national forums, and called for the organization of the unskilled. They also urged greater cooperation between labor and farmers, favored the unionization of black workers, and advocated municipal ownership. They generally helped to redefine and shape southern workers militancy and political philosophy. That a significant number of southern trade-unionists embraced socialism signaled an important shift in the political economy and an increased identification of the Party as a legitimate vehicle for resistance. On the heels of intensified disfranchisement, anti-democratic terror, and single party consolidation, the southern-wing of the Socialist party accomplished in the trade union movement what it largely could not achieve through traditional political avenues.

Between 1903 to 1918 southern Party members captured over thirty leadership positions in national, state, and local AFL bodies. Yet standard accounts of the Socialist party have long suggested only in Illinois and Pennsylvania did socialists enjoy significant control over AFL state federations. Furthermore, such a scenario portrays the Northeast, Midwest, and parts of the far West as the only regions in which the SPA enjoyed any legitimate hearing among workers. The failure to recognize southern socialists' presence and success at

“boring from within” the AFL not only reinforces notions of southern labor's timidity, or even exceptionalism, but also omits an important chapter in the party's larger history as well.<sup>4</sup>

In Georgia, SPA members S.B. Marks and L.P. Marquardt held the presidency of the State Federation of Labor consecutively from 1911 to 1917. These two men, together with Jerome Jones, *Journal of Labor* editor and Samuel Gompers loyalist, became the most influential figures in the Georgia labor movement. A printing tradesman and native of Gainesville, Georgia, Marks led the Atlanta Federation of Trades (AFT) and Pressmen's Local #10. In 1916 he began a twenty-six year career as vice president of the International Printing Pressmen and Assistants' Union, serving until his death in 1942.<sup>5</sup> Marquardt's activity in Atlanta labor circles spanned over thirty years and included stints as president of the GFL,

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<sup>4</sup> Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912*, 312-34; Philip S. Foner, *The History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. 4: The Policies and Practices of the American Federation of Labor, 1900-1909*, (New York, 1964), 367-92; David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (New York, 1955); Howard Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1953); For a debate which helps frame some of the arguments presented in these works see John H.M. Laslett, “Socialism and American Trade Unionism,” and Philip S. Foner, “Comment,” in John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Failure of a Dream*, 200-251.

<sup>5</sup> *Party Builder*, August 23, October 25, 1913; *Atlanta Constitution*, December 15, 1942; Minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting of the Atlanta Labor Temple, July 29, 1916, Records of The Atlanta Labor Temple Association, Box 30, Folder 2, SLA; *Savannah Labor Herald*, April 16, 1915.



AFT, and the Atlanta tailors' union. During his tenure as GFL president, Marquardt strongly denounced Georgia Governor Joseph M. Brown's anti-labor policies, promoted greater cooperation with the state Farmers Union, and advocated the formation of a Georgia Labor Party.<sup>6</sup>

The Augusta SPA local was led by Max Wilk, a short and slender man with blue eyes and gray hair, affectionately referred to as "Our Max" by friends and co-workers. As one of the original members of the state party he was responsible for bringing socialist organizer and dramatic orator J.L. Fitts to Atlanta in 1903. Wilk edited the *Augusta Labor Review*, a journal professing an openly socialist position and exercising considerable influence within the city's Federation of Trades, a body in which "nearly all the officials belonged to the Socialist local." Besides his occupational activities as a jeweler, truck farmer and editor, Wilk became one of the Georgia Federation's chief organizers, serving as delegate to the Farmers Union, and regularly representing the state at the annual AFL national convention. In 1912, the Socialist Party's National Executive Committee decided Wilk was sufficiently important and influential to be sent on a two month, thirty-city

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<sup>6</sup> *Journal of Labor*, October 23, 1914; *Savannah Labor Herald*, April 18, 1913; *Atlanta Constitution*, April 9, 1935; Mercer Evans, "The History of the Organized Labor Movement in Georgia," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1929, 217-18; *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the Georgia Federation of Labor*, 1916, SLA.

organizing and speaking tour across the South as a participant in the party's lyceum lecture series.<sup>7</sup> Under Marks' and Marquardt's leadership, and with Wilk's tireless campaigning, the GFL assumed, at the very least, a rhetorical posture of left-wing unionism. Material support for strikes increased, organization of the unskilled received greater attention, and the forging of political alliances with farmers proceeded. In addition, resolutions calling for nationalization of railroads and utilities were endorsed.<sup>8</sup> By 1916, the Georgia labor movement functioned "essentially [as] a political organization" that harbored a range of ideas reflecting progressive, democratic, socialist, and laborite philosophies.

Socialists in Tennessee also featured prominently in the trade unions. In 1910 Jacob Forwalter, a socialist carpenter, served as Chattanooga's delegate to the Tennessee Federation of Labor, a body that declared as its primary objective the "emancipation of the laborer from the bonds of wage slavery." Tennessee's SPA had particular success among carpenters and printers in Chattanooga, miners in

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<sup>7</sup> Max Wilk, World War I Draft Registration Card, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group 163; *Journal of Labor*, February 28, 1913; *Party Builder*, November 20, 27, 1912; *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor*, 1918.

<sup>8</sup> *GFL Proceedings*, 1912, 1916, 1919; *Journal of Labor*, February 28, 1913; *Party Builder* September 6, October 18, 1913, March 7, 1914; *Macon Industrial Journal*, July 20, 1913; Evans, "Organized Labor in Georgia," 91, 227-28, 241-42; see A.W. Ricker, "Farmers and Socialism" *International Socialist Review*, April 1904.

Tracey City, and bookbinders and typographers in Memphis, where socialist Edwin Dalstrom, secretary of Bookbinders Union 172, served as editor of the *Memphis Social Democrat*. Additionally, Nashville's carpenters joined the Party in substantial numbers while the city's machinist lodge counted socialists among its ranks.<sup>9</sup>

Florida's SPA labor leadership emerged in both craft and industrial environments, particularly among carpenters, engineers, machinists, and printer unions. In Tampa, socialists and other labor radicals occupied a most visible role in the city's labor culture through their newspapers, co-operative stores, and mutual-aid societies. Here, Walter Riggs, president of the Central Trades Assembly, Z.A. Middlebrooks, secretary of the Engineers local, and Franklin Pimbley, Carpenters local 696's delegate to the UBCJA, represented a significant SPA presence in Tampa's labor movement.<sup>10</sup> On the other side of the state, Jacksonville's SPA leaders included Arthur Hickling, described as “an A-1 Job

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<sup>9</sup> Dalstrom Papers, MVC/MSU; Memphis Typographical Union #11 Papers, 1874-1979, MS 68, MVC/MSU. For a time-line on the Memphis labor see “History of the Memphis Labor Movement, 1853-1915,” Memphis Trades and Labor Council, MS 223, MVC/MSU; *Nashville Labor Advocate*, June 11, August 13, October 1, 22, 1909, August 25, 1911.

<sup>10</sup> *Tampa City Directory*, 1909, 1912; *Proceedings of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America*, 1902, 1904; Mormino and Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City*, 97-142; Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 31-54, 96-97.



machinist," typographer A.R. Jordon, and paperhanger M.D. Pancoast, president of the Central Trades Council, all of whom played important roles in the city's politics and labor. Under both Pancoast's and Arthur Keep's administration of the Central Trades Council socialist and non-socialist trade unionists often made common cause for the "advancement of labor" during both the city's dramatic 1912 street car strike and the 1916 Merrill Stevens machinist strike.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, strikes by the Pensacola and Jacksonville street-car workers, the Orlando carpenters, Tampa ship-builders and cigar makers, and the central Florida phosphate workers, who crippled that war-torn industry, demonstrate persistent worker militancy even in the most conservative New South cities and towns.<sup>12</sup>

While the SPA enjoyed its greatest success in manufacturing centers such as Tampa and Jacksonville, where large AFL locals already existed, SPA organizers also spread the gospel of socialism throughout the state. In the tobacco

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<sup>11</sup> *Artisan*, January 9, 30, February 13, March 27, July 10, 1915, January 15, April 22, February 19, March 11, October 14, 21, 28, November 4, 11, 25, December 2, 1916; "Facts Regarding Street Car Strike in Jacksonville," loose material in Albert Gilchrist Papers, MS 125, special collections, Florida State University.

<sup>12</sup> T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity, 1513-1924*, (Jacksonville, 1925); James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City*, (Gainesville, 1991); Flynt, "Pensacola Labor Problems and Political Radicalism, 1908"; *Artisan*, June 23, 1917; George Pozzetta, "Immigrants and Radicals In Tampa, Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57 (January 1979); *Tampa Citizen*, July 4, 11, 18, 1919.

warehouses of Quincy, the lumber mills of Palatka, the crate factories of Ocala, and the oyster shucking houses of Apalachicola, workers organized under the banner of socialism.<sup>13</sup> As early as 1903 socialist union leaders advanced their support beyond the local level when they elected W.R. Healey, state secretary of the Florida SPA, to the office of vice president of the Florida State Federation of Labor.<sup>14</sup>

Healey spent most of his life as a farmer and attorney in the small central Florida town of Longwood. At the 1903 state convention he and his supporters introduced several resolutions that were ultimately rejected by more conservative delegates due to their "socialistic" nature, especially those "recommending the discussion of politics at union meetings" and calling on all trade unionists to withdraw from the state militia.<sup>15</sup> In St. Augustine the following year, socialists lined up enough votes to pass the state militia resolution, but "after a heated debate" failed on the question of "politicizing" union meetings.<sup>16</sup> In the years that

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<sup>13</sup> *First Annual Report of the State Labor Inspector, 1914*, (Tallahassee, Florida), 22-25.

<sup>14</sup> C.A. Wimset and R.L. Harper, "History of the Florida State Federation of Labor," in *Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Florida State Federation of Labor*, Sanford, Florida, January 12, 1915.

<sup>15</sup> *Florida Proceedings*, 1915.

<sup>16</sup> *Florida Proceedings*, 1915.

followed the Florida State Federation adopted a cautious approach to political action, but a large socialist bloc within pushed to radicalize the Federation's agenda, particularly regarding relations with the AFL.<sup>17</sup> From 1903-1917, the left-wing of the state Federation developed a pronounced hostility to the AFL. Arthur Keep, president of the Jacksonville Central Trades and Labor Council and editor of the *Artisan*, advised the 1915 state convention against sending any delegates to its national convention. Keep, an otherwise loyal AFL man, complained bitterly that representatives of state bodies at AFL conventions "have but one vote while international unions may have six to seven hundred votes."

Keep's concerns were hardly new. Southern delegates to AFL conventions, most notably William Mailley and Max Wilk, had long questioned the arbitrary power of the more conservative international leadership. While southern socialists within the AFL had pressed for something approximating a "states rights" position, they also embraced industrial unionism and radical labor politics. Indeed, Mailley and Wilk were delegates at two of the AFL's more contentious conventions; first, in 1894, as the left introduced Thomas Morgan's political programme, or Plank 10,

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<sup>17</sup> *Florida Proceedings, 1917; The Unionist*, March 9, 1907.



which called for collective ownership and then in 1912 as Cleveland typographer Max Hayes challenged Samuel Gompers' hold on the presidency.<sup>18</sup>

The primary ideological contribution of SPA labor leaders rested on their espousal of industrial unionism. In February 1914, the Atlanta Federation of Trades held a meeting on the question of the "New Industrialism." Georgia Federation president S.B. Marks, joined by W.C. Puckett, Carl Karston, and Georgia Socialist Party member Al Schwartz, presented the case in favor of industrial unionism. In an obvious jab at Gompers, Marks blamed international officers for craft separation: "we have paid too little attention to the unskilled man. We must come together." Marks' socialist influence presumably played a significant role in the formation of the Georgia Federation of Labor's (GFL) stance on the 1914-1915 textile strike at Atlanta's Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills. As Gary Fink observed, GFL involvement "signaled an important escalation of the conflict" when it entered the dispute on behalf of unskilled industrial workers.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Birmingham socialist R.E.L. Connolly used his position as vice president of the

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<sup>18</sup> On Plank 10 see Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Vol. II: From the Founding of the American Federation of Labor to the Emergence of American Imperialism*, 287-94; American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the National Convention*, 32 (1912); *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor Convention*, 1913.

<sup>19</sup> Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike*, 43.

International UBCJA to advocate a closer relationship between the trades and workers organized along industrial lines.<sup>20</sup> And in 1905, at the Alabama State Federation of Labor annual convention, Thomas Freeman of Carpenters Local 1041 introduced a resolution calling for affiliation between skilled and unskilled in the state's rolling mills.<sup>21</sup>

The socialists' ability to push for industrial unionism within the AFL, however, became complicated after 1905 with the formation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In the South, not unlike the rest of the nation, the pivotal debate centered on the proper relationship between the party, the IWW, and the AFL regarding the question of industrial versus craft unionism as forms of labor organization. Eugene V. Debs, long a proponent of industrial unionism dating back to the creation of the American Railroad Union, polarized the SPA when he co-founded the IWW at its July convention.<sup>22</sup> Other prominent and influential members of the national party, however, had shown a reluctance to break from the well entrenched, politically connected, and numerically superior

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<sup>20</sup> "R.E.L. Connolly, A Big Man of the Labor Movement," *Nashville Labor Advocate*, April 8, 1910.

<sup>21</sup> *Alabama State Federation of Labor Proceedings*, 1905.

<sup>22</sup> See *Constitution and Proceedings of the American Railroad Union, Chicago, Illinois, July 4, 1893*, Rare Books Collection, Georgia State University; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, (Urbana, 1982).

AFL. Some, led by Max Hayes, editor of the *Cleveland Citizen*, sought to radicalize the traditionally conservative federation by challenging Samuel Gompers' presidency at the 1912 AFL convention. If leadership positions could be captured by socialists the policies and ideology of the AFL might be changed without dividing workers.<sup>23</sup> As a result, the "right-wing" of the Party utilized the old tactic of "boring from within" in its effort to capture the AFL for socialism.

Southern comrades, faced with the same decision of "defecting" to the IWW or promoting "dual unionism," typically remained loyal to their AFL locals. But another factor drove southerners to the AFL. A strong sense of loyalty, tradition, and regionalism accompanied political alliances in the South, and a worker's union often defined his position in the community. Carpenters Local 75 in Birmingham, for instance, exerted strong community influence, had active socialist participation, and served as a link to city's German immigrant community. Furthermore, in the years following the panic of 1907, southern labor, including the AFL affiliates, became increasingly assertive in demanding increased wages and union recognition. Even the Georgia Locomotive Engineers abandoned the trademark conservatism of the Railroad Brotherhoods and sought concessions

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<sup>23</sup> *Macon Industrial Journal*, August 31, 1913; *Proceedings of the American Federation of Labor, 1912*, microfilm edition, reel 6; see also James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925*, (New York, 1967), 29-52.



when finding out that the Central of Georgia Railroad had made record profits during the panic.<sup>24</sup> Ultimately, southern socialists who may have shown a quiet admiration for the militancy of the IWW presumably made the pragmatic calculation to pursue their politics through the SPA and an increasingly assertive AFL.

In several locations, however, “wobblies” did enjoy a degree of success. The IWW, operating in what were frequently charged atmospheres, made inroads in Greenville, South Carolina, during the Monaghan Mill Strike; among dock workers at Jacksonville, Pensacola, Mobile, and Gulfport, Mississippi; in Sheffield, Alabama, Tampa, and in numerous locations throughout Louisiana; and in Birmingham where an IWW local was organized by one of the city's “most prominent union men.” While defections to the IWW appear to have been exceptional, gradually southern labor adopted certain elements of its program.

If by 1912 the Socialist Party of America found itself divided between left and right factionalism, southern organizers appeared seemingly immune. In 1913 the Alabama State Federation of Labor looked favorably upon socialism's “miraculous growth in all sections of the state” and proclaimed that just as “Moses rebelled against slavery” socialism too would lead the workingman to freedom.

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<sup>24</sup> Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, Simpson Division #210 Records, Box 311, SLA.

J.H.F. Moseley, the editor of the Birmingham *Labor Advocate* and former member of the Knights of Labor, seemed sufficiently enthusiastic about socialism's prospects to even name his son Eugene Debs Moseley!<sup>25</sup> Party organizers had been building a foundation of support since the first southern organizing drive in 1903, and the Birmingham Trades Council, numerous carpenters unions, and the Birmingham machinists regularly sent socialist representatives to the annual state conventions in the ensuing years.<sup>26</sup> Alabama socialists Robert E. Lee Connolly, Thomas Freeman, William Doyle, and Charles Love represented the arm of the Federation that advocated woman's suffrage, organization of black workers, improved factory and mine safety, and an eight hour day.<sup>27</sup>

Radical southern workers also embraced electoral politics. Organized labor in Birmingham, led by the building trades, unsuccessfully campaigned for socialist Clement Wood's 1913 mayoral bid. Wood had previously served as city recorder, but Commissioner A.O. Lane fired the young judge following his speech at a mass

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<sup>25</sup> *Proceedings and Minutes of the Carpenters and Joiners Union of America*, 1912, 592, SLA; *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, December 26, 1913, March 6, 1914; *Birmingham City Directory*, 1903, 1913; McLaurin, *The Knights of Labor in the South*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> *Proceedings of the Alabama State Federation of Labor*, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1911.

<sup>27</sup> *Proceedings of the Alabama State Federation of Labor*, 1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1912, 1916.

meeting defending the “class struggle” of striking construction workers. Lane claimed the dismissal had to do not with ideology, but rather with “temperament.” In the mayor's race, Wood received the enthusiastic endorsement of the *Birmingham Labor Advocate* and the Birmingham Trades Council, several of whose officers worked in his campaign. Reflective of organized labor's precarious position in a Democratic South, however, Wood's loss to George Ward by a 55-45 percent margin brought an abrupt change in the tone of the labor press. Even though Wood had won the vote of Birmingham's working class suburbs, the *Labor Advocate*, hoping to secure favor with the new administration, suddenly distanced itself from Wood's “unfortunate partizan selection of socialist principles.” The SPA continued to remain active in both city and trade union politics, however, later electing socialist Arlie Barber to the City Commission, making William Doyle president of the influential machinist local, and forming the Municipal Ownership League.<sup>28</sup> The Party also maintained its historical presence in the coal fields around Birmingham. During the 1908 coal strike, Alabama Socialist party organizers joined Mother Jones in the mines, and the socialist press, notably

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<sup>28</sup> George Ward Scrapbooks, Vol. 14, 153, 164, DAH/BPL; *Southern Labor Review*, January 11, February 8, 1922.



*Appeal To Reason* and the *International Socialist Review* featured regular coverage of events in the region.<sup>29</sup>

But socialist organizers' confronted new challenges and mixed results when removed from industrial ventures like coal and the kind of secondary industry found in the nascent urban and manufacturing areas of Birmingham, Atlanta, Tampa, and to a lesser extent Augusta and the Tennessee coal fields. Just as the Party had successfully broadened its appeal throughout much of the South socialist efforts to organize mill hands in the Piedmont were dealt a severe blow.

Charleston's Walter M. Cook, SPA member and eventual national organizer, made several organizing trips into the towns of Union, Belmont, Charleston, Dalton and Columbia. In the spring of 1914, Cook spoke to a group of about 250 mill workers at an open air meeting at Buffalo Mill which employed approximately 1,500 people including an estimated 15 or 20 party members.<sup>30</sup> Cook had trouble organizing locals and placed the burden on the "level of illiteracy" among mill hands, making the distribution of socialist literature a dubious tactic. In fact, there were other more complex dynamics at work from the start. The all white textile labor force of the Piedmont had, in the main, been slow to embrace unions, let

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<sup>29</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, August 8, 22, October 24, 1908; *International Socialist Review*, October 1908.

<sup>30</sup> *Party Builder*, April 25, 1914.

alone socialist politics. Certainly numerous historians have characterized the Piedmont as something of an anomaly for the relative scarcity of mass movements and radical politics. A brief upsurge of populist sentiment had once filtered through the region, but mill hands of rural origins relied on kinship networks and ties to the land as a source of resistance to capitalist wage relations and exploitation. Furthermore, the rural structure of both workers and the landed elite conspired to deaden the impact of a socialist message steeped in the language of industrial organization, craft preservation, and resistance to outside capital.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, a potent mix of mill village paternalism and intimidation proved remarkably successful at thwarting political agitators. In fact, one of the SPA's best southern operatives, J.L. Fitts, found out first-hand just how perilous when he attempted to organize workers at the mill district of Laurinburg, North Carolina. Fitts, who had spent considerable time in and around the town, fled after a citizens' committee informed him one evening "that it would be healthy" for him to leave

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<sup>31</sup> For the case of conservative modernization and uneven industrial development in the Piedmont see Dwight Billings, *Planters and the Making of a "New South": Class, Politics, and the Development of North Carolina, 1865-1900* (UNC Press, 1979); Randolph Werner, "'New South' Carolina: Ben Tillman and the Rise of Bourgeois Politics, 1880-1893," in Winfred Moore, Joseph Tripp and Lyon Tyler, eds., *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society* (Greenwood Press: Westport, Connecticut, 1986), 149-66; Phillip Wood, *Southern Capitalism: The Political Economy of North Carolina, 1880-1980* (Durham, 1986).

the next morning. The “good” citizens explained to Fitts they “did not want socialist doctrine taught to the ignorant” mill hands.<sup>32</sup>

By 1913, South Carolina comrades, frustrated at their failure in the mill villages, decided to direct their propaganda efforts at the state's farmers and to forge potentially explosive biracial alliances.<sup>33</sup> The South Carolina State Federation's lead organizer, J.C. Gibbs, a Socialist Party member and engineer from coastal Georgetown, had a long history of agitation. Earlier in New Orleans Gibbs claimed he had undergone “persecution for socialism, and [he] was ready to undergo more” if necessary.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, Gibbs, the son of a Louisiana slave owner, made the organization of African Americans a priority. In 1915, he organized black lumber workers into a segregated AFL local, reasoning “[T]he negro [sic] is too great a factor in the labor market to be ignored any longer by the

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<sup>32</sup> *Appeal to Reason*, July 18, 1908.

<sup>33</sup> *Party Builder*, July 19, 1913; “State Platform of the Socialist Party of South Carolina,” SPA/111; *American Socialist*, December 5, 1914. On Piedmont mill village life and organized textile labor see David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*, (Baton Rouge, 1982); Newby, *Plain Folk of the New South*; Jacqueline Dowd Hall et. al., *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, (Chapel Hill, 1987); Tom Tippet, *When Southern Labor Stirs* (New York, 1931); Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, 1942); Broadus Mitchell and George Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South*, (Baltimore, 1930).

<sup>34</sup> *Who's Who in Socialist America*, 40.



white working class, and [is] used as a 'boomerang' to knock us in the head and reduce wages.” To be sure, the effect of race on the labor market also bothered socialists in Mississippi. Evidence suggests that socialists there, despite troubling racism among some of the party's leadership, orchestrated the state federation's adoption of a resolution calling for “an aggressive campaign” to organize blacks.<sup>35</sup> Both black and white socialists, acutely aware that the party would be open to attack, promoted the idea of “economic equality not [racial] amalgamation.” Nevertheless, between 1910 and 1913 race based vigilantism and anti-labor violence increasingly became intertwined to confront the SPA in new ways. When, in 1913, New Orleans police shot into a crowd of strikers employed by the United Fruit Company it exposed a steady rise in class and race violence that was spreading throughout the South. In Tampa, the 1910 mob lynching of two striking Italian cigar workers in Ybor City and the attack on SPA poll watchers during Tampa's municipal elections, following the *Tampa Tribune*'s call for a “large white vote” to roll back socialism, demonstrate the workings of establishment terror in that city. Elsewhere, the death of three socialist street car strikers in Augusta at the hands of the Georgia state militia, the Grabow, Louisiana “lumber

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<sup>35</sup> *Proceedings of the South Carolina Federation of Labor, 1915; Who's Who in Socialist America, 40; Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of the Mississippi State Federation of Labor, Jackson, June 24-25, 1918.*

war,” and the arrest and intimidation of Jacksonville longshoremen under provisions of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act cast a distinctly uneasy edge over labor radicalism in the South. In this charged atmosphere socialist J.J. Hicks, of Kale Kerr, Florida, observed “we must hang together or we'll hang separately.”<sup>36</sup>

Following the script from earlier assaults on populism, Democrats proved particularly adept at using racial politics against socialist electoral aspirations. The 1912 mayoral race in Atlanta illustrates the effectiveness of such tactics. Democrat James Woodward, a member of Atlanta Typographical Union (ATU) #48, faced opposition from the socialist printer, H.C. Henderson. During the campaign, the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Augusta Chronicle* aroused racist fears, warning of a voting alliance of “socialists and negroes [sic].” Woodward won the election overwhelmingly, an almost certain outcome even had such mythical alliances existed. But by playing on racial fears with the horrors of the 1906 Atlanta race riot still simmering, Democrats inflicted far more injurious damage to socialist legitimacy and race relations in the city.

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<sup>36</sup> *Appeal to Reason-Southeast Edition*, July 5, August 23, 1913; *Augusta Chronicle*, September 26, 27, 28, 29, 1912; *Journal of Labor*, October 4, 11, 1912; *Tampa Tribune*, March 24, 1910; Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 87-100; Merl Reed, “Lumberjacks and Longshoremen: The I.W.W. in Louisiana,” *Labor History* 8 (Winter 1972), 41-59; James Green, “The Brotherhood of Timber Workers, 1910-1913: A Radical Response to Industrial Capitalism in the Southern USA,” *Past and Present* 60 (August 1973), 161-200.



Most white workers in Atlanta undoubtedly supported Woodward, a union man, as one of their own, electing him mayor on four separate occasions between 1899-1916.<sup>37</sup> The characterization of the SPA as the party of the black man, a dubious charge given the apparent ambivalence of most Atlanta socialists in organizing black workers, fostered suspicion between socialist trade unionists and their racist white co-workers. Whether white voters internalized the racist appeals and sought to protect their race privilege or whether they simply rejected the socialist candidate for political reasons, those who supported Woodward by acquiescing to racism tainted and compromised their own political effectiveness.<sup>38</sup> The press newspapers elevated a vote for Woodward to a symbolic rejection of “socialist notions” of racial equality. Therefore, if workers really voted by negation, Socialist candidates inherited a negative southern racial legacy with

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas M. Deaton, “James G. Woodward: The Working Man's Mayor,” *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South* 31 (Fall 1987) 11-23; Gary Fink, “We Are City Builders, Too: Atlanta Typographers and New South Boosterism, Atlanta Style,” *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South* 36 (Winter 1993): 40-53.

<sup>38</sup> Recent literature on this question includes David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London, 1994); Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Eric Arnesen, “Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930,” *Radical History Review* 55 (Winter 1993), 53-87; Daniel Letwin, “Interracial Unionism, Gender, and ‘Social Equality’ in the Alabama Coalfields, 1878-1908,” *Journal Of Southern History* 61 (August 1995), 519-54.



ramifications far deeper than the hostility their movement ordinarily attracted. Socialist members of Woodward's typographical union faced the unenviable task of choosing between two often incompatible alternatives: their ideological commitment which might carry the social stigma of advocating black equality or loyalty to their union president.<sup>39</sup>

Debates over industrial organization or racist, anti-radical terror most certainly did not alone shape and define the Socialist party's labor activity in the South. Ushered in with the New South's lofty dreams were dramatic shifts in economic organization, and corresponding changes in the nature, meaning, and organization of work itself. One group of workers' felt especially under siege at the turn-of-the-century. In the early 1900s, the rise of contractors and middlemen in the building trades coupled with improved machinery and increased specialization threatened carpenters craft status. In response to these forces, many embraced socialism as an alternative means to confront social, political, and economic insecurity.

The building industry of the South was going through monumental changes. Long term breakthroughs like the Bessemer process and new products such as rolled steel, reinforced concrete, improved tile, and sheet metal gradually replaced

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<sup>39</sup> Membership roster compiled from *Atlanta City Directory*, 1911-1913.

wood, cast iron, and brick in building construction. New machinery challenged the productivity of carpenters as well. Mechanization enabled contractors to rationalize production by using cheap, unskilled labor capable of producing far more than a skilled carpenter.<sup>40</sup> President P.J. McGuire of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBCJA) estimated the capacity of a molding machine alone to be “about twelve times greater than by hand.” Steam powered machinery brought forth not only greater production but also standardization in the building process. An increasingly common feature of the trade was the output of prefabricated doors and precut wood products assembled by woodworkers in shops sometimes located far away from the actual building. As Robert Christie observed, machine production of standardized fixtures meant “more and more of the carpenter's work disappeared into planing mills.”

Consequently, the building trades became more specialized as sheet-metal workers, wood workers, stonecutters, and plasterers, not to mention machines operated by child labor, assumed a status in direct conflict with the work rules and shop control that carpenters once exerted over the trade. Investors, however, often tempered their enthusiasm for the use of capital intensive machinery as it required

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<sup>40</sup> *Manufacturers' Record*, December 5, 19, 1907; Robert Christie, *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters' Union* (Ithaca, 1956), 79-82; Walter Galenson, *The United Brotherhood of Carpenters: The First Hundred Years* (Cambridge, 1983), 76-7.

heavy investments and training that meant a decrease in short term profits.

Sometimes builders moved only gradually in fully converting to labor saving machinery, quite aware that surplus could be extracted in several ways. The real immediate impact of mechanization was that it complemented the industry's already decisive movement toward workplace reorganization. Nevertheless, a Chattanooga carpenter's observation that the "increased productivity of machinery heightened profits" and displaced workers reveals an awareness and fear among carpenters that their livelihood was under attack.<sup>41</sup>

The dramatic changes in the building industry similarly transformed the carpenter's fundamental relationship with the building contractor. Local building trades councils had traditionally set the standard wage for contracts and served as a

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<sup>41</sup> *Chattanooga Labor Leader*, February 4, 1910. On mechanization and reorganization's impact on the cigar making trade see Gary Mormino, "Tampa and the New Urban South: The Weight Strike of 1899," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 60 (January 1982): 337-56. For a discussion on the relationship between machinery, technology and labor displacement see Raphael Samuel, "Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 3 (Spring 1977): 6-72. Samuel argues that machinery was utilized only as a last resort as capitalists often preferred hand power for reliability, adaptability, and quality of work. Samuel further suggests that nineteenth century capitalism, in Britain at least, "created more skills than it destroyed." See also David Montgomery, "Workers' Control of Machine Production in the Nineteenth Century," *Labor History* 17 (Fall 1976): 485-509; Irwin Yellowitz, "Skilled Workers and Mechanization: The Lasters in the 1890's," *Labor History* 18 (Spring 1977) 197-213; Jeffrey Haydu, *Between Craft and Class: Skilled Workers and Factory Politics in the United States and Britain, 1890-1922* (Berkeley, 1988).



clearinghouse for both workers and employers in establishing a equitable hiring system. But gradually both small contractors and worker control were replaced by large commercial firms, speculators and middlemen. Unsteady work and depressed wages plagued the new industry characterized by production speed-ups, standardization, and specialization. Tremendous growth in Jacksonville led carpenters to strike in 1902 and again in 1905 around the intertwined issues of low wages, an eight hour day, and worksite control. In the latter year, the city's Central Labor Union called a general strike in support of the carpenters, but the success of the Builders Exchange in importing strikebreakers, engaging in a lockout, and winning a court injunction spelled defeat for the carpenters' and consolidated builders' control over the industry.<sup>42</sup>

Paradoxically, the rapid growth of an urban South created and limited options for carpenters. Of all trades, the carpenters possibly possessed the least ability to deal with the effects of labor migrancy. Uneven building cycles created both labor gluts and shortages, turning New South cities and towns into revolving doors of worker mobility. Carpenters through their various trade bodies, councils, and publications attempted to control the distribution of work. UBCJA locals frequently posted warning bulletins such as “don't come to Waycross [Ga.] unless

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<sup>42</sup> James B. Crooks, *Jacksonville After the Fire, 1901-1919: A New South City* (Gainesville, 1991), 31-32.

you have a paid up union card in your pocket,” and declared regional “boycotts” of contested areas. But unorganized workers and displaced craftsmen often did not heed such travel advisories.<sup>43</sup> Carpenters, stripped of the powerful tool of control over the hiring process, became subject to the whims of national contractors and absentee owners.

Constructing a New South with piecework, outwork, and cheap labor threatened to displace an entire work culture and its social and economic underpinnings. The carpenter's world of skilled status, equitable work relations, and community harmony fell victim to the newly industrialized building industry. The new workplace dynamics of technological change and capital reorganization coincided with an employer offensive against unionization, resulting in intense jurisdictional disputes and reduced wages. In response, the building trades adopted a business unionism consistent with AFL's conservative go slow policies. The growth of the business agent, full time staff, and structural centralization were the new features of the International UBCJA.

A significant number of carpenters, however, concerned with their declining status and economic leverage, sought increasingly radical solutions to their problems. Inheriting this legacy from their long time socialist president, P.J.

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<sup>43</sup> *Savannah Labor Herald*, May 20, 1910.

McGuire, the carpenters adopted political solutions to confront the changing nature of the trade.<sup>44</sup> By 1900, a movement began within the UBCJA to move away from pure craft unionism toward “craft industrialism,” or perhaps more accurately, amalgamation. Ironically, by 1902, the year of McGuire's ouster as international president, many southern carpenters' unions developed a distinctly radical character and a sharp political critique of their eroding economic prospects. As business unionism took hold in the national ranks, southern delegates at the 1902 UBCJA convention included SPA members Robert E. Lee Connolly, Buel Andrus, and William Doyle of Birmingham, Frank Pimbley of Tampa, and Harry Morgan of Atlanta.<sup>45</sup> While the UBCJA looked to codify work rules, ease jurisdictional squabbles endemic to the business, and formalize trade agreements, socialists in the ranks advanced more radical solutions. Southern socialist leaders in the UBCJA envisioned the complete reorganization of society where an equitable and just workplace characterized all social and economic relationships. Socialist carpenters in the South embraced the type of workplace organization consistent with Michael Kazin's San Francisco carpenters, New York City's

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<sup>44</sup> On Peter McGuire and UBCJA intra-politics see Mark Erlich, “Peter J. McGuire's Trade Unionism: Socialism of a Trades Union Kind?” *Labor History* 24 (Spring 1983): 165-97.

<sup>45</sup> *Proceedings of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, 1902.*



German carpenters described by David Montgomery, or the longshoreman unions studied by Bruce Nelson.<sup>46</sup> But perhaps reflecting the socialist leadership's influence, several UBCJA southern locals remained firmly committed to the power of the ballot box and pursued a combined program of workers' control and electoral support for SPA candidates.

For many southern carpenters in the pre-war years the espousal of socialism seemed perfectly consistent with membership in an AFL trade union. As historian John Laslett discovered in his study of six national unions, socialism and trade unionism were often viewed as complementary, not adversarial.<sup>47</sup> The activity of the carpenters of Chattanooga provides a window for exploring the role socialist politics played in the southern labor movement. In that city, the socialist-led UBCJA local 769, the largest and most influential in the Chattanooga Central Labor Union (CCLU), exercised considerable muscle. Jacob Forwalter, an SPA member, held several important offices including CCLU vice president, financial secretary of the Carpenters District Council, and delegate to the Tennessee

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana, 1987); Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, 301; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, 1988).

<sup>47</sup> John Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York, 1970).

Federation of Labor.<sup>48</sup> Local 769 and the local SPA routinely sponsored free lectures and debates, where “cigars were enjoyed” and the unorganized were especially encouraged to attend.<sup>49</sup> The carpenters and the SPA both held their meetings at Marxian Hall on Cherry Street where socialists and trade unionists of all stripes deliberated on topics ranging from “the cause of the high cost of living” to “the ethics of capitalism.” They also frequently passed resolutions such as a declaration of “Woman's Day.” The socialists held picnics, organized study groups, operated a library, and provided free entertainment when Dr. S.J. Spence frequently enlivened Party gatherings with “the singing of socialist songs.” The SPA, the UBCJA, and the CCLU collectively arranged several visits to the city by Eugene Debs and R.E.L. Connolly, the latter a Birmingham socialist and UBCJA International vice president who frequently addressed open meetings of the carpenters.<sup>50</sup> These forums became central to both UBCJA and SPA organizational efforts. Indeed, the two groups can hardly be distinguished from each other. Carpenters in Chattanooga deemed it entirely appropriate to channel their political,

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<sup>48</sup> *Chattanooga Labor Leader*, December 2, 1910, January 13, August 18, 1911.

<sup>49</sup> *Chattanooga Labor Leader*, December 24, 31, 1909, February 4, June 24, July 1, August 19, 1910.

<sup>50</sup> *Chattanooga Labor Leader*, March 10, June 10, 1910, March 3, 1911, February 24, 1913.

economic, and social agenda through the Party and the union, reasoning that both shared the fundamental objective of working class organization.

Similarly, Nashville and Birmingham socialists maintained an active and cordial relationship with carpenter unions and the city labor movement. Nashville's socialists also hosted Debs and Connolly and held lively open street meetings on topics ranging from the "economic interpretation of religion" and "Heaven and Hell" to "the class struggle." Interestingly, the Nashville Socialist local's lectures and campaign meetings became frequent targets of the police. Free speech controversies with city hall, however, apparently did not impinge on the socialists' ability to wield influence within the UBCJA, whose ranks included several prominent SPA members.<sup>51</sup> Birmingham, of course, remained the largest and perhaps the most important center of socialist influence for the carpenters union. Dating back to the late 1890s, socialist E.E. Frissell served as president of his carpenter local and as a member of the Birmingham Trades Council.<sup>52</sup> From 1903 forward, the publication of the *Southern Socialist* by the Birmingham and Bessemer carpenters, the frequent lectures by socialists at local typographers

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<sup>51</sup> *Nashville Labor Advocate*, April 2, June 11, 25, August 13, October 1, 8, 22, 29, 1909, February 25, March 18, 25, 1910, September 29, 1911.

<sup>52</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, April 2, 9, 1898; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, May 3, 1903; *Birmingham City Directory*, 1899.



meetings, and a full socialist municipal ticket in Bessemer revealed a substantial SPA presence. In addition to several reform measures such as more stringent building and food inspection codes and “compulsory education, free books, food, and clothing for all children,” the Bessemer socialists' 1903 platform demanded the collective “ownership of capital represented by mines, land and machinery and [sought to] bring about the cooperative commonwealth by capturing the powers of government at the ballot box.”

If the carpenters' support of SPA candidates produced few victories in electoral politics, union elections produced entirely different outcomes. Socialists represented the South (District Four) in the Carpenters' General Executive Board (GEB) from 1904-1916. District Four of the UBCJA counted close to 9,000 members in an area covering the southeast, the British West Indies, and Puerto Rico.<sup>53</sup> As early as 1902, Alabama sent four socialist delegates to the UBCJA national convention, while Florida and Georgia each sent one. Tampa socialist Franklin Pimbley served as representative of District Four from 1904-1908 and R.E.L. Connolly, elected in 1908, eventually assumed the chair of the GEB as International vice president.<sup>54</sup> In 1910, twenty-eight delegates to the biennial

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<sup>53</sup> *UBCJA Proceedings, 1906.*

<sup>54</sup> *UBCJA Proceedings, 1902, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1910, 1914.*

convention signed a resolution “endorsing the Socialist Party, abolition of the wage system, and the establishment of the cooperative commonwealth.” Connolly and A.D. Slye of Ensley, Alabama, were among the supporters of the resolution which also called on the membership to “study the doctrines and principles of socialism.”

An accelerated southern industrial economy, a wide-spread and sophisticated employer offensive against organizing, and the willingness of states to use their national guards for strike breaking put southern labor in an extremely weakened position.<sup>55</sup> With their very survival in question southern workers increasingly were forced to adopt new, collective solutions to the mounting “industrial crisis” of the region. While reliance upon the ballot box ultimately proved to be illusive, socialists did successfully advance an agenda in a forum germane to the everyday life of workers. Throughout the South, from shrimp boat workers in Biloxi to the machinist union in Waycross, Socialist party members

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<sup>55</sup> Joseph M. Brown Papers MS 41, Box 8, Folder 1, Atlanta Historical Society; Gary Fink, “Efficiency and Control: Labor Espionage in Southern Textiles,” Robert Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville, 1991), 13-34; *Journal of Labor*, October 4, 1912, *Augusta Chronicle*, September 27, 28, October, 5, 7, 1912; Loose material regarding use of militia in Tampa and Jacksonville labor disturbances, Gilchrist Papers/FSU.

gained control of unions and elected representatives to their state bodies.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, Socialist party involvement in the trade-union movement not only expedited the leadership's push toward industrial unionism, but labor's increased assertiveness signified southern workers' response to political alienation through dramatic and sometimes militant action. Within the various southern AFL state federations and local trade councils socialists at different junctures successfully advanced a radical agenda by "boring from within."

In the South, as elsewhere, socialism became for many workers a legitimate expression of working class organization and solidarity. Just as many of South Carolina's textile workers spoke through iconoclast Cole Blease, socialist workers of all trades saw the party as a vehicle for political expression.<sup>57</sup> If workers routinely crossed each other's picket lines because their unions emphasized craft status instead of class unity, the Socialist party afforded an opportunity for those same workers to act collectively in promoting a political agenda. Furthermore, for unorganized workers such as the machinists in St. Augustine or carpenters and cabinet makers in Waycross and Bonifay, Florida, the Socialist Party represented a

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<sup>56</sup> On Mississippi shrimpers see E. Paul Durrenberger, "The History of Shrimpers' Unions in Mississippi, 1915-1945," *Labor's Heritage* 5 (Winter 1994): 66-76.

<sup>57</sup> For a discussion on Cole Blease see Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina*, 215-72; Newby, *Plain Folk of the New South*, 545-6.



substitute for AFL unionism. Workers in machine shops, mills, and factories may have been unorganized or belonged to separate unions, but the weekly or monthly meetings of the SPA saw them hanging their hats on the same rack. More often than not southern SPA leaders spoke of fostering cooperation with the labor movement, not ideological hostility. Ultimately, socialist workers and union leaders constituted an accepted and important component of a larger southern trade union movement.

## CHAPTER V

### AMERICANISM, SOUTHERN PATRIOTISM AND THE LIMITS OF PROTEST: WAR IN EUROPE, WAR AT HOME, 1915-1920

*We have been having some very rough weather on the Gulf Coast, but this morning the sun is trying to shine through the clouds. It pictures to me the present condition. Storm, dark clouds, after a while sunshine and happiness. We must believe it so, or go crazy.*

Sumner Rose to Eugene V. Debs,  
November 11, 1919

*When fortune is on our side, popular favor  
bears her company*

*Publilius Syrus, 1<sup>st</sup> Century B.C.  
Maxim 275*

At the dawn of the twentieth century, southern socialists exercised considerable influence within trade unions, exhibited a movement culture that attracted an unlikely group of radicals, and in electoral matters often provided more than just a casual irritant to the Democratic Party. In spite of the legal and extra-legal barriers erected against such political dissent, the party broadcast the voice of a restless South which was at the very least viewed as consistent with certain Southern traditions of resistance. However, when war erupted in Europe

the SPA began a period of sharp decline as events half-a-world away transformed regular politics in the South, and consequently undermined the SPA's fortunes as well.

The demise of the party in the South ultimately reflected a much broader national movement to eliminate dissent and proceed with the business of America. With few exceptions, the SPA experienced a simultaneous collapse throughout the country, but regional dynamics played a role in shaping the nature and form of that national episode. In the South, the SPA's demise was in part a casualty of the region's accelerated movement toward national reintegration. Indeed, the violent methods used to crush the party in the South closely mirrored the tactics employed throughout the country, but the use of *patriotism* by southern conservatives certainly suggests a political experiment unique to the region. Ironically, "Americanism," not the reactionary nature of southern politics alone, destroyed the party in the South.

By 1917 any political tolerance, accommodation, acceptance or support the Socialist party enjoyed in the South came to an abrupt halt with America's entry into the European war. The nationalist fervor that accompanied the war effort pitted so-called loyal Americans against those who questioned U.S. participation. Socialists and the IWW became convenient scapegoats to rally the population. The



Sedition Act in 1917 resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of wobblies, socialists, and German Americans. Socialist opposition to the war, however, constituted a part of a larger peace movement in the South. Before the formal declaration by Congress on April 6, 1917, the anti-war movement encompassed a range of ideological tendencies and included Democrat, Progressive, suffragist, trade unionist, and socialist.

As early as the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, many southerners had spoken out against possible U.S. involvement. The most vocal critics included Democrats Cole Blease of South Carolina, Tom Watson of Georgia, Sidney Catts of Florida, and James K. Vardaman of Mississippi.<sup>1</sup> These leaders attempted to rally opposition to what they portrayed as a war of eastern bankers and industrialists, issuing strongly worded denunciations quite often replete with anti-Semitic and racist demagoguery. Vardaman reasoned that American neutrality had been compromised by a "little group of willful men," and according to Catts manufacturers orchestrated U.S. involvement "not because of any patriotic sentiment but because it will bring dollars into their coffers." In agitating against conscription Watson declared, "where Morgan's money went, your boy's blood must go." And Blease, with typical rhetorical flair, proclaimed that each American

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<sup>1</sup> George Tindall, *The Emergence of The New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 42.

soldier killed in Europe rested on the shoulders of Woodrow Wilson. Certainly party politics and personality conflicts with the President also played a role in opposition to the administration's war policy. Watson's and Blease's anti-militarism and vitriolic attacks on Wilson had roots in the 1912 presidential campaign. Both men had opposed Wilson during that election and had subsequently developed hostile relations with him that reached far deeper than the war issue. Similarly, Vardaman's battles with Wilson over the Panama Canal Tolls Bill, the income tax, and the Ship Purchase Bill, in 1914 earned the Mississippi senator the enduring animosity of the administration.<sup>2</sup>

Until 1917 they effectively challenged Wilson's preparedness program and his pledge to keep the U.S. out of the war by appealing to "a deep suspicion" in the rural South that preparedness and war represented a scheme by arms manufacturers and financial interests to profit from the European conflict.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as historian George Tindall observed, a "latent rural-progressive opposition,"

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<sup>2</sup> Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, 426-30, 451-52, 455; Robert Milton Burts, *Richard Irvine Manning and the Progressive Movement in South Carolina* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1974), 170-75; Kirwin, *Revolt of the Rednecks*, 278; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 41.

particularly in areas of Farmers' Union strength, characterized southern anti-war efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, these southern politicians attempts to rally opposition to the preparedness effort by playing on a regional sentiment against eastern capital collapsed under the weight of generous economic rewards. Between 1913-1915, a depression gripped the national economy, stagnating the already fragile southern industrial establishment. Regional output of textiles, timber, and steel fell dramatically during these years, forcing nervous industrial and political leaders to search for new markets and economic stimulus.<sup>5</sup> Sidney Catts abandoned his fiery denunciations of the president and with help from pro-war Senator Duncan Fletcher secured military bases, shipbuilding contracts, and other defense production facilities for Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Tampa. Indeed, flying schools, army installations, and maritime construction gave the Florida economy a needed boom.<sup>6</sup> Similar support of Wilson's preparedness effort came from

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<sup>4</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of a New South*, 46-47; Georgia's SP anti-war effort was spearheaded by Mildred Hicks of the rural Bainbridge local. Mildred Hicks Papers, MS 496, Box 3/3, EmU.

<sup>5</sup> Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol. 4, *The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917* (New York, 1965), 435-61; Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina*, 249-50.

<sup>6</sup> Flynt, *Cracker Messiah*, 186-9; Flynt, *Duncan Upshaw Fletcher: Dixie's Reluctant Progressive* (Tallahassee, 1971) 108, 112-16; Crooks, *Jacksonville After*



“Pitchfork” Ben Tillman, whose Charleston Naval yard stood to benefit from U.S. contracts.<sup>7</sup> As the European war intensified, the South experienced a great infusion of federal dollars and private capital. Industrial expansion in steel, timber, and shipbuilding fueled economic, social, and political changes that quieted opposition voices.<sup>8</sup>

On the eve of the U.S. entry into the war a strange political transformation swept across the South. War opponents became pariahs on the South’s political landscape, and with the Congressional declaration of war “peace advocates retreated into silence.” The opposition had hoped to harness an anti-war, rural-progressive coalition rooted in southern sectionalism, but divisive attacks on Wall Street bankers eventually gave way to themes of unity and “Americanization.” As Tindall observed, “the idea of a peculiar Americanism in the South with overtones of Anglo-Saxon racism and anti-radicalism, became an established article of the regional faith.” Numerous political careers that started in the backlash of the 1890s were now sacrificed on the alter of patriotism. Opposition to the war “sealed the

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*The Fire*, 120-21.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1964) 518-25.

<sup>8</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 54-59, 33-69, *passim*; Flynt, *Duncan Upshaw Fletcher*, 96-109, *passim*.

political fate” of dissenters such as Vardaman and Blease, now portrayed as “pro-German” and “Kaiser loving betrayer(s) of the American people.” In 1918, war opponents like Watson, Blease, Vardaman and Thomas Hardwick of Georgia were defeated in their respective bids for reelection.<sup>9</sup> If electoral backlash had been the only punishment that war opponents received, the period from 1914 to 1918 might have been recorded as simply an episode in shifting southern political attitudes and an accelerated move toward regional integration. But the subsequent violent reaction and the campaign of terror to enforce the “new patriotism” made the war a particularly vulnerable and defining moment for socialists.

Americanism and patriotism in the South came to define itself as both anti-radical and anti-German. In the public eye, socialist opposition to the war became the equivalent of displaying pro-German sympathies as ethnic Germans and socialists became almost indistinguishable in the popular imagination. For conservative southerners the “Hun” menace could be found everywhere, in government, public schools, churches, and civic groups, and German citizens remained constantly under surveillance as agents of the Kaiser. Ultimately, the attempt to discredit trade unionists and socialists involved the creation of a new and acceptable political and social identity. In the construction of a new patriotic

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<sup>9</sup> Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 64.

identity, Americanism became defined by interwoven strains of anti-German attitudes, a rejection of radicalism, and upright moral behavior. Attempts to ban the teaching of German in public schools, the equation of socialism with “foreign ideas,” and the community pressure placed on wartime “slackers” created a nativist pattern that subsumed regionalism to a new national code and imperiled dissenters who remained outside the profile.

Previous vocal opposition to the war became conspicuously silent as socialists and other dissenters faced intensified censorship and violence. In Florida, Tennessee, and Mississippi, “law and order” leagues, South Carolina's Minute Men, and in Jacksonville the Liberty League actively sought to “correct” any “unpatriotic” souls.<sup>10</sup> Jacksonville's vigilantes tarred and feathered a German-born worker who allegedly expressed sympathy for the German cause, and in Athens, Georgia, eighteen robed members of the Ku Klux Klan forced anti-war activist J.T. Norris to kiss the flag and repent for his “disloyalty.” Former Athens Mayor W.F. Dorsey bragged that the climate in Georgia was “too hot for pro-Germans” and welcomed the Klan's efforts: “the KK's helped save the country once; they are ready to help again.” A climate of hysteria and terror pervaded

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the United States, 1917-1941, microfilm edition, reel 34 [hereafter USMI/reel #]; Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 49; Crooks, *Jacksonville After the Fire*, 127.



much of the South, lumping together Germans, socialists, and labor organizers as un-American. After two organizers of the Socialist Party of Georgia were assaulted, state secretary Mary Raoul Millis reported in 1918 that the “comrades are absolutely terrorized.” Alabama’s SPA recounted a similar climate of terror that threatened socialists as well as union organizers. In Birmingham, agents of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company dynamited the home of AFL organizer H.V. Hale after accusing him of holding meetings with German agitators.<sup>11</sup>

In many areas of Alabama federal agents and neighbors alike routinely spied on socialists.<sup>12</sup> In Mobile, suspected unionists and radical workers in the machine shops of the L & N Railroad remained under constant surveillance, and the general manager of that city’s Vrendenburgh Sawmill Company reported “everybody on the job had instructions to be on the lookout for German spies.” Elsewhere in southern Alabama, patriotic citizens reported on “those Germans of

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<sup>11</sup> *Minutes of the Joint Conference of the National Executive Committee and State Secretaries, Chicago, Illinois, August 10-12, 1918, SPA/7; Chattanooga Labor World, May 10, 1918.*

<sup>12</sup> Report on Distribution of Socialist Literature At Mobile, June 23, 25, 1917, United States Attorney to V.M. Schowalter, Point Clear, Alabama, September 27, 1917; V.M. Schowalter to Hon. A.L. Pitts, Mobile, Alabama, September 25, 1917; Report of Special Agent C. K. Berge, “Possible German Spy,” United States Attorney and Marshal Reports, Alabama, Southern District, Subject Correspondence File, 1907-1923, Box 1, RG 118, NARA [U.S. Attorney/box#].

Fairhope” as liberty loan “slackers” who made disloyal statements and other utterances that “violated the espionage act.” Eventually, the violent reaction to socialists became so threatening that the party's National Executive Committee pulled its organizers out of the South.<sup>13</sup>

Intimidation represented only one method of silencing Wilson's Southern critics. Armed with the passage of the Espionage Act on June 15, 1917, the government moved swiftly to suppress subversive literature. The suspension of first class mailing rights effectively killed any socialist anti-war periodicals like the *Appeal to Reason*, the *International Socialist Review*, the *American Socialist* and South Carolina's *Little Fool Killer*. The ban also included non-socialist journals such as Tom Watson's *Jeffersonian*, the *Charleston American*, the *Abbeville Scimitar* and the *Anderson Farmer's Tribune*.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, the federal

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<sup>13</sup> *Augusta Labor Review*, May 18, 25, 1918; *Minutes of The Joint Conference*, SPA/7; “Reorganization of Bainbridge Socialists,” Hicks Papers, 3/3, EmU; Mary Raoul Millis to W.J. Lewis, August 17, 1932, Raoul Family Papers Ms 548, 17/18, EmU; Millis to Clarence Senior, September 12, 1929, 17/17. The Georgia party still managed to field a slate of candidates in the statewide elections, and in Atlanta and Birmingham the socialist led Jewish Workman’s Circle “carried on” as they had before the war. Nevertheless, by 1918, the Alabama and Georgia SPA experienced a dramatic decline in membership and participation.

<sup>14</sup> Burts, *Richard Irvine Manning*, 176; Undesirable publication file, USMI/34; Donald Johnson, “Wilson, Burleson, and Censorship in the First World War,” *Journal of Southern History* 28 (February 1962): 46-58; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, Vol.7, *Labor and World War I, 1914-1918* (New York, 1987), 318-21.

government convicted *Scimitar* publisher William Beard of disloyalty under the Sedition Act and increasingly forced socialist and anti-war journals to devote more editorial space to defending their constitutional rights than to actually opposing the war.<sup>15</sup>

Despite AFL President Samuel Gompers' enthusiastic support of preparedness and U.S. involvement, some of the South's state federations and many central labor unions strongly opposed a commitment of America's human and material resources to the war effort. The Georgia Federation of Labor assumed a strong anti-preparedness position, reflected quite openly in the Waycross and the Augusta central labor unions.<sup>16</sup> Max Wilk's *Augusta Labor Review* maintained a particularly strong resistance to U.S. participation:

"Does Americanism merely spell great guns, big battleships, rights abroad, preparedness to defend what we've bought or annexed? What Americanism worth while and enduring is not based upon a feeling of economic security, social justice and equal opportunity to all? That is the only preparedness that we, the workers of America, feel bound to support."

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<sup>15</sup> Burts, *Richard Irvine Manning*, 176; *The Jeffersonian Publishing Company vs. J.Q. West, Postmaster*, U.S. Circuit Court, Southern District of Georgia, Northeast Division, Augusta, Georgia, Equity Case File #24, box 2, RG 21, NARA; *Augusta Labor Review*, August 14, September 1, November 10, 1917; *Jeffersonian*, August 16, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> *Augusta Labor Review*, July 26, September 9, 1916; *Labor Index* (Waycross), March 4, 1916;



As early as 1915, the Jacksonville labor press offered a strongly worded and militant denunciation of any U.S. involvement in the war and called for a general strike of American workers to hinder the production of war material.<sup>17</sup> In the South, socialist and militant AFL opposition to preparedness, military training in the public schools, and conscription produced for a fleeting moment a counterweight to the rising tide of patriotism.<sup>18</sup>

While Democrats, trade unionists, and reformers who opposed the war gradually modified or renounced their positions and slipped back into the good graces of their party or community, socialists remained targets. Most of the Southern-wing of the SPA, led by Georgia's Mary Raoul Millis and Alabama's Emma Connolly, voted with the majority resolution at the party's National Emergency Convention in St. Louis which called the war declaration "a crime against the people of the United States" and "sham national patriotism." The resolution further held capitalist greed accountable for the war and called for international working class opposition as well as active resistance to conscription

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<sup>17</sup> *Artisan*, June 12, 19, 1915.

<sup>18</sup> T.H. Blizzard, Ware, County, Georgia, World War I Draft Registration Card, RG 163, NARA; *Proceedings of the Georgia Federation of Labor, 1916*, SLA.

and press censorship.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, with the onset of war, some of the AFL's most passionate anti-war messengers reversed their well-publicized stances against preparedness and militarism and endorsed the President's policy. Old allies in the labor movement now moved against the socialists. The Birmingham *Labor Advocate* began carrying sensational headlines: "German Propaganda Masquerades Under Socialist Guise." The city's Trades Council rescinded an anti-war resolution made by socialist machinist William Doyle, citing the "shame" it brought to patriotic union men.<sup>20</sup> A week prior to the formal war declaration, the Augusta Federation of Trades, perhaps the South's strongest socialist-influenced central labor union, went on record as offering "moral and physical support" to President Wilson.<sup>21</sup> In Georgia and Florida, shortly after U.S. entry the state federations pledged their support of the "patriotic declaration" of the AFL national executive committee.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Proceedings of the National Emergency Convention, April 7-14, 1917, St. Louis, Missouri*, SPA/7; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement* 7, 31-35; Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, 125-28.

<sup>20</sup> *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, March 31, April 7, 21, 1917; Philip Taft, *Organizing Dixie: Alabama Workers During the Industrial Era* (Westport, Connecticut, 1981), 42; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism*, 51-52.

<sup>21</sup> *Augusta Labor Review*, March 24, 1917.

<sup>22</sup> *Augusta Labor Review*, April 28, 1917; *Proceedings of the 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Florida State Federation of Labor, Tallahassee, April 11-13, 1917*.

Certainly numerous workers genuinely supported U.S. intervention, but more than simple patriotism drove the AFL and its state federations. As historian Philip Taft concluded after studying Alabama's wartime workers, "the labor movement sought to protect and expand democracy at home while fighting for it abroad." State and local trade union bodies lobbied the public and the administration to support labor's inclusion in the nation's economic decision making. The Alabama and Tennessee federations demanded a role in post-war "reconstruction," and the buzz word "industrial democracy" filtered through the labor press across the South: "[p]olitical democracy is a delusion unless built upon and guaranteed by a free and virile industrial democracy."

Balancing patriotism with an aggressive industrial program characterized many departments and groups of the AFL during the war period, such as the overworked central Florida phosphate workers. But workers engaged in "necessary war work" often responded with militant workplace action. Strikes in several industries—shipbuilding in Tampa, textiles in Atlanta, and the metal trades in Birmingham—portrayed a workforce squeezed by long hours, speedups, and unsafe conditions.<sup>23</sup> The Tennessee Federation even qualified its support of the

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<sup>23</sup> On the phosphate industry see Arch Frederick Blakey, *The Florida Phosphate Industry: A History of the Development and Use of a Vital Mineral* (Cambridge, 1973); *Metal Trades Department vs. Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company*, Case #2, July 10, 1918, Records of the National War Labor



war by threatening to “stop every wheel of industry in the state to force a division of war profits.” That Federation also demonstrated a creative use of popular language by characterizing greedy employers as “un-patriotic” citizens concerned only with profiteering.<sup>24</sup>

Southern labor's use of the concept of “patriotism” to advance its standing suggests the term became thoroughly internalized in the region and could represent fundamentally different ideas of what loyal citizenship meant.<sup>25</sup> Both industrialists and workers saw their respective contributions to the war effort as patriotic but defined its meaning in very different ways. Patriotism became the litmus test by which demands and grievances could be negotiated. Stephen Norwood discovered that AFL organizers in Bogalusa, Louisiana, waged a bitter biracial union campaign against the Great Southern Company by labeling that interest “Lumber’s Kaiser.” Southern lumber, for its part, concealed its own economic ties and attempted to elicit a more complicated memory by comparing southern union men and federal labor mediators to “carpetbag” rule and a “Second Reconstruction.” But with a Southerner in the White House, the delicate tempering of sectionalism

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Board, microfilm edition, reel 22.

<sup>24</sup> *Proceedings of the Tennessee Federation of Labor, 1917, 1918.*

<sup>25</sup> *The Gleaner* (Brunswick, Ga.), August 31, 1918.

in favor of a American identity, and the links between federal agencies and the South's major war production industries and workers, such charged language failed to hit its mark. Instead, for a brief moment during and immediately after the war, even age-old racist appeals were often expressed in terms of loyalty. The AFL's attempt to organize black machinists in Birmingham confronted fierce opposition, not as it had just five year's earlier for its "carpetbag" defiance of Jim Crow custom, but rather as "unpatriotic."

Organized labor's use of patriotism to expand democracy at home reflected the consequences of a post-war consensus that isolated and sacrificed socialists and labor radicals within the AFL in the interests of social, economic, and political harmony. In many southern cities, anti-war positions not only bucked community standards of patriotism, but often elicited interesting legal and cultural responses by local, state, and federal authority in defense of those standards. The cases of a socialist, Arlie K. Barber, and an AFL organizer, the Reverend J.A. Callan, provide an illuminating look at the intersection of ideology, culture, and legality in the maintenance of a prescribed political climate.

In 1915, the citizens of Birmingham elected socialist Arlie K. Barber to the city commission. During his two years of service, Barber, the owner of a department and drug store on 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, advocated an agenda of municipal

ownership, progressive taxation, free heat and lighting, and increased funding to city schools. Barber also zealously investigated insurance, telephone, and telegraph rates, challenged corporate tax exemptions, and introduced measures that would have prohibited brokerage firms from dealing in futures.<sup>26</sup> During his tenure, Barber received praise from the chief of police who credited the commissioner's management style with guiding the police and fire departments through a period of "great harmony."

But Barber certainly had his adversaries. From the time of his election, the Birmingham press called Barber "the laughing stock of the community" and editorially labeled his selection "a mistake and grave blunder." His opposition, which included corporate interests and newspapers, even attempted an unsuccessful recall campaign.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the loquacious and radical druggist managed to accomplish a great deal despite the powerful and well-connected political and economic interests he railed against. Barber could not survive, however, the ubiquitous force of patriotism that consumed Birmingham in 1917. One day after President Wilson announced America's war intentions, the Birmingham City Council, in an ultra-patriotic resolution, pledged the city's total

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<sup>26</sup> *Birmingham City Directory, 1915*; Ward Scrapbooks, Vol. 14, 1, 29, 35, 79, 144, 153, 164, 243, 259, 319, DAH/BPL.

<sup>27</sup> Ward Scrapbooks, Vol. 14, 115, 146.



loyalty to the war effort and placed all of its means and resources at the disposal of the federal government. Councilman Barber strongly opposed it with equally provocative rhetoric. “[O]ur people divide the lead while a few Wall Street plutocrats divide the gold,” he protested, and labeled U.S. involvement in the war “a disgrace to the civilized world.” Barber further implied that J.P. Morgan and other capitalists orchestrated the war to secure handsome profits.<sup>28</sup>

The predictable outrage at Barber's position came almost instantly. Richard Luccier, president of the rival Tutwiler Drug Company, perhaps seizing the opportunity to strike at a competitor, concluded that “Arlie Barber stands convicted of sedition.” Luccier thought Barber should be dealt with by federal authorities at once. Others found the commissioner's statements “unpatriotic and un-American” and questioned his qualifications to oversee the city's police department. A number of Birmingham citizens at a mass meeting told Barber to “resign and leave town.” In the days following this uproar United States Attorney Robert Bell sat in on commission meetings observing commissioner Barber's every move.<sup>29</sup> Silenced, he served out his term under the watchful eye of patriots. Subsequently, Barber abandoned any aspirations in electoral politics as men like

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<sup>28</sup> *Birmingham News*, April 3, 1917; *Birmingham Ledger*, April 3, 1917; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, April 4, 1917.

<sup>29</sup> Ward Scrapbooks, 368-70; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, April 5, 1917.

the Reverend A.J. Dickenson, leader of the anti-Catholic “True Americans” and city commission president Nathaniel Barrett were able to wrestle away Barber’s anti-corporatism and infuse it with racist and anti-immigrant vitriol.<sup>30</sup>

The case of John A. Callan, charged by federal agents in April 1918 for violations of the Espionage Act, demonstrates an attempt by the state of Georgia to define acceptable wartime political behavior. Callan, the “industrial preacher,” had been active in Georgia labor circles for several years, described by some as a “leading spirit in the [1916] Atlanta Street Car Strike.” At the time of his arrest Callan had been organizing Columbus’ Bibb Manufacturing Company mill workers for over a year on behalf of the United Textile Workers of America (UTWA). Recent strikes at the Anchor Dock Mills in Rome, Atlanta’s Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills and Exposition Mills combined with wartime suspicion and paranoia elevated an already adversarial relationship between business owners and workers to new heights.<sup>31</sup> Less than a week after the U.S. war declaration, agents, operating

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<sup>30</sup> Henry McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (UNC Press, 1995), 161-62; Carl Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 86-89; Despite threats, intimidation, and legal harassment, Barber remained in Birmingham, continued his Socialist Party activity, and later in the 1930s spoke throughout the South on behalf of Norman Thomas Clubs, Raoul Family Papers, EmU, 17/16.

<sup>31</sup> On the Fulton Bag strike see Fink, *The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills Strike*; Evans, “History of Organized Labor in Georgia,” 89-91; UTWA Strike in Rome, loose material in Al Kuettner Collection, SLA; *Atlanta Constitution*,

on an anonymous tip, raided Callan's Columbus room and allegedly uncovered a lethal combination of "dynamite, whiskey, and I.W.W. literature." According to government witnesses, Callan possessed blueprints of Bibb Manufacturing, Empire Mills, Columbus Power Company and the City Water Works with intent to sabotage those facilities. During the raid, Justice Department agents supposedly uncovered diagrams and notes including one reportedly written in German describing a plan to "destroy the Empire Mill with dynamite and flee in haste." Authorities swiftly transferred the suspected German agent to Atlanta, expressing concern that the defendant "would have been lynched" had he remained in Columbus.<sup>32</sup>

The Georgia Federation of Labor immediately protested the arrest, calling the charges "a frame-up comparable only to the famous [Tom] Mooney case in San Francisco." Delegates to the Federation's convention further declared the arrest "high-handed blackmail on the part of the textile interests of Columbus to whose underpaid employees this gifted minister [Callan] had been spreading the gospel of trade unionism and organization." Federation President Marquardt appointed a committee led by socialist Max Wilk, labor lawyer Paul Donehoo,

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January 29-31, 1918.

<sup>32</sup> *United States Vs. J.A. Callan*, Criminal Case #1387.



T.B. Johnson, W.F. Woods, and George Marshall, to investigate the charges. Within a week the Federation retained defense counsel of Samuel Olive, John Smith, and Donehoo, and appealed to central trade bodies throughout the state to contribute to the "Callan Defense Fund." Individuals, local unions, and the Georgia SPA responded with enthusiasm, collectively raising the necessary money for Callan's defense.<sup>33</sup> Finding a spirit of cooperation among Georgia's laborers, Atlanta's socialists held a fund raising picnic and declared "there may be disagreements on minor points or on tactical methods, but the working class is beginning to understand the meaning of class solidarity and mass political action." Indeed, the Callan affair did not seem to diffuse either worker militancy or establishment reaction in Atlanta or Columbus. In early June, workers at Atlanta's Piedmont mills organized into a local of the UTWA, before mill owners engaged in a lockout, won an injunction, and crushed the union. Two months later, both Columbus textile and street car employees walked off the job to protest alleged company violations of their labor agreements. When striking workers threatened scabs and stormed street cars, the state declared martial law.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Proceedings of the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of the Georgia Federation of Labor, Brunswick, Ga., April 16-19, 1919*; Evans, "Organized Labor Movement in Georgia," 90.

<sup>34</sup> *GFL Proceedings, 1919*; Evans, "History of Organized Labor in Georgia," 91.

Despite all of the sensational reports and rumors of Callan's spying, the charges against him were dropped for lack of evidence nearly two years after his arrest.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, throughout the course of his trials, Callan continued to work for the cause of organized labor and later devoted most of his time to the North Georgia Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>36</sup> Although accused of being a German spy, an IWW agitator, a "whiskey drinker," and a socialist, inconclusive evidence indicates that the vilified Callan may or may not have been any of these things. His organizing ability, however, clearly threatened entrenched economic interests, and the SPA's unqualified support suggests at the very least a cordial relationship between the preacher and the comrades. Ultimately, Callan's case symbolized how insecure Southern elites, backed by state and local governments and reinforced by forces from below blurred the distinction between socialists, labor radicals, reformers and ethnic Germans. The forces that chose to use the war as a pretense to crush socialism largely succeeded. In the South, virtually all state organizations ended up in shambles; party newspapers ceased publication, and organized labor, for its part, retreated into a conservative posture. The loyalty most Southerners felt toward Wilson made any sympathy toward the socialists extremely ill-advised. By

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<sup>35</sup> Order of Nolle Prosequi, entered and filed June 13, 1920, Case #1387, NARA.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, "History of Organized Labor In Georgia," 91.

the time the government dropped the charges against Callan, the armistice had been signed, and America had invented a new enemy—the Bolshevik.

The 1917 October Revolution may have seemed incidental to southern socialists and their own political experiences, but the ramifications of events in Russia would ultimately reactivate oppressive state attacks on radicals, ideologically split the national party, and contribute to its ultimate disintegration. With the overthrow of the czar some prominent socialists in the national leadership “switched their advocacy to the Bolsheviks” and sought to bring a “Russian style revolution to America.” The Bolshevik revolution offered a program of action with radical possibilities that some Southerners, too, briefly embraced. Georgia state secretary Mary Raoul Millis praised the Bolsheviks for putting revolutionary theory into action and “expressing the aspirations of oppressed people.”

In 1919 the left-wing bolted the SPA and in turn divided into two sometimes antagonistic camps, the Communist Labor Party (CLP) and the Communist Party (CP). The CLP consisted primarily of a native-born membership while the CP, under ethnic Russian leadership, incorporated the former language federations.<sup>37</sup> Tampa comrades and Birmingham's Jewish socialists expressed sympathy toward the left-wing, but southern socialists, already isolated by war

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<sup>37</sup> Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, 210-12, 177-233, *passim*.



time repression, generally assumed a more conservative posture. Most SPA locals in the South bemoaned the rise of factionalism and initially rejected affiliation with the communist movement.<sup>38</sup> Some SPA members, like Millis, briefly flirted with communism but ultimately found that tendency incompatible with their own political experiences.<sup>39</sup>

On the heels of the Russian revolution, left-internationalism failed to replace the more familiar socialist message that had been rooted in the South's own lexicon. Nevertheless, the impact of the 1919 national party split crippled the SPA's organizational abilities and the ensuing collapse was irreversible. In the South, the SPA lay in shambles, but remnants of the party, the IWW, and communists continued to serve as political targets of the state. Federal agents continued to monitor radicals and suspected radicals in a variety of settings. North Carolina counted approximately three hundred SPA members, a handful of IWW and Communist Labor Party organizers, and a chapter of the Committee of Forty-Eight led by Wade B. Leonard, an "acquaintance of Trotsky [sic]" In Savannah, a

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<sup>38</sup> George White to Adolph Germer, June 20, 1919, SPA/9; Report on regional conditions, 4<sup>th</sup> Corp Area, Fort McPherson, Ga., USMI/20; Mary Raoul Millis to Walter M. Cook, August 4, 1919; Charles Weintraub to Cook, August 31, 1919, SPA/7.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Raoul Millis, "Autobiography of Mary Raoul Millis," (typescript 1953), 330, Raoul Family Collection, 46/13, EmU; Report on Regional Conditions, USMI/20.

local of the Communist Party formed, and the World War Veterans, an alleged IWW front group, organized a small number of black workers. The IWW also maintained locals in Atlanta, Knoxville, Key West, Tampa, and Mobile, and in Easley, South Carolina and Gulfport, Mississippi.<sup>40</sup> Jacksonville's strong SPA local survived the war and the Red Scare in better shape than most of the South's locals; and the IWW, the Communist Party, and the CLP established branches in that city.

Prior to the Bolshevik revolution the message of native born American socialists and southern radicals, however distasteful to the ruling establishment, had at least been a familiar entity on the political landscape. But fashioning a revolution based on the Russian model aroused great concern in a region already suspicious of "foreign ideas" and angry over the Soviet anti-war stance. A South thoroughly bathed in anti-German hysteria and sustained by Jim Crow and nativism exhibited little ability to cleanse itself of paranoia and suspicion. The psychological leap from the "Hun" to the Bolshevik proved to be remarkably easy.

Southern politicians like former Georgia Governor Joseph Brown found in Bolshevism an easy ruse to sustain his frequent attacks on labor, embellished with

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<sup>40</sup> S.H. Munson, information concerning local conditions, Atlanta, Ga., May 3, 1920, Charles Day, intelligence report, Savannah, Georgia, December 1, 1920, J.E. Wyke, report on local conditions, Savannah, Georgia, May 11, 1920, George Ahern, report on local conditions, Jacksonville, Florida, November 30, 1920, USMI/19; *Chattanooga Labor World*, November 22, 1917; *Railroad Workers Bulletin*, October 1, 1922, U.S. Attorney/ 1; IWW state secretaries, USMI/34.

racist and anti-radical rhetoric. Obviously still dwelling on a 1910 strike of ethnic Italian miners at the Dunham Mines in Walker County, Georgia, the governor reacted to the post-war unrest by asking how the “average Georgian” would feel having his daughter marry an Italian.<sup>41</sup> Brown possessed an uncanny ability to synthesize rather casually all of his individual fears into a great monolithic enemy. Indeed, he often publicly warned of the potential danger that radical labor and immigrants might some day cooperate with black workers, because “foreigners do not mind negroes [sic].” Irrespective of evidence, Brown instinctively assumed that at the center of the Bolshevik program would be a call for the social equality of blacks. In Brown's conception, foreigners, radicals, union members, and blacks constituted one united front which seriously threatened an ordered and harmonious society.

Labor organization, of course, provided the force through which all that endangered Georgia, the South, and the nation could be channeled. Southern labor's support for the Plumb Plan which would nationalize the railroads, along with the “epidemic of strikes” in 1919, gave regional Democrats pause for concern that perhaps Bolshevism had in fact come to Dixie. “[L]abor unionism is as

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<sup>41</sup> Joseph M. Brown, “Shall We Substitute Russian Bolshevism for American Constitutional Government, In Georgia and the United States?” Speech delivered September 27, 1920, Joseph M. Brown Papers, 8/6, Atlanta Historical Society.



heartless in Georgia as it is in Russia,” Brown reasoned, “it has no more scruples in Georgia than in Russia against committing murder to establish its dominance.” The fashioning of the “other” in southern society certainly had a long history, and transforming the Bolshevik image into one fundamentally at odds with a new found fondness of the American character rested at the center of the region's anti-radicalism.

At Moultrie, Georgia, Charles Baranda, an AFL organizer, received a harsh lesson in how mobs identified un-American activities along race, ethnic, and ideological lines. In February 1920, Baranda had traveled to Moultrie in hopes of organizing employees at the Swift Packing Company. Several days after his arrival a leaflet circulated describing “an Italian working among both the negroes [sic] and white men in the county, spreading the dangerous doctrines of the Bolsheviki [sic] and the IWW.” A citizens' committee called for a public meeting to “combat the efforts of foreigners to disturb the happy condition of our people.” Amazingly enough, an estimated one thousand people gathered on February 17<sup>th</sup> at the county courthouse to take “conservative but positive action to forestall labor trouble.” At a gathering that night speakers leveled numerous charges against Baranda, who attended in an attempt to refute any forthcoming accusations. Hoping to disarm the crowd, the AFL organizer stated his and his forefathers' American citizenship and

displayed an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army. Interrupting Baranda, however, a hostile citizen asked him if he had spoken to black workers. When Baranda admitted that he had “pandemonium broke loose and preparations were made to deport him from town.” A committee immediately proceeded to escort Baranda to the Norman Park railroad station and put him on a northbound train.<sup>42</sup>

Baranda's treatment provides a useful reminder that intense public passions shaped by a mob mentality blinded any realistic distinctions among labor organization, calls for black equality, and socialist agitation. Caught in the same emotional dragnet were Florida Federation President Arthur Keep and Tennessee's Fred Keith, who had both taken pro-war positions and showed no evidence of membership in the SPA or any other “radical” group, but were nevertheless described by agents as dangerous reds and “radical to the extreme.”

In the South, a range of responses characterized enforcement of post-war patriotism. The federal Espionage and Sedition Acts provided an operative legal framework to suppress radicals, but in such a volatile atmosphere citizens and patriotic groups often went beyond legal mandates. In 1919 in an already charged environment in which Wallace Stovall, editor and owner of the *Tampa Tribune*, advocated that IWW leaders be hanged as an example to labor agitators, Tampa

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<sup>42</sup> *GFL Proceedings, 1920.*

socialists called for a public demonstration to protest the imprisonment of anti-war activists Eugene Debs, Tom Mooney, and Kate O'Hare. On the same day, the city's cigar workers had also planned a May Day celebration, parade, and rally. Tampa authorities responded by banning all demonstrations and dispatched military units to Ybor City. At the same time, one official, T.N. Henderson, vowed that "as long as I am chief of police and can get enough men" the socialist meeting would not be held. The following day Frank Lehti, a Finnish shoemaker, was arrested and charged under an article in the city code prohibiting "utterances disloyal to the United States." In justifying this action, chief Henderson promised that Tampa's "enviable reputation for loyalty and patriotism" gained during the war would not be taken away during peace time. Intent on proving their patriotic credentials, Tampa authorities, vigilantes, and citizens' committee waged a war of terror and intimidation against radicals and dissenters.<sup>43</sup>

The nationwide Palmer raids reached into the South and included Jacksonville in its dragnet, leading to the arrest of eight suspected Communist Party members in that city. The Jacksonville and the Tampa experiences showed

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<sup>43</sup> Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes in the New South*, 59, 116-22; Flynt, "Florida Labor and Political Radicalism," 82-83; George White to Adolph Germer, May 16, 1919, SPA/9; Endorsements received for the National League for the Release of Political Prisoners, SPA/9; *Tampa Tribune*, April 25, 26, 27, May 2, 1919; *Tampa Citizen*, July 19, 1919.



that authorities had become equally comfortable utilizing the courts, the press, and extra-legal methods in silencing protest.<sup>44</sup> As historian Robert Ingalls' work shows, Tampa's elite developed over time a range of methods of control regardless of the “other” in question. In the fifty-plus years examined by Ingalls's book, Tampa authorities alternately organized citizens committees around issues of “honor,” race, protection of business interests, and anti-radicalism.<sup>45</sup> In imposing a strict, anti-radical order upon the South, authorities had only to rely on the region's violent history to develop the structures of enforcement.

Across the South zealous patriots, blessed with the support of federal, state, and local authorities, created informal surveillance networks and vigilante committees to monitor and “deal with” radicals. “Good citizens” in places like Griffin, Georgia, Senatobia, Mississippi, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and Montgomery, Alabama, provided the federal government with a constant flow of information concerning socialist, Bolshevik, and IWW activity.<sup>46</sup> Southern posts of the American Legion, the Kiwanis Club, the Knights of Columbus and several

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<sup>44</sup> *Florida Times-Union*, January 3, 4, 22, 1920.

<sup>45</sup> Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> W.E. McNeil to A. Mitchell Palmer, May 11, 1920, John Sheffield to Palmer, November 13, 1920, DJIF/13; Rev. H.K. Williams to Palmer, February 18, 1921, DJIF/14; Thomas Owen to Palmer, January 6, 1920, DJIF/24.

other organizations of “True-Americans” pledged their unqualified support for Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's anti-socialist efforts. In Alabama, prominent bankers, coal operators, lumber giants, and public servants in rather colorful and sensational prose called on the government to crush the “foreign influence which is gnawing at the vitals of the nation.” Thomas Owen, director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, urged legislation increasing federal power to “deport and punish agents of the Red Regime.”

Many “spy reports” revealed an expressed concern that the socialist message sharpened existing social “problems.” Issues of race, ethnicity, and morality frequently motivated the fervent anti-radicals. One Mississippi informer feared socialists' “unwholesome influence on the negro [sic]” and Reverend H.K. Williams of Elizabeth City's First Baptist Church preached that “radical socialism” led to “the divorce evil, polygamy, and free love.” In Tampa, the mayor, state senator, and special agents characterized that city's Latin working-class as “cliquish,” “unruly,” and “un-desirable,” and in Southern Pines, North Carolina, attorney P.P. Pelton discovered a suspected red because he “showed his Jewish blood in his short stocky build, hooked nose, and olive complexion.” In justifying their actions, vigilantes and “good citizens” throughout the South so thoroughly

mixed their language to describe accused radicals that such descriptive connotations as Bolshevik, IWW, or socialist lost any real meaning.

That powerful interests in the South during and immediately after the war could effectively invent a “foreign” dominated SPA and arm itself with a newfound patriotic and anti-radical language reveals the tremendous power of political mythology and nationalism. Indeed, that southern socialists had opposed the war and now embraced a “foreign” doctrine supposedly dedicated to destroying American political traditions made the emotional equation of Bolshevism and treason an all too easy political construction.<sup>47</sup> The truth of the matter is that most Southern socialists who remained active after the party’s undoing assumed a left anti-communism, and in the 1920s and beyond redirected their energies into a variety of southern radical and liberal organizations. Mary Millis became a staunch anti-communist and orchestrated a brief renaissance of the Georgia SPA in the early 1930s. She later devoted much of her time to the Atlanta urban league, community theater, and the cause of civil liberties, working closely with the ACLU. In 1932 Millis served on the Angelo Herndon defense committee, an ad hoc group formed to monitor the case against Herndon, a black communist arrested in Atlanta on spurious charges. Max Wilk continued to edit the

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<sup>47</sup> Murray, *Red Scare*, 34.



*Augusta Labor Review* and, unlike many of his former comrades who defected to the more radical CIO, remained loyal to the AFL. Throughout the Great Depression, Birmingham's Arlie Barber campaigned tirelessly for SPA standard bearer Norman Thomas and the Hicks sisters of Bainbridge retooled their agrarian radicalism to embrace the "Share Our Wealth" philosophy of Louisiana's Huey P. Long. Other party members showed up at the founding convention of the Southern Conference For Human Welfare or drifted into the ranks of the Highlander Folk School and other numerous education projects.<sup>48</sup>

In the end, the collapse of the Socialist party in the South resulted as much from regional and national hysteria during the First World War and the Red Scare as it did from any particular tenets of the party's political program. Indeed, taken together, the later experiences of former SPA members show the variety of ways radicalism positioned itself in the South, as well as the rather malleable nature of

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<sup>48</sup> Mary Raoul Millis to W.L. Harrigan, August 21, September 1, 1932, Earl Bell to M.R. Millis, August 26, 1932, box 17, folder 18; Misc. Clippings and correspondence file items relating to Urban League, Thomas Clubs, I.L.D. and ACLU, 17/16, Raoul Family Papers #548, EmU; *Augusta Labor Review*, June 29, 1945; Mildred Hicks, "Buying Power for the Masses," *Plain Talk Magazine*, May 1933, 25, 41; Mildred and Mary Hicks, "The Five Day Plan," *The Social Service Bulletin*, December 15, 1931; Mildred Hicks, "Work for All Plan," *The Pathfinder Union*, September 15, 1933, Mildred Hicks Papers ms 77-243, Emu, Box 3/6; On the Angelo Herndon case see Charles Martin, *The Angelo Herndon Case and Southern Justice* (Baton Rouge, 1976); John Glen, *Highlander: No Ordinary School* (Knoxville, 1996); Thomas Krueger, *And Promises to Keep: The Southern Conference for Human Welfare, 1938-1948* (Nashville, 1967).

the region's populism. But caught between the vice of state repression and a groundswell of reaction from below the party was dislodged from its own authentic moorings. In organizing the South, socialists had managed to negotiate the one-party system, disfranchisement, and race baiting, but the charge that the party was "un-patriotic" and disloyal destroyed in four years what had taken nearly twenty years to build.

## EPILOGUE

*A new broom sweeps clean, but an old  
broom knows the corner.*

Traditional

On the morning of November 5, 1912 near the socialist colony of Ruskin, Florida, voters lined up at the Gulf City polling station to cast their ballots in state and local elections. The *Tampa Morning Tribune*, citing the “fierce rivalry between the Democratic and Socialist party,” predicted a heavy turnout.<sup>1</sup> During the campaign socialist candidates vowed to make a “determined fight,” and the party fielded a full ticket throughout Tampa and the surrounding area. SPA poll watchers must have delighted at the crowd that day as the socialist presence proved to be “stronger than usual.” The following day, when election officials began to tabulate results, socialist optimism seemed confirmed. In the city of Gulfport, a straight Socialist party ticket headed by Mayor E.E. Wintersgill won the election and incomplete results in other municipalities for various offices showed several close races between Democrats and Socialists.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 6, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Petersburg Daily Times*, November 8, 1912; *Tampa Daily Times* November 6, 7, 1912; *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 6, 1912



But at the Gulf City precinct a strange twist to the SPA's already surprising showing would color this particular election. Socialist voters who waited in the long line at that precinct must have surely delighted at the irony of the ballot they were asked to mark. It listed only the Socialist candidates, and Democratic supporters were forced to write in the names of their nominees.<sup>3</sup> The following day an alarmed Democrat-controlled canvassing board promised a thorough investigation, but in all likelihood the issue of electoral fraud ceased to be much of a concern so long as the overwhelming majority of Democratic candidates won their races. The integrity of the process hardly mattered as long as the results were desirable. More significantly, such episodes suggest that the Socialists themselves, in attempting to beat the Democrats at their own game, became as much a product of the region's political culture as their Democratic foes. In the New South, old political tricks died hard.

In 1906, an *Atlanta Journal* editorial labeled Alabama Governor Braxton Bragg Comer's efforts to regulate the railroad trusts as a "significant event occurring in the very heart of the Democratic South, as far removed as possible from socialistic influences." Six years later the same newspaper expressed fear that an election day alliance between blacks and socialists would topple Mayor James

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<sup>3</sup> *Tampa Daily Tribune*, November 7, 1912.

Woodward.<sup>4</sup> Of course, such an event failed to materialize, and with few exceptions the Bourbons never had reason to fear the socialists at the polls. But the popular perception, and indeed the socialists' own expectations, as to what they could achieve in the American South distort the party's lasting contributions.

C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South* portrays the story of an elite that governed for its own interests at the expense of southern working people. The practical barriers to insurgent party advances have been ably demonstrated in the work of scholars describing the anti-democratic character of southern politics. But socialist isolation did not preclude the party from actively pursuing its own political agenda. Indeed, New South industrialism and social change challenged conventional political relationships. The ballot box now included union elections, and the South's power brokers just as often assumed the identity of industrialist as they did political boss. Located in the union halls and worker libraries, on city street corners, and in the region's mines, mills, and fields were southern politics of a different variety. Perhaps in studying socialist efforts to break the Democratic gridlock and resist the South's emergent capitalist development some larger lessons can be learned. That many southerners embraced socialism should not come as a surprise. If for only a moment, socialism offered an opportunity to confront

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<sup>4</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, September 11, 12, 1906, December 3, 4, 5, 1912.

political alienation and impersonal market forces by combining the region's familiar lexicon with the millenarian hopes of the party.



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