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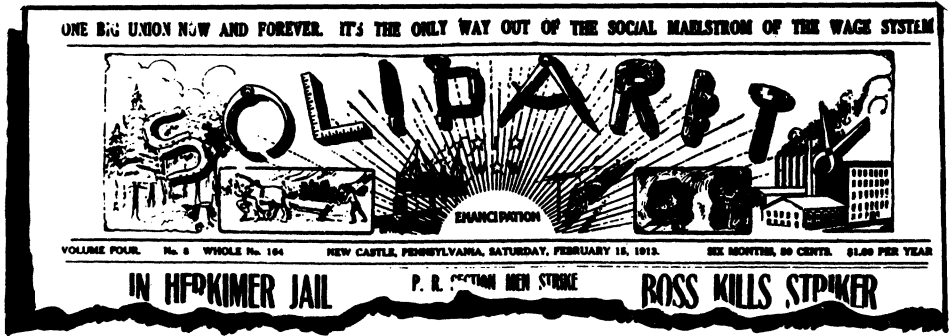
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Masthead of Solidarity

Why is there no Socialism in the United States?

by *Eric Foner*

It is now nearly eighty years since the German sociologist Werner Sombart raised the question, 'why is there no socialism in the United States?' In the ensuing decades, the problem has been a source of apparently endless debate among historians examining the distinctive qualities of the American experience, American radicals seeking an explanation for their political weakness, and Europeans alternately fascinated and repelled by the capitalist colossus to their west. Indeed, long before Sombart, the exceptional economic and political history of the United States commanded attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

Marx and Engels themselves occasionally sought to solve the riddle of America, the land where, as Marx once put it, capitalism had developed more 'shamelessly' than in any other country. They could never quite decide, however, whether the unique qualities of nineteenth-century American life boded well or ill for the future development of socialism. Would the early achievement of political democracy prove an impediment to class consciousness in the United States or encourage it by making economic inequalities appear all the more illegitimate? Was the absence of a feudal tradition a barrier to the development of class ideologies, or did it make possible the early emergence of a modern, socialist political culture? If America was, in so many ways, the most capitalist nation on earth, should it not also become the most socialist? Marx and Engels could never quite answer such questions to their own satisfaction, and subsequent writers who

have entered into the 'why is there no socialism' quagmire have rarely been more successful.¹

In the end, Marx and Engels remained optimistic about prospects for socialism in the United States (Engels even advising the 'backward' workers of Britain to learn from the example of the Knights of Labor.) Other observers, however, believed that the nature of American society precluded the emergence of class-based political ideologies on the European model. In 1867 E. L. Godkin, the Irish-born editor of *The Nation*, sought to explain why, despite a wave of strikes in the United States, the 'intense class feeling' so evident in Great Britain could not exist in America:

There [in Europe] the workingman on a strike is not simply a laborer who wants more wages: he is a member of a distinct order in society, engaged in a sort of legal war with the other orders. . . . His employer is not simply a capitalist in whose profits he is seeking a larger share: he is the member of a hostile class, which . . . it is considered mean or traitorous for him to hope to enter. This feeling, we need hardly say, does not exist in America. The social line between the laborer and the capitalist here is very faintly drawn. Most successful employers of labor have begun by being laborers themselves; most laborers hope . . . to become employers. Moreover, there are . . . few barriers of habit, manners or tradition between the artisan and those for whom he works, so that he does not consider himself the member of an 'order.' Strikes, therefore, are in the United States more a matter of business, and less a matter of sentiment, than in Europe. . . . Should the worst come to the worst [the American worker] has the prairies behind him, a fact which . . . diffuses through every workshop an independence of feeling, a confidence in the future, of which the European knows nothing. Besides this, the American working class are in the enjoyment of political power.²

I have quoted Godkin at some length, because the 'why is there no socialism' debate has not advanced very far beyond the answers he proposed over a century ago. Godkin touched upon nearly all the elements from which modern responses to the question are generally forged: American ideology, social mobility, the nature of the union movement, the political structure. In this essay, I propose to examine the most recent trends in this seemingly timeless debate. The essay is not meant as a history of socialism in the United States, or as an exhaustive survey of the immense body of literature that now exists on the subject (since nearly every work on American radicalism and labor explicitly or implicitly proposes an answer to the question, 'why is there no socialism'). It will not examine expressions of American radicalism, such as abolitionism and feminism, whose impact upon American life has been far more profound than socialism. I hope, however, both to draw attention to the most recent contributions to this debate, and to raise questions about both the adequacy of specific explanations, and the underlying premises upon which the entire discussion appears to rest. It might well be worth raising at the outset the question whether the experience of socialism in the United States is, in reality, exceptional, or whether it represents an extreme example of the dilemma of socialism throughout western society.

To some extent, the 'why is there no socialism' debate remains inconclusive because the participants define socialism in diverse, sometimes contradictory ways.

It is often unclear precisely what it is whose absence is to be explained. When Sombart wrote, in the period before World War I, there existed a reasonably unified body of socialist theory and political practice. But since the shattering of the international labor and socialist movements by World War I, the Russian Revolution, the rise of socialist and communist parties and, indeed, governments hostile to one another but all claiming the mantle of 'socialism', and the emergence of new forms of socialism in the Third World, it is impossible to contend that 'socialism' retains a coherent meaning. Socialism itself possesses a history, but too often, contributors to the debate treat it as an ahistorical abstraction.

Nevertheless, by common consent, the extremely imprecise problem, 'why is there no socialism in the United States' has been reduced to a discrete set of questions. It does not mean, 'why has the United States not become a socialist nation?', or even, 'why is there no revolutionary labor or political movement?' Rather, the problem is generally defined as the absence in the United States of a large avowedly social democratic political party like the Labour party of Britain, the French Socialist party, and the Communist party of Italy. From the strength of such parties, moreover, American writers generally infer a mass socialist consciousness among the working classes of these countries. Thus, 'why is there no socialism?' really means, why is the United States the only advanced capitalist nation whose political system lacks a social democratic presence and whose working class lacks socialist class consciousness?

Posed this way, the question does seem to have a *prima facie* plausibility, although, as I will suggest, it may well rest on assumptions about western European politics and class relations that are out of date today and may never have been fully accurate. One must, in other words, be wary of explanations for American exceptionalism based upon trends and phenomena equally evident in other countries. But this is only one of the pitfalls that characterize many analyses of the problem. Too often, it is assumed that a fairly simple, direct connection ought to exist between the social structure, class ideologies, and political parties. Many explanations of the connection exist, some, it is true, mutually exclusive. Poverty is sometimes seen as a barrier to radicalism, sometimes as its most powerful spur; social mobility sometimes is said to increase, sometimes to decrease class awareness; ethnic cohesiveness is seen as an impediment to class solidarity, or as the springboard from which it emerges. But whatever the specific argument, disproportionate influence is too often assigned to a single element of the social structure, and politics and ideology are too often viewed as simple reflections of economic relationships.

Particularly in the case of the United States, the conflation of class, society and politics has unfortunate consequences. One cannot assume that the absence of a powerful social democratic party implies that American workers fully accept the *status quo* (although, as we shall see, such an assumption is often made.) Actually, what needs to be explained is the coexistence in American history of workplace militancy and a politics organized around non-ideological parties appealing to broad coalitions, rather than the interests of a particular class. David Montgomery has expressed the problem succinctly: 'American workers in the nineteenth century engaged in economic conflicts with their employers as fierce as any known to the industrial world; yet in their political behavior they consistently failed to exhibit a class consciousness.' Why was militancy in the factory so rarely translated into the politics of class? Labor and socialist parties have emerged

in the United States, (indeed, Americans, in the late 1820s, created the first 'Workingmen's parties' in the world) but they have tended to be locally-oriented and short-lived. As Montgomery observes, the American form of socialism has centered on control of the workplace, rather than creating a working-class presence in politics.³ 'Why is there no socialism' thus becomes a problem of explaining the *disjuncture* of industrial relations and political practice in the United States.

Finally, there is the problem of proposed answers that simply explain too much. Descriptions of an unchanging American ideology, or timeless aspects of the American social order such as mobility, leave little room for understanding the powerful American radical tradition based upon cross-class movements and appeals to moral sentiment rather than economic interest. Nor can they explain those periods when socialist politics did attract widespread support. It is too little noted that at the time Sombart wrote there *was*, in fact, socialism in the United States. In the first fifteen years of this century, the American Socialist party appeared to rival those in Europe, except the German, in mass support and prospects for future growth. Around 1910, the American Socialist party had elected more officials than its English counterpart; certainly, Sombart's question might as readily have been asked about Britain as the United States before World War I. Thus, what must be explained is not simply why socialism is today absent from American politics, but why it once rose and fell. Such a definition of the question, I will argue, requires that we 'historicize' the problem of American socialism. Rather than assuming an unchanging pattern of American exceptionalism, we need to examine the key periods when American development diverged most markedly from that of Europe.

With these admonitions in mind, let us review some of the most prominent explanations for the weakness of socialism in the United States. Probably the most straight-forward approach is the contention that the failure of socialism results from the success of American capitalism. Various aspects of the American social order, according to this argument, have led workers to identify their interests with the socio-economic status quo. This, indeed, was the burden of Sombart's own analysis. The economic condition of workers in the United States, he insisted, was far better than that of Europeans in terms of wages, housing, and diet. Socially, moreover, they were far less sharply distinguished from the middle class than their European counterparts. And finally, they were conscious of being able to move west if dissatisfied with their present conditions. The success of capitalism, Sombart believed, made the American worker 'a sober, calculating businessman, without ideals.' 'On the reefs of roast beef and apple pie,' he added, 'socialistic utopias of every sort are sent to their doom.'⁴

From Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis,' which saw in the westward movement the key to American distinctiveness, to more recent studies attributing the failure of socialism to high rates of geographical and social mobility and the ability of American workers to acquire property, the success of capitalism has been seen as making the American working class complacent and rendering socialism irrelevant to American politics. As anyone who has lived in both America and Western Europe can testify, extremely high rates of geographical mobility are a distinctive feature of American life. In the nineteenth century, each decade witnessed a wholesale turnover of population in working-class neighborhoods, presumably with adverse effects on the possibility of creating permanent class institutions.⁵ Even today, the lure of the Sunbelt draws workers from the depressed

industrial heartland, an example of the individual 'safety-valve' that Turner identified as the alternative to class conflict in the United States. A recent variant on the theme was the contention, popular during the 1960's, that the white working class had exchanged material security and a privileged status in relation to minorities at home and workers abroad, for a renunciation of economic and political radicalism. Socialism, according to this view, could come to the United States only as the indirect result of revolutions in the third world, or the activity of marginal social groups like migrant workers and welfare mothers, not yet absorbed into the American mainstream.

Plausible as they appear, the 'success of capitalism' and 'mobility' approaches raise as many questions as they answer. First, they rest upon assumptions about the standard of living of American workers that are rarely subjected to empirical verification. Have the wage levels and rates of social mobility of American workers always been significantly higher than in Western Europe? Vague references to the 'scarcity of labor' in the United States do not suffice to answer that question.⁶ Many immigrants complained that certain aspects of their lives -- the length of the work day, the pace of factory labor -- compared unfavorably with conditions at home.

More importantly, the precise implications of the ability to acquire property for class consciousness and socialism are far more problematical than is often assumed. A venerable tradition of analysis, dating back at least as far as Alexis de Tocqueville, insists that far from promoting political stability, social mobility is a destabilizing force, raising expectations faster than they can be satisfied and thus encouraging demands for further change. Certainly, recent American and European studies of labor history suggest that the better off workers -- artisans in the nineteenth century, skilled factory workers in the twentieth, were most likely to take the lead in union organizing and radical politics.⁷ As for geographical mobility, until historians are able to generalize about the success or failure of those millions who have, over the decades, left American farms and cities in search of economic opportunity, the implications of the extraordinary turbulence of the American population must remain an open question.⁸ But in any case, the historian must beware of the temptation simply to deduce political ideology from social statistics or to assign disproportionate influence to a single aspect of the social structure. And finally, the 'success of capitalism' formula can hardly explain the relative weakness of socialism during the Great Depression, which failed to produce a mass-based socialist movement, or the radicalism of the 1960's, which arose in a period of unparalleled affluence.

Even more popular than the 'social mobility' thesis is the contention that the very ethos of American life is inherently hostile to class consciousness, socialism, and radicalism of any kind. Probably the best known expression of this point of view is Louis Hartz's *The Liberal Tradition in America*. To summarize Hartz's argument very briefly, Americans were 'born equal', never having had to launch a revolution to obtain political democracy or social equality, with the result that American ideology has been dominated by a Lockean, individualistic outlook against which neither socialism on the left nor serious conservatism on the right can make any headway. A thoroughly bourgeois 'fragment' spun off by Europe, America possessed only one part of the European social order. Lacking a hereditary aristocracy and a dispossessed working class, it had no need for class ideologies and politics.

No feudalism, no socialism. This oft-repeated aphorism sums up Hartz's contention that socialism arises from a vision, inherited from the feudal past, of a society based upon a structure of fixed orders and classes. Without a feudal tradition, and a sense of class oppression in the present, Americans are simply unable to think in class terms. Indeed, in its ideals of social mobility, individual fulfilment, and material acquisitiveness, American ideology produced a utopia more compelling than anything socialism could offer. Socialists called for a classless society; Americans, according to Hartz, were convinced they already lived in one.⁹

Dominant in the 1950's, the 'consensus' school of American historiography exemplified by Hartz has lately been supplanted by an interpretation of the American past marked less by ideological agreement than by persistent conflict among various racial and ethnic groups and classes. The rise of the new social and labor history, and a new sensitivity to the historical experience of blacks, women, and others ignored in Hartz's formulation, have made historians extremely wary of broad generalizations about a unitary 'American ideology.' The work of Hartz, Richard Hofstadter and others appears to a generation of historians who came of age in the turmoil of the 1960's as excessively celebratory of the American experience.

Actually, like Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition*, the first major expression of the consensus interpretation, *The Liberal Tradition* was not a celebration of American distinctiveness at all, but a devastating critique of a political culture incapable of producing anything approaching an original idea. There was a right-wing bias in much consensus writing (represented, for example, by Daniel Boorstin, who gloried in the native pragmatism that, he contended, enabled Americans to escape the disruptive political ideologies of Europe). But Hartz and Hofstadter, who shared Marxist backgrounds, believed America's imprisonment within the confines of liberal ideology rendered it incapable of understanding the social realities of the modern world. They were concerned less with socialism and its failure than with affirming the underlying unities on which the American experience was girded, and with supplying a corrective to older interpretations that had mistaken the family quarrels of American political parties for ideological struggles over the nature of American society.¹⁰

The work of the new labor and social history, as I have indicated, has battered the consensus interpretation. In contrast to the universal diffusion of liberal values, students of working-class culture have stressed the development of semi-autonomous working-class and ethnic cultures resting on an ethic of community and mutuality, rather than individualism and competition.¹¹ The idea of an unchallenged bourgeois hegemony is also weakened when one considers that until the Civil War, the most powerful political class in the United States was composed of southern slaveholding planters, a group bourgeois in neither its relationship to labor nor its social ideology. Although the Old South was hardly 'feudal' (a term Hartz invokes without providing any precise definition), it was certainly pre-bourgeois in many respects. One might almost suggest that with its aristocratic social order and disfranchised laboring class, the South should, if Hartz is correct, have provided fertile soil for socialism.¹²

Hartz's thesis has also been weakened from an entirely different direction: intellectual history. Recent writing on eighteenth-century American ideology has not simply dethroned Locke from the pivotal ideological role accorded him by Hartz, but has virtually expelled him from the pantheon of early American

thought. The political rhetoric of the American Revolution, according to recent studies, owed less to Lockean liberalism than to classical republicanism, an ideology that defined the pursuit of individual self-interest as a repudiation of that 'virtue' (devotion to the public good) indispensable in a republican citizenry. Eventually, liberalism triumphed as the dominant rhetoric of American political culture, but not until well into the nineteenth century, and as the result of a historical process whose outlines remain unclear. But if Hartz's liberal consensus did not characterize all of American history, then other elements of his argument, such as the absence of a feudal past, lose much of their explanatory power. The notion of an overarching liberal consensus went far toward understanding the context within which Hartz wrote – America of the 1950's – but has proved of little value in explaining the strength of challenges to the capitalist order ranging from the class violence of 1877 to the Knights of Labor, Populism, and the old Socialist Party.¹³

Nonetheless, Hartz's contention that even American radicals have been trapped within a liberal ideology devoted to the defense of individualism and private property is not entirely incompatible with recent studies of the radical tradition. From Tom Paine's studied distinction between society and government (the former an unmix'd blessing, the latter a necessary evil) to abolitionists' critique of all social and political relationships embodying coercion, to the American anarchists whose individualist outlook differed so markedly from the class-oriented anarchist movements of Europe, a potent strand of the American radical tradition has rested upon hostility to the state and the defense of the free individual. The ideologies of nineteenth-century labor and farmers' movements, and even early twentieth-century socialism itself, owed more to traditional republican notions of the equal citizen and the independent small producer, than to the coherent analysis of class-divided society.

Pre-capitalist culture, it appears, was the incubator of resistance to capitalist development in the United States. The world of the artisan and small farmer persisted in some parts of the United States into the twentieth century, and powerfully influenced American radical movements. The hallmarks of labor and Populist rhetoric were demands for 'equal rights,' anti-monopoly, land reform, and an end to the exploitation of producers by non-producers. These movements inherited an older republican tradition hostile to large accumulations of property, but viewing small property as the foundation of economic and civic autonomy. Perhaps we ought to stand Hartz on his head. Not the *absence* of non-liberal ideas, but the *persistence* of a radical vision resting on small property inhibited the rise of socialist ideologies. Recent studies of American socialism itself, indeed, stress the contrast between native-born socialists, whose outlook relied heavily on the older republican tradition, and more class-conscious immigrant socialists. According to Nick Salvatore, American socialists like Eugene V. Debs viewed corporate capitalism, not socialism, as the revolutionary force in American life, disrupting local communities, undermining the ideal of the independent citizen, and introducing class divisions into a previously homogenous social order.¹⁴

Salvatore and other recent writers are not reverting to a consensus view of American history, though their work explores the values native-born socialists shared with other Americans. But ironically, at the same time that one group of historians strongly influenced by the radicalism of the 1960s was dismantling the consensus view of the American past, another was resurrecting it, as a theory of

the 'hegemony' of middle-class or capitalist values in the United States. In one version of the consensus/hegemony approach, labor and capital were seen as united by an ideology of 'corporate liberalism' that, beneath an anti-business veneer, served the interests of the existing order. Government regulation of the economy, hailed by American reformers as a means of blunting capitalist rapaciousness, and seen by many radicals as a stepping stone to a fully planned economy and perhaps even socialism itself, was now interpreted as the vehicle through which capitalists were able to control the political economy without appearing to do so. Because of the resiliency of corporate liberalism, virtually all popular protest movements had been incorporated within the expanding capitalist order.¹⁵

A somewhat different version of the 'hegemony' argument emphasizes culture rather than political ideology. The rise of mass culture, the mass media, and mass consumption in twentieth-century America, according to this view, not only rendered obsolete the socialist goal of building an alternative culture within capitalist society, but shaped the aspirations of workers, making leisure and consumption, rather than work or politics, the yardsticks of personal fulfilment. Recent studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American radical movements have focused not on such traditional concerns as political ideology and organizational history, but on the creation of 'counter cultures' within the larger society. Obviously influenced by the theory of hegemony (and in some cases, by a perhaps idealized understanding of the much-publicized cultural activities of the modern Italian Communist Party), these works have implied that the seedbed of socialist politics is a counter-hegemonic set of cultural institutions, rather than the polity or the workplace. But studies of the modern working class have emphasized the disintegration of 'working-class culture.' 'Social life,' contends one such analysis, 'is no longer organized around the common relation to the production of both culture and commodities. The working class public sphere is dead.'¹⁶

Unfortunately, the consensus interpretation in its radical 'hegemony' variants still suffers from the problem of homogenizing the American past and present. Indeed, in adopting the notion of hegemony from Gramsci, American historians have often transformed it from a subtle mode of exploring the ways class struggle is muted and channeled in modern society, into a substitute for it. The sophisticated analysis of a writer like Raymond Williams, who observes how diverse ideologies can survive even in the face of apparent 'hegemony', is conspicuously absent from American writing.¹⁷ The notion that mass culture and mass society render any kind of resistance impossible, moreover, can hardly explain the dissatisfactions reflected in the radicalism of the 1960s. In the end, the 'hegemony' argument too often ends up being circular. Rather than being demonstrated, the 'hegemony' of mass culture and liberal values is inferred from the 'absence' of protest, and then this absence is attributed to the self-same 'hegemony.'

An entirely different set of answers to the 'why is there no socialism' question derives from the sociology of the working class itself, and examines aspects of the American social order that make it difficult for workers to organize successfully. The assumption is that socialist politics is unlikely to emerge in the face of an internally divided working class. The traditional assumption that capitalist development must produce an increasingly homogenous proletariat with a single set of interests, represented by unions and a political party, has given way before a recognition of the many kinds of divisions and stratifications built into the capitalist labor process itself. Divisions between the skilled and unskilled, craft and industrial



Industrial Worker, August 25, 1917

workers, often reinforced by divisions along lines of race, ethnicity and gender, belie the notion of a unified working class. It is doubtful, however, that such divisions are very useful in explaining the unique features of American labor history, for it appears that similar segmentation exists in other advanced capitalist societies. The United States is hardly the only country where capitalist development has failed to produce a homogenous working class.¹⁸

Even more common than labor market segmentation as an explanation for the distinctive history of the American working class, is its racial and ethnic heterogeneity. The complex web of backgrounds from which the American proletariat emerged is often seen as rendering unity along class lines all but impossible. Although apparently straight-forward, the notion that the exceptional diversity of the American working class has inhibited both class consciousness and socialist politics, actually encompasses a number of distinct approaches to American labor history.

On the simplest level, it is easy to point to the critical role racism and ethnic prejudices have played in shaping the history of American labor. For most of American history, black workers were systematically excluded by most unions. On the West Coast, prejudice against the Chinese shaped the labor movement, helping to solidify the domination of conservative skilled craft workers over a less-skilled majority. The racism of many labor organizations in turn fostered prejudice against unions among minority workers.¹⁹ And even in the case of white ethnic groups, differences of language, culture and tradition clearly made organization difficult early in this century, when massive immigration from southern and eastern Europe coincided with the rapid expansion and consolidation of monopoly capitalism. The constant redefinition and recreation of American labor (a process that continues today with new waves of immigration), also meant that working-class institutions and traditions had to be rebuilt and battles refought over and over again. 'The making of the American working class' (a subject yet to find its historian) was a process that occurred many times, rather than once.

The diverse backgrounds from which the American working class was forged is sometimes seen as affecting class consciousness in other ways as well. Racial and ethnic loyalties often drew men and women into cross-class alliances, while racism, nativism, and ethnic hostilities inherited from Europe all inhibited the development of a consciousness of workers' collective interests. Immigrant groups created a complex network of ethnic social, religious and political institutions, diverting working-class energies from institutions like unions and radical political parties that explicitly sought to unite men and women across ethnic lines.²⁰ Others contend that the cultural heritage of Catholic immigrants, who comprised so large a portion of the industrial working class, made them unreceptive to any form of political radicalism. In his pioneering study of Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century Boston, Oscar Handlin portrayed a religious community that saw efforts to change the world as at best futile and at worst sacreligious. Handlin's argument has sometimes been generalized to the proposition that ex-peasant immigrants are inherently indifferent or hostile to radical movements. (This contention begs the question of why, for instance, groups like Italian immigrants played so prominent a role in the creation of the labor and socialist movements in Argentina, while allegedly eschewing radicalism in the United States.) Another line of argument derives from the large numbers of early twentieth-century 'new immigrants' (Italians, Poles, Greeks, etc.) who were actually migrant laborers, planning only a

brief stay in the United States. In 1910, for example, threequarters as many Italians left for home as entered the United States. Not intending to make the United States a permanent haven, Gerald Rosenblum argues, these new immigrants reinforced the narrow 'business' orientation of American labor organizations: higher wages, not efforts at social change, were what attracted them to unions.²¹

Despite the popularity of what might be called the 'ethnic' interpretation of the weakness of American socialism, it is by no means clear that cultural divisions were an insuperable barrier to class consciousness or political socialism. Racism and ethnic prejudice are not, as they are sometimes treated, 'transhistorical' phenomena that exists independent of historical time and place. What needs to be studied is what kind of organizing and what conditions have allowed unions to overcome pre-existing prejudices. Unions organized on an industrial basis have under certain circumstances been able to bring black and white workers together. The Industrial Workers of the World managed to lead successful, militant strikes early in this century by recognizing that ethnicity can, under certain circumstances, generate distinctive forms of radical protest. This is especially true where class and ethnic lines coincide, as in turn-of-the-century American industrial communities. Ethnic group solidarity, Victor Greene has argued, actually increased militancy during strikes by immigrant workers in the Pennsylvania coal fields, and the IWW's tactic of establishing strike committees composed of democratically-elected representatives from each ethnic group, brought to its strikes all the strength of the pre-existing network of immigrant institutions. So long as each group believed no one group was receiving favored treatment, the bonds of ethnicity in no way contradicted a willingness to work with others. Like many 'global' explanations of the failure of socialism, in other words, the ethnic approach proves too much: rather than investigating the specific circumstances under which racial and ethnic divisions inhibit class solidarity, it assumes that a diverse working class can never achieve unity in economic or political action.²²

From the recent emphasis upon the resiliency of immigrant sub-cultures has emerged the latest explanation for the failure of American socialism. In *The Radical Persuasion* Aileen Kraditor, a former radical historian who has repudiated her earlier writings and taken a prominent role in a new conservative historians' organization, argues that the very strength of ethnic cultures rendered political radicalism irrelevant to the immigrant proletariat. In early twentieth-century America, according to Kraditor, workers were able to create cultural enclaves so self-sufficient that they saw no need for far-reaching political change: all they wanted was to be left alone, enjoying relative local autonomy. Those radicals who did try to organize in lower-class communities were perceived either as misfits who had rejected their cultural inheritance or as representatives of a hostile outside environment. In a sense, Kraditor's book represents a rightward, but in some ways logical, extension of the new social and labor history. Her emphasis upon the cultural resiliency of immigrant workers' ethnic communities reflects a major preoccupation of recent historical writing, as does her subordination of political and ideological considerations to ones of culture. Correctly criticizing an older stereotype of the unified class-conscious proletariat, Kraditor substitutes another equally ahistorical construct, the self-satisfied, community-oriented worker, for whom the private sphere is sufficient unto itself and who is therefore uninterested in radical ideologies or political change.²³

Related to the composition of the American working class, of course, is the

distinctive character of American trade unionism itself. Why, despite a history of labor violence unparalleled in Europe, does organized labor in the United States appear so much more conservative and apolitical than its European counterparts? Sometimes, attention is drawn to the exclusionary policies of American Federation of Labor unions, whose craft basis of organization reinforced pre-existing divisions between skilled and unskilled workers, and excluded large numbers of workers – blacks, women, new immigrants, etc., from the labor movement. Indeed, it has been argued by James O'Connor that, in a nation in which no more than a quarter of the workforce has ever belonged to trade unions, the higher wages of unionized workers are, in effect, subsidized by lower-paid non-union workers via inflation. Other writers contend that the problem is not the nature and role of unions *per se*, but the fact that labor leaders have constantly sought to undercut the militancy of the rank and file, preferring accommodations with capital to prolonged class struggle. Whether this is a question of the perfidy of individual 'misleaders' or the growth of bureaucratic structures isolating officials from their membership, the result has been a union movement uninterested in posing a political challenge to capital.

No one, however, has satisfactorily explained how and why a presumably militant rank and file constantly chooses moderate 'misleaders' to represent it. And it should be noted that the implicit portrait of class-conscious workers betrayed again and again by a corrupt or moderate leadership assumes a unity and militancy among American workers that other approaches to the 'failure of socialism' question have discounted. One might, in fact, argue that at a number of points in American history, the image of a moderate leadership curbing a radical rank and file ought to be reversed. In the 1930s, for example, it is now clear that socialist and communist organizers played a pivotal role in galvanizing working-class protest and creating the CIO industrial unions.²⁴

Thus far, we have considered approaches to the question of socialism that focus upon on the society or the workplace. An alternative point of view looks to the nature of the American political system since it is a political party whose absence is to be explained. Various aspects of American politics, it is argued, have made it difficult for labor or socialist parties to establish themselves effectively. First, there is the early achievement of political democracy in the United States, the 'free gift of the ballot' as Selig Perlman termed it. Unlike the situation in Europe, the vast majority of male American workers enjoyed the suffrage well before the advent of the industrial revolution. In England, class consciousness was galvanized, at least in part, by the struggle for the vote and the exclusion of workers from the suffrage paralleled and reinforced the sense of a class-divided society learned at the workplace. In the United States, however, the 'lessons' of the polity were the opposite of those of the economy. In the latter, the worker often perceived himself as a member of a distinct class; in the former, he thought of himself as an equal citizen of the republic. Alan Dawley, indeed, writes that 'the ballot box was the coffin of class consciousness' in nineteenth-century America. Not only were the major parties remarkably adept at absorbing labor leaders into political office, but the early achievement of political democracy gave workers a vested interest in the existing political order. American workers, according to this argument, developed a strong sense of their 'rights' in both polity and workplace, but were not convinced of the necessity of launching a direct national political challenge to capital. Perhaps labor parties never advanced beyond

the local level in the United States because workers did not see the national state as being under the control of a hostile class. And even on the local level, Ira Katznelson argues, workers traditionally allocated economic issues to unions, while politics revolved not around questions of class, but rather the distribution of patronage among competing ethnic groups by urban political machines.²⁵

The unusual structure of American politics has also affected the possibilities for socialist parties. The electoral college method of choosing the president helps entrench the two-party system (since votes cast for a third candidate who cannot achieve a majority are 'wasted'). The size and regional diversity of the country has made it difficult to translate local labor strength into national power. American political parties have proven remarkably adept at absorbing protest, adopting the demands of reformers in watered down form, and forcing radicals to choose in elections between the lesser of two evils. The contrast between the American 1930's, when Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal made broad concessions to labor and thereby cemented an alliance with the union movement, and the conservative policies of Depression-era British governments, is only one example of the remarkable flexibility of American parties. To liberal historians, such actions vindicate the receptivity of the American political order to demands for reform; to radicals they often appear as frustrating barriers to truly radical change.²⁶

Other political factors have also inhibited the rise of labor and socialist politics. American historians have yet to assess the full implications of the disfranchisement of southern blacks from the late nineteenth century until the 1960's. Here was a group comprising a significant portion of the American working class that, when given the opportunity, proved receptive to parties like the Populists which sought far-reaching changes in American life. Their exclusion from political participation shifted American politics to the right while entrenching within the Democratic party a powerful bloc of Southern reactionaries. At various times, immigrants and most migrant laborers have also been barred from voting. Industrial workers, moreover, have never formed anything approaching a majority of the American electorate. In a vast nation, predominantly rural until well into this century, parties resting exclusively upon labor could not hope to win national power. In 1900, the United States was already the world's foremost industrial power, yet a majority of the population still lived in places with fewer than 2500 residents.

A final 'political' consideration often stressed by historians sympathetic to American socialism but minimized by those who are not, is outright repression. The Populists were deprived of electoral victories throughout the South by blatant fraud in the 1890's. Violence by federal and state troops and private police forces suppressed strikes on many occasions, and court injunctions defeated many others. The first Red Scare of 1919-20, which jailed and deported radical leaders, devastated both the Socialist Party and IWW. The second, after World War II, effectively destroyed the Communist Party.²⁷

Each of these 'political' approaches contains an element of plausibility, but many suffer from a shortcoming shared by other explanations for the failure of socialism: they invoke aspects of American politics common to other countries to explain American exceptionalism. To take one example, virtually every European socialist movement suffered governmental repression at one time or another in its history, sometimes far more severe repression than anything experienced in the United States (very few American radicals, after all, were ever executed by the

state.) The Spanish labor and communist movements suffered under Franco, the Italian under Mussolini; German socialists faced Bismark's anti-socialist laws. Yet all managed to survive, and some emerged stronger than ever. The 1919 and post-World War II Red Scares were not confined to the United States. Why, one may ask, has repression proved more effective against radicals in the United States than elsewhere? Of course, one might argue that the very openness of American politics, the normality of democratic procedures, makes it difficult for radical movements to deal with repression when it does appear. American radicals, because of the democratic political culture from which they have emerged, have lacked the tradition of underground organization that might have enabled them to survive repressive governments. Of course, one might also ask why, if the state has been unusually repressive in the United States, American workers have persisted in viewing the national government as somehow being above class politics.

Other political explanations also leave important questions unanswered. The electoral college system biases American politics towards a two-party system, but does not explain why socialists have been unable to replace the Republicans or Democrats with a socialist or labor party (as the Republicans replaced the Whigs in the 1850's.) The fact that industrial workers form a minority of the total population is hardly unique to the United States. Socialist and labor parties everywhere have come to power by appealing to middle-class and rural voters as well as industrial laborers. In every industrial country, moreover, a considerable minority of workers has always voted for non-socialist parties. The implicit comparison between a class-conscious European working class and the politically fragmented American proletariat may not stand up to careful scrutiny of European political history.

Thus far, the answers to the socialism problem have been largely 'external' – they have focused upon aspects of American society and politics that have inhibited the growth of socialist politics and working-class consciousness. There are also explanations that might be described as 'internal' – those that focus on the nature and presumed errors of radical movements themselves. Such an approach has an obvious appeal for more optimistic left-oriented historians. For if essentially unchanging aspects of American society – social mobility, the 'American ideology,' the nature of the political system – are responsible for the failure of socialism, there appears to be little reason to hope for a future revival of socialist fortunes. If, however, tactical, strategic or ideological errors sabotaged previous socialist movements, then perhaps future radicals can learn from past mistakes, avoid repeating them, and rebuild American socialism.

The 'internal' approach also has the virtue of directing attention to the actual histories of past socialist movements and the specific circumstances that contributed to their rise and fall. After all, if one accepts as sufficient an 'external' explanation, one need not study in any detail the history of particular attempts to create a socialist politics in the United States. The 'internal' approach, in other words, tends to 'historicize' the socialism question, forcing the historian to examine the specific contingencies that affected the failure of socialist parties, rather than focusing on generalizations about American society so sweeping as almost to stand outside history itself. Not surprisingly, the two periods of American history that have attracted most attention from those interested in tracing the history of past socialisms, are the first two decades of this century, and the 1930's and 1940's.

Both stand out as eras when the trajectory of socialist movements in the United States diverged most markedly from that of their European counterparts. Why did the Socialist and Communist parties fail to build upon their undoubted successes and establish themselves as permanent parts of the American body politic?

One kind of internal approach, associated most prominently with Daniel Bell, argues that American socialists and communists failed to attract broad support because of their sectarian orientation and concern with ideological purity rather than the give and take essential to success in American politics. 'In the world but not of it,' they eschewed reforms in favor of a preoccupation with socialist revolution, thereby isolating themselves more or less by choice. A somewhat analogous argument is that of James Weinstein, who begins by challenging Bell's portrait of the Socialist party, insisting that between 1900 and 1919 it acted as a traditional reformist party, taking ideology less seriously than the winning of votes. In the end, however, according to Weinstein, the party succumbed to the kind of ideological rigidity described by Bell, the attempt of one faction, allied with the Comintern, to impose the Soviet model of a highly-disciplined, ideologically correct party upon what had been a broad coalition in the mainstream of American politics.²⁸

Despite its success in winning local elections (the Socialist party by 1912 had elected some twelve hundred local officials and thirty-three state legislators, and controlled municipal governments in such cities as Schenectady, Milwaukee and Berkeley) and attracting a respectable vote for Eugene V. Debs for president in 1912 (900,000 ballots, or six per cent of the electorate), the Socialist party suffered from a number of internal weaknesses. Paul Buhle stresses the nativism of many Socialist party leaders and their unwillingness to reach out to the new immigrant proletariat. The party's electoral obsession, which led it to measure the advance of socialism almost solely in terms of the ballot box, led it to neglect organizing when votes were not at stake. Preoccupied with electoral strategies, the party failed to respond to the massive upheaval of the unskilled immigrant factory workers between 1909 and 1919. Where was the Socialist party at McKee's Rocks, Lawrence or the great steel strike of 1919? The Industrial Workers of the World demonstrated that it was possible to organize the new immigrant proletariat, but despite sympathy for the IWW on the part of Debs and other left-wing socialists, the two organizations went their separate ways. Here, indeed, was the underlying tragedy of those years: the militancy expressed in the IWW was never channeled for political purposes while socialist politics ignored the immigrant workers. Indeed, the Socialist party's strength lay not among factory workers but in an unusual amalgam of native-born small farmers, skilled workers in certain cities, ethnic groups from the Russian Empire like Finns and Jews, and professionals and intellectuals. Leon Trotsky was perhaps unkind when he remarked that the American Socialists were 'a party of dentists.' But its thinness among the industrial working class was certainly among the party's most debilitating weaknesses.²⁹

Another explanation for the decline of American socialism focuses on the crisis brought about by World War I. The Socialists' principled opposition to America's participation in the war fundamentally transformed the party, alienating many native-born members and intellectuals, while attracting a new constituency among immigrant workers. Ironically, at the moment of its final collapse, the

Socialist party for the first time accurately reflected the composition of the American proletariat.

Opposition to the war laid the party open to the massive repression that was, at least in part, responsible for its demise. One may speculate whether, had American Socialists, like their European counterparts, supported the war and perhaps even entered a coalition wartime government as junior partners, as the Labour party in Britain did, they might have shielded themselves from repression and established their political legitimacy. (Of course, given the experience of our own times, one may well ask whether participation in governing an imperialist nation involves a socialist party in an inevitable sacrifice of principle, at least so far as foreign policy is concerned.) What is clear is an outcome fraught with irony, in view of the assumption that American socialism is so much weaker than that of Europe. Of the two great 'isms' created by the nineteenth century – socialism and nationalism – the latter in western Europe proved far the stronger in 1914. Socialist internationalism was crucified on the cross of socialist support for the war effort. Was the American party's opposition to the war a courageous act of suicide? At least, history ought to record that the American Socialist party went to its death not because there was *less* socialism in the United States than in Europe, but because, apart from the Russian Bolsheviks, the American was the party that remained most true to socialist principles.

If the period before World War I represented one opportunity for the development of a mass socialist party in the United States, the 1930's appears to represent another. By the mid-thirties, the Communist party had established itself as the major force on the socialist left. The achievements of the communists, recent research has made clear, were indeed impressive. Moving far beyond the electoral emphasis of the old Socialist party, they understood that struggle, on a variety of fronts is the most effective means of mass mobilization and education. In contrast to the socialists' isolation from the militant struggles of the pre-World War I years, the communists took the lead in a remarkable array of activities – union-building, demonstrations of the unemployed, civil rights agitation, aid to republican Spain, etc. Indeed, the wide variety of their activities becomes all the more amazing when it is remembered that the party at its pre-war peak numbered well under 100,000 members.³⁰

Given the mass militancy of the CIO and range of party concerns, why did a larger socialist or labor political presence not emerge from the Great Depression? Some accounts stress the resiliency of the political system itself, the way President Roosevelt managed to absorb labor militancy into a redefined Democratic party coalition. Others point to the internecine warfare between AFL and CIO unions as sabotaging efforts toward the creation of an independent labor party. Still others blame the Communist party's quest for legitimacy, especially in its Popular Front period. The party's determination to forge an alliance of all anti-fascist elements, including the Democratic party, and its ideological emphasis upon American nationalism ('Communism is twentieth-century Americanism' as the mid-thirties slogan went), foreclosed the possibility of independent socialist politics. According to James Weinstein, here also lay a cardinal difference between the old socialists, who at least had made socialism a part of American political discourse, and the 1930s communists, who saw themselves as the left wing of the New Deal coalition.³¹

But like the old Socialist party, the communists were unable to cut the gordian

knot of the relationship between nationalism and socialism. On the one hand, the party achieved primacy on the Left partially by virtue of its relationship with the USSR, the only existing socialist state. On the other, the Soviet connection proved a point of vulnerability, opening the party to repression as 'un-American' after World War II, and leading to inevitable questions as to whether specific policies reflected American or Soviet interests and realities. It is not clear, however, how much emphasis ought to be put on the Soviet connection for the party's failure to grow in size. After all, every Communist party in the world had to deal with the Comintern. What is certain is that the CP was most successful precisely when it was most American. As Maurice Isserman's recent study demonstrates, the Popular Front, whatever its relationship to socialist ideology, was exactly the policy that most American communists desired, and the party's membership was highest in the mid-1930s and again toward the end of World War II, precisely when socialism and nationalism coincided. Indeed, recent studies of the war years criticize the party for subordinating labor militancy to the war effort and a quest for nationalist legitimacy, via the no-strike pledge.³² (The implicit assumption that calls for greater efforts to win the war alienated American workers concerned only with their paychecks may, however, be open to question.)

Through the no-strike pledge, subordination of criticism of the Roosevelt administration, and the decision to transform itself from a party into a 'political association' the Communist party sought 'legitimacy' – a permanent foothold in American politics – during World War II. The experience of war and the resistance movements did legitimize European Communist parties as defenders of their nations (no one, whatever his political outlook, could call the French or Italian Communist parties 'un-French' or 'un-Italian' after the experience of World War II). But American communists ended up with the worst of both worlds. The no-strike pledge alienated shop-floor militants, without winning 'legitimacy' from those with the power to dispense it, the price, perhaps, of trying to exist at all at the very focal point of world imperialism. The party remained vulnerable to the wave of repression that began with the onset of the Cold War. The base communists had laboriously created in the labor movement was effectively destroyed, with disastrous consequences for the entire direction of the post-war labor movement.

Let us return, in conclusion, to our original question. Why is there no socialism in the United States? As we have seen, all the explanations that have been proposed – the internal and the external, the social, ideological, economic, and cultural – have a certain merit, and all seem to have weaknesses as well. Nor can we simply add them all together in a kind of mixed salad and feel satisfied with the result. Perhaps the debate has gone on for so long and so inconclusively because the question itself is fundamentally flawed. Perhaps beginning our investigation with a negative question inevitably invites ahistorical answers.

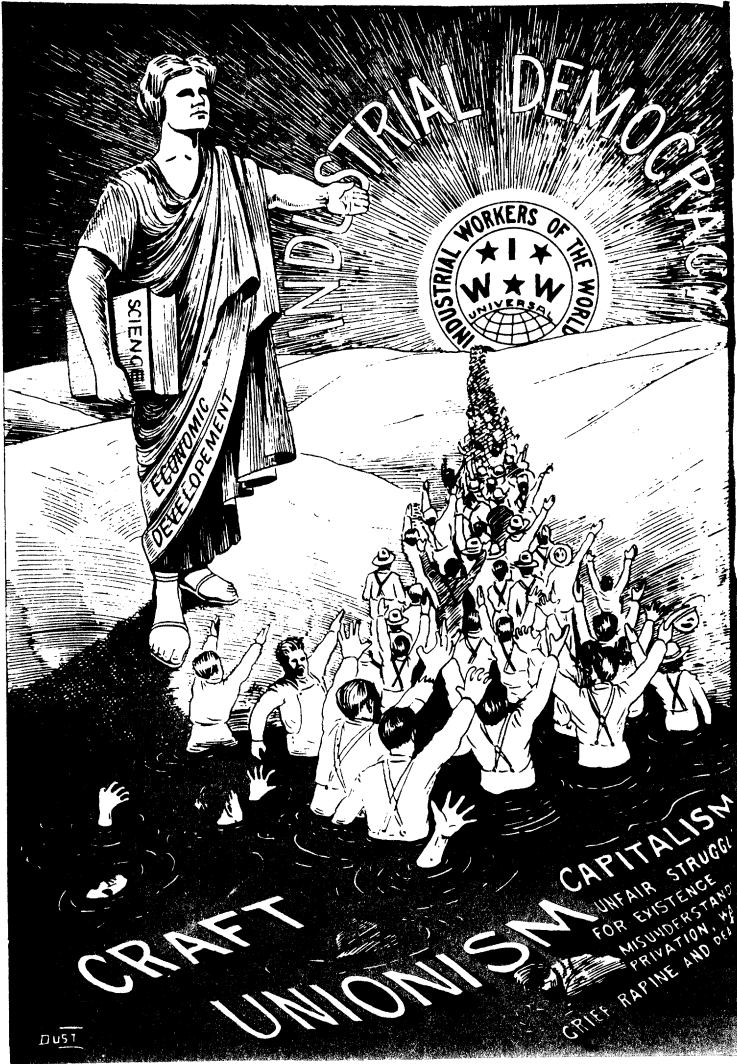
Like a kindred question that has bedeviled the study of American slavery – 'why were there no slave rebellions in the United States?' – the socialism question rests on a number of assumptions that may not survive careful analysis. The rise of socialism, or the outbreak of slave rebellions, are defined as normal occurrences, whose absence needs to be explained. In the case of slavery, the question is premised upon the conviction that the 'normal' human response to severe repression is armed rebellion, an assumption for which human history, unfortunately, does not offer much support. In the case of socialism, the premise is that under capitalism, the working class will develop class consciousness, expressed in unions

and a labor or socialist political party, and that consequently the failure of either to emerge must be the result of some outside interference. No one asks, for example, 'why is there no feminism in Europe?' (a legitimate question when either independent feminist movements or the historical participation of women in socialist parties in Europe and the United States are compared) because socialism is held to be an inevitable, universal development under capitalism while feminism is assumed to emerge from local, contingencies that vary from country to country.

In the end, of course, 'why is there no socialism' rests upon an interpretation of history that accords socialism a privileged position among radical movements because it arises inexorably out of the inner logic of capitalist development, and holds out the promise of a far-reaching social revolution. To the Marxist paradigm that underlies this vision, I have no objection. But it does seem to me that the empirical evidence that justifies the question – the existence of mass Labour, Socialist and Communist parties in western Europe and not in the United States – fundamentally contradicts the Marxist foundation of the question. A Marxist question, in other words, arises from a non-Marxist outcome, for the 'absence' to be explained is not socialism (a revolutionary transformation of society) but the existence of political parties of a decidedly social democratic bent that aim at no such transformation. The Left parties of Western Europe have without doubt improved the conditions of life of their constituents, but they have proved incapable of using their impressive political strength to reshape fundamentally their societies. They have, one might say, promoted liberalism and egalitarianism more successfully than socialism, and presented themselves as the proponents of modernization and social rationalization rather than class rule, thus operating in ways more analogous to American political parties than either Americans or Europeans would care to admit. The issue for Western European socialist parties is not precisely socialism, but the equitable distribution of the products of capitalism. In other words, one might well ask not 'why is there no socialism in the United States,' but, 'why has there been no socialist transformation in any advanced capitalist society?'

To put the question this way challenges another underlying premise of the socialism question: American exceptionalism. Too often in American historical writing, 'Europe' is posited as an unchanging class-conscious monolith in contrast to the liberal, bourgeois United States. In much American writing, 'Europe' equals France, and 'France' equals the French Revolution. The heroic struggles of European workers and socialists are highlighted and the more recent erosion of working-class consciousness and socialist ideology ignored. Too often, American historians equate the official doctrine of 'revolutionary' labor movements, such as the French earlier in this century, or political platforms calling for collective ownership of the means of production, with a pervasive socialist consciousness among a majority of workers. They ignore the fact that large numbers of European workers have always voted for 'bourgeois' parties. American commentators often cite the history of British labor as one example of class-conscious 'European' working-class development, unaware of the debates among British writers about what some see as an exceptional *absence* of socialism compared with the continent. Certainly, recent events demonstrate that 'the containment of . . . working-class movements within the limits of trade union economism and social democratic reformism' is hardly unique to the United States.³³

To abandon American exceptionalism as an organizing theme is not, of course,



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to assert that the history of every capitalist nation is identical. The history of the United States is, in important ways, unique, as is that of England, France, Germany, and every other country. But a preoccupation with the exceptional elements of the American experience obscures those common patterns and processes that transcend national boundaries, most notably the global expansion of capitalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its political and ideological ramifications. It also diverts attention from the 'Americanizing' influences so prominent in Western Europe during the past generation. America, Sombart wrote, was 'the land of our future.' Are not the economies, and the working classes, of both America and Europe today being transformed by the decline of old basic industries, the backbone of traditional unionism and socialism? Is not European politics, like European popular culture, becoming more and more 'American,' with single-issue movements rising to prominence and political parties, even those calling themselves socialist, emphasizing the personalities of their leaders and their appeal to the entire electorate, rather than a carefully-delineated ideology representing the interests of a particular social class? Western European Socialist and Communist parties today occupy points on the political spectrum ranging from distinctly moderate (the Italian, Danish and Portuguese Socialist parties) to various shades of left and some, like the British Labour party, are bitterly divided against themselves. In such a situation it is not at all clear that 'socialism' retains any clearly-defined political content.

Perhaps, because mass politics, mass culture, and mass consumption came to America before it did to Europe, American socialists were the first to face the dilemma of how to define socialist politics in a capitalist democracy. Perhaps, in the dissipation of class ideologies, Europe is now catching up with a historical process already experienced in the United States.³⁴ Perhaps future expressions of radicalism in Europe will embody less a traditional socialist ideology than an 'American' appeal to libertarian and moral values and resistance to disabilities based upon race and gender. Or, perhaps a continuing world economic crisis will propel politics in both Western Europe and America down a more class-oriented path. Only time will tell whether the United States has been behind Europe in the development of socialism, or ahead of it, in socialism's decline.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the conference on 'Why is there no socialism in the United States' in May 1983, organized by the Centre d'Études Nord-Américaines, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and will be published in the proceedings of the conference.

1 Among the many reviews of the 'why is there no socialism?' debate, two of the better recent surveys are: Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Why No Socialism in the United States?', in *Sources of Contemporary Radicalism*, Seweryn Bialer and Sophia Sluzer, ed., New York 1977, 31–149, which contains an interesting section on how Marx, Engels, and other European socialists viewed the problem, and Jerome Karabel, 'The Failure of American Socialism Reconsidered,' *Socialist Register*, 1979, 204–27. See also R. Laurence Moore, *European Socialists and the American Promised Land*, New York 1970. An excellent collection of discussions of the history of American socialism and introduction to the Sombart question is John H. M. Laslett and Seymour M. Lipset, ed. *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, Garden City, N.Y., 1974. Still indispensable for the history of socialism in the United States is Donald D. Egbert and Stow Persons, ed., *Socialism and*

American Life, 2 vols., Princeton, 1952, the second volume of which consists of an exhaustive bibliography.

2 E. L. Godkin, 'The Labor Crisis,' *North American Review*, CX (July, 1867), 177-79.

3 David Montgomery, 'The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington "Riots" of 1844,' *Journal of Social History*, V (Summer, 1972); Montgomery, *Workers Control in America*, New York 1979. James R. Green, *The World of the Worker*, New York 1980, also stresses the predominance of 'control' issues in labor struggles. An excellent recent study of the rise and fall of local labor parties in the 1880's is Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics*, Urbana 1983.

4 Werner Sombart's original essay has recently been printed, for the first time in its entirety, in English translation: *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*, White Plains 1976.

5 The view that the acquisition of property and high rates of geographical mobility explain the failure of socialism is expressed, for example, in Stephan Thernstrom's influential *Poverty and Progress*, Cambridge 1964. Peter Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860*, New York 1971, exemplifies a host of studies of the high rate of population turnover in nineteenth-century American cities. See also the self-congratulatory conservative version of the 'success of capitalism' argument in James Nuechterlein, 'Radical Historians,' *Commentary*, October, 1980.

6 A recent investigation, Peter Shergold, *Working-Class Life: The 'American Standard' in Comparative Perspective, 1899-1913*, Pittsburgh 1982, concludes that skilled workers in Pittsburgh did enjoy higher wages than their English counterparts, but that the unskilled did not.

7 For an interesting recent example, see Ronald Schatz, 'Union Pioneers: The Founders of Local Unions at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1933-37,' *Journal of American History*, LXVI (December, 1979), 586-602.

8 The idea that the West functioned as an effective safety valve for eastern labor was disproven nearly fifty years ago in Carter G. Goodrich and Sol Davidson, 'The Wage Earner in the Westward Movement,' *Political Science Quarterly*, L (1935), 161-85 and LI (1936), 61-116. Quantitative methods have become far more sophisticated since then, but students of geographical mobility are still generally unable to ascertain whether men and women who moved in search of economic opportunity actually succeeded in bettering their conditions of life. The essential raw material for such studies is the manuscript census returns, using which it is easy to discover that an extremely high percentage of urban working-class populations had 'disappeared' from one census to the next (a period of ten years). But not knowing where these individuals went, it is impossible to locate them in the next census, to determine their occupation, wealth, etc.

9 Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, New York, 1955. The 'fragment' argument is expanded in Hartz's *The Founding of New Societies*, New York 1964. One may wonder, however, why Australia, another 'bourgeois fragment' society did give rise to a powerful Labour party.

10 Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition, New York 1948*; Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics*, Chicago 1953.

11 The 'pre-bourgeois' character of the Old South is argued effectively in the works of Eugene D. Genovese. See *The Political Economy of Slavery*, New York 1965; *The World the Slaveholders Made*, New York 1969; and *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, New York 1974.

12 Much of this work was inspired by Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America*, New York 1976.

13 The most significant revisionist works on the ideology of the American Revolution are J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton 1975, which sees republicanism extending well into the nineteenth century as an organizing paradigm of American political thought, and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, Chapel Hill 1969, which dates the 'end of classical politics' and the triumph of liberalism from the adoption of the federal Constitution in 1788. Joyce Appleby has recently sought to resurrect the idea of a dominant liberal ideology, in a more sophisticated formulation than Hertz's. See her 'Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic,' *Journal of American History*, LXVIII (March, 1982).

14 For the individualist strain in American radicalism, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, New York 1976; Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism*

in *American Ideology*, Cambridge 1964; Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*, New York 1968; David DeLeon, *The American As Anarchist*, Baltimore 1978. For the 'small producer' radical ideology, see Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*, New York 1976; Chester McA. Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865–1901*, New London 1946. For socialist thought, Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism 1870–1920*, Urbana 1979; Nick Salvatore, *Citizen and Socialist: Eugene V. Debs*, Urbana 1982.

15 James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State 1900–1918*, Boston 1968; Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism*, New York 1963. Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*, New York 1980, portrays radical movements as always being suppressed or absorbed within the liberal framework.

16 Works examining radicalism as the expression of an alternative culture include Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*; Charles Leinenweber, 'Socialists in the Streets: The New York City Socialist Party in Working Class Neighborhoods, 1908–1918,' *Science and Society*, XLI (Summer, 1977), 152–71; and 'The Origins of Left Culture in the United States: 1880–1940,' a special issue of *Cultural Correspondence*, Spring, 1978. The quotation is from Stanley Aronowitz, 'Cracks in the Bloc: American Labor's Historic Compromise and the Present Crisis,' *Social Text*, V (Spring, 1982), 45–51. See also John Alt, 'Beyond Class: The Decline of Industrial Labor and Leisure,' *Telos*, XXVIII (Summer, 1976), 55–80.

17 Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,' *New Left Review*, 82 (November–December, 1973), 3–16. For less sophisticated American uses of the idea of hegemony to explain the weakness of radicalism, see Aileen Kraditor, 'American Radical Historians on Their Heritage,' *Past and Present*, 56 (August, 1972), 136–52; Milton Cantor, *The Divided Left*, New York 1979.

18 Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, David M. Gordon, eds., *Labor Market Segmentation*, Lexington 1975; David M. Gordon, Richard C. Edwards, Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States*, New York 1982; Alistair Reid, 'Politics and Economics in the Formation of the British Working Class: A Response to H. F. Moorhouse,' *Social History*, III (October, 1978), 347–62.

19 Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, New York 1974; Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, Berkeley, 1971.

20 This is the argument of Mike Davis, 'Why the U.S. Working Class is Different,' *New Left Review*, 123 (September–October, 1980), 3–46. It is also emphasized in the latest evaluation of the Sombart question, John H. M. Laslett, *Reluctant Proletarians: A Short Comparative History of American Socialism*, Westport 1984.

21 Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants*, Cambridge 1941; Stanley Aronowitz, *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness*, New York 1973, whose third chapter, an excellent survey of the formation of the American working class, seems to accept the notion that Catholic immigrants of peasant background are inevitably conservative; Gerald Rosenblum, *Immigrant Workers: Their Impact on American Labor Radicalism*, New York 1973.

22 Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike*, Notre Dame 1968; Eric Foner, 'Class, Ethnicity and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish America,' *Marxist Perspectives*, 2 (Summer, 1978), 6–55; Melvin Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, New York 1969. The phrase 'transhistorical' is taken from the important essay by Barbara J. Fields, 'Ideology and Race in American History,' in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, ed., New York 1982, 144. For an example of the overcoming of racism by one industrial union, see Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, ch. 3.

23 Aileen Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890–1917*, Baton Rouge 1981. Kraditor's earlier work, which she now claims was written under the influence of 'liberal ideology,' includes *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, New York 1969, and *The Ideas of the Women's Suffrage Movement*, New York 1965. She is now a member of the editorial board of *Continuity*, a conservative historians' journal.

24 James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State*, New York 1973; Jeremy Brecher, *Strike*, San Francisco 1972, which stresses spontaneous labor militancy, dampened by union organization itself; Philip S. Foner's multi-volume *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, New York, 1947–), emphasizing the conservative tendencies of labor leaders,

especially those of the American Federation of Labor. For the 1930's, see Schatz, 'Union Pioneers,' and Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, Princeton, 1977, which, while unsympathetic to communist unionists, provides convincing evidence of their pivotal role in creating CIO unions. Melvyn Dubofsky questions the extent of rank-and-file militancy during the Depression in 'Not So "Turbulent Years": Another Look at the American 1930's,' *Amerikstudien*, XXIV (1980), 12–20.

25 Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, New York 1928, 167; Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*, Cambridge 1976, esp. ch. 8; Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in America*, New York 1981. David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, New York 1967, also stresses how politics served as a 'safety-valve' for labor discontent.

26 For Roosevelt's flexibility, see Mike Davis, 'The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party,' *New Left Review*, 124, (November–December, 1980), 43–83. Allan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest*, New York 1982, demonstrates the hold of FDR on voters otherwise attracted to radicalism. Christopher Lasch, 'The Decline of Populism,' in *The Agony of the American Left*, New York 1969, is excellent on how apparent concessions to radical groups rarely involve fundamental social change. The electoral college system, in which the party carrying a state wins the state's entire electoral vote for its presidential candidate, penalizes third parties whose strength is widely dispersed, while allowing regionally-concentrated third parties to carry enough states to disrupt a presidential election by throwing the contest into the House of Representatives (as happens when no candidate receives a majority of the electoral vote.)

27 A recent study of the Socialist party stressing repression is James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895–1943*, Baton Rouge 1978. For the first Red Scare, see William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933*, Cambridge 1963; for the second, David Caute, *The Great Fear*, New York 1978.

28 Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in America*, Princeton 1967; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912–1925*, New York 1967. Of course, every European Socialist party experienced the same split between those adopting the Bolshevik model, and those preferring traditional social democratic politics. See Albert S. Lindemann, *The 'Red Years': European Socialism versus Bolshevism, 1919–21*, Berkeley, 1974.

29 Paul Buhle, 'Debsian Socialism and the "New Immigrant Worker",' in William O'Neill, ed., *Insights and Parallels*, Minneapolis, 1973, 249–304. John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left*, New York, 1970, relates the decline of socialism in the unions. The best history of the Socialist party remains David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, New York 1955.

30 The astonishing variety of party activities comes through even in hostile accounts like Cochran, *Labor and Communism*. See also Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, Urbana 1983, and *Radical History Review*, 23 (1980), an issue devoted to the history of Communist parties in Europe and the United States.

31 Davis, 'The Barren Marriage'; James Weinstein, *Ambiguous Legacy: The Left in American Politics*, New York 1975.

32 Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, Middletown, Ct., 1981; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II*, New York 1982). A more sympathetic account is Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union*, Bloomington Ind., 1980). See also *Radical America*, IX (July–August 1975), a special issue on American labor in the 1940's.

33 Reid, 'Politics and Economics.' Marianne Debouzy, 'La class ouvrière Américaine: recherches et problèmes,' *Mouvement Social*, 102 (January–March, 1978), 3, notes the tendency of American historians to make unwarranted assumptions about the European working class. Perry Anderson summarizes the 1960's debates on 'the whole tragedy of English labour history' in *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London, 1980), 44–46. For general problems of Social Democratic parties, see Adam Przeworski, 'Social Democracy as a Historical Phenomenon,' *New Left Review*, 122 (July–August, 1980), 27–58. Bruce M. Stave, ed. *Socialism and the Cities*, Port Washington, 1975, discusses how American socialists acted in those communities where they achieved local power.

34 This was the arresting thesis of Lewis Corey, an American communist who wrote during the 1930's under the name Louis Fraina. He argued that classical socialism was a

stage in the development of capitalism, a stage the United States, because of the extremely rapid expansion of capitalism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in effect leaped over. In Europe, classical socialism of the Second International variety assisted the bourgeoisie in completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution, a historical task unnecessary in the United States. Harvey Klehr, 'Leninism, Lewis Corey, and the Failure of American Socialism,' *Labor History*, XVIII (Spring 1977), 249-56.



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