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*The first article of a two-part
history of American socialism*

SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

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DURING the past century, the socialist movement throughout the world has grown from a few thousand social pioneers, many of them exiles from their native lands, to a movement which embraces tens of millions of men and women and is molding the economic and political systems of many of our most important countries. Parties with a democratic socialist viewpoint are today in control of the governments of Great Britain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Israel; have important representatives in the coalition cabinets of Holland, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, and Finland; and are supported by strong delegations in the parliaments of Belgium, France, Western Germany, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada.

In numerous countries, it is true, the organized socialist movement is weak. But even in some of these countries, socialist ideas have had a remarkable effect on the country's institutions. In India the Indian Socialist Party is small numerically, but Premier Nehru, leader of the Congress Party, has long been regarded as a democratic socialist, and has greatly influenced public thinking in the direction of the democratic socialist goal.

The United States is one of the few great industrial nations where the Socialist or Labor or Social Democratic Party has not attained political stature. But even here, the socialist message has profoundly influenced our economic, political, and social thinking.

The first stage of socialist thinking and agitation, as is well known, was the Utopian stage of over a century ago. In the beginning of the nineteenth century in France and England, many Utopian thinkers and doers, shocked at the gross inequalities, the economic wastes, and poverty which they witnessed all around them, determined to help bring about a society where justice, equality, and fraternity would be the order of the day. Many of them felt that the best way to do this was to organize cooperative colonies as experimental laboratories which would seek to carry out their ideas of a good society. They believed that once the people witnessed the success of these colonies, other cooperative ventures would result, and gradually the competitive, profit-making society would be supplanted by a cooperative economy where men and women worked for service to the community, rather than for private profit.

The followers of these Utopians—of Cabet and Fourier of France, of Robert Owen, famous cotton mill owner and social crusader of England, and others—began to look around for the best places in which to establish these colonies. They looked across the sea and saw the vast, unsettled territories in America. They sent their emissaries to this country to prepare the ground for their social experiments. In this they had the help of such Americans as Albert Brisbane, father of the famous editor, Arthur Brisbane. After a trip to Europe in

the early 1830's, Albert Brisbane interested the great Horace Greeley of *The New York Tribune* and others in the establishment of colonies here.

The result, particularly during the 1840's, was the organization of large numbers of colonies in the United States, the most famous of which was the Brook Farm Experiment in New England. Most of the brilliant thinkers of that section of the country—Emerson, Thoreau, Lowell, Whittier, Greeley, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller, George Ripley, and John S. Dwight—were, in one way or another, associated with it. The North American "Phalanx," developed by a number of New York idealists at Red Bank, New Jersey, in 1843, and New Harmony, established by Owen in Indiana twenty years earlier, should also be mentioned.

The colonies, for the most part, failed. It was found to be a difficult thing to establish little islands of Utopia in the midst of an economic system run on entirely different principles. But some colonies survived, and the fundamental discussions evoked by this development of the possibilities of the cooperative way of life contributed their part to the social thinking and action of this country.

A small socialist movement of a non-Utopian nature was started by a number of Germans who came to the United States following the uprisings of 1830 and 1848. But the antislavery movement and the Civil War began to absorb the energies of the "forty-eighters," and the movement, to all intents and purposes, was suspended until after the war was over. In 1867, several groups of social radicals, primarily from Germany, reorganized their forces and formed a number of workingmen's unions with a socialistic objective in cities of the East and Middle West.

In 1872, Karl Marx, who had formed the First International of Workingmen eight years before, found that, while he was hard at work in the London libraries on his *Das Kapital* and other works, Bakunin and his anarchistic followers, with a philosophy of violence and insurrection, were securing a tight hold on the machinery of this body. At the Hague Congress of that year, as a means of preventing

the International from falling into Bakunin's hands, Marx and his followers succeeded in having its headquarters removed to the United States. The small group of socialists in this country rallied to its support, but they were weak and divided, and, in 1876, after a lingering illness, the First International, which had taken up headquarters in New York, was finally pronounced officially dead.

Until the turn of the twentieth century, the principal socialist organization in the United States was the Socialist Labor Party. In the first decade of this movement the party members agitated vigorously for numerous reform measures and cooperated with a number of political and trade union groups. In 1886 they took an active part in the tense campaign for the election of Henry George, America's leading single taxer, for Mayor of the city of New York.

In 1890, however, the party admitted to its membership Daniel DeLeon, a native of Venezuela, who, after receiving his education in Germany, came to the United States and was granted a prize lectureship in international law at Columbia University. DeLeon, who had an incisive mind and a trenchant pen, quickly rose in 1892 to the editorship of the party's paper, *The People*. Once in the saddle, he used his position to mold all party members to his particular way of thinking.

One of his first crusades was that against the leaders of the trade-union movement whom he denounced for failing to organize along industrial lines. He took them to task for asking for mere crumbs for labor rather than working for an entire change in the industrial system. He declared that some of the leaders of labor were ignorant, some corrupt. All, he affirmed, were unfit for leadership.

In 1895, after failing to capture the Knights of Labor, he organized the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance and began to form unions in competition with the A.F.L. and the K. of L. The Alliance, however, only succeeded in antagonizing and alienating organized labor and in splitting the Socialist Party ranks.

Among other things, it led Morris Hillquit, and those who wished to work closely with the A.F.L. and other labor groups, and who refused to conform to the rigid discipline im-

posed by DeLeon in the party, to secede from the S.L.P., and to join with other groups to organize the Socialist Party of the United States. In 1900, those who remained in the S.L.P. under DeLeon struck out all immediate demands from their platform, declaring that such demands belonged to the infancy of the movement. For this action, they acquired the name of "impossibilists," and henceforth wielded little influence on the American scene.

After seceding from the S.L.P., the Hillquit group looked around for new allies. It found these allies in a group called the Social Democracy that had shortly before been organized in the Middle West. This group was composed chiefly of the followers of Victor Berger, the Milwaukee socialist leader, who later became the first socialist Congressman in the United States, and of the followers of Eugene Victor Debs. Berger, a man of great energy and keen intelligence, a native of Austria-Hungary, had brought his socialist ideas from Europe, and had built a strong movement in this important Wisconsin city.

DEBS

Eugene Victor Debs had come to the socialist movement as a result of his experience in the trade-union movement in the United States. Born in Terre Haute, Indiana, of Alsatian parents, he became a worker in the railroad shops of his native city at an early age. Bitterly resenting the tragic conditions to which the railroad workers were then subjected, he joined the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and became one of its most active workers. An increasingly popular figure in the union, he was elected Grand Secretary and Treasurer of the Brotherhood, and editor and manager of their magazine at 25. During the next 13 years, from 1880 to 1893, as secretary, he built up the organization from 60 to 226 lodges, wiped out a considerable debt, and made the union a force to be reckoned with in the railroad industry. In the meantime he served as city clerk of Terre Haute and as a Democratic member of the Indiana legislature.

Debs came to feel during these years, however, that the union was doing little or nothing for "the forgotten man," the unskilled worker,

in the railroad industry. He gave up his job, which paid a salary of \$4,000 a year, to form a more inclusive union organized along industrial lines. He formed the American Railway Union, receiving in his new position a salary of \$900.

As leader of the A.R.U., he first tackled the job of improving the lot of the workers in the Great Northern Railroad where the scale of wages ranged from a dollar a day for trackmen and trainmen, to \$80 a month for train dispatchers. The A.R.U. won a great victory over this giant railroad.

The railroads, however, decided to do everything in their power to annihilate this young union. They saw their opportunity when the workers for the Pullman Car Company voted to strike against intolerable conditions. Debs's union had advised against the strike, but, when it came, decided to support it.

The A.R.U. asked its members not to handle Pullman cars. The company pressed the government to send to the scene of action thousands of deputy marshals, armed and paid for by the railroads. They were followed by troops and state militia. An injunction was issued against Debs and others, forbidding interference with the trains. Debs was accused of violating the injunction, and sent to jail for contempt of court.

Debs entered jail a Democrat. In prison he read many socialist books and pamphlets, including the writings of Edward Bellamy, Blatchford, and Kautsky. Berger visited him and delivered to him "the first impassioned message of socialism" Debs had ever heard. He left Woodstock jail a socialist in spirit. However, in the election of 1896, he supported the silver-tongued orator on the Democratic ticket, William Jennings Bryan. But in June, 1897, on the dissolution of the American Railway Union, he helped to form the Social Democracy, which Berger and some Eastern socialists, notably Abraham Cahan of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, later joined. At its 1898 convention the party was captured by a group which felt that its main efforts should be directed to the organization of colonies, rather than to independent political action. Debs, Berger, Cahan, and others revolted and formed the Social Democracy Party.

Two years later, in 1900, the Hillquit wing of the S.L.P. and the Social Democracy Party joined forces to put into the field as their candidate for President, Eugene Victor Debs. Debs was the first socialist leader in the United States coming out of the ranks of the American working class. He talked in the language of the American worker—a leader as American as apple pie—waged a vigorous campaign, with McKinley and Bryan as his opponents, and, to the surprise of the old party leaders, received a vote of nearly 100,000. This vote was about three times that of the candidate of the Socialist Labor Party.

Elated at the results of the campaign, the various forces backing Debs came together in a Unity Convention at Indianapolis, in June, 1901, and formed the Socialist Party.

The next 11 years of socialist activity in the United States, the period from 1901 to 1912, showed the greatest period of numerical growth and of political promise of any decade in the party's history. This period covered the presidencies of McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft; it was the time of the country's second great period of trust formations; of the depressions or recessions of 1904 and 1907; of the first great forward march of organized labor, the American Federation of Labor having grown from 278,000 in 1898 to 1,676,000 in 1904. It was the period of the anthracite coal strike of 1902 in behalf of union recognition and the nine-hour day; of the development of the building trades; of the dramatic 1909 and 1910 strikes against sweatshop conditions in the men's and women's garment industry; of the organization of the Industrial Workers of the World and their dramatic strikes among the Western miners, lumbermen, and textile workers.

This period brought forth the muckrakers—Lincoln Steffens, Ray Stannard Baker, Ida Tarbell, Charles Edward Russell, Gustavus Myers—with their telling polemics against monopoly and the “malefactors of great wealth.”

It produced a brilliant group of social novelists who had revolted against the extremes of wealth and poverty found in the Fifth Avenues and the East Sides of our crowded cities—Upton Sinclair with his *Jungle*; Jack Lon-

don with his *Iron Heel*; Ernest Poole with his *The Harbor*; Frank Norris, David Graham Phillips, and James Oppenheim.

It was the time of vivid factual studies of the conditions of the poor—of John Graham Brooks's *Social Unrest*; Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives*; Robert Hunter's *Poverty*; W. J. Ghent's *Our Benevolent Feudalism*.

It was the period of the remarkable development of Christian social and socialist literature—including the eloquent volumes *Christianity and the Social Crises* by Walter Rauschenbusch and *Between Caesar and Jesus* by George D. Herrons.

The period gave birth to the first group of books on socialism written by American socialists and published by regular publishers—books from the pens of Morris Hillquit, Robert Hunter, John Spargo, Louis B. Boudin, Edmond Kelly, W. J. Ghent, William English Walling, A. M. Simons, James Mackaye, Allan Benson, Algernon Lee, and many others.

Historians of the type of Charles Beard during these days were busy borrowing a leaf from Karl Marx, and in emphasizing the importance of economic factors in molding our political and social institutions. John Dewey was engaged in relating philosophical and educational systems to democratic ends. Charles Steinmetz, the electrical wizard and leading socialist, was busy in showing how our technological progress must be accompanied by social progress if the United States and other lands are to avoid tragic dislocations and are to be able to utilize all of our resources for the common good.

Thorstein Veblen and Lester Ward were arousing the world of scholarship with their heretical volumes on economics and sociology. Social workers—Jane Addams, Frances Perkins, Florence Kelley among them—were increasingly emphasizing the need of getting at the causes of poverty, while trying immediately to ameliorate present day social conditions. And artists and cartoonists of the type of Art Young, John Sloan, Ryan Walker, and George Bellows, were portraying through pictures the topsy-turvy character, as they saw it, of much of our commercialized civilization.

It was the period also of the beginning of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, formed to pro-

mote an intelligent interest in socialism among college men and women—a movement which, while committing no student member to a belief in socialism, stimulated thousands of the finest social idealists in our universities to do their part in the constructive solution of the social problems of the day.

These and other forces had a tremendous impact on the socialist movement. Socialist magazines flourished, the *Appeal for Reason* running a circulation of about a half million. Hundreds of thousands of pamphlets and leaflets were printed and distributed. Socialist lecture services were eagerly utilized. Party branches appeared throughout the nation. The Socialist Party membership grew from 16,000 in 1903 to 118,000 in 1912, a seven-fold growth in nine years. The Socialist vote quadrupled between 1900 to 1904 to reach 400,000, doubling again from 1904 to 1912, when it reached 900,000. If this rate of increase continued, declared socialist prophets, it was easy to see that the Socialist Party would become in the not distant future the dominant party of the land.

EXPANSION

As for the country's cities, Socialists won control during those days of Milwaukee, Schenectady, and other cities. In 1912, in fact, Socialist mayors headed 56 cities, while over 1,000 dues-paying members of the party were occupying public office in various cities and states. One Socialist, the Milwaukee leader, Victor Berger, was elected to Congress.

Socialists were active in the trade-union movement. In 1912, Max Hayes, a prominent Cleveland Socialist, running against Samuel Gompers for President of the A.F.L., obtained about one-third of the votes cast. In the needle trades of New York and other cities, the leadership was almost entirely Socialist.

The party did much during this period in the promotion of social and labor legislation, and, time and time again, after the party members had initiated legislation, and had joined with free-lance reformers to popularize it, the country found Socialist legislative proposals taken over by the major parties and enacted into legislation, usually, however, in a watered-down form.

Although there were many differences of opinion within the Socialist Party during the period 1901 to 1912 as to the best procedures to follow, the party members were so busy building and so enthusiastic about the results obtained, that these differences failed to lead to splits.

During the following decade, from 1912 to 1922, however, a number of things happened both in the United States and abroad which decimated the party ranks. First of these was the controversy of a number of years standing between the moderate socialists of the type of Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger and the extremists. The moderates believed that progress toward socialism would come primarily through political action, the election of Socialists to public office, and the gradual peaceful and democratic transfer of industry from private to public ownership. The extremists, like William D. Haywood, the leader of the I.W.W., were more syndicalist than socialist in their philosophy.

Haywood laid more emphasis on economic action than he did on parliamentary activity. He believed with syndicalists that strikes, leading to a general strike, and such tactics as sabotage, would be more effective in bringing about fundamental change.

Haywood was for a while a member of the Executive Committee of the party. But after a long and bitter controversy, the party, in 1912, passed an amendment to its constitution to the effect that anyone advocating the use of sabotage and violence would not be eligible for membership. Such tactics, the amendment declared, "made for guerrilla warfare, demoralized those who employed these methods and opened the door to the *agent provocateur*." Haywood was expelled from the party's Executive Committee in 1913, and took with him a number of his adherents. Others left not because they agreed with Haywood, but because they disliked the controversy engendered in party gatherings.

Then in 1912, some of the former adherents of the party, particularly among the social workers' group, were drawn into the ranks of the Progressive or Bull Moose Party, led by Teddy Roosevelt. They thought his was a more effective instrument for achieving im-

mediate social reforms. Others, listening to the eloquent addresses of Woodrow Wilson on the New Freedom, decided to vote for the former Princeton President and thus prevent the reelection of William Howard Taft.

The most vigorous disagreements within the party, however, were those caused by events emanating from abroad. The first of such events was the breaking out of World War I. The majority of the party opposed America's entrance into the war—some because they were opposed to all wars, or all wars between capitalist nations; some because they believed that, if America remained neutral, it would be in a better position to help to mediate a just and lasting peace.

Others favored the most vigorous prosecution of the war by the United States as a means of crushing German militarism and imperialism. When the United States entered the war, and the Socialist Party passed the St. Louis anti-war resolution, this group—including many of the writers of the movement—left the party either temporarily or permanently.

During the war, the party's voting strength increased in such cities as New York, which, in 1917, during the Hillquit campaign, sent strong delegations to the city and state legislatures. The party's opposition to war, on the other hand, led to the imprisonment of Eugene Victor Debs and a number of other Socialist leaders and rank and filers, to the

breaking up of any party meetings, and to the disorganization of the party machinery.

But a more important cause of disruption of the party at that time was the Russian Revolution of 1917, followed by the establishment of the Soviet Republic in the form of a Communist Party dictatorship. Many Socialists in America, particularly those who had come from Russia and surrounding countries, were mistakenly of the opinion that the proletarian revolution starting in Russia would soon sweep over the world like a prairie fire, engulfing the United States. They thought that it was their duty to mobilize the masses for the revolution in this country. The majority of the party, however, declared that they saw no evidence of a revolutionary crisis in the United States, and that the job of Socialists here, as in other democratic countries, was to use the ballot and other peaceful instruments of change to bring about a cooperative system of industrial society. The extremists, at a convention held in Chicago in July, 1919, split from the Socialist Party, and formed the Communist and Communist Labor parties. The Socialist Party membership, as a result, declined to 27,000.

Thus the party secessions of the decade 1912-1922 resulting from disagreements over syndicalism and sabotage, over Bull Mooseism, Wilsonism, war policies, and bolshevism, had greatly weakened the party and left its membership less than one-fourth of that of 1912.

[To be continued]

Deep in Mao Tse-tung's China, a Catholic missionary used good old American slang to inform a colleague in Hong Kong that things weren't so rosy as the Communists claimed. The priest wrote that wood was plentiful, officials honest, people happy, production rising. Then he added this postscript: "Tell all this to Father Sweeney."—*Pathfinder*.

The *Queen Elizabeth*, outward bound from Southampton, dropped her pilot in somewhat gusty weather. Dangling at the end of his ladder, he clawed with his foot for the pilot boat.

The sole occupant of the latter, influenced by the weather conditions, kept his craft a respectful distance from the towering liner.

This went on for some little time, to the growing disgust of the ship's bo'sun. He decided eventually to intervene and hailed the bridge.

"What's the matter, bo'sun?" came the inquiry from the bridge.

"Pilot boat wants to know if you can move a bit nearer, sir."—*Daily Telegraph* (London).