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ARTICLE

The Golden Age of Pragmatic Socialism: Wisconsin Socialists at the State Level, 1919–37

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Abstract
Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Socialists in Wisconsin experienced a "golden age" of political successes in the state legislature. Whereas the 1920s are commonly seen as a period of socialist decline, Wisconsin Socialists entered the decade with a renewed sense of optimism. Following World War I, the Wisconsin Democratic Party collapsed as a viable political option and the Wisconsin Socialist Party found itself the second most powerful party behind the Republican Party. Wisconsin Socialists took a pragmatic approach to legislative debates and allied with progressive Republicans to defeat conservative opposition. Socialists were vital to progressive reform prior to World War I; however, the Socialist-Progressive alliance reached its full potential in the 1920s. From 1919–31, the Wisconsin legislature passed 295 Socialist-authored pieces of legislation ranging from labor demands, public utilities, and criminal justice reform. Many of the proposals resulted from negotiations between the Socialist and Progressive caucuses. The success of the Wisconsin Socialists—and their alliance with progressive Republicans—suggests that at least in some places the Progressive Era extended into the 1920s.

Keywords: Socialism; politics; Progressive Era; progressivism; Wisconsin

For nearly seventy years, scholars of American socialism have seen the decades following World War I as a period of socialist decline. While they offered slightly different chronologies and reasons for this period of defeat and retrenchment, they have generally approached the story like "coroners conducting an autopsy of an exhausted dying movement."[1] The legislative successes of Socialist state legislators in Wisconsin, however, call into question this scholarly consensus. While the Socialist caucus never captured more than 15 percent of seats in the state senate or assembly, they engineered the passage of hundreds of Socialist-authored bills and shaped many more from 1919 to 1931.[2] Their influence diminished as the Great Depression wore on, but it did not disappear. [Figure 1]

Socialist state legislators achieved this success by adopting a pragmatic philosophy.[3] The electoral collapse of the Wisconsin Democrats in the 1920s made the Socialists the state's "second party" and allowed them to forge a political alliance with progressive Republicans.[4] This alliance not only enabled them to author and shape legislation; it also

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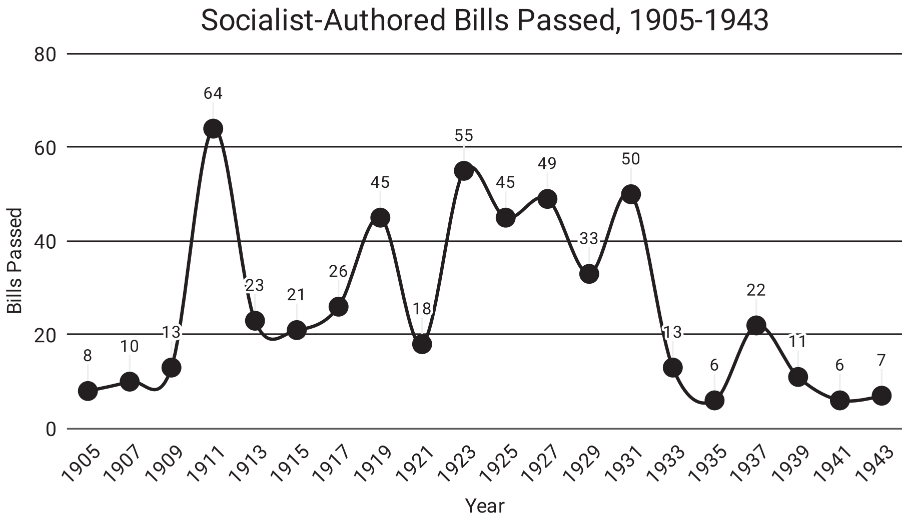

Figure 1. Number of Socialist-authored bills passed by the Wisconsin legislature during each legislative cycle from 1905–1943. The peaks at 1911 and 1919 make sense because those were the years during which the Socialist Party had their highest number of legislators, fourteen and twenty respectively. However, the sustained success in the 1920s cannot easily be explained by the sheer size of the Socialist caucus because it was smaller than that of 1911 and 1918. Data compiled from *Index to the Journals of the Wisconsin Legislature, Senate and Assembly* (Madison, WI: State Printer, 1905–1943).

gave them great institutional power within the statehouse. They effectively mobilized their allies in the labor movement in order to maintain political pressure during legislative debates. Given their relatively low numbers in the legislature, the Socialist caucus should have struggled to achieve passage on most of their legislation, yet that was not the case. In fact, the Socialists' pragmatism coalesced with Wisconsin's broader political atmosphere after World War I to create a "golden age" for Wisconsin Socialists.

The Wisconsin Socialists' opposition to World War I helped the party survive into the 1920s. The war was unpopular in Wisconsin, especially in German American communities like Milwaukee that had generational ties to the Socialist Party dating back to the late nineteenth century. Instead of placing their displeasure at the Socialist Party, many voters redirected it toward the Democratic Party both nationally and statewide. In fact, Wisconsin was the only state where a majority of its Congressional delegation—nine out of eleven congressional representatives—voted against declaring war in 1917. Wisconsin Socialists dodged the antiwar sentiment by aligning itself with Wisconsin progressives led by Senator Robert La Follette, who was one of the leading antiwar voices in Congress.[5] Wisconsin Socialists campaigned on a noninterventionist platform; however, once the United States formally entered the war, elected Socialists, such as Milwaukee mayor Daniel Hoan, did not interfere with war mobilization efforts like bond drives and rationing.[6] While the United States' involvement in the war sent shockwaves across the political spectrum and devastated radicals across the country who actively tried to interfere with mobilization, the Wisconsin Socialist Party averted catastrophe and emerged from the war relatively unscathed as a political force. The same could not be said of the Wisconsin Democratic Party who were decimated by the strong antiwar vote. From 1919–32, the Democratic caucus never rose above eight members, and more than

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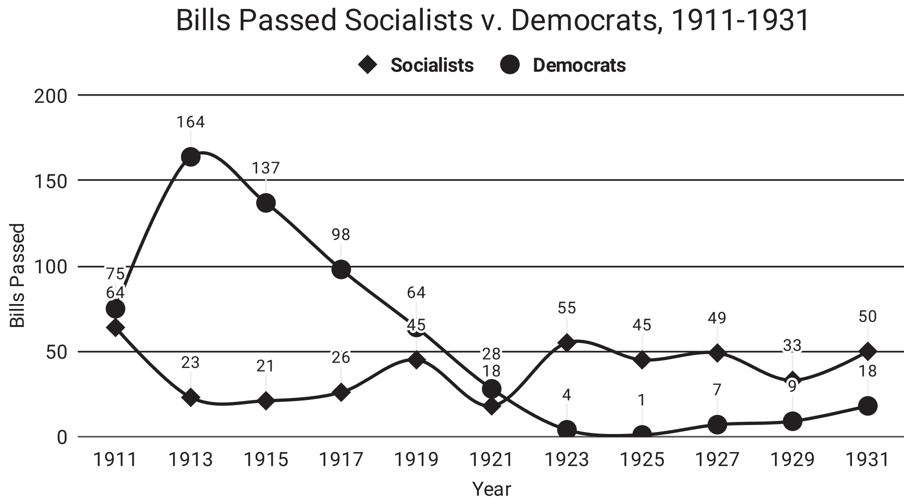

Figure 2. Number of Democratic and Socialist-authored bills passed by the Wisconsin legislature. Notice the sharp decline in Democratic bills around the start of World War I. The Socialists surpassed the Democrats in both number of legislators and amount of passed bills during most of the 1920s. Data compiled from *Index to the Journals of the Wisconsin Legislature, Senate and Assembly* (Madison, WI: State Printer, 1905–1943).

once there was only one Democrat in the state legislature. It was not until 1932 that the Democrats reemerged as a political force in Wisconsin behind the New Deal coalition.[7] [Figure 2]

The Democrats' disappearance dovetailed with growing disorder within the Republican caucus, and the Socialist caucus did not hesitate to exploit that disunion throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The Wisconsin Republican Party experienced constant ideological factionalization between a progressive wing, modeled after Robert La Follette, and a conservative wing.[8] Always on the lookout for opportunities, Socialists frequently sided with the progressive wing of the Republican Party and brokered deals with their new allies in order to advance their agenda.

Socialists and progressive Republicans created their own de facto caucus so as to seize control of the state's legislative agenda from the more conservative members. Historian John Buenker noted this dynamic, but he argued that the Socialist caucus simply provided political cover for the progressive Republicans' less radical platform.[9] The inverse is equally true. Socialists managed both to achieve passage on vast amounts of their authored legislation and to integrate their ideas into the agendas of other parties. Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, Socialist legislators moved bills they authored through the statehouse at a higher rate than before they established the new relationship with progressive Republicans. [Figure 3]

Wisconsin Socialists benefitted from their pragmatic approach to politics at different levels of government. Victor Berger, leader of the Wisconsin Socialist Party and five-time Congressmen from Milwaukee, advocated for a strategy that he called "The Milwaukee Idea."[10] Instead of relying on direct labor actions against industry, Berger's social democratic approach called on socialists to focus on elections, legislative strategies, and the trade union movement. Wisconsin Socialists successfully won both local and statehouse level elections and gained control over numerous craft unions in order to create a

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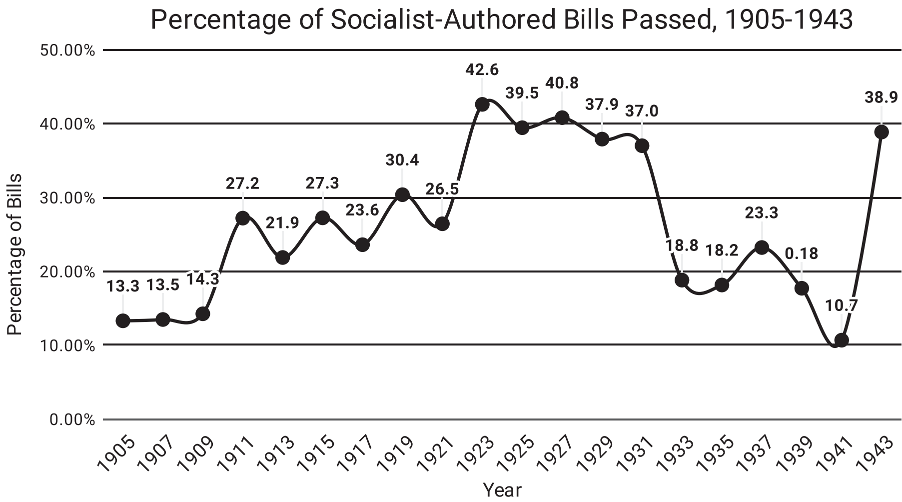

Figure 3. Percentage of Socialist-authored bills passed by the Wisconsin legislature from 1905–1943. In 1923, for example, the Socialist caucus proposed 129 bills. The legislature approved fifty-five of those bills, which the governor signed into law. This means that the Socialist caucus had a 42.6 percent "success rate" (55/129) during the 1923 legislative session. During the 1920s, the drastic increase in the "success rate" cuts against prior declensionist narratives. The period should be considered a "Golden Age" for Wisconsin Socialists. Data compiled from *Index to the Journals of the Wisconsin Legislature, Senate and Assembly* (Madison, WI: State Printer, 1905–1943).

symbiotic relationship. Once in power, Socialists sought to use their political arm to "reach … out for the powers of the state" while their trade union arm disciplined and organized the state's industries.[11] The resulting dual-track agenda required that Socialist state legislators had to be willing to negotiate in the statehouse in order to redistribute power away from the legislature and into the hands of municipal Socialists in Milwaukee.

This pragmatic strategy allowed Socialist legislators to negotiate with progressive Republicans in order to write legislation that satisfied both groups' political aims. This does not mean that the Socialist caucus got everything it wanted. Socialists and progressive Republicans engaged in heated debates about the degree to which legislation should alter the state's economic foundations. When Socialists introduced an eight-hour workday, progressives offered a ten-hour version. Progressives wanted ten dollars a week for unemployment during the Great Depression; Socialists countered with twelve dollars. The resulting legislation reflected compromises from both sides of the coalition because progressives needed Socialist votes to pass the legislation through the statehouse, and Socialists were willing to accept incremental change. In other words, Wisconsin Socialists did not avoid the messiness of politics, and they understood that it was better to accept altered versions of their bills rather than to see their ideal agenda fail entirely.

The Socialist-progressive alliance also increased the Socialists' institutional power in the legislature. During the 1920s and 1930s, Socialists chaired numerous legislative committees or held key committee assignments. The Socialists could leverage their support for progressive legislation into committee leadership positions because progressive Republicans needed the Socialist caucus' support in order to defeat conservative opposition.[12] Furthermore, Socialists could pressure progressive leaders like Republican governor John Blaine into supporting Socialist-authored legislation by mobilizing the

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labor movement. Many Socialist legislators came from the ranks of trade unions, and those unions routinely lobbied on the group's behalf.[13] Socialist State Legislators Frank Weber (1907–12, 1915–16, 1923–26) and Frederick Brockhausen (1905–12) were the president and secretary, respectively, of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor (WSFL).[14] A lobbying letter from the WSFL came, in effect, from a Socialist's desk. That was the "Milwaukee Idea" in action. The Socialists acted as the political arm of the unions, and the unions functioned as the lobbying arm of the Socialists.[15] If progressives wanted organized labor's support, they needed to work with the Socialists.

The legislative successes of Socialist state legislators in Wisconsin supports the idea that the 1920s and 1930s were a period filled with Socialist ascension instead of decline, at least in terms of pragmatic socialism. Numerous declensionist narratives fixated on the timing of and reasons for socialism's failures on the national level.[16] Daniel Bell famously argued, in true consensus-era thinking, that the Socialist Party of America (SPA) was unable to enter "more directly into American life" because of its rigid ideology.[17] Bell did not consider the possibility that Socialists could act pragmatically once elected to office. These narratives also failed to analyze what Socialist politicians accomplished while in office at the state level. In their 2000 work *It Didn't Happen Here*, Seymour Lipset and Gary Marks passingly admit that Milwaukee Socialists briefly defied the declensionist trend seen at the national level; however, they rely heavily on the "coroner" mode of analysis and do not adequately explore state-level politics.[18] If historians only focus on Eugene Debs or the Socialist Party nationally, then the story of American socialism will always be one of declension.

To be sure, not all Socialists were as fortunate as those in the Badger State. Wisconsin Socialists survived the First Red Scare and thrived in the subsequent decades, in part because they did not face the same level of repression experienced by other socialists elsewhere around the country, particularly in the American West.[19] Victor Berger was charged and sentenced under the Espionage Act and denied his seat in Congress, but that does not compare to the violent repression suffered by revolutionary Socialists such as the International Workers of the World (IWW).[20] The Wisconsin Socialist Party may have survived the Red Scare due to their more palatable form of socialism. Their pragmatism made them potential allies, not enemies, of progressive Republicans.

The success of the Wisconsin Socialists after World War I also suggests a new periodization of the Progressive Era. Scholars like Rebecca Edwards and Heather Cox Richardson have called on historians to extend the Progressive Era backward in time.[21] The success of the Wisconsin Socialists—and their alliance with progressive Republicans—suggests that, at least in some places, the Progressive Era extended into the 1920s as well. This argument draws on the understanding of the Progressive Era advanced by Jefferson Cowie. He describes the period as a "kaleidoscope of reform" and argues that "progressivism's greatest strengths lay in what many have seen as its weaknesses: its ill-defined nature, its shifting alliances, its cross-class alliances, [and] its orientation toward a local scale of action."[22] Whereas Cowie follows the historical convention that the Progressive Era ended after World War I with middle-class reformers disillusioned and "radicalism routed," I contend that the Progressive Era extended well past the war as Wisconsin Socialists entered the 1920s with renewed optimism and branded themselves the inheritors of the Progressive movement.[23]

In 1924, Socialist campaign flyers proclaimed, "Socialists are the Dependable Progressives," who could establish a social democracy representative of both the farmer and the laborer.[24] During that same election, the Socialist Party of America formally endorsed Robert La Follette's campaign for president, and Wisconsin Socialists

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encouraged their supporters to vote for the Progressive Party candidate. Historian James Weinstein has argued that the SPA's endorsement of La Follette left Socialists "high and dry" across the country after the campaign's failure, but that was not the case in Wisconsin.[25] It is true that the Socialist Party nationally continued a precipitous decline throughout the 1920s, but at the same time, Wisconsin Socialists gained significant political capital by supporting the former governor's presidential run. The campaign strengthened the Socialists' ties to progressive Republicans and served as an accelerant for pragmatic socialism in Wisconsin. That relationship thrived throughout the 1920s and eventually culminated in the 1930s when the Wisconsin Socialists formally aligned with the Progressive Party headed by Robert La Follette's sons.

While scholars have researched the Wisconsin Socialist Party extensively, they have focused almost entirely on Milwaukee city politics while devoting little attention to state legislators.[26] Frederick Olson completed the first full chronology of the Milwaukee Socialists in his unpublished dissertation, "Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," but his analysis gave scant attention to the ways in which Socialist state legislators worked in tandem with their comrades in municipal offices to progress the Socialist agenda.[27] Socialist state legislators often put forth legislation that granted more power to Milwaukee's mayor, a seat that Socialist Daniel Hoan occupied from 1916–40. The power of municipal Socialists hinged on whether or not their state legislative comrades could work with progressive allies in order to construct legislation that allowed Milwaukee to control its own tax rates, annex surrounding land for expansion, and access bonds for municipal projects. Recent analyses have done a wonderful job of explaining how the Milwaukee Socialists remained politically viable throughout the early twentieth century; however, the central role of state legislators has been underexplored and can deepen our understanding about how Milwaukee Socialists managed to build and retain power for most of the early twentieth century.[28]

Socialist state legislators should not be shunted to the sidelines of political history. Instead, their inclusion allows for a greater understanding of how pragmatic Socialism thrived at various levels of government in the post-WWI era. Wisconsin Socialists were not alone in their ability to survive the First Red Scare. In the early 1920s, Socialists in Minnesota were instrumental to the formation of the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, and they fostered relationships with progressive politicians throughout the decade.[29] Further research may reveal that Socialists' strategies in Minnesota mirrored those of their Wisconsin comrades. Wisconsin Socialists were also part of a transnational trend of working-class reformers operating at the state and local level. As Shelton Stromquist has demonstrated, during the Progressive Era "a new kind of pragmatic urban working-class politics … proved capable of adapting a common municipal reform program to the specific partisan political environment of different U.S. cities."[30] The same is true at the state level. Socialist state legislators played an important role in the reformist milieu in Wisconsin, and they furthered progressive politics both before and after WWI.

The 1918 election was the beginning of a new era for Socialists in Wisconsin. The Socialist Party's electoral success had been largely confined to the urban landscape of Milwaukee, but the party used the state's antiwar fervor to their advantage and focused their attention on a new rural constituency.[31] Socialist Herman Marth (1919–20), who ran for the state legislature in Central Wisconsin's Marathon County, won his race in part by distributing campaign material that promised government ownership of grain mills and packinghouses in order to benefit farmers across the state. He also attacked insurance companies for gouging the average citizen with the blessing of Republicans and Democrats. Marth and other representatives relied on the idea that "the farmers have learned

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their lesson," and would vote for the Socialist ticket.[32] The strategy worked, and the Socialist caucus expanded to its largest size ever. When the 1919 legislative session began, four senators and sixteen representatives went to work expanding the Socialist Party's agenda.

The Socialist caucus achieved notable victories during the 1919 legislative cycle. Their main focus was a series of tax bills aimed at raising funds to offset the decreased revenue from prohibition policies and to pay for the WWI veteran's bonus. The legislature passed three separate Socialist-authored tax bills that lowered property taxes, reorganized taxation rates in Milwaukee, and raised taxes on large grain-elevator operators.[33] In addition, Socialists worked to fulfill campaign promises made to both their rural and urban constituencies. The legislature approved new hunting regulations and subsidized animal feed, both bills written by the Socialist caucus. Socialist-authored bills raised funds to prevent occupational diseases, adopted new apprenticeship laws, and updated housing codes.[34] Socialists also expanded public ownership by securing passage of Socialist Representative Frank Metcalfe's (1911–12, 1915–20) bill that allowed cities to purchase bonds to fund public market places.[35] By the end of the legislative cycle, forty-five Socialist-authored bills had been signed into law. Pleased with the victories, Milwaukee Mayor Dan Hoan praised his comrades in the legislature for "their steadfast adherence to progressive measures that has made possible that which we have achieved."[36]

When the Socialist caucus returned to the legislature for the 1921 session, they set their sights on regulating public utilities. In the previous decade, Socialists struggled to gain legislative approval for public utilities in Milwaukee, but that changed in the 1920s because progressive Republicans were increasingly willing to approve the expansion of public utilities in cities like Milwaukee.[37] The Republicans' shift toward public utilities likely occurred because the Federated Trades Council (FTC) of Milwaukee launched a lobbying campaign in favor of the legislation. Frank Weber, former Socialist state legislator, headed the FTC in 1921, which shows the close linkage between the Socialists and their labor allies.

The Socialists' pragmatism was on full display during the 1921 legislative session. Socialist state senator Joseph Hirsch (1921–24) proposed legislation to create a weekly schedule for wage payments, a move that would ease the lives of many strapped workers. After failing to rally enough support behind his bill, Hirsch and the rest of the Socialist caucus pivoted and threw their votes behind a progressive Republican bill that created a two-week pay period, which Republican governor John Blaine signed into law.[38] Instead of rejecting the watered-down version, Socialists understood the importance of getting any version of the bill passed due to its immediate benefits for the Socialist Party's labor constituency. The Socialists' pragmatism allowed them to take the small, yet important victory and keep the fight for socialism moving toward the next legislative battle.

During the 1923 session, Socialists aggressively threw their support behind the progressive wing of the Republican Party in return for votes on Socialist bills. This working relationship involved both a give and a take for the Socialists. They had to be content with small changes, something they had become accustomed to since arriving in the legislature. Socialists aimed much of their legislative pressure at Governor Blaine. Milwaukee mayor, Dan Hoan, sent numerous letters to Blaine asking him not to veto Socialist bills that arrived at his desk.[39] One example was his letter supporting Socialist Julius Keisner's (1919–28) bill that gave Milwaukee's mayor the ability to fill vacancies on the city council. Blaine eventually gave his support to the bill and signed it into law.[40]

Wisconsin's Socialists were not afraid to use their political capital, and they routinely pressured the governor into supporting their legislation. When Socialist Representative

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John Polakowski (1923–24) proposed legislation that would have disbanded the Wisconsin National Guard, the Socialist Party organized a letter-writing campaign in support of the bill. The campaign mobilized groups like the Women's Peace Union of the Western Hemisphere, who implored Governor Blaine to help the "abolishment of war."[41] The bill passed in the assembly by a vote of sixty-two to seventeen, but it did not make it to Blaine's desk because it failed in the senate. Because of their position on the left wing of the Progressive movement, the Socialists were in a perfect position to propose radical legislation and get some of it approved through the bargaining ability on which they prided themselves. By the end of the 1923 session, Governor Blaine signed fifty-five Socialist-authored bills into law. The approved legislation increased pensions for mothers, reduced working hours for women, and provided funding for public county hospitals.[42]

During the 1924 campaign, Socialists continually badgered Governor Blaine. They knew he had his eyes set on a U.S. Senate run and that his political future relied on organized labor's support. On the campaign stump, Socialists lambasted Blaine as a politician who "had no labor program in mind and was extremely timid about taking a stand on any labor question."[43] After listing out the WSFL's nine major labor demands, which included a general eight-hour day, a ban on the use of private detectives during labor disputes, and the creation of old-age pensions, Socialist speakers pointed out that the program had "no active support whatever from Governor Blaine."[44] Socialists hoped they could push the governor towards supporting the WSFL's platform during the following legislative session.

While they continued to pressure Governor Blaine, Socialists realized they needed a strategy to convince their fellow legislators to support the Socialist slate of bills. Before the 1925 session, the Socialist Party conducted opposition research into the other state legislators from Milwaukee County. The report indicated which legislators could be pressured into supporting labor bills or other progressive legislation. For example, the report described Republican Thomas Conway as "friendly to labor and usually votes satisfactorily from the progressive point of view," and Republican Ernest Pahl as "an old time Populist, progressive but very economical. He will scrutinize public expenditures carefully but is not opposed to paying higher taxes if he feels he is getting the benefit of the same."[45] The background information gave the Socialist caucus an idea of who their allies would be during the session. They knew that Republican John Eber "votes about nine-tenths of the time with the socialists," even though he personally denounced the Socialist Party.[46] Socialists hoped they could pressure Republican Ben Glass into fulfilling his campaign promises. Glass "ran for the assembly on the La Follette platform and was endorsed by Governor Blaine."[47] If the governor got behind Socialist-authored bills, legislators like Glass would likely follow suit.

The legislative report also gave the Socialist caucus strategies to convince more conservative legislators to support labor legislation. Republican Theodore Engel was "the most thoroughly reactionary in the assembly" and was "bitterly opposed by the State Federation of Labor." Nonetheless, Socialists believed he would vote for any bill in the interest of women. The report indicated, "He does not believe women should work and is in favor of any measure to restrict their hours or better their working conditions."[48] Similarly, Republican Chas Perry was "opposed to labor legislation generally but will favor any minor improvement in general conditions which does not too severely affect profits or does not disturb business."[49] In other words, the Socialists would have to be pragmatic, but they had the opportunity to leverage concessions from even the most conservative members of the legislature.

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Armed with the knowledge of where to exert pressure, the Socialist caucus unleashed a whirlwind of labor proposals during the 1925 session. Forty-five different pieces of Socialist-authored legislation passed in the legislature. Socialist Senator William Quick (1923–26) achieved passage on his bill to exempt labor organizations' property from taxation, and Socialist Representative Alex Ruffing (1919–26) expanded workmen's compensation to cover medical treatments.[50] The most successful legislator during the session was Socialist Senator Joseph Padway (1925–26) who saw eleven of his bills signed into law. The legislature approved Padway's bill requiring private investigators to complete a licensing program and banning company-hired investigators from infiltrating labor unions.[51] All of Padway's successes had been highly touted as part of the WSFL's 1924 platform. It is likely that Governor Blaine backed Padway's bills because of the combination of Socialist pressure and the labor movement's demands during the previous election.

Socialist legislators were tenacious during the 1925 session, particularly around child labor. Joseph Padway proposed two separate bills relating to child labor, and he led numerous lobbying campaigns to force legislators to reaffirm their commitment to the labor movement. One bill focused on regulating child labor protections in the state, while the other sought approval of the recently passed federal Child Labor Amendment.[52] Padway mobilized unions across the state, and letters flooded into the statehouse and the governor's office in favor of the child labor legislation. Support came from the Carpenters' District Council, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, the Milwaukee Typographical Union, and Post Office Clerks' Union.[53] By the end of the session, the legislature had approved Padway's improvements to the state's child labor laws, and Wisconsin became one of only five states to ratify the Child Labor Amendment during the 1920s.

Labor legislation was not the Socialist causus's only focus as their agenda expanded to include prison reform. The Socialist influence in the legislature is undeniable as progressive Republicans increasingly welcomed radical reforms that combated exploitation throughout society. In 1927, Socialist Senator Walter Polakowski proposed a pair of prison reform bills, both of which passed. The first provided a workmen's compensation program for prison laborers, while the other created an investigative committee to inspect living conditions throughout Wisconsin's prison system.[54] Despite the fact that inmates would not be able to vote for the Socialist Party, the caucus used its power to reform as much of society as it could. The legislature also approved other Socialist-authored bills that raised funding for training schools across the state and set up employment offices as part of the Socialists' increased focus on expanding education and employment opportunities.[55]

The Socialist caucus did not water down its legislation all of the time. In 1927, it proposed Joint Resolution Twenty-One, which would have nationalized Wisconsin's railroad system. The proposal sailed through the assembly before the senate ultimately rejected it. Socialists' ability to get half of the assembly to vote in favor of nationalizing an industry is a testament to the caucus' capacity for persuasion. It is difficult to discern the exact methods Socialists used to convince their fellow legislators. Perhaps it was part of a bargain by which the Socialists would support a progressive Republican bill in exchange for votes on nationalizing the railroads. It is equally likely that progressive Republicans in the assembly voted in favor of the bill as a way to gain credibility with labor unions.

As the 1920s progressed, it became increasingly apparent to Socialist legislators that the best way to preserve their power was to continue their relationship with the progressive Republicans.[56] The Republican Party had been moving increasingly towards a schism. Under the leadership of Philip La Follette, son of the popular former Wisconsin

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governor and senator, Robert La Follette, the progressive wing of the Republican Party split off and formed the Progressive Party in 1934.[57] In the years leading up to that split, one of the primary leaders of the Socialist partnership with the Progressives was Socialist legislator Thomas Duncan. Duncan had experience working alongside Republicans because he had served as Milwaukee mayor Daniel Hoan's secretary from 1920 to 1925.[58] Duncan's relationship with Hoan made him the conduit for any bill that Hoan and his administration wanted the legislature to pass. In 1927, Duncan ushered through a series of bills designed to help Milwaukee expand its public utilities by giving it significant power to condemn property and exercise eminent domain.[59] By the end of the session, the legislature approved twenty-one of Duncan's bills for a success rate of 55 percent.

Although Wisconsin's Socialists consistently saw waves of their legislation signed into law, they were not insulated from electoral setbacks. Defeats in the 1928 election cut the Socialist caucus in half from ten to five legislators, which prompted some Socialists from around the country to question the Wisconsin Socialists' strategies. Norman Thomas wrote to Hoan that the election results suggested, "There is something wrong about Wisconsin socialism." Thomas feared, "We aren't going to get far on socialism while it remains an individual or local affair."[60] On the one hand, Hoan shared Thomas's concerns about the Socialist Party's national prospects; on the other hand, declining success at the ballot box did not fluster Milwaukee's mayor because pragmatic socialism could still succeed despite electoral setbacks. He replied that the Socialist Party should focus on the quality of its elected officials, rather than the number of votes they received.[61] In a way, Hoan was more interested in what Socialists could do with the current political advantage they had. His caucus would fight regardless of their numbers in the legislature.

Hoan's optimism makes sense because the Wisconsin Socialists continued to achieve passage on bills and influence legislation, despite their lower numbers. Even with only five legislators in the statehouse, Socialists continued their legislative push during the 1929 session. Once again, Thomas Duncan defied all expectations and was responsible for twenty-five of the thirty-three Socialist-authored bills passed by the legislature. He dedicated his efforts towards legislation that improved Milwaukee's harbor, but he also managed to gain approval for a joint resolution calling on the U.S. Congress to extend legislation designed to improve maternal and infant health.[62] Duncan embodied the Socialists' dual-track agenda of working to pass Progressive Era reforms while also trying to bolster the political power of the Socialist administration in Milwaukee. At the same time, he set an example of how to work alongside progressive Republicans. When the legislature created a special committee to investigate the municipal ownership of water-power, progressive Republicans welcomed Duncan's participation as one of the committee's five members.[63] Duncan's role on the committee set the groundwork for future programs in Wisconsin such as the New Deal era's "Little TVA" Act passed in 1937.

Wisconsin politics experienced another seismic shift akin to WWI once the Great Depression hit in 1929. The Depression further divided the Republican Party, and progressives, led by newly elected Governor Philip La Follette, had to rely heavily on Socialist votes in order to pass much of their agenda in the statehouse. Socialists, who had prophesized the coming of an economic disaster throughout the 1920s, were poised to demand a lot for their participation.

During the 1931 session, Socialists were at the height of their influence in the state legislature due to progressive Republicans' precarious position. As an olive branch to the Socialist caucus, progressives appointed Duncan chairperson of the Joint Finance Committee. This was arguably the most important committee in the legislature because it was in charge of approving a budget before presenting it to the entire legislature for a vote. In

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other words, Socialists exercised great influence over the legislature's purse strings, and were prepared to unleash the spending necessary to tackle the Depression.

By the end of the legislative session in the summer of 1931, Governor La Follette had signed fifty bills authored by members of the Socialist caucus, which ran the gamut of Socialist dreams dating back to before WWI. The approved legislation included a series of workmen's compensation bills that strengthened and expanded the program.[64] In addition, Socialist bills further regulated the use of private detectives, expanded the power of cities to establish public utilities, and created a program for old age assistance.[65] The legislature also approved the Socialists' calls for increased penalties for convict-made goods, as well as for hotels that violated regulations on working hours.[66] Not all of the proposals focused on the economy as Socialist legislators proposed Joint Resolutions that called upon the U.S. Congress to enact a federal ban on lynching.[67]

Thomas Duncan benefitted the most from the closer alliance between Socialists and progressives, achieving passage on an impressive 65 percent of his bills.[68] The most striking of Duncan's bills that passed was Senate Bill sixty-six, which established an executive council for the governor.[69] This council served as an advisory board and helped to manage Wisconsin's recovery efforts during the Great Depression. Duncan himself went on to lead Governor Philip La Follette's executive council as his secretary. This may have been borderline quid pro quo, but Socialists used Duncan's position to have a direct conduit to the governor's office, greatly improving their chances of getting Socialist legislation passed throughout the 1930s.

The 1931 session's most contentious moment revolved around the question of whether or not the legislature would create a state program of unemployment compensation. Both the Socialist and progressive caucus had their own proposals, and the debate raged for months over which version of the bill would pass. Socialist Representative George Hampel's (1931–32, 1937–44) version proposed twelve dollars a week in unemployment payments. It also included an eight-hour working day provision across all industries, which proved untenable for progressives during the negotiations.[70] Progressives rallied behind Republican Harold Groves's version, which called for ten dollars a week in payments, but did not have a cap on working hours.[71] Not surprisingly, the Socialist caucus derided the progressives for not limiting working hours, which they argued could have ensured full employment of workers around the state. Socialist Representative George Tews (1915–16, 1927–28, 1931–32) summarized the caucus' sentiment when he declared on the floor of the assembly that a progressive was "a socialist with their brains knocked out."[72] Despite the tension, the Socialists backed the progressives' version of unemployment compensation, which was at risk of failing without their votes. Socialists believed that any a version of unemployment compensation was better than ending the session with nothing. Their pragmatism allowed them to see the full picture and bring tangible victories to the people who needed it most: the state's unemployed.

Following the 1932 elections, the amount of Socialist-authored legislation declined precipitously as only fifty-three Socialist-authored bills passed the legislature from 1933 to 1943. The forces that had allowed Socialists to achieve success over the previous fourteen years began to reverse. The Democratic Party reemerged behind Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal coalition, which stripped away some of the Socialists' labor support in Milwaukee. Additionally, the new Progressive Party was a more palatable option for many reform-minded voters who previously may have voted for the Socialist ticket. As a result, the Socialist Party lost its status as the "second party" in the legislature and found itself as a minority party behind the Progressives, Republicans, and Democrats.

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Although the amount of Socialist-authored legislation declined after 1932, Socialists maintained some semblance of political power and remained successful at influencing legislative actions through their continued relationship with the Progressive Party. Wisconsin Socialists formalized their alliance with the Progressive Party by merging with it in 1935. In the fall of that year, labor and farmer groups from around Wisconsin convened to form a new political organization within the Progressive Party called the Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation (FLPF). Among the groups included in the new FLPF were the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor, the Farmer's Equity Union, the Railroad Brotherhoods, and the Socialist Party of Wisconsin. As early as July 1933, Daniel Hoan reported to the Socialist Party's National Executive Committee that the WSFL wanted to create a labor party in Wisconsin.[73] If that happened, the Wisconsin Socialist Party would have to choose whether or not to remain politically separate from the group or get involved.

The decision to merge with the Progressive Party was not an easy one for the Wisconsin Socialists. They had proved in the 1920s that working with progressives was beneficial, but they retained their political independence while doing it. Many Socialists had trepidations about being subsumed under another political party's banner for fear of losing their political autonomy. As the negotiations over the FLPF were underway, Morris Hillquit, member of the SPA's Executive Committee, offered advice and words of caution about how Wisconsin's Socialists should proceed: "Our safest course … is to maintain the integrity of our own organization without permitting ourselves to be deflected from our straight path."[74] Joining another political organization, Hillquit feared, might distract the socialist movement. The merger had potential if there was "a way in which [the socialists] could arrange for harmonious co-operation and mutual support of the two organizations."[75] In other words, Socialists needed reassurance from the Progressive Party leadership that they could maintain their political identity and positions.

After months of negotiations, Hoan managed to gain assurance from Progressive Party leaders that the Socialists would retain their political independence.[76] The Socialist Party pledged its support to the FLPF and refrained from running candidates against the Progressive Party. In exchange, the Socialist Party ran candidates on the Progressive Party ballot line in a negotiated number of districts. Though Socialists now ran on the Progressive ticket, the Wisconsin Socialist Party continued as an entity and was still part of the SPA. The agreement ensured that "[t]he Socialist Party [was] to name the candidates of the federation in places where it [was] especially strong."[77] This arrangement likely saved the Socialists from extinction in the legislature, but it did require that they tone down their rhetoric. Socialist politicians reassured their supporters that they could "keep their party identity under the new plan," which would help to expand solidarity across the state.[78] Mayor Hoan was optimistic about the decision. He believed that the Socialists could still serve as the left wing of the Progressive Party and provide a check on the group's decisions. If the progressives stumbled, Hoan argued, "[o]ur party will emerge out of their wreckage to harvest the crops."[79]

The Progressive-Socialist alliance certainly breathed new life into the Socialist caucus. In the 1935 legislative cycle, prior to the merger, the Socialists only had three legislators and achieved passage of six of their bills. By running of the Progressive Party line in 1936, they doubled their size to six legislators and saw Governor La Follette sign twenty Socialist-authored bills during the 1937 legislative session.[80]

The most important change in Socialist power came from their leadership of various legislative committees. Two factors determined committee positions. First, the proportion of each party's representation in the legislature decided committee compositions.

In 1937, the Progressive Party had a majority in the assembly, so their members chaired each committee. Next, seniority decided the committee chairs. Ironically, the socialist legislators had the most seniority across the Progressive caucus because they had been around longer than most of the young Progressive legislators. As a result, four different Socialists chaired high-profile committees and ushered through the most important progressive legislation during the 1937 session. Andrew Biemiller (1937–41) chaired the Education Committee, Herman Wegner (1933–44) chaired the Rules Committee, Edward Kiefer (1911–14, 1931–40) chaired the committee on Public Welfare, and David Sigman (1931–32, 1935–38) chaired the all-important Labor Committee.[81] These positions gave the Socialist caucus more power working within the Progressive Party than they ever had working outside of it.

The most significant examples of Socialist power within the Progressive Party can be seen in the passage of the "Little Wagner" and "Little TVA" Acts, which were based on the New Deal programs but were scaled down to the state level.[82] The "Little TVA" Act created the Wisconsin Development Authority with the power to oversee funding for public utilities across the state.[83] Socialists had been strong supporters of public utilities in Milwaukee and had tried to create a state-level program since 1911. This was their chance. Both Andrew Biemiller and Thomas Duncan actively supported the measure in committee hearings, and Biemiller proposed the assembly version of the bill.[84] Duncan in particular proved instrumental in the bill's passage. The "Little TVA" Act sailed through the assembly, but it faced a challenge in the senate where Progressives and Socialists were one vote short. The rules of the chamber limited the time senators could debate before they called the votes. Duncan, now the secretary for Governor La Follette, watched the senate debate and devised a stalling tactic. He, literally, stopped the clocks inside the senate chamber so officials could not tell that the allotted time had expired.[85] This gave Progressive legislators the time they needed to convince one of their colleagues to vote for the bill. As the clerk called the roll, the Wisconsin Development Authority passed by one vote.

Socialists also played an important role in the passage of the "Little Wagner" Act that protected unions' collective bargaining power across the state through the creation of arbitration boards.[86] This legislation built upon previous Socialist-authored bills from the 1920s, and Socialists were once again on the frontline of expanding the program in 1937. Henry Ohl Jr. (1917–18), head of the WSFL and a former Socialist representative, was a staunch lobbyist for the legislation, and other Socialist labor leaders, Joseph Padway and John Handley were present at the bill signing.[87] At every step of the process, the Wisconsin Socialists used their legislative power to ensure the passage of these statewide programs. It was the culmination of decades of persistence that resulted in statewide programs for labor protections and public utilities support. Socialists failed to create these programs while working as an outside party, but they succeeded as an integral part of the larger Progressive Party coalition during the 1930s.

What does it mean to be successful in politics? Winning elections, passing legislation, and running important committees is success. Yet the Socialists' lasting impact came from their ability to introduce and integrate their ideas into the legislative agendas of other parties. For example, almost every year that the Socialist caucus was in the legislature one of its members proposed a bill to make public school textbooks free to every student. Despite the persistence, the proposal failed every year to make it to the governor's desk. Some observers might label this as failure; however, that is not the end of the story. In 1941, a Republican bill passed that ensured that the state would provide textbooks for impoverished students.[88] Socialist Andrew Biemiller, now the minority leader for the

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Progressive Party, led his caucus in supporting the legislation, even though he had authored a stronger version of the bill in the previous legislative cycle. He realized that voting for something that would bring tangible benefits to the most vulnerable was what mattered. A few years later in 1945, the last three Socialists left the Wisconsin legislature. None of them lost their election; they chose not to run.

By that time, the conditions that allowed Socialists to succeed throughout the twenties and thirties had changed. The outbreak of World War II began to unravel the Progressive Party, and with it, the Socialists' last electoral vehicle. Nonetheless, it is important to breakdown what made the Wisconsin Socialists so successful in the 1920s and 1930s, when so many other political radicals struggled. Despite the varying size of the caucus, Socialist legislators managed to accumulate and retain political power. They never relied on one particular strategy because different circumstance required different responses. Socialist leaders understood the importance of cultivating a strong base of support from labor unions who lobbied on the group's behalf. Similarly, Socialists realized that they needed allies within the legislature, so they fostered relationships with progressive Republicans. The virtual disappearance of the Democratic Party after World War I allowed Socialists to cultivate that relationship until it finally blossomed into an official alliance under the Progressive Party. Once that relationship solidified, Socialists were tethered to the political success of their non-Socialists allies. The alliance worked to the Socialists' advantage for most of the twenties and thirties, until it all came crashing down. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Wisconsin Democratic Party remade itself behind the New Deal, conservatives coalesced in the Republican Party to resist New Deal programs, and the Progressive Party disintegrated as supporters flocked to the other major parties.[89] The combination of these factors created an untenable position for Wisconsin Socialists. The political landscape shifted under their feet, and they proved unable to adapt as they did in the aftermath of WWI.

Political power can be challenging to grasp fully because there is not a simple definition of what makes a group politically powerful. Whatever the definition, Socialists knew how politics worked in Wisconsin. They forged a relationship with progressive Republicans and left an indelible mark on Wisconsin politics at the state level. Wisconsin went on to be a beacon of progressivism and reform for the next seventy years, much of it inspired by the Socialist-progressive coalition.[90] Recently, socialism has reemerged as a favorable option for many Americans. In response, historians have resumed the search for an "American Style" of socialism and the ways in which Socialists changed the country.[91] That trend is likely to continue, but it needs to transcend the prior assumptions of when, where, and how Socialists succeeded across the country. Sociologist Daniel Bell famously concluded that the socialist movement "was trapped by the unhappy problem of living '*in* but not *of* the world,' so it could only act, and then inadequately, as the moral, but not political, man in immoral society."[92] The success of Socialist state legislators in Wisconsin throughout the twenties and thirties, and their lasting impact on other parties' ideologies, proves that socialists were in fact active participants *of* their political world.

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Notes

1 Richard Schneirov, "New Perspectives on Socialism I," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 2 (July 2003): 247. For examples of declensionist history of American socialism, see David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 6; James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America: 1912-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 7.

2 From 1919 to 1931, 295 pieces of Socialist-authored legislation passed the Wisconsin legislature, 79 percent more than the 165 bills they passed in a similar twelve-year period between 1905 and 1917. During their entire tenure in the legislature, the Wisconsin Socialist caucus achieved passage on 525/1,904 of their authored bills for a success rate of about 28 percent. Data compiled from *Index to the Journals of the Wisconsin Legislature, Senate and Assembly* (Madison: State Printer, 1905–1943). Socialists enacted important legislation prior to World War I, including the nation's first workmen's compensation program, but the Socialists' first decade in office pales in comparison to their successes in the 1920s. During this time, the Wisconsin legislature consisted of thirty-six state senators and one hundred assemblypersons. Each branch had the power to propose legislation, but both legislative bodies needed to approve a bill before the governor had a chance to sign the legislation. Senators served four-year terms. The entire assembly as well as the governorship was up for election every two years.

3 The Wisconsin Socialist Party was arguably the most successful branch of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), both in terms of number of elected officials and passage of legislation. The SPA began in 1901 as a merger of the Social Democratic Party of America and disaffected elements of the Socialist Labor Party of America. Its leadership ran the gamut of left-wing political thought, with Eugene Debs as the unifying figurehead, Wisconsin's Victor Berger and New York's Morris Hillquit maintaining the "right-wing" ideology of Social Democracy, and the IWW's Bill Haywood representing the "left-wing" of the coalition. From its founding, the SPA was a factionalized group with differing approaches to politics and varying strategies about how to transition the United States away from capitalism and toward socialism. These ideological differences were not insignificant. Many to the left of the Wisconsin Socialists, including Debs and Haywood, argued that a pragmatic, piece-meal approach to achieving socialism was ill advised and counterproductive to the SPA's goals of revolutionary socialism. Wisconsin Socialists believed that a pragmatic approach could inch the United States toward socialism, alleviating conditions for the working class in the process, until the socialist movement gained more control over the government. Both wings of the SPA struggled with one another over control of the party, and the Wisconsin led right-wing, headed by Berger, succeeded in expelling Haywood from the party. Likewise, the left-wing attempted to expel Berger for his willingness to work with progressive Republicans, but they were unsuccessful. Ideological factions continued to spar with one another during the entirety of the SPA's existence, and this essay is an exploration into the pragmatic, social democratic approach utilized by the Wisconsin Socialists during the entirety of their existence. For further analysis of the ideological breakdown of the SPA's leadership, see Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925*, 5–15.

4 There is no shortage of historical analysis into how to define a "progressive" in this era. See Glenda Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: New Press, 2003); Robert Johnson, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland*, Oregon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); John Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York: Norton, 1973); Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10 (Dec. 1982): 113–32. For more on the Wisconsin context of progressivism, see footnote 6.

5 "Wisconsin Socialist Party Convention Minutes," June 15, 1918, Box 11, Socialist Party of Wisconsin Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society (hereafter cited as WSP Papers, MCHS).

6 For the Wisconsin Socialists' experience during World War I, see John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 1999), 227–33.

7 David Brye, *Wisconsin Voting Patterns in the Twentieth Century, 1900-1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979).

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8 The ideological schism within the Wisconsin Republican Party during the early twentieth century has been well documented. See, Paul Glad, *War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1990) 296–345; Robert Maxwell, *La Follette and the Rise of the Progressives in Wisconsin* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1956); Herbert Margulies, *The Decline of the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1920* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1968); John Miller, *Governor Philip F. La Follette, The Wisconsin Progressives, and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Nancy Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette: The Righteous Reformer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

9 John Buenker described the period as a "Third Party System" where Socialists could win elections, operate politically, and ally with progressives. See John Buenker, "Cream City Electoral Politics: A Play in Four Acts," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, eds. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); John Buenker, *The Progressive Era, 1893-1914* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1998); John Buenker, "Progressivism Triumphant: The 1911 Wisconsin Legislature," In *Wisconsin Blue Book 2011-2012* (Madison: Wisconsin Legislative Bureau, 2011), 99–170. Frederick Olson argued that the Socialists acted as a "progressive vanguard" willing to offer more radical versions of bills that would make similar progressive legislation look more palatable by comparison. See Frederick Olson, "Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1952), 440.

10 Sally Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973).

11 Victor Berger, "Against the Economic Trend," *Social Democratic Herald*, Jan. 14, 1905. Berger routinely disparaged left-wing Socialists who wanted to engage in direct actions such as strikes, on the job work stoppages, and the fostering of new labor unions, such as the IWW, separate from the AFL. Berger and his Wisconsin Socialists had the luxury of working within the AFL because they managed to gain control over the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor and the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee. Organized labor in Wisconsin could wield legitimate power without resorting to direct action. On the contrary, Socialists in other parts of the country, particularly the West, did not have the same options to work within the democratic process.

12 This portion of my analysis is informed by developments in political history outlined by historians such as Julian Zelizer and Meg Jacobs. See Meg Jacobs, Julian Zelizer, and William Novak, eds, *The Democratic Experiment : New Directions in American Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003). In recent years, political history has seen a resurgence as historians have begun to redefine political power and how it is applied at different levels of government. This new approach also helps to broaden the political canvas beyond just presidents to include legislators, staffers, and policies, while at the same time understanding that there are institutional constraints that prevent change regardless of outside pressures. Zelizer argues this point in regards to Congress and the presidency, but there is no reason it cannot be applied to state politics as well. See Julian Zelizer, *Governing America: The Revival of Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

13 Victor Berger's "Milwaukee Idea" hinged on the Socialist Party's alliance with organized labor. It is well documented that organized labor was the closest ally of the Socialist Party. See Frederick Olson, "The Socialist Party and the Union in Milwaukee, 1900-1912." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 44 (Winter, 1960–61): 110–16; John Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881-1924* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 9–53; Gerd Korman, *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanizers: The View from Milwaukee, 1866-1921* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1967), 15–45; Eric Fure-Slocum, "Milwaukee Labor and Urban Democracy," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, eds. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009).

14 Parenthetical dates indicate the years in office for the Socialist state legislators. Frederick Olson, "The Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," 91-92; Marvin Wachman, *History of the Social Democratic Party of Milwaukee, 1897-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1945), 39–40.

15 One debate that is emblematic of this relationship is the Wisconsin Socialists' position on Prohibition. Milwaukee was home to many breweries; therefore, Prohibition was a huge threat to many craft unions in Milwaukee. The Wisconsin Socialists vowed to oppose Prohibition to protect the numerous labor unions employed in the brewing industry. Some members in the broader SPA were in favor of Prohibition, but Milwaukee Socialists managed to get pro-Prohibition language stripped from the SPA's 1908 party platform. SPA Convention Minutes, afternoon session, May 17, 1908, Box 11, WSP Papers, MCHS.

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16 Ira Kipnis argued that, "The socialist party should be studied … in order to discover the reasons for its limited success and general failure." He also contended that it was factionalism that tore the SPA apart. See Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 4, 425. David Shannon included an entire section in his book entitled "Last Rites and Post Mortem." He focused on nineteen "causes of death" ranging from failures as a party to lack of support from labor unions over the years. See Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America,* 249–68. Martin Diamond followed up on the factionalism idea in his unpublished dissertation stating, "Socialism was 'betrayed' by the left wing-wing to futility and by the right-wing to dilution, which is to say it was not betrayed at all but simply that it failed." See Martin Diamond, "Socialism and the Decline of the American Socialist Party," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1956), 189. Walfred Peterson posited that it was the SPA's lack of a foreign policy stance that caused it to decline into obscurity after World War I. See Walfred Peterson, "Foreign Policy and Foreign Policy Theory of the American Socialist Party 1901-1920," (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1957), 263–64.

17 Daniel Bell, "The Background and Development of Marxian Socialism in the United States" in *Socialism in American Life*, vol. 1, eds. Donald Egbert and Stow Persons (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), 213–406.

18 Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed In the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2000), 30, 56, 71–77, 123, 205.

19 James Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Jerry Calvert, *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895-1920* (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1988); Jim Bisset, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Jeffrey Johnson, *"They Are All Red Out Here": Socialist Politics in the Pacific Northwest, 1895-1925* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

20 Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All* remains the definitive work on the history of the IWW. Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

21 Heather Cox Richardson, "Reconstructing the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," in *A Companion to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, eds. Christopher McKnight Nichols and Nancy Unger (Jan. 2017), 5–20. Edwards's main goal was to extend the Progressive Era back into the nineteenth century, but she left the door open to how far the Progressive Era should extend toward the New Deal. See Rebecca Edwards, "Politics, Social Movements, and the Periodization of U.S. History," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 8 (Oct., 2009), 463–73.

22 Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception: The New Deal & the Limits of American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 30, 66. Socialists were an integral part of the progressive movement prior to World War I, but they wanted to go further. Therefore, Socialists in the 1920s and 1930s were "progressives" by the fact they were trying to *progress* society toward, what Richard Hofstadter once described as, the "social democratic tinge" of the New Deal and beyond. See Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 308.

23 Jefferson Cowie, *The Great Exception,* 85.

24 "Socialist Party State Platform," 1924, Box 3, Daniel W. Hoan Papers, Milwaukee County Historical Society (hereafter cited as DWH Papers MCHS).

25 Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925,* 324.

26 Marvin Wachman, *History of the Social-Democratic Party of Milwaukee, 1897-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1945). Wachman's study was the first attempt to chronicle the rise of the Milwaukee-based Socialists. Only covering the period up to the first Socialist-mayoral administration in 1910, Wachman focused on how the Socialist Party organized in order to win citywide, but there is little-to-no analysis of the work of the Socialist state legislators.

27 Olson acknowledged that Socialist state legislators held some political leverage over progressive Republicans in the 1920s, but he did not attempt to explain how they gained that power or what they did to extend it into the 1930s. See Olson, "Milwaukee Socialists, 1897-1941," 256–59, 439–41. In the subsequent decades, a few notable works built upon Olson's dissertation. Elmer Beck explored the accomplishments of the Socialists at the municipal level, but the state legislators received scant attention. See Elmer Beck, *The Sewer Socialists: a History of the Socialist Party of Wisconsin, 1897-1940* (Fennimore, WI: Westburg Associates, 1985). The periodization of these works also hints at the idea that state-level politics receives little analysis, because, while the last Socialist state legislator was around until 1945, both Beck and Olson stop their analysis at 1940. For

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other examples that explore the Socialists' municipal successes, see Douglas Booth, "Municipal Socialism and City Government Reform: The Milwaukee Experience, 1910-1940," *Journal of Urban History* 12 (Nov. 1985), 51–74; John McCarthy, *Making Milwaukee Mightier: Planning and the Politics of Growth, 1910-1960* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

28 Aims McGuinness, "The Revolution Begins Here: Milwaukee and the History of Socialism," in *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past*, eds. Margo Anderson and Victor Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 79–106.

29 For a positive view on Socialists' roles in the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP), see Robert Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1955), 353–61. Michael Lansing offers a slight revision to Morlan's positivity. Lansing claims that Morlan overstated the Socialists' influence in the FLP in order to link the Minnesota Democratic Party (who merged with the FLP in the 1944) with a domestic strain of radicalism rooted in agrarian reform. See Michael Lansing, *Insurgent Democracy: The Nonpartisan League in North American Politics* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2015), 267.

30 Shelton Stromquist, "Claiming Political Space: Workers, Municipal Socialism, and the Reconstruction of Local Democracy in Transnational Perspective," in *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History,* ed. Leon Fink (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 322.

31 Wisconsin Socialists' successes outside of Milwaukee included municipal victories in Sheboygan and Manitowoc. See Beck, *Sewer Socialists.* For more information on the Wisconsin Socialist Party's efforts outside of Milwaukee, see James Lorence, "Dynamite for the Brain": The Growth and Decline of Socialism in Central and Lakeshore Wisconsin, 1910-1920," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 66 (Summer 1983): 250–73.

32 "Herman A. Marth – People's Man," *The Commonwealth,* 1918, Box 11, Folder 272, WSP Papers, MCHS.

33 For taxation laws, see Laws of Wisconsin, 1919, Chapter 143, Chapter 642, Chapter 481.

34 For hunting, see Laws of Wisconsin 1919, Chapter 339, Chapter 436, and Chapter 341. For animal feed, see Laws of Wisconsin 1919, Chapter 184. For disease prevention, see Laws of Wisconsin 1919, Chapter 668. For apprentices, see Laws of Wisconsin 1919, Chapter 221. For housing codes, see Laws of Wisconsin 1919, Chapter 570, Chapter 546, and Chapter 380.

35 Laws of Wisconsin, 1919, Chapter 192.

36 Box 22, Folder 537, DWH Papers, MCHS.

37 Laws of Wisconsin 1921, Chapter 525.

38 *Index to the Journals of the Wisconsin Legislature, Senate and Assembly* (Madison, WI: State Printer, 1921), SB53 (hereafter cited as *WLI*, with appropriate year). Bills will be referenced as either SB (senate) or AB (assembly) to indicate which section of the legislature it originated in. Laws of Wisconsin 1921, Chapter 460.

39 Dan Hoan to John Blaine, May 1, 1923, Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS.

40 Laws of Wisconsin 1923, Chapter 107.

41 Women's Peace Union to Blaine, Feb. 29, 1923, Box 25, John J. Blaine Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society (hereafter cited as JJB Papers, WSHS).

42 For mothers' pensions, see *WLI* 1923, AB305. For reduced working hours, see *WLI* 1923, AB306. For public county hospitals, see Laws of Wisconsin 1923, Chapter 228.

43 Hoan, undated speech, Box 3, DWH Papers, MCHS.

44 Hoan, undated speech, Box 3, DWH Papers, MCHS.

45 "Legislators – 1925 Wisconsin Legislature," Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS, 1–2.

46 "Legislators – 1925 Wisconsin Legislature," Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS 1.

47 "Legislators – 1925 Wisconsin Legislature," Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS 1.

48 "Legislators – 1925 Wisconsin Legislature," Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS 2.

49 "Legislators – 1925 Wisconsin Legislature," Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS 2–3.

50 For Workmen's Compensation, see Laws of Wisconsin 1925, Chapter 405. For taxation changes, see Laws of Wisconsin 1925, Chapter 147.

51 Laws of Wisconsin 1925, Chapter 289.

52 For child labor regulation, see Laws of Wisconsin 1925, Chapter 187. For the Child Labor Amendment, see *WLI* 1925, Joint Resolution 6.

53 Milwaukee Post Office Clerks' Union to Thomas Duncan, Jan. 31, 1925, Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS; Carpenters District Council to Duncan, Jan. 31, 1925, Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS; Duncan to Roy Leach, Jan. 24, 1925, DWH Papers, MCHS; F.J. Cark to Duncan, Jan. 31, 1925, Box 22, DWH Papers, MCHS.

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54 For convict compensation, see Laws of Wisconsin 1927, Chapter 190. For prison investigations, see Laws of Wisconsin 1927, Chapter 354.

55 For county training schools, see Laws of Wisconsin 1927, Chapter 535. For employment offices, see Laws of Wisconsin 1927, Chapter 308.

56 In 1935, Duncan wrote a letter to fellow Socialist Andrew Biemiller where he recalled how important the decision to align with the Progressive Party was in preserving Socialist influence. He hoped that it could serve as a model for other states to follow, particularly in more western parts of the country. Duncan to Andrew Biemiller, Dec. 7, 1935, Box 42, Philip La Follette Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison (hereafter cited as PFL Papers, WSHS).

57 For a complete analysis of how and why the Progressive Party formed, see John Miller, *Governor Philip F. La Follette, The Wisconsin Progressives, and the New Deal.* Starting in 1934, I will use the capitalized "Progressive" when referring to members of that party. Otherwise, lower-cased "progressive" refers to progressive members of the Republican Party prior to the schism.

58 Duncan was by far the most successful member of the Socialist caucus across its history. The legislature passed eighty-two of his authored bills for a 53 percent success rate.

59 Laws of Wisconsin 1927, Chapter 69, Chapter 70, and Chapter 437.

60 Norman Thomas to Hoan, Nov. 12, 1928, Box 12, DWH Papers, MCHS.

61 Hoan to Thomas, Nov. 14, 1928, Box 12, DWH Papers, MCHS.

62 For harbor improvements, see Laws of Wisconsin, 1929, Chapter 303, Chapter 318, Chapter 476, Chapter 150, Chapter 151. For maternal and infant health, see *WLI* 1927, Joint Resolution 19. Socialists did not want the federally funded program created under the Shepard-Towner Act to end, as it would decrease the availability of social welfare funds in Wisconsin. The Shepard-Towner Act of 1921 was the first major piece of federal legislation aimed at improving maternal and infant health. In 1923, Wisconsin Socialists achieved passage on their own state-level program aimed at creating mother's pensions. See *WLI* 1923, AB305. For more on the Sheppard- Towner Act, see Stanley Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s," *Journal of American History* 55 (Mar. 1969): 776–86.

63 "Wisconsin Legislative Interim Committee on Water Power," Nov. 9, 1928, Box 27, DWH Papers, MCHS.

64 Laws of Wisconsin 1931, Chapter 14, Chapter 42, Chapter 66, Chapter 132 Chapter 175.

65 For private detectives, see Laws of Wisconsin 1931, Chapter 52. For old age assistance, see Laws of Wisconsin 1931, Chapter 109. For regulation of public utilities, see Laws of Wisconsin, 1931, Chapter 183.

66 For convict-made goods see, *WLI* 1931, AB320. For women's working hours in hotels, see Laws of Wisconsin 1931, Chapter 235.

67 *WLI* 1931, Joint Resolution 51, Joint Resolution 66.

68 The Socialist caucus achieved passage on fifty of their authored bills for a 37 percent success rate, which was even higher than the Republican Party's success rate of 34 percent.

69 Laws of Wisconsin 1931, Chapter 33. For a potential reason as to why La Follette chose Duncan for this position see, Miller, *Governor Philip F. La Follette, The Wisconsin Progressives, and the New Deal,* 19.

70 *WLI* 1931, AB18.

71 *WLI* 1931, AB8.

72 "$10,000,000 Tax: Assembly Passes Compromise Bill," *Milwaukee Sentinel,* Jan. 6, 1932.

73 Hoan to Morris Hillquit, July 21, 1933, Box 31, DWH Papers, MCHS.

74 Hillquit to Hoan, July 28, 1933, Box 32, DWH Papers, MCHS.

75 Hillquit to Hoan, July 28, 1933, Box 32, DWH Papers, MCHS.

76 Following the death of Victor Berger in 1929, Daniel Hoan was the de facto figurehead of the Wisconsin Socialist Party. His position as the mayor of Milwaukee, Wisconsin's largest city, made him one of the leading figures of state politics. Another important individual during these negotiations was Henry Ohl Jr., the president of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor. Ohl was a member of the Socialist Party as well as a former state legislator, which allowed him to argue persuasively why the Socialists should agree to join the Progressive Party. Henry Ohl to Hoan, Oct. 18, 1935, Box 15, DWH Papers, MCHS.

77 Socialists ran for office in the Milwaukee districts that they had historically won throughout the 1920s. "The Farmer-Labor Progressive Federation," *Milwaukee Leader,* Dec. 2, 1935.

78 "Socialists Keep Party Identity under New Plan," *Milwaukee Leader,* Dec. 2, 193. Berquist to Duncan, Dec. 7, 1935, Box 42, PFL Papers, WSHS.

79 Hoan to George Hampel, Oct. 8, 1935, Box 15, DWH Papers, MCHS. Hoan, untitled speech, Nov. 8, 1934, Box 3, DWH Papers, MCHS.

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80 For election laws, see Laws of Wisconsin 1937, Chapters 70–75. For laws relating to public schools, see Laws of Wisconsin 1937, Chapters 19, 107, 342. For laws relating to retirement programs, see Laws of Wisconsin 1937, Chapters 134, 160.
81 *WLI,* 1937.
82 Progressives had to work to get these programs through the legislature. Conservative Republicans opposed the expansion of government programs, and the Democratic Party also housed a considerable number of conservative members. Politicians who may have considered themselves "New Deal" Democrats were more likely to be a member of the Progressive Party until the late 1930s. Therefore, the Progressive Party worked with the Socialists to overcome the conservative elements in both the Republican and Democratic Party. See Glad, *The History of Wisconsin, Volume V*, 296–345.
83 Philip La Follette to Thompson, Apr. 22, 1937, Box 74, PFL Papers, WSHS.
84 "Complete Record of Proceedings of the Joint Hearing by the Joint Committee on Finance and Assembly Committee on State Affairs," Apr. 22, 1937, Box 42, PFl Papers, WSHS; *WLI,* 1937, AB608.
85 Duncan memo to Philip La Follette, Mar., 1937, Box 73, PFL Papers, WSHS.
86 *Milwaukee Leader,* Apr. 14, 1937.
87 *Janesville Gazette,* Apr. 9, 1937, Box 73, PFL Papers, WSHS; Ohl to La Follette, Apr. 14, 1937, Box 73, PFL Papers, WSHS. For a picture of the bill signing, see *Madison Capital Times,* Apr. 14, 1937, Box 73, PFL Papers, WSHS.
88 *WLI*, 1941, SB347.
89 Alexander Shashko, "'Shoe Leather and Perspiration': Grassroots Liberalism and the Building of the Wisconsin Democratic Party at Midcentury," *Wisconsin Law Review* (2003): 2–30; Glad, *The History of Wisconsin, Volume V*, 296–345.
90 McGuinness, "The Revolution Begins Here: Milwaukee and the History of Socialism," 100–102; Dan Kaufman, *The Fall of Wisconsin: The Conservative Conquest of a Progressive Bastion and the Future of American Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018).
91 Peter Dreier and Michael Kazin, "How Socialists Changed America," in *We Own the Future: Democratic Socialism – American Style*, eds. Kate Aranoff, Peter Dreier, and Michael Kazin (New York: The New Press, 2020). Dreier and Kazin do a masterful job highlighting Socialists' impacts on society; however, their analysis jumps from World War I to the Great Depression without so much as a mention of the 1920s. Likewise, the political work of state legislators is absent.
92 Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952) 5.

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