

Socialism¹

Earl C. Davis

Pittsfield, MA

1910²

Of what the Socialist party consists: What Socialism has accomplished.

Socialism is a growing, vital movement, not a dead, fixed thing. The detailed plan for which Socialists work is not the same today as it was ten years ago. It has to change with the growth and development of conditions. Likewise the Socialists are in a very different position in a democratic country, where parliaments are open to the working class as well as others, thereby making it possible to influence legislation. France and Belgium are good examples of this. When we go to a monarchical country, such as Russia, the situation is quite different and it

¹ Most of Earl Davis' manuscripts that have survived were stored together in a large trunk that came to me when my mother-Davis' daughter-died. This manuscript, "Socialism," came to me by a different route. It was stored in a folder labeled, "Agitator," in Earl Davis' writing desk, which my sister, Brinna Sands, inherited. *The Agitator* was a short-lived radical, socialist leaning, newspaper published between 1910 and 1912. Most likely this manuscript consists of a set of notes that Earl Davis took from an article in *The Agitator*. I have not been able to find or access any articles from *The Agitator*. However, portions of this manuscript can be found in Carl D. Thompson's *The Constructive Program of Socialism: As Illustrated by Measures Advanced by Socialist in Municipal, State and National Legislation*, Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Company, 1908. Upon the election of Emil Seidel as Milwaukee's first Socialist mayor in 1910, Thompson became Mayor Seidel's City Clerk. Given that the most detail in this manuscript concerns Socialist accomplishments in Milwaukee, it is reasonable to suppose that these notes are from an article by Thompson, drawing on his earlier book, but expanding that with his experiences in Milwaukee.

² I date this manuscript both by the folder label-Agitator-and by the language it contains of the "newly elected Socialist administration" in Milwaukee. Emil Seidel was elected Mayor of Milwaukee in 1910.

is useless to expect such results as are shown in a democratic country. America is the most democratic of all the countries, so far as political opportunities for the working class are concerned; hence it offers the most admirable field for the constructive type of Socialism; but owing to the fact that it is a newer country composed of many, many different peoples and has had the far west into which to expand, we do not find it so far developed as in some countries abroad.

The Socialist platform consists of the following:

- o That all public utilities shall be publicly owned.
- o That these public enterprises shall be democratically administered.³

This really means that the same principles that Lincoln asserted should apply to government shall also apply to industry. Under existing conditions the chief motive of industry is the payment of dividends and profits. The Socialist maintains that, inasmuch as Labor, both mental and manual, produces wealth, then labor should receive the advantages of wealth. In other words, the Socialist would organize industry so that we would have this wealth of the people created by the people and for the use of the people, and thus emancipate the laboring classes from excessive toil and desperate poverty, and given them the opportunity of mental, moral and spiritual development.

- o That every person shall be guaranteed the ownership of private property up to the full amount of wealth created by his personal effort.
- o That the forms of industrial and commercial activities shall become orderly, systematic and cooperative; thus abolishing the wastes, antagonisms and demoralizing influences of competition.
- o That conditions of labor, mental and manual, shall be progressively improved—hours shortened, wages raised, child labor abolished, insurance against accident, sickness, old age and death established.

³ Text in blue is taken verbatim from Carl D. Thompson's *The Constructive Program of Socialism: As Illustrated by Measures Advanced by Socialist in Municipal, State and National Legislation*, Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Company, 1908.

- o That the opportunities for labor and the acquiring of the enjoyments of life shall be open and equal to all.

In short, to establish economic justice, to organize industry upon scientific and moral lines and insure industrial harmony and peace.

Let also these points be emphasized.

- o That Socialism does not propose to force all the means of production and distribution into common ownership, but only such as have become sufficiently developed and concentrated to be used in common, and are monopolistic in effect.
- o That Socialism does not propose to destroy personal or private industry, allowing full play to these in all matters that are not by nature social.
- o That Socialists do not expect to establish Socialism by sudden, violent or revolutionary means, but through gradual evolutionary changes.

In the organization of the Socialist today into a political party there are two distinctive points which make it different from other political parties. The first one is that all officers of this party organization and all candidates for municipal, state or national office are the servants of the Socialist party; their action is determined by, and must conform to, the principals and the will of the party expressed in a referendum vote.

Second, provision is made in the organization of the Socialist party for the submission to popular vote of any amendment to its constitution or other motion or resolution. Under the constitution of the Socialist party there could not be such a situation as existed in the Republican part of New York State yesterday morning.

Now, what has Socialism accomplished?

I wish that I had time to show how Socialism is working, in Germany, Belgium, Russia, Italy, America and, in fact in all civilized countries, but I must content myself with a few specific instances where the influence is greatest. To begin with, let me give a glimpse of what has been done in Germany.

There are more Socialists there than are people in Spain or Mexico. They polled over three million votes at the last general election to the Reichstag. Its journals reach over a million subscribers. There is a school in Berlin for the training of men and women as organizers, secretaries and editors.

All progressive legislation since the days of Bismarck have been to stem the rising tide of Socialism. Indeed Bismarck himself admitted, "If there were no Social Democracy, and if many were not afraid of it, even the moderate progress which we have hitherto made in social reform would not have been brought about."⁴

In Ulm the Socialists have bought land and erected houses for the working people, entirely eliminating the slums so that today the city owns 80% of the land within its borders and the working man is freed from the burden of extortionate rents and the immoral influence of congested slum sections. The same general line of work is being done in all of the cities of Germany that are controlled by the Social-Democratic party.

In line with efforts to solve some of the problems of morals and health is the war upon alcoholism, one of the most important problems that now confronts the Socialist party. Aside from the purely humanitarian motives which influence the Socialist to attack alcoholism, there is also a party motive. They fully realize that one of the greatest enemies to the propaganda of their ideals is drunkenness. In Belgium the Socialists own a large number of clubhouses or "Houses of the People," as they are called, all of which are based upon extensive cafés patronized solely by the working class. Regardless of the financial loss entailed, alcoholic drinks are no longer sold in many of the cooperatives, and the Belgium party is gradually developing a definite political policy against the entire drink traffic.

The action of the Socialist party in the town of Lille, France is another indication of its moral purpose. In that place, owing

⁴ This remark of Bismarck is quoted in Carl D. Thompson's *The Constructive Program of Socialism: As Illustrated by Measures Advanced by Socialist in Municipal, State and National Legislation*, Milwaukee: Social-Democratic Publishing Company, 1908, p. 11.

to the fact that the marriage fee demanded by the church was so high, there were large numbers of men and women living together in a relationship not recognized by law and hence many illegitimate children. As soon as the Socialist party came into power, it provided for a free marriage ceremony, and the fee demanded by the church to be paid by the city. As a result, many hundreds availed themselves of the opportunity thus offered to become legally married.

Now let me cite one or two instances of what Socialists have accomplished in this country. They have had mayors in at least three cities of considerable note, Haverhill, Brockton and Milwaukee. It was largely through their efforts in Haverhill that the city was released from loss rule, they forced the reduction of the price of gas from \$1.40 per thousand to \$1.00 thus saving the people of Haverhill \$18,000 a year on this one necessity; they made a fine showing in their successful fight for the abolition of grade crossings and succeeded in a measure in abolishing the contract system on public work. At least one of the public school buildings was built by the city directly.

Even so late as in 1908 the schools of Milwaukee, which had been miserably neglected, had thousands of children quartered in miserable shanties which were so cold that school could not be kept in cold weather. The Socialists brought this condition to the attention of the public with telling effect. The newly elected Socialist administration has already begun constructive work for the betterment of the city. The tractor company has been forced to run cars across a hitherto unused viaduct in order to shorten the time of service between the south side of the city and the business district. Almost the first business of the new city council was to abolish the incompetent and unwieldy Board of Public Works and substitute a single commissioner. The administration has established a corps of city plumbers to repair leaks in the city pipes and to force down the prices of contractors. A free law department is being established to give free advice to the poor through the office of the city attorney. The day work of the city hall employees has been advanced from six hours to eight. At the same time the wages paid skilled laborers on the new city viaduct have been raised from \$3 a day to the union wage of \$4.50 and the union label has been put upon all printing. Contrary to the policy of the ex-absentee-mayor,

Mayor Seidel⁵ has refused to deliver {??} {??} lectures even at the tempting figure of \$250 a night. Instead he has busied himself with the perfection of a plan to open the schools of the city for Saturday night dances. With such a scheme in operation, it will be possible to close the present foully ventilated and often undoubtably corrupting cheap dance halls run in covert connection with saloons. Indeed, he has already closed more than 100. Of the first actions of the new mayor none was watched with so much interest as his appointments. The principal offices have been filled with socialists who have proved their ability by a half dozen years of work in the council and in the party organization. True to his pledge to reappoint all competent officials of the old administration, Mayor Seidel has kept in office a number of men, including the deputy city treasurer, the city cashier and the assistants to the city attorney. And while the mayor searches the country for the best men for commissioners of health and public works, the two offices will be filled by temporary appointees. A Bureau of municipal research is being organized and preparations are being made for cleaning up the slums, opening a large tract of land for building workingmen's cottages, building a new isolation hospital, and starting a municipal lighting plant, wood and coal yard, and ice factory. Cries of "visionary," "impracticable," and "utopian" are not much heard in Milwaukee nowadays.

And so I could go on and on talking of splendid victories fought and won for the good of the people. Whenever they have had the opportunity, the Socialists have held seriously to that idea of John Wesley's motto that Emil Seidel nailed upon the wall of his office, "Do all the good you can to all the people you can."

⁵ Emil Seidel (1864-1947) was Mayor of Milwaukee from 1910 to 1912 when he was defeated by a candidate—Gerhard Bading (1870-1946)—who ran on a combined Democrat/Republican ticket. Seidel ran for Vice President of the United States on the ticket with Eugene Debs in 1912, getting 6% of the popular vote.