Socialism in Ohio, 1917-1919: The Socialist Party of Ohio, Municipal Politics, and Radicalization during the First World War

Research Thesis

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Introduction

I. Why Did the Big Tent Collapse?: Introduction, Historiography and Scope

Splits between reformist and radical members were ever-present in the Socialist Party of America (S.P.A.), since its founding in 1901. Direct actionists and political actionists, those who emphasized a coming workers' revolution and those who emphasized reforms toward socialism in existing political institutions, often struggled for control over their party's platform, policies, and official tactics. That is not to say, however, that these two wings of the party completely diverged; in fact, they often pragmatically compromised and collaborated toward the S.P.A.'s overall success. Radicals and reformists alike contributed to the S.P.A.'s municipal electoral successes in the early years of the 1910s, each sensing that, no matter how a "cooperative commonwealth" would come about, workers would be benefitted by socialist control over public utilities, constraints on municipal police forces, and official recognition of unions in their cities. Even if the direct actionists sensed that these short-term successes in reform would not necessarily lead to a socialist state, they understood that an electorally successful party could assuage the working class's short-term struggles and expand a revolutionary base. Meanwhile, moderate political actionists remained united with their more radical comrades, sensing that they were energizing, competent organizers, leaders, and candidates. In this context, American socialists formed a big tent party – one that featured internal fractures but tended to accept a broad scope of ideological stances and tactical approaches, under uniting ideals of a Marxist class struggle toward political and economic power. As a result, the party's leftists and moderates alike accepted general organizational tactics prior to the First World War: they used reformist platforms to campaign for municipal political offices, with the aim of attracting support from a broad range of supporters and party members, from various ideological, political, and social backgrounds.

While this arrangement worked well for the party, reaching its greatest successes in the Midwest, in elections between 1910 and 1912, the big tent faltered during the First World War. Ultimately, the decisive end of the party's broad coalition occurred in 1919, when the S.P.A.'s more left-leaning and radical members defected and formed two communist parties, which deemphasized elections and prioritized direct action and agitation toward revolution. At the center of this party split, members of the Socialist Party of Ohio (S.P.O.) found themselves torn decisively along political actionist and direct actionist lines. Some of the state party's figures were chosen to head the new communist factions; they appealed to the vanguardist example of the Bolsheviks in Russia and sought to join a coming international revolution. Others remained committed to the reformist vision set by the S.P.A. prior to the First World War, with the politically successful Victor Berger and Eugene Debs, the figurehead of American socialism, as their guiding examples.

Together, the Ohio's moderates and radicals had constructed one of the most successful state socialist organizations in the United States, which elected slates of candidates to municipal offices in 1911 and provided Eugene Debs nearly 100,000 votes in his 1912 campaign for the presidency. The ground for socialism also seemed fertile in Ohio, as the S.P.O. counted a membership that often averaged around 70,000 socialists throughout the state. But by 1919, Ohio also became a center of organizing for the leaders of the new American communist parties. State Secretary Alfred Wagenknecht and Charles E. Ruthenberg, leader of the Local Cleveland Socialist Party, became the respective heads of the Communist Labor Party and the Communist Party of America. Especially in the urban industrial centers of Cleveland and Cincinnati, prominent socialists like Lotta Burke organized local communist organizations, and respected socialist luminaries like Marguerite Prevey of Akron leant their names and reputations to the nascent parties. Although many of these leaders and figures had previously been on the left wing of the

S.P.O.'s push for success in traditional politics, new pressures and influence arose during the First World War that made a new approach, which centered direct, revolutionary action, seem necessary.

This thesis will attempt to understand what these pressures and influences were, to understand the S.P.O.'s radicalization. Specifically, it will attempt to answer several questions: how and why did the S.P.O. transition from a party that emphasized electoral success, to an organizational hub for revolutionary communist parties? Considering that some prominent socialists, especially in central Ohio's local parties, remained members of the mainline Socialist Party, why did some socialists defect and some remain? To answer these questions, this thesis will track the course of three local socialist parties in Ohio's urban, industrial centers – Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton – during the First World War. These cities have been chosen for their differing levels of political success and the differences between their socialist locals' leaders, who varied in their ideological stances, between direct and political action, and their prominence in national party debates and disputes. By assessing the S.P.O. and its locals' approaches anti-war agitation, political campaigns, legal struggles, and interactions with allies and rivals in organized labor and mainstream politics, this thesis will attempt to bridge a gap that has existed thus far in the historiography of American socialism: an understanding of how the local experiences of socialists impacted their movement's national and international debates, disputes, and divides. Ultimately, the goal of this work is to demonstrate how and why the party's implementation of anti-war organizing transformed intraparty dynamics and socialists' relationship to traditional political institutions and non-socialist political figures, with local organizing, campaigns, and demonstrations driving that transformation.

Early in the twentieth century, local political institutions and governments represented socialists' most direct avenue to influence and interact with government. Indeed, socialists throughout Ohio and the United States established themselves as third parties – and even government officials – in several municipalities. However, with the S.P.A.'s passage of a radical anti-war program and the entry of the U.S. into the First World War, wartime security issues local politics and government institutions' interpretations of civil liberties. Because of their connection to an anti-war party, socialists were increasingly beset by securitized municipal and legal institutions, which socialists believed foreclosed all elements of political and democratic recourse. Internally, the experience of wartime suppression reopened old debates in the party, namely whether the Socialist Party should overturn or reform existing political institutions. The local experience of repression caused the fracturing of the big tent, as socialists' participation in municipal politics was no longer guaranteed, and variations between local parties' experiences entrenched them into differing organizational and ideological approaches.

The split of the Socialist Party of America (S.P.A.) in 1919, and its political marginality afterwards, has been subject to consideration by many historians. The formation of two communist parties and their break from the S.P.A. has been presented as the result of various international and national influences. Historians building upon the classic works of Theodore Draper tend to consider the splits in 1919 as marking the end of American socialism and marking the beginning of a left-wing movement in the United States that looked more toward the international socialist and communist movement. While the early 1910s marked electoral and political successes for an S.P.A. that emphasized collaboration with organized labor and often reformist approaches to building socialism, after 1919, socialists began looking toward the example of the Soviet Union and thus alienated constituencies, sympathizers and supporters in domestic politics and organized

labor.[1] Typically, these historians began from Werner Sombart's question, "Why is there no socialism in the United States?" (That is, why is socialism less competitive in the U.S. than in other countries.) Their answer was that American socialists had embraced an international or foreign character, in terms of ideology and organizing, rather than using distinctly American ideals, issues, and organizational styles as it had earlier in the 1910s.

Other historians, like James Weinstein, emphasized various intraparty ideological and tactical disputes as a cause of the American socialist movement's decline between 1919 and 1925. According to Weinstein, the presence of these intraparty disputes themselves made the party and its tenets inaccessible to non-members.[2] While Weinstein represented these disputes as occurring around many discrete issues, from debates over support for the First World War to even tensions between foreign- and native-born socialists, other scholars have attributed the split of the socialist party to individual issues. C. Roland Marchand, for example, argued that disagreements about the First World War were the primary reason for the split of the S.P.A., rather than wider ideological and tactical disputes between left-wing and moderate socialists that took place around the war. Marchand cites the fact that socialists that had previously been viewed as firmly on the Left, like Upton Sinclair, withdrew from the party over its wartime platform alongside moderates, while both moderates and left-wing members supported the party's peace platform.[3] Considering the approaches of these historians, from Draper to Weinstein, the place of local parties in national intraparty splits and disputes remained unclear and under-considered.

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[1] Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 33-35; Harvey Klehr and John E. Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 4; Seymour M. Lipset, "The Labor Movement and American Values," *Failure of a Dream?: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, ed. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour M. Lipset (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 553-556.

[2] James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), x-xi.

[3] C. Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1889-1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 289-290.

Where historians have considered the role of local and state parties in the American socialist movement, it is often to answer why and how socialists managed to achieve political power in municipal elections between 1910 and 1912, then why they had trouble doing so from 1913 onward. Richard W. Judd's *Socialist Cities* and Donald Critchlow's edited volume *Socialism in the Heartland* are perhaps the best examples of this approach. Judd does especially well at the end of his monograph to demonstrate how pre-war frustrations in local politics, such as fusions of competing candidates and the constraints of municipal institutions, resulted in socialists' difficulty when responding to the issues presented by the war.[4] However, like Draper and Weinstein, Judd also did not tie local struggles into those that occurred at the national and international levels of socialist organization, so these levels of socialist organization remained fractured from one another. This thesis will attempt to bridge this fracture by tracing the wartime pressures in local institutions, where socialists did much of their organizing, altered their relationships to politics; how socialists changed their tactics and ideology changed to meet these challenges, both within and outside of the party; and the external, intellectual influences socialists used for guidance, when engaging in wartime politics. Using Ohio as a case study, one that captures the diverse approaches that existed in American socialism, I hope to demonstrate the connection between these levels of socialist politics. The socialists' experience of having political opportunity and recourse closed off in their communities was the factor that spurred them to look abroad to international movements and adopt tactics that confronted institutions they viewed as illegitimate and hostile.

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[4] Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989),161-162; Donald T. Critchlow, "Introduction," *Socialism in the Heartland: The Midwestern Experience*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 1-17.

II. Structure

This study will explore the developments and radicalization that occurred in the S.P.O. in three chapters, each attempting to understand how wartime issues contributed to the breakdown of the Socialist Party's internal cohesion. Chapter 1 focuses mainly on how the big tent initially included anti-war organizing into its municipal campaign strategies and argues that local constraints often determined how socialists balanced their organizing, between courting voters and costly anti-war agitation. This chapter demonstrates further that, as local politics was increasingly tied to national security issues, municipal governments, politicians, presses, and political observers went to extraordinary measures to defeat socialists' influence. Even for socialists who moderated their agitation and made patriotic appeals to avoid entanglement in wartime crackdowns, the war issue became an unavoidable burden for the S.P.O.'s locals.

As local politics and interpretations of civil liberties were defined as security issues, socialists experienced breakdowns of democratic norms, as well. Chapter 2 demonstrates how socialists confronted those breakdowns, either by questioning the legitimacy and utility of existing political institutions, or by further moderating their rhetoric and stances to avoid backlash. Chapter 3 continues by tracking how these differing tactical approaches translated into ideological splits in the American socialist movement. Increasingly, socialists could not agree on whether political institutions and American democracy were legitimate or not. Furthermore, they could not agree on whether revolutionary revolts against existing political institutions were legitimate or not. Under the big tent, both moderate and leftist socialists managed to ideologically justify their political action, either as an end in itself or as a means to revolutionary ends. As the socialist left increasingly questioned whether repressive political institutions could have any legitimacy or utility for their movement, this ability to ideologically justify local political action faded. Big tent

socialism provided a uniform organizational strategy for all members and sects in the socialist party, which helped to cover ever-present debates and divergences in their beliefs. However, this compromise, and the unified vision of socialist organizing and cooperation it represented, were unable to survive the wartime, security-minded repression of anti-war dissent. Wartime developments showed the ability to freely campaign and propagandize were not guaranteed under the existing government, so they did not always translate to the advancement of the socialist movement.

1. The Socialist Big Tent and National Security in Municipal Politics, 1917

In 1917, the S.P.O. faced some of the most consequential municipal elections since its successes in 1911, as well as the new challenges presented by the American war effort and the government's effort to protect it. Emerging governmental restrictions on public speech and propaganda, combined with backlash against anti-war sentiments by the non-socialist press and opposing politicians, made intensive municipal campaigning by socialists more difficult. Socialists in Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati struggled to define a balance between their anti-war principles and their efforts to remain politically active and able to influence the policies of local governments toward the workers' benefit. More radical socialists, especially in Cleveland and Cincinnati, engaged in a campaign of education, intended to draw workers and voters leftward toward support of a coming revolution and anti-war principles. Meanwhile, more moderate socialists remained focused on immediate issues that had long defined socialist campaigns, like municipal ownership and official recognition of public workers' unions. The latter approach attracted greater electoral success, but as local politics were increasingly viewed in connection to national security in the United States and Ohio, socialists came to be generally defined by their national party's radical position against the war and direct actionist rhetoric – a development that jeopardized the remaining mainstream political footholds the Socialist Party managed to maintain after 1911.

I. Defining the Socialist Movement in Ohio, 1911-1917

By 1911, the national, state-level, and municipal Socialist Party organizations had established themselves as a viable political force. Having won scattered mayoral and city council elections in small cities across the United States, the Socialist Party began winning in larger cities,

starting with Milwaukee's municipal elections in 1910. This initial success marked the beginning of successes that continued into 1912, as socialists followed the lead of Milwaukee's Victor Berger. In other cities, including Dayton, local socialist parties adopted reformist platforms that were more radical than those offered by Republicans and Democrats. Often, socialists established themselves as an alternative to corrupt incumbents from the major parties, and they answered progressive calls for the municipal ownership of transit with promises to publicly own utilities and communication infrastructure, too. The model of socialist campaigning that proved successful in Milwaukee also proved successful in Ohio; in 1911, socialists were elected to office in thirty of the state's municipalities, including two city councilmen in Dayton and seventeen mayors in total. Berger's moderate socialism, under which the party would organize around reforms that would eventually build toward a socialist state, established a formula for success in the early 1910s.

At the national level of the party, Berger's moderate wing held control of its executive committee and set the direction of the party toward political action, away from revolutionary, direct actionist tactics. Even as the socialists reached their greatest successes between 1911 and 1912, including Eugene V. Debs' famous presidential run, the dominance of the reformist socialists was not absolute. Splits between the moderates and radicals remained in the background of these successes. In 1912, the party's moderate leadership banned public appeals to direct action by the party's members. William D. Haywood, leader of the International Workers of the World (I.W.W.), rebuked the moderates for seemingly cooperating with capitalist political institutions, rather than dismantling them in favor of working-class control.[5] Continuing to advocate direct action, in the form of general strikes and a coming mass revolution, Haywood was eventually expelled from the S.P.A. in 1913, and many members of the I.W.W. defected with him. Due to

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[5] "The Victory at Patterson," *International Socialist Review* 12, 10 (April 1912), 679; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 168-169.

Haywood's ardent criticism of the party and its leaders, notable figures ranging from Berger to Debs sensed that his continued presence could be a liability to the party and its unity around its newfound electoral success. But unlike these national, intraparty splits, direct actionists and reformists managed to effectively cooperate in Ohio.

At the level of state and municipal organizing, cooperation between moderates and the radical left wing was a pragmatic arrangement. The big tent in Ohio, under which socialists of various ideological and tactical approaches worked together, was based on two agreements: they worked together toward the long-term goal of a socialist state, and whether that state would arise through reform or revolution, political campaigns were an effective way of building toward it. The election years of 1911 and 1912 demonstrated this agreement best, marking proof of success for the big-tent approach. Socialists in Cleveland, Dayton and smaller cities throughout the state ran successful political campaigns in 1911. Ohioan voters elected socialists to office in a total of thirty municipalities, including two socialist councilmen in Dayton, as well as seventeen socialist mayors.[6] In Cleveland and Dayton, mayoral candidates also ran encouraging third-party campaigns in 1911. Charles E. Ruthenberg, left-wing member of the Local Cleveland Socialist Party, won ten percent of first-choice votes in the city's ranked-choice elections. Moderate Willard Barringer of Dayton won twenty-seven percent of the vote in his election, likely helping to swing the election toward its Republican victor and allowing two socialist city councilmen to achieve victory on his coat tails.[7] What is more, Ohioan voters provided Eugene Debs more than 90,000 votes in his campaign for president, the second-most of any state, behind Pennsylvania. The same year as Debs' famous presidential campaign, Ruthenberg stood as the party's gubernatorial candidate and

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[6] Judd, 73-74.

[7] "Complete City Election Results," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 9, 1911, 2; "Slight Gains Made in the Plurality of Philipps," *Dayton Daily News*, November 9, 1911, 1.

nearly matched Debs' vote total. Based on their achievements in these two campaign seasons, socialists had proven that they could seriously compete for voters and supporters in their cities and their state – and, perhaps, that they were building toward even greater successes.

As the S.P.O. developed into a serious, promising third party, its wings continued to coalesce around municipal campaigns as effective political organizing. The unification of the party toward these campaigns may have been best expressed by Akron's Marguerite Prevey, who made her name as a serious direct actionist with close ties to the I.W.W. and a proponent of a general strike. Although the Local Dayton Socialist Party dedicated itself to developing into a political force in its city's existing political institutions, rather than agitating the working class toward a confrontation with the capitalist class, Prevey nevertheless viewed the Local's electoral successes in 1911 as a benefit to the movement. Writing for the *New York Call*, Prevey confidently stated that she expected the socialists to sweep the next elections. Referring to Dayton and crediting a "campaign of education," Prevey continued, "there is no reason why they should not capture the entire city."[8]

For direct actionists and left-wing socialists like Prevey and C.E. Ruthenberg, political campaigns represented an opportunity to educate the working class – and potential voters, at large – about socialism and the class struggle it sought to solve. In fact, these campaigns represented the most immediate and direct venue in which to do so. Ruthenberg, critical as he was about government institutions he viewed as serving capitalist interests, suggested that campaigns served as an opening to more revolutionary organizing. According to Ruthenberg, policies like municipal ownership may have been helpful to aid workers' short-term struggles, but these reforms could not offer liberation in themselves. Also, despite the positive aspects of their administrations, reformist

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[8] Marguerite Prevey, "Socialist Vote in Ohio is All Right," *New York Call*, November 11, 1911, 2.

politicians like Cleveland Mayor Tom L. Johnson still represented an exploitative, capitalist political and economic order.[9] Ruthenberg held that the only solution to workers' struggle would be for short-term reforms to be made by a socialist party, which would interpret and enforce laws to the workers' benefit when in government. Possession of the military and police powers of the government by socialist representatives of the working class could be used in a coming revolution.[10] However, Ruthenberg was also the first to openly acknowledge that he did not expect to win political power during his campaigns in the early 1910s, since he felt too few workers and voters understood socialist tenets and goals. As the socialist leader and writer expressed to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 1911, the purpose of his candidacy was to give high-profile speeches and distribute large amounts of propaganda. These actions would be starting points for workers to study the foundational texts of Marxism and socialism, then to understand the need for a revolution by their economic class.[11]

Even if Ruthenberg sensed that participation in mainstream politics and short-term reforms was only an avenue toward a greater upheaval, his campaigns still demonstrated their importance to growing the party. When placed under scrutiny and threatened with expulsion by the S.P.O.'s moderate leadership in 1912, under charges that Ruthenberg had followed Haywood in emphasizing direct action and disunity with moderates, Ruthenberg affirmed his commitment to his party's organizational approach. As the proceedings gained the attention of the national party, Ruthenberg wrote a statement for the *New York Call*, reaffirming that "It was upon municipal issues that most of the Ohio victories were won."[12] In many ways, Ruthenberg struck a middle

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[9] Charles E. Ruthenberg, *Are We Growing Toward Socialism?* (Cleveland: Local Cleveland Socialist Party, 1917), 40.
[10] Ibid.
[11] "Becomes Socialist Instead of Pastor," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 25, 1911, 4; Oakley C. Johnson, *The Day Is Coming: The Life and Work of Charles E. Ruthenberg, 1882-1927*, (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 78-79.
[12] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "State Executive Committee and Speakers List," *New York Call*, July 30, 1912, 4.

position between these "municipal issues" and what he termed "the revolutionary character" of the Socialist Party.[13]

Emphasizing the importance of Marxism and its revolutionary ends in his theoretical writings, the perennial mayoral and gubernatorial candidate also understood how confronting the major parties' candidates on municipal issues could draw attention and interest to his program. For instance, in 1911, Ruthenberg took the opportunity at a Labor Day event at Cleveland's Luna Park to confront Newton D. Baker – his opponent and successor to Mayor Tom L. Johnson's reformism – on the merits of his municipal ownership platform. Specifically, Ruthenberg argued that Baker had weakened his municipal ownership plank, demonstrating a seeming lack of commitment to such improvements.[14] Rather than propagandizing about a coming workers' revolution, Ruthenberg energized Cleveland's socialists – and gained the attention of the city's non-socialist presses and voters – by choosing to confront Baker on his own ground. Ruthenberg ultimately placed third and Baker won the mayoral seat, but he had also run the most successful mayoral campaign by a socialist in Cleveland's history, by taking a hard stance on a reformist issue. The promise of revolution was not going to build a radical movement on its own; even hopeful revolutionaries needed to demonstrate they could make tangible improvements to people's immediate surroundings to build their movement's appeal.

While Ruthenberg and his local party attempted to gradually build a revolutionary movement through his campaigns, the Local Dayton Socialist Party demonstrated how a strong reformist platform could lead to immediate political success. Although Dayton's socialist city

[13] Ibid.
[14] "Socialists Name Party Candidates," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 3, 1911, 6; "Socialist Candidate for Mayor is Fighter," *Cleveland Socialist News*, in "Scrapbook, 1911-1912," 1911, newspaper clippings, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 1, Ohio History Connection (hereafter OHC), 23; "Ruthenberg Wants Debate with Baker," *Cleveland Socialist News* in "Scrapbook, 1911-1912," newspaper clippings, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 1, OHC, 23-24.

councilmen only made up a minority of the council – and failed to achieve much during their term – the Local Dayton Socialist Party saw their victory as the beginning of a drive toward socialism. Except, instead of building power in existing political institutions toward a violent overthrow of capitalism, those institutions would be used to create a society that was more amenable to workers' needs and increased their control over their economic conditions. Attempting to grow its presence in municipal politics, Local Dayton ran aggressive campaigns on urban beautification, municipal ownership, and the expansion of a unionized workforce in public service. Just as Marguerite Prevey predicted in 1911, Dayton's non-socialist political observers and journalists viewed the socialists as capable of gaining a greater foothold in their city's politics – or, at least, maintaining the one they had already created. Since non-socialist, progressive reformers had not taken hold in the city's politics, as they had in Cleveland and even Cincinnati, local observers sensed that Local Dayton could potentially capture outrage about corruption and underfunded, undersupplied public goods in the city.

Despite Local Dayton's appeal on these issues, political calculations in the city changed after the Great Dayton Flood of 1913. Public outrage about the city government's mismanagement of the emergency, including the city's poorly maintained levies, led to greater pressure for reforms of the municipal government. Unfortunately for Local Dayton, however, it was unable to act as the voice for these sentiments. Instead, National Cash Register president John H. Patterson and his Citizens' Committee became an empowered force in Daytonian politics, as Patterson played a very public, admired role in relief efforts after the flood and was sought out to manage a restructuring of the city government. The city manager plan offered by Patterson and the Citizens' Committee further benefitted from Patterson's reputation and its promise of greater efficiency in solving local issues. Socialists opposed the plan in the citywide referendum, claiming it reflected a corporate

board, rather than a democratic form of government. Even as the socialists ardently campaigned against the plan, and even submitted a "democratic" plan that came in second place, the Citizens' Committee's momentum continued; the city manager plan was overwhelmingly approved by a margin of 11,542 votes in favor and 2,020 against it.

In the subsequent municipal elections of 1913, Local Dayton attempted to regain momentum, becoming the most prominent opponents of the new city manager government and the candidates of the Citizens' Committee – which had effectively transformed into its own political party. The socialists attempted to mobilize an opposition to the Citizens' Committee by framing the election as a competition between the workers and capitalists of Dayton – and even more broadly, between large, corporate power and the democratic will of the city's citizens. Still, the Citizen's Committee won, attracting both Republicans and Democrats. Meanwhile, the socialists struggled under the new system of at-large elections in the city. In 1911, the city's socialist councilmen had been elected based on their strength in the industrial seventh and tenth wards. In 1913, these same councilmen could not overcome the majority of Dayton's voters who were Republicans and Democrats – and who crossed party lines to vote for the Citizen's Committee. The Citizens' Committee answered the demand for a strong, reformist vision in Dayton, attracting a cross-party coalition of voters due to their strong appeals to competence in the wake of a crisis, and overwhelming the socialists' base, as a result.

While Local Dayton waged its campaign against the Citizens' Committee in Dayton, socialists in Cincinnati organized their own local party in 1913 – one that was so small the national party grew concerned about its survival in its early years.[15] Socialism in Cincinnati had not taken hold to the same degree as in Cleveland and Dayton, with its membership nearing the 3,000 mark,

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[15] Lotta Burke to Maurice McCracken, July 23, 1954, Maurice McCracken Papers, box 2, folder 22, Cincinnati History Library and Archives (hereafter CHLA).

or Dayton, with Local Dayton's high-profile electoral successes. Instead, Cincinnati's politics had been dominated for the two decades between 1892 and 1912 by Boss George Cox's Republican machine, which was ousted by the anti-corruption campaign of Democrat Henry Hunt. Both groups often worked to appeal to the "proletarian" voters of Cincinnati – the industrial workers and ethnic and religious minorities on the city's periphery. As some urban historians have suggested, these groups in Cincinnati often cast their votes as a way of protecting themselves from perceived incursion by elites in the center of the city and in wealthy neighborhoods.[16] While Local Dayton's political success were sapped by a new reformist movement, when socialists finally organized a party in the Cincinnati, their logical constituency had already been captured.

Cincinnati's socialists were drawn from several local, liberal churches, suffrage organizations, and reform movements. The party's organizers, like suffragist Lotta Burke, a founding member of the local party, connected the issues of their respective movements to the material political and economic issues addressed by socialism. Indeed, Burke contended that the conditions that oppressed workers and denied women the right to vote came from the same source: capitalist domination of economics and politics.[17] Furthermore, Cincinnati's socialists tended to combine the strategies of Cleveland and Dayton, while also collaborating to a greater degree with prominent local figures. For example, the socialists worked closely with local pastor Herbert S. Bigelow, famous for his roles in the Single Tax and social gospel movements, on a resolution that would place the city rail system under municipal ownership with the intention of limiting the influence of private profit over public goods and services.[18] Local Cincinnati grew moderately

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[16] Zane L. Miller, "Boss Cox's Cincinnati: A Study in Urbanization and Politics, 1880-1914," *Journal of American History*, 54, 4 (1968), 832, 837; Robert A. Burnham, "Reform, Politics, and Race in Cincinnati: Proportional Representation and the City Charter Committee," *Journal of Urban History* 23, 2 (1997), 132.
[17] Lotta Burke to Maurice McCracken, no date, Maurice McCracken Papers, box 2, folder 22, CHLA.
[18] "More Vote for Bigelow's Bill," *Cincinnati Post*, January 29, 1917, 2.

throughout the 1910s through these relationships, but this growth often represented formerly non-socialist reformers who joined the party, rather than workers or voters. Prior to the start of the First World War in 1917, the party could only achieve around three percent of total votes cast in municipal contests. Rather than building a party toward revolution or political success, the socialists of Cincinnati had organized themselves into another organ of reformist activism in their city.

By the time the political fortunes of the S.P.O. plateaued between 1913 and 1917, the socialists had formed themselves into a coalition, with a seemingly effective tactical approach that pushed conflicts between moderates and the left-wing to the background. Campaigns for seats in municipal governments formed the basis for this coalition. The endpoint of this organizing through campaigns remained uncertain: whether it would end in the construction of socialism through reform within traditional politics, or in the education of workers toward class consciousness and the ability to wage a revolution. In fact, as the party grew through campaigns – and, in some cases, maintained relatively high membership and more modest successes after 1913 – this question seemed less pressing than it had in the power struggles of the party's national leadership.

The strategy of municipal campaigns demonstrated that both moderate and left-wing members could lead the party to greater success, despite their ideological and tactical disagreements. Moderates' municipal platforms could attract otherwise disconnected community members and attention to the party. At the same time, left-wing direct actionists acted as able recruiters and propagandists; in the case of Local Cleveland, thousands of members were attracted to the party through well-organized, energetic public rallies by organizers like C.E. Ruthenberg. Even a city like Cincinnati, where socialism did not take hold, a mix of left-wing and moderate approaches proved useful, as socialists could collaborate with an active milieu of progressive

activists to influence their city's politics. As the global crisis of the First World War began to play a greater role in American and Ohioan politics, especially after 1917, socialists hoped to attract people toward an anti-war position – and a socialist post-war order – by using a mixed tactical approach that had been formulated by both wings of their party prior to the war.

II: The Socialist Big Tent and Anti-War Organizing

As the United States prepared to go to war in 1917, socialist political action was well-established, in terms of its advocacy of worker-friendly reforms and efforts to attract a large bases of support from a variety of local constituencies. However, although municipal campaigning underpinned much of socialist organizing, party members also recognized the potential of a large-scale military conflict to entrench and benefit capitalists' interests. As conflicts in European socialist movements also showed, it threatened to divide the party along pro-war and anti-war lines, which caused the disintegration of the Second International. As left-wing socialists especially demanded their party take action on the war and confront militarist and capitalist interests, the S.P.A.'s moderate leadership feared the potential of a similar split and granted leftists concessions toward more direct actionist principles, when formulating the party's national program on the war. However, even though the party sought a unifying vision of anti-war organizing, the constraints of local politics heavily determined how and where anti-war organizing was implemented. Locally specific constraints – and the overarching goals of local Socialist Parties – became deciding factors in the methods Ohio's socialists used to agitate against the war.

By the time news of renewed unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany and the Zimmerman Telegram reached Ohio in 1917, many socialists had already begun agitating against war in their respective cities, viewing militarism as a protective force for capitalists. Since

municipal campaigning in Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati laid the organizational groundwork for socialists in these cities, who used them to form tactics around their specific constraints, challenges, and long-term goals for the socialist movement, this transition to an anti-war cause was natural. As early as 1914, the first year of the World War, Local Cleveland began using its effective tactics for propagandizing and public rallies to promote anti-war causes. Between 1914 and 1917, Local Cleveland attracted thousands of attendees to "rallies for peace," and in one instance, distributed 50,000 copies of a pamphlet entitled "Starve the War, Feed America."[19] Continuing its "educational" approach to organizing, Local Cleveland focused its attention on building mass consciousness about large, structural problems, attempting to demonstrate how war was a tool to protect capitalists' profits and property.[20] "[J.P.] Morgan's millions" became C.E. Ruthenberg's refrain, when reminding listeners about the causes of the First World War, establishing the war as an effort to benefit capitalists' interests and profits.

However, pre-war, anti-militarist agitation varied sharply, based on the political goals of each local party. Although the party broadly agreed on an anti-war position, moderates were more concerned with immediate, local matters, as they attempted to regain the political successes they lost in the mid-1910s. In Dayton, socialists remained more focused on local debates about municipal reform and economic, bread-and-butter issues, looking toward the municipal elections of 1917 as an opportune time to confront the Citizens' Committee on charges of mismanagement of Dayton's city government. Since three of the five city council seats were open to challenges, and as public discontent began to reemerge after several years of governance by the Citizens' Committee, Local Dayton believed 1917 would provide a prime opportunity to gain majority

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[19] *Cleveland Citizen*, September 12, 1914, 3, transcribed in Oakley C. Johnson, typewritten notes, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 2, 15.
[20] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "Speech Repeated to the Jury," *Guilty of What?* (Cleveland: Socialist News), 18-19.

control of the city government, if they could build and maintain public support. However, between 1915 and 1917, Local Dayton had worked with other organizations in the city to form a peace society that drafted a peace resolution, which it mailed to President Woodrow Wilson, then another resolution opposing the use of public schools to teach military skills and tactics.[21] Still, issues like municipal waste and opposition toward the city manager system of government, in Dayton and in other cities, remained the local's most pressing concerns.[22] In Cincinnati, socialists worked with Herbert Bigelow – who officially joined the party around April 1917 – to bring both socialist and non-socialist speakers to the city, under the auspices of his progressive People's Church. In one instance Bigelow successfully invited William Jennings Bryan to speak against militarism at his church – an example of Local Cincinnati's continued collaboration with reformist figures and movements when engaging in politics.[23] Bryan opposed the war as a matter of private interests entangling their country in a foreign conflict to protect their "unnecessary risks," such as travelling or shipping goods on British vessels carrying weapons. [24] In this case, Bryan demonstrated that the anti-war sentiments of leftists, socialist moderates, and pacifist progressives aligned by blaming American involvement in the war on the interests of wealthy travelers and shippers – which made pre-war collaboration logical. However, local parties of Cincinnati and Dayton adjusted their anti-war organizing to fit with their pre-war approaches to municipal campaigning. Local Dayton concentrated its attention and resources toward building a case against the government of the Citizens' Committee – which had been its focus for several years – and Local Cincinnati still

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[21] John T. Walker, "The Dayton Socialists and World War I: Surviving the White Terror," *Socialism in the Heartland: The Midwestern Experience, 1900-1925*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 119.
[22] Judd, 165; Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, March 9, 1917, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU, 12.
[23] "The Core No More," *Cincinnati Post*, January 18, 1917, 3.
[24] Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan: The Last Decade* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 8; William J. Bryan and Mary Baird Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan* (Chicago: John C. Winston Company, 1925), 410-413.

lacked the support and resources necessary to do the mass organization of the kind that happened in Cleveland. The locals of both cities instead looked to allied organizations to fill these gaps of attention and resources, so they could still participate in the Socialist Party's opposition to the war.

As the socialists in Ohio intensified their anti-war agitation and Congress debated a declaration of war against Germany in March 1917, the S.P.A. began to develop uniform party policies and platforms for its approach to the war issue. State executive committees and national committee delegates received invitations for an emergency convention in St. Louis. The socialist delegation from Ohio heavily consisted of left-wing socialists from northern Ohio, including Ruthenberg and Marguerite Prevey as delegates to the national committee, and the new state executive committee dominated by left-wing State Secretary Alfred Wagenknecht and State Organizer Charles Baker. Each member of the state delegation was assigned to influential committee posts on ways and means, organizing, and militarism and, thus, was influential in the development of the majority platform that emerged from St. Louis.

Of course, this is not to say that the socialist Left was solely responsible for the Socialist Party's hard stance against the war, which defectors like John Spargo later rebuked. Although the national party had not formalized a stance on the war, leading up to 1917, moderate party leaders realized the need for an official party line on the war to maintain the S.P.A.'s cohesion. Having witnessed the dissolution of the Second International – when European socialist moderates had split based on support of their respective national war efforts, and the European Left split from moderates in opposition to any national war efforts – party leaders like Morris Hillquit recognized the need for unified organizational goals within the party. As charges of pro-militarism and pro-Germanism were thrown at moderate party leaders, a division between the left wing and moderates seemed imminent, if the two wings could not agree on a vision for the party during wartime. When

the emergency convention convened on April 7, 1917, one day after President Woodrow Wilson signed the Declaration of War, convention president Hillquit expressed regret for the party's lack of a formal stance on American military involvement in Europe. Then, emphasizing the need for party unity during wartime, Hillquit described the party as "the only considerable organized force which has still retained a clear vision" to oppose the war.[25] To maintain stability between an increasingly oppositional left-wing and the moderates, Hillquit chose to push the party toward an anti-war position, which could prevent the defection of dissatisfied, radical voices.

With the support of an anti-war platform from the party's moderate leadership, and left-wing delegations dominating the convention's committees, C.E. Ruthenberg played a significant role in shaping what would become the majority party platform, becoming its co-author alongside Hillquit. Ruthenberg's approach to organizing, the political role of the Socialist Party, and the revolutionary "character" of the socialist movement are evident throughout the document. While the platform contained provisions typical to socialists of all sects, including public ownership of industry, transportation, and land, appeals to direct action were far more prevalent than in other national policies from the S.P.A. For example, the Hillquit-Ruthenberg platform called for socialists to engage in "continuous, active, and public opposition to the war, through demonstrations, mass petitions, and all other means within our power."[26] The platform further provided for mass action against conscription, if necessary, and an "extension of the campaign of education," within anti-war organizing and socialist campaigns.[27] The left-wing leadership indicated that these provisions of the platform were intended to leave direct action as a potential

[25] Alexander Tratchenberg, *The American Labor Year Book, 1917-18* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1918), 373.
[26] Socialist Party of America, "Proclamation and War Program," 1917, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 2, OHC, 3.
[27] Ibid., 3-4.

anti-war tactic, writing in the *Ohio Socialist* that it was hopeful that the party policy against the explicit advocacy of violent revolution would eventually be repealed because of it.[28] The platform, in many ways, matched Ruthenberg's own ideological preferences and the tactics he had developed during his time in Cleveland: to oppose the war, socialists needed to educate workers into a class-conscious base of opposition – and toward outright resistance to the war, if necessary.

The adoption of the Hillquit-Ruthenberg provision was not unanimous but it did receive the approval of a broad range of socialists. John Spargo drafted a second platform, urging socialists to support the war, eventually leaving the party after receiving only five votes at the convention. A second anti-war platform, with minor differences from the first, also drew away thirty-two votes, leaving the platform with a resounding majority of 132 delegates, consisting of both leftists and moderates.[29] Ruthenberg effectively helped to develop a platform that would preserve at least most of the S.P.A.'s coalition, despite the withdrawal of prominent pro-war, pro-ally socialists like Spargo and James Graham Phelps Stokes, in response to the platform. The S.P.A. had not gone the way of the Second International, and to Ruthenberg and the S.P.O.'s left-wing state leadership had used their growing influence to pull the party toward the direct actionist, revolutionary "character" that members like Ruthenberg imagined for it. The socialist big tent remained based around traditional campaigns and rallies throughout the war, according to the new party platform. But with the leverage offered by the war and the hard line they had taken against it, left-wing socialists had moved the ideologically diverse party to accept direct action as part of its accepted tactics – and, perhaps, as necessary to them.

The S.P.O. delegates returned to Ohio pleased with their success and ready to institute the platform throughout the state. In the party's newspaper *The Ohio Socialist*, the state executive

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[28] "The National Convention: What it Did," *The Ohio Socialist* April 1917, 2.
[29] Ibid.

committee encouraged locals to "intensify their activities…so we may reach the great majority of workers with the Socialist Party's position upon war and with the message of socialism in general."[30] Now that socialists were bound by the national, left wing-driven mandate to propagandize, speak, campaign, and agitate against the war by any means necessary, the S.P.O.'s leadership hoped its locals would institute these national measures in their municipal settings. With the party increasing its organizing around municipal elections and the wider war issue, the S.P.O.'s belief that these campaigns would increase involvement in the party were vindicated between April and July of 1917. Hundreds of members joined the party throughout the state, citing their opposition to the war.[31] However, as the S.P.A.'s approved platform and organizational tactics began to be implemented at the local level, variations based in long-standing habits of organizing emerged.

Local Cleveland and Local Cincinnati both began engaging in the respective tactics of education and collaboration with non-socialists they had developed before the war. Up to June 1917, anti-war rallies were especially popular and successful in Cleveland. The S.P.O.'s state office praised one such meeting for attracting 4,000 attendees and $125 in donations.[32] These rallies in Cleveland followed the majority resolution of St. Louis exactly, featuring many of the party's most prominent speakers and mass distributions of literature. Local Cleveland's rallies were a "who's who" of northern Ohio's most prominent left-wing socialists. The delegates to St. Louis, Ruthenberg, Marguerite Prevey, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker, held rallies every weekend in Cleveland's public squares, each of which brought increasing numbers of attendees

[30] Ibid., 3.
[31] "69 Locals Did Not Report," *The Ohio Socialist*, April 1917, 6; "Who's Here This Time," *The Ohio Socialist*, May 1917, 2; "Roll Call," *The Ohio Socialist*, June 1917, 5.
[32] "Another Historical Demonstration," *Ohio Socialist*, May 1917, 2.

and new members.[33] In Cincinnati, tactics were similar, including the mass distribution of propaganda, although they were more reliant on outside organizations than Local Cleveland. A branch of the newly formed People's Council for Peace and Democracy, founded by socialists in New York, emerged under the direction of both socialists and non-socialist reformists in Cincinnati. A government agent, sent to observe potential "pro-Germans" in Ohio, found that the socialist "pro-Germans" in Cincinnati were often heavily intermixed with local unions and members of local, anti-war immigrant groups.[34]

Local Dayton also adopted the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform, they made fewer direct appeals to it than their comrades in Cleveland and Cincinnati. Much of its concerns about the war were reflective of their past stances on municipal reform issues. In 1917, the local party's platform repeated the standard themes it had established against the city manager system: generally, it reflected the interests of industrialists and reflected capitalist-dominated government policy. To Local Dayton, the war represented this corporate approach to politics, though this time at the level of foreign policy. The war was beneficial to industry in Dayton, as many local manufacturers like the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company received lucrative government contracts. In response, Local Dayton questioned whether these contracts would benefit the workers of the city, implying that local businesses were war profiteers and hoarding money gained through their workers' labor.[35] Since Local Dayton was focused on the upcoming municipal elections, their attention to the war centered around the effects it would have on the power of monied interests in their own community. Because Local Dayton sought to establish itself as an alternative to the Citizens'

[33] Ibid.; "62 New Members," *Ohio Socialist*, April 1917, 1.
[34] C.S. Weakley, "In Re: People's Council and Socialist Party, Cincinnati, O.," *Industrial Workers of the World Activity and People's Council of America*, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the United States, 1917-1941, ProQuest History Vault, 121.
[35] Sharts, 98-101

Committee, which drew influence from notable local industrialists, to aid in its electoral campaign, further influxes of money into the city fit neatly into the socialists' rhetoric as a boon to corporate economic and political power.

The S.P.A. platform was intended to bridge divides between moderate political actionists and left-wing direct actionists, but tactical divisions still existed. Notably, Local Dayton chose not to explicitly oppose the draft, due to concerns about prosecution under laws against speech that was deemed as obstructive to the war effort. In Cleveland, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker had already been arrested for obstructing the draft on May 27, 1917, under Section 332 of the United States Criminal Code, just weeks before the Espionage Act was passed in mid-June.[36] Local Dayton member and organizer Oscar Edelman later attributed Local Dayton's silence about the anti-war resolution and the draft to these wartime crackdowns.[37] Local Dayton had been a party that was dependent upon public campaigns toward local political offices for its past political successes and gains in membership, whereas Local Cleveland's engagement with local campaigns represented means to revolutionary ends, rather than ends in themselves. Local Dayton was anti-war, but it was more pacifistic than prone to hardline agitation. As on-the-ground organizing began in 1917, the unified vision of the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform did not come to pass. An educational campaign may have worked for Local Cleveland, where that was the dominant form of organizing. But, the same would not work for Local Dayton, which understood that it could win an election and greater political influence, as a result, so long as the party did not overstep and cause a significant disruption to its organizing, legal or otherwise. As a result, Local Dayton adopted a pragmatic approach to organizing during the war, which was to remain consistent for several years.

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[36] Edward S. Wertz, "Argument Before the Jury," *Guilty? Of What? Speeches Before the Jury in Connection to the Trial of C.E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker* (Cleveland: Cleveland Socialist News, 1917), 54.
[37] Oscar Edelman, interview by Ellis Jacobs, WYSO, January 1973, in Oscar Edelman Papers, box 7, file 45, WSU.

The S.P.O.'s anti-war agitation was shaped by the strategies its locals adopted for their pre-war campaigning and organizing. Having shaped the party's platform, Local Cleveland implemented it resolutely, using well-established practices like public rallies and speeches it had developed prior to the war. Local Cincinnati broadly followed the approach set by socialists in Cleveland, but still lacking the internal resources needed to independently implement the party platform, it continued to collaborate with aligned reformist, religious, and immigrant organizations. Immediate political necessities caused Local Dayton to diverge from its comrades in other cities. After finding earlier success by focusing on municipal issues, and worried that too much focus on the war could jeopardize the re-creation of that success, Local Dayton focused on how the war would potentially affect the nature of corporate power in Dayton and continued to emphasize a platform of municipal reform. At the national level, the S.P.A. intended its anti-war platform to limit intra-party division and unify the vision of its members. But the S.P.O.'s local parties had to adjust their tactics and visions of anti-war organizing to meet the varied, immediate constraints present in their respective cities.

III. Wartime Municipal Campaigns

Between the last municipal campaign season in 1915 and 1917, the basic platform of the S.P.O. and its locals did not change much. The planks of the municipal platforms continued to lambast non-socialist opponents for mismanaging and corrupting their cities, with socialist candidates representing a more dedicated force for reform. Unlike in prior years, though, the elections of 1917 were increasingly dominated by the all-encompassing First World War and connected issues like rationing and conscription. During the summer of 1917, the socialists attempted to adjust their campaigns to account for these developing issues, and differences arose

between their approaches. The local parties in Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati each needed to divert resources and attention from their municipal activities to account for wartime issues, though each party varied in how much they needed and were willing to divert. By the end of the summer, each local party contrasted in the progress they had made toward their campaigns, often correlating to how much they chose to focus on municipal issues compared to anti-war agitation. Socialists often directed more of their resources and attention toward municipal campaigns, if they continued to sense that this organizing represented their most direct route toward greater influence in their communities and among potential party members and voters. Socialists who continued conceive of campaigns in this way – and presented themselves as strong alternatives to incumbent parties, proposing aggressive reforms to community issues – tended have more tangible successes by the end of the summer of 1917.

Local Dayton managed to effectively attract a broad base of voters by casting the class struggle in terms of anti-corruption and municipal ownership policies. Though Local Dayton considered Populism a faulty political movement for its lack of class analysis, its campaign certainly reflected a rhetorical populism, in which the socialists offered Dayton's citizens an opportunity to take power from corrupt, exploitative elites.[38] As an alternative to the "organized group of business interests" represented by the city commission and manager system, Dayton promised to bring about a "beautiful" city by assuaging everyday issues faced by citizens, including "crowded street cars, high-priced gas, coal, ice and food."[39] As a solution to the "High Cost of Living," Local Dayton affirmed its dedication to "wiping out the private profit" of various private interests, by instituting "public ownership" of public utilities like the city's privatized streetcars and "stop[ping] the enormous profits of these public utilities from flowing to…New

[38] "Populists and Socialists," *Miami Valley Socialist*, January 21, 1916, 2-3.
[39] "Socialist Candidates for Commissioners!," 1917, Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, folder 9, WSU.

York capitalists."[40] Many aspects of this platform reflected the class struggle that socialists opposed everywhere, including the influence private profit and big business had on government and public institutions. However, these issues were shown through the lens of immediate issues were specific to Dayton and frustrated its citizens.

Interestingly, just as Local Dayton chose not to focus on wartime issues, to avoid the legal and political backlash taking place in other cities, the Citizens' Committee and Democrats took a similar approach to the war, at the start of the campaign. Instead, both parties continued to run on their support of the city manager system of government and suggestions to strengthen it. Incorporating the Republican Party into its ranks, the Citizens' Committee held consistent, unilateral control over Dayton's city council without much resistance from the Democrats. Despite their success in county- and state-level politics, rarely offered a distinct alternative to the rule of the Citizens' Committee in Dayton; they supported the city manager system in 1913 and were trounced by the Committee in the 1915 city council elections. Frustrations mounted against the Democratic Party, among both voters and its local institutions. One such institution was the *Dayton Daily News*, which in one postmortem of Democrats' 1917 campaigns, criticized the party for offering no new policies against their opponents' platforms.[41] Meanwhile, the Citizens' Committee focused on the administrative efficiency the city manager system brought Dayton's city government, and likely did not feel a need to criticize their Democratic and Socialist opponents for their support or opposition to the war. Indeed, there was little resistance to the war itself in Dayton, as the city's industry benefitted from its profits and its workers benefitted from employment in war industries. Unlike other cities, the deadline to register for the military draft also passed with little resistance. In the early days of the war effort and the municipal campaigns

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[40] Ibid.
[41] "Barringer, Socialist, Leads in Primary Battle Here," *Dayton Daily News*, August 15, 1917, 1-2.

of 1917, Dayton maintained its status quo; there were no crises that caused the competing parties to alter their campaign tactics or messaging.

Local Dayton's presentation of itself as an alternative choice proved successful, as voters' frustrations grew with the stagnant Citizens' Committee and Democratic campaigns. The city's political status quo was shaken by the primary elections in August. On the morning of August 15, 1917, local newspapers reported a massive victory for the socialists. All three of Local Dayton's candidates for city council polled thousands of votes ahead of their opponents in the Citizens' Committee and Democratic Party, receiving more than 29,000 votes combined. Meanwhile, Citizens' Committee candidates combined for 20,000 votes and Democrats for 10,000. Judging by the vote totals, a mass defection of voters from the Democrats enabled the socialists' victory, signified by a decline in votes for Democrats that matches the gains of socialist and independent candidates.[42] Socialists and non-socialists alike attributed the victory to voters' dissatisfaction with the war. Writing in the *New York Call*, the Local's leader Joseph Sharts claimed the socialists had succeeded "squarely on the war issue…the workers registered their protest against the war and voted for peace."[43]

A mass anti-war protest vote is a potential explanation for the socialists' success in Dayton, but it is incomplete, considering the focus on local issues by the three competing parties leading up to the primary. As the *Dayton Daily News*' postmortem of the primary signifies, many Democratic voters may have lacked confidence in their party's platform of agreement with the Citizens' Committee. At the same time, Local Dayton's promises of clean, publicly owned streetcars that would offer well-paying, steady jobs, as well as lower prices for food and utilities, offered an ambitious vision to voters who felt the promises of the city manager reforms remained

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[42] "Barringer, Socialist, Leads in Primary Battle Here," 1

[43] Weinstein, 147.

unfulfilled.[44] Many Democrats may have been dissatisfied with the war, since they had voted for President Woodrow Wilson's pacifistic campaign in 1916, but the campaign's general focus on community issues and reported dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party's municipal policies suggest that the voters' mass protest likely resulted from more immediate concerns. In the end, Democratic voters' defection served to knock their party out of the race. Since, under Dayton's rules, the first- and second-place finishers were slated to compete in the November elections, the socialists and the Citizens' Committee would represent voters' only two options. With 10,000 Democrats up for grabs, their preferred candidates eliminated from the race, the two parties were set to compete for their support, amid an accelerating war effort and a heightened debate about the course of reform in the city.

Unlike the socialists in Dayton, the local parties of Cleveland and Cincinnati built influence outside of their cities' government institutions – a practice that perhaps led socialists in these cities to present themselves more confrontationally. This trend had been established prior to the war in their respective propagandizing and collaboration with allied activist groups. During the war, socialists in these cities continued emphasizing work outside of their city governments, though now with a greater focus on anti-war organizing. Unfortunately for these local parties, this translated to making them targets for legal repercussions. In Cleveland, socialists were charged with threatening to destabilize the U.S. government through a long-standing law. Later, after the passage of the Espionage Act in June 1917, Lotta Burke, mayoral candidate Thomas Hammerschmidt, and eleven other socialists were charged with destabilizing the American war effort in Cincinnati. As these cities' socialist leadership spent much of the summer in jail and court, these legal issues were especially disruptive; many socialists struggled to organize both campaigns

[44] Local Dayton Socialist Party, "Socialist Candidates for Commissioners," 1917, Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, file 9, WSU.

and anti-war agitation. For example, in Cincinnati, Lotta Burke – who was the city's most prominent socialist and campaigning for school board – was arrested for distributing pamphlets against the draft, arrested, and transported to a jail in Dayton, where she spent three weeks between June and July.[45] This episode extended into the November elections, as a result of a lengthy trial and appeals process, which often kept Cincinnati's socialists from campaigning or agitating in their community.[46] As a result of these challenges, socialists in Cleveland and Cincinnati attempted reincorporate municipal reform planks into their platform or relied even more upon allied activist groups. However, the socialists lost a large amount of time in these cities to days in jail and court, leaving gaps in their organizations and casting themselves as targets for further backlash against their campaigns. Local Dayton managed to avoid legal struggles because they sublimated their anti-war ideals into their broadly popular municipal platform, meaning it could take advantage of voters' frustrations while not alerting the institutions in its community. Local Cincinnati and Local Cleveland failed to do the same; as a result, they tended to make themselves targets of legal penalties and failed to establish broad-based support from voters.

To make up for the Socialist Party's organizational gaps in Cincinnati, Local Cincinnati's activist allies attempted to continue anti-war agitation and municipal campaigns. The Cincinnati branch of the People's Council for Peace and Democracy was a major organizational force in the wake of the arrests in Cincinnati. According to one member, the branch was organized to supplement the organization of Local Cincinnati, since it remained "rather weak," with one stated goal being to elect socialists and anti-war candidates to office between 1917 and 1918.[47] The

[45] "Woman Is the Only Treason Suspect Still in Jail," *Cincinnati Post*, June 27, 1917, 9.
[46] "Woman in Plot Case Gives Bond," *Cincinnati Post*, July 16, 1917, 1; "$3500 Bond Set for Socialist," *Cincinnati Post*, November 1, 1917, 13.
[47] C.E. Morgan, "In Re: People's Council of America Fifth Meeting," *Industrial Workers of the World Activity and People's Council of America*, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the United States, 1917-1941, ProQuest History Vault, 127.

People's Council also attempted to form a broad coalition of anti-war Cincinnatians, ranging from Socialist Party members like Herbert Bigelow to non-socialist reformists like Edward F. Alexander, the lawyer to the thirteen arrested socialists. Some People's Council members also attempted to bring in national organizations that had been more well-established in Cincinnati, including German- and Italian-American groups, who stressed opposition to both the American and Central Powers' war efforts.[48] The Council continued the anti-war campaigning of Local Cincinnati by distributing anti-war literature and increased public speaking (though explicit and specific references to draft resistance were heavily limited).[49] Socialists in Cincinnati followed the anti-war platform in their city to agitate against an unjust, capitalist-led war, but relationships with non-socialist groups remained necessary to maintain the political efforts of the small, destabilized party.

In Cleveland, mayoral candidate C.E. Ruthenberg experienced an extensive series of trials, from a criminal trial in federal court in June to and extended process of appeals through the end of the year. Out on bond between June and December, Ruthenberg continued speaking to crowds in opposition to the war on a weekly basis and organizing new members for Local Cleveland. In preparation for the elections, socialists began soapboxing and distributing fliers throughout Cleveland, canvassing the city with Local Cleveland's slogan: "For Socialism, Peace, and Democracy." New members continued to join by the hundreds as a result of open-air campaigning, which often included extended discussions about the causes of war under capitalism. Between May

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[48] Weakley, "In Re: People's Council and Socialist Party, Cincinnati, O.," 121.

[49] Ibid., 121-122; "Report of Meeting of the Cincinnati Branch of the People's Council, at Room 811, Odd Fellows Temple," *Industrial Workers of the World Activity and People's Council of America*, U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the United States, 1917-1941, ProQuest History Vault, 247-250.

and July, even as Ruthenberg's time was split between the courtroom and the soapbox, 350 members joined over the course of six weeks, registering their names at the speaking events.[50]

While much of Ruthenberg's focus remained on the war, his Local did not necessarily neglect their task to build the party's strength in local politics. Together with the People's Council branch in Cleveland, Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland formulated a campaign strategy that would take advantage of Cleveland's ranked-choice voting system. Essentially, Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland ran a campaign for voters' second-choice votes.[51] On the ground, this meant the socialists spent less time attempting to persuade voters away from the Republicans or Democrats, both of which had remained popular through reformist city administrations, instead only needing to convince voters to consider the Socialist Party as an alternative to the rival major party.[52] If effective, the plan could circumvent the challenge of dissuading voters from the well-entrenched major parties. But even if ineffective, the socialists would be able to create inroads with more voters outside of the party. Even if the socialist ticket only represented a sort of protest or second-choice vote in 1917, the party could fulfill Ruthenberg's short- and long-term vision for the Socialist Party: it could gain the party voters, who could be educated into participants in an eventual revolution. Through their revamped campaign strategy socialists recognized they needed to maintain some presence in municipal politics to break through; they could not rely solely upon anti-war agitation, which could bring hundreds of new members but perhaps not enough to attain political influence for the party. Referencing the socialist victory in Dayton at their meetings, Local Cleveland attempted to demonstrate that they could offer a strong alternative to their opponents in the major parties, appealing to voters' immediate demands for their city government.[53]

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[50] Johnson, 123.
[51] Morgan, "In Re: People's Council of America Fifth Meeting," 128.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

Throughout the rest of the election, Cleveland's socialist candidates attempted to balance their commitment to anti-war agitation and promises of reform in the city itself to present themselves as an effective alternative in Cleveland's city government. Local Cleveland again nominated Charles E. Ruthenberg to head its ticket as a mayoral candidate, who would spend much of his time engaged in anti-war agitation and speaking. In down-ballot school board races, socialists became especially concerned with the militarization of public education and that schools would be used to spread wartime propaganda and teach "soldierly skills."[54] Alongside this opposition to militarism in schools, Local Cleveland's school board candidates also ran on a platform that would allow teachers to organize a union and collectively bargain their contracts with the school board, as well as provide free meals and textbooks to students.[55] To achieve their goals of opposing the war, imperialism, and global capitalism, while also bringing new, dedicated members into the party, Local Cleveland attempted to connect these overarching issues to community reforms. The political reality remained that voters and people outside of the party demanded tangible improvements in their communities, when deciding who to support in municipal elections. Despite their commitment to aggressively anti-war politics, Local Cleveland attempted to meet these local demands to gain support.

Despite the Socialist Party's increasing focus on the First World War, socialists remained concerned with their ability to grow their influence in their communities' politics. Since the socialists often used their campaigns to these ends, and because their anti-war agitation tended to result in organizational gaps through arrests and legal difficulties, the S.P.O.'s local parties had to decide how much of their attention and resources they were willing to dedicate to their campaigns

[54] Socialist Party of America, "Proclamation and War Program," 3; "School Committee Begins Its Labors," *Ohio Socialist*, May 1917, 4.
[55] "Socialists and the Schools," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 17, 1917, 10.

and anti-war agitation. Often, the socialists felt they were unable to concentrate equally on both the national anti-war program and their campaigns, because of the time and assets needed to respond to these legal struggles and community backlash.

As of August 1917, Local Dayton established itself as potentially the most successful party to balance anti-war organizing and municipal campaigning, as it connected wartime issues to frustrations with local governance and ran a campaign that appealed to everyday issues. For socialists in other local parties, though, sole focus on anti-war organizing brought negative attention. New members and aligned, progressive activists may have been mobilized by war issues, but socialist campaigns could be easily halted and obstructed if law enforcement witnessed socialists advocating outright resistance to the war effort. As a result, socialists in Cleveland and Cincinnati split their organizing more evenly between municipal campaigning and anti-war propagandizing to translate popular outrage into more stable, widespread support. In terms of tangible success, socialists remained reliant upon city-wide campaigns, elections, and the pursuit of influence in existing government institutions – a reliance that became more fraught throughout 1917, as pro-war voices and narratives proliferated American politics at nearly every level, concentrating more of their attacks on the Socialist Party.

IV. The Pro-War Backlash

As the municipal campaigns of 1917 continued after August, the war grew into a more salient issue in municipal politics, as was true nationally and internationally. With American soldiers being conscripted, trained, and deployed on the European front, a sense grew that Americans had to enthusiastically support and contribute to their country's war effort, both to support its soldiers and to aid the U.S. in preserving its democratic system. War bonds were sold

by the government and bought by thousands of citizens, and newspapers ran inspiring stories about hometown soldiers overseas and articles about how conscripted men could build soldierly traits and skills, in preparation for deployment. A national ethos of "Americanism" began to develop around support for the war, as Americans were asked to persevere through the sacrifices of rationing and combat, and to contribute in various ways to combat overseas threats to American democracy.

In Ohio, Americanism and support for the American war effort played an increasing role in the ongoing municipal races. Throughout the state and its cities, institutions like the press, law enforcement, and municipal governments rallied in support of the war, asking their citizens to contribute to their government and its forces in Europe. However, such institutions also became more vigilant about perceived threats to the war effort in their own communities. With its staunch stance against the war, its radical national platform, and its push for significant agitation against conscription and militarism, the Socialist Party seemed one potential threat. Even though more moderate socialists, like those in Dayton, sought to avoid a pro-war backlash by not explicitly agitating against it, the party's national platform was an explicit call for resistance by socialists. To pro-war voices and institutions, the socialists could sow disunity by casting the war in terms of the class struggle, as they had for several years. Since socialists could present a potential danger to the war effort, local institutions observed their campaigning and organizing with unease, whether they achieved tangible political successes or not.

Throughout Ohio's cities, a crackdown began in these institutions and spread throughout their communities. Anxious that socialists could potentially win political office in Dayton, or that their aggressive organizing could attract anti-war sympathizers in Cleveland and Cincinnati, local presses, politicians, and governments increasingly adopted a new narrative: if the socialists could

campaign successfully, gain supporters, and win their elections, America's war effort could be destabilized. Local presses began portraying socialists of all ideological sects as traitors; incumbent politicians instituted greater restrictions on public gatherings and speeches; and law enforcement stringently patrolled socialist gatherings for potential sedition or violations. Politicians, presses, law enforcement, and even mobs used socialists' connections to anti-war ideals to justify more combative rhetoric and more violent behavior, as the security of the war effort became a locally debated issue.

The narrative of the election changed most drastically in Dayton, as political opponents reacted to the socialists' primary victory and sought new grounds on which to oppose their campaign. The primary results came as a shock to Dayton's press, political observers, and parties; one column even stated that the Democrats who voted for the socialists "[gave] themselves over to abandon."[56] Although thousands of Democrats defected during the primary, around 10,000 did not, and without a Democratic candidate to support in November, they would effectively be up for grabs between the Citizens' Committee and Local Dayton. For some Democratic institutions, realizing that those 10,000 Democrats could bring socialist candidates to power, if they were swayed by the socialist campaign, the goal became to ensure that these non-defecting voters remained outside of the socialist coalition. During the election, as the *Dayton Daily News* had demonstrated, many Democrats and their institutions criticized the Citizens' Committee, feeling that the incumbent party had not fulfilled its reformist promise of good government. But faced with an insurgent local Socialist Party – which represented "abandon" or potentially irresponsible, radical politics – non-defecting Democrats and party institutions lined up behind the Citizens' Committee, hoping to avert a socialist city government. The last time the Democrats and the

[56] "Election Result Creates Food for Reflection," *Dayton Daily News*, August 9, 1917, 9.

Citizens' Committee formed a coalition in 1913, it was based around the city manager plan. In 1917, non-defecting Democrats and the Citizens' Committee formed a coalition around an ideological position: the Americanism of the First World War. With the support of both major presses in the city, the *Daily News* and the *Dayton Journal*, the narrative of the election shifted; it would be decided on the national issue of the war, rather than issues of municipal reform.

The shift in the elections defining issues, from municipal reforms to war polities, was achieved by portraying Local Dayton as traitorous and connecting it to more radical fellow-travelers in the socialist movement. The *Dayton Daily News*, regretting the Democrats' loss, praised the Citizens' Committee's "wholesome, rational campaign," then urged Democrats to "become fully aroused in their sense of duty" for Dayton and their country.[57] This duty became clear over the coming months: voters had to actively work to defeat the socialists and their national anti-war policy. Both the Democratic *Daily News* and Citizens' Committee-aligned *Dayton Journal* began casting the Socialist Party as "a sheltering place for traitors," quoting Dayton native, *Daily News* owner and Governor of Ohio James Cox.[58] The *Daily News* further began drawing comparisons to Paterson, New Jersey, which had become closely associated with the high-profile, violent I.W.W. strikes that had taken place there earlier in the 1910s. Such disruption in Dayton, the Dayton press argued, "cannot be a source of advantage to any municipality," especially in a war for the defense of freedom.[59] As the election neared, in October, Americanist rhetoric intensified further. In one *Daily News* article, the loyalty of the socialist voters was questioned:

> "The party that has appropriated the name Socialist is, in fact, the party of pro-Germanism.… They cannot be loyal Americans and at the same time promote opposition to our government in the great enterprise it has been forced to undertake. No man who believes in the principles of democracy can

[57] Ibid.
[58] "Strong Feature of City-Manager Plan Disclosed," *Dayton Daily News*, September 16, 1917, 9.
[59] Ibid.

> conscientiously vote the Socialist ticket, for every Socialist ballot cast at this time becomes A BULLET FIRED AT AN AMERICAN SOLDIER."[60]

To ensure there was no socialist victory in Dayton, Democratic political leaders and institutions established a clear divide: Democrats could either defect to the socialists and sabotage American government and democracy, or they could vote for the Citizens' Committee, in support of American values. In August, the socialists polled well largely because they could avoid being bogged down in the war issue, and because they had offered a popular municipal platform for Dayton's voters. After August, the stakes of the election increased, as the security of the war effort was portrayed as partially dependent on the state of local government in Dayton. By making local governance a security issue and portraying the Socialist Party as a cover for destabilizing influences, Dayton's widely read, partisan newspapers chipped away at the socialists' reformist presentation of their campaign.

Between August and October, Local Dayton managed to maintain its course and continue emphasizing other issues in its campaign, although war issues became more unavoidable in the campaign. In fact, the party even grew in its membership, often drawing from skilled workers, centered in wards around the factories and workshops in Dayton's industrial center. The party even managed to attract storeowners and professional workers, like lawyers, breaking with its ideological, working-class boundaries but expanding its constituency.[61] Between August and November, the party gained nearly 200 members, after hovering around a membership of around 500 since 1911. Vindicated by their primary victory and these gains, the socialists likely saw little reason to change course, even as their opponents cast them as traitors. For instance, prior to the

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[60] Walker, 121; "Are You a Real American?," *Dayton Daily News*, October 31, 1917, 6.
[61] Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, August 17, 1917, Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, folder 1, WSU, 59-61; Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, August 24, 1917, Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, folder 1, WSU, 65-67; Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, August 31, 1917, box 2, folder 1, WSU, 69.

November elections, Local Dayton remained more concerned with the "class rule" by capitalists in their city – a regime that was exemplified by companies based in New York privately holding and profiting from utilities and public transportation in Dayton, according to the socialists.[62] The socialists' strategy was still to emphasize the class struggle in citywide issues, rather than national and international issues of the war and militarism.

Facing the challenges of an eagle-eyed press and the governor of Ohio looking with great intent at his hometown, Local Dayton attempted to preserve the coalition it had constructed with continued moderation on war issues. By October, the Local's main concern was mobilizing poll-watchers and ward captains, who would ensure election integrity for the party and distribute campaign literature about the socialists' local platform throughout Dayton's fourteen wards and outside its factories.[63] Nevertheless, the socialists remained rather vulnerable to attacks on the war issue and, in late October, would be forced defend themselves from a flurry of charges of non-support for the United States government and principles of Americanism.

This vulnerability came to a head, as Local Dayton faced a scandal that attracted a wide range of influential politicians and observers to condemn it, although the party attempted to remain moderate and even outwardly patriotic. Restrictions against anti-war gatherings in Cincinnati also presented difficulties for the city's socialists, as they were often monitored – and even interrupted – by police when their speeches turned to war-related subjects. Bigelow was especially targeted by these restrictions due to his prominence as a speaker in Cincinnati. Since the city government of Cincinnati had prevented him from speaking about the war through their surveillance, Bigelow used the stage at Dayton's Memorial Hall to respond to the Socialist Party's pro-war critics, who

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[62] Local Dayton Socialist Party, "Municipal Platform of the Socialist Party," Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, folder 9, WSU.
[63] Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, October 12, 1917, Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU, 92.

cast non-support for the war and patriotism as contradictory. The *Dayton Daily News* reported that Bigelow was "conservative" in his remarks, avoiding talk of outright resistance to the war.[64] Bigelow's speech affirmed his patriotism and "love" for the flag, and he stated his concern that the restriction of free speech would set a poor precedent for peacetime.[65] Despite reporting that Bigelow's speech had been "conservative," the *Daily News* still took this as an explicit signal that the Socialist Party – even Local Dayton – was committed to opposing the war effort. Though Bigelow used patriotic rhetoric and mainly criticized the war's effects on civil liberties, the basic anti-war subject matter of the speech reflected poorly upon a party inundated by charges of non-support and even treason.

After the report of the meeting was printed in the *Daily News*, one aspect of the meeting came to represent it as a whole: the absence of an American flag on the stage. Bigelow's involvement in the meeting faded to the background, but political opponents of Local Dayton cast the contents of his speech and the absence of the flag as a signal of socialists' hypocrisy and noncommitment to the patriotic appeals in the speech. By Sunday, October 22, the absence of the flag had already become a talking-point. Giving a sermon, Methodist pastor Dr. George W. Bunton called the flag's absence "an insult to the community…whose interests are in harmony with American principles and American impulses."[66] By October 24, the press in Dayton already declared that the socialists had lost the election because of their blunder, as many of the party's non-socialist voters would abandon the party due to its evident un-Americanism and radicalism.[67] As the absence of the flag ballooned into a scandal, influential figures demonstrated that Local Dayton would be unable to avoid commenting or acting on war-related issues. By avoiding such

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[64] "Rev. Bigelow Is Heard in Address," *Dayton Daily News*, October 21, 1917, 5.
[65] Ibid.
[66] "Socialist Meeting Insult to America," *Dayton Daily News*, October 22, 1917, 9.
[67] "What the People Have to Say," *Dayton Daily News*, October 24, 1917, 6.

issues to this point, the socialists allowed themselves to be unreasonably cast as radicals and traitors without offering an effective response. As fitness to govern locally was increasingly linked to patriotism and support of the national war effort, the socialists' decision not to raise the war issue made them inactive as they were declared treasonous and resultingly unfit to lead.

Evidently, Local Dayton also worried about the effects the flag incident would have on their election totals and attempted to find a patriotic solution to the scandal. Meeting minutes show that the local deliberated about donating a large flag to the City of Dayton and Memorial Hall, in honor of Dayton's living Civil War veterans.[68] The presentation of the flag to the veterans and Memorial Hall took place on November 3, three days before the election. But charges of un-Americanism against the socialists stuck as they had not before, perhaps because the press now had a specific though exaggerated example of an unpatriotic action by the party. A day after the presentation of the flag, the *Daily News* ran a front-page editorial comparing the ideologies represented by both the American flag and "the Red Flag of Revolution." While the American flag represented the work of Abraham Lincoln and the founding fathers "who devoted their lives to the service of their country," the *Daily News* asserted that the red flag of socialism represented disorder and "its followers in Paris [who] were responsible for the Reign of Terror."[69]

To further attract Democrats away from the socialist ticket, Governor James Cox directly involved himself in the election, speaking in Dayton the same day the socialists presented the flag at Memorial Hall. Cox, who won gubernatorial and congressional elections in Dayton and was one of Montgomery County's most prominent Democrats for more than a decade, was an anti-socialist

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[68] Regular Meeting Local Dayton Socialist Party, October 26, 1917, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU, 101-105; Regular Meeting Local Dayton Socialist Party, November 2, 1917, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU; "Socialists Would Present Flag; Own Building Remains Unadorned," *Dayton Daily News*, October 28, 1917, A2; "Flag Is Presented for Memorial Hall," *Dayton Daily News*, November 4, 1917, 2.

[69] "Under Which Flag Do You Stand," *Dayton Daily News*, November 4, 1917, 1.

fixture in the Democratic *Dayton Daily News* since the primaries in August. But November 3 marked the first time Cox had campaigned in Dayton, in person, to swing the Democratic vote toward the Citizens' Committee. Cox relentlessly derided both the local and foreign policy platforms of Local Dayton and the S.P.A. The governor argued that the two platforms were connected, in terms of the harm they could cause, and that both sought to sow doubt in the American government and its institutions. If the socialists won, according to Cox, "news will be in Berlin within a day" and Dayton would be drawn into "brotherhood with the sultan of Turkey."[70] As for Local Dayton's plans for Dayton, Cox criticized the socialist commission candidates for their opposition to the conservancy plan proposed by the incumbent commissioners. The socialists stood against the plan on the grounds that it offered leasing rights that were too generous to private ownership and against the principles of democratic control of public resources and utilities.[71] Cox ridiculed this reasoning as an example of "socialistic alarm and falsehood," designed to distract voters from the "patriotic uprising against [the Socialist Party]."[72] Furthermore, because the election shifted from local to national issues, and stances on the war effort signified whether municipal candidates were competent or not, the socialists' connection to their national party caused their perception in Dayton to suffer. Socialists pragmatically avoided discussing war issues to avoid legal consequences. However, their inability to address war issues and differentiate their local platform from the foreign policies of their national party lost them the credibility of their most effective appeal: that they were an effective alternative to Citizens' Committee rule in Dayton.

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[70] James Cox, "Speech at Memorial Hall" (1917), in *Dayton Daily News*, November 4, 1917, 1, A1-A2.
[71] Local Dayton Socialist Party, "Municipal Platform of the Socialist Party," 1917, Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, file 9, WSU.
[72] Cox, "Speech at Memorial Hall," A1.

The socialists attempted to combat Cox's influence over the election by distributing a handbill retorting the assertions he made about their party and attempting to return the election to municipal issues. The bill included Cox's past accusations of corruption against the Citizens' Committee and accusations that Cox himself had collaborated with the Citizens' Committee to raise natural gas prices, in order to benefit his remaining utilities and business interests in the city.[73] No matter whether the Citizens' Committee or Cox were corrupt, however, the handbill challenged Cox to "name one Socialist official ever convicted of graft."[74] In many ways, the last two weeks before the municipal elections marked a period of mistakes for Local Dayton and increased threats to the socialists' coalition from the primary elections. However, rather than defending itself solely on the war issue, Local Dayton attempted to return its focus to issues of city governance in Dayton – even though recent events had demonstrated the war issue was unavoidable.

As the campaigns entered the last two months of the municipal campaigns, between Labor Day and election day, a similar pro-war backlash took place in Cleveland and Cincinnati, which compounded upon already existing obstacles to socialists' organizing in both cities. As in Dayton, non-socialist presses were integral in the backlashes since their writings formed the ideological basis behind them. Unlike Dayton, the Socialist Parties of Cleveland and Cincinnati faced obstacles to organizing from within government institutions – and even from fellow citizens. Incumbent municipal administrations, major party candidates, and fellow citizens began to react in more extreme ways to the supposed danger socialists posed to the war effort. Socialists attempted to form closer relationships with non-socialist voters and groups and to work heavily within local institutions to do so, even as legal restrictions were instituted in municipal

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[73] Local Dayton Socialist Party, "Questions for Governor Cox to Answer," 1917, Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, file 9, WSU.
[74] Ibid.

governments to prevent anti-war agitation. Increasingly, the socialists were shut out of traditional avenues of political involvement in their cities and struggled to demonstrate their legitimate claim to such involvement, against attacks from the press, surveillance by law enforcement, and even violence by other citizens.

In Cleveland, Ruthenberg continued to use his campaign as a hub for anti-war education, while out of jail on bond. Sensing that local institutions remained an effective avenue to reach potential supporters, the socialist mayoral candidate decided to engage in a debate with his competitors at a Labor Day event, in Cleveland's Luna Park. The Labor Day event had been a typical part of the Cleveland mayoral race since Ruthenberg started running in 1911, and he often used the event as an opportunity to confront other candidates about their opposition to strikes and the potential weakening of municipal ownership in Cleveland.[75] Now, such an event, which often drew thousands of local workers and voters – a ready audience, present on their day off – offered Ruthenberg yet another prime opportunity to educate. Ruthenberg went about the event in his typical way, educating the largely working-class audience about the ideology of the Socialist Party and emphasizing his message that the war was being waged for private profit.[76]

However, violence overshadowed the debate. During Ruthenberg's speech, an estimated 5,000 soldiers, who were on leave for the holiday, stormed the joint rally. In the aftermath of the event, the *Plain Dealer* wrote, "patriots everywhere, while recognizing the irregularity of the act…in suppressing [Ruthenberg's] treasonous utterances, will rejoice in the task achieved."[77] After only escaping the mob by being pulled into a dressing room, Ruthenberg took exception to

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[75] "Ruthenberg's Speech at Luna Park," *Cleveland Citizen*, September 1911, newspaper clipping, in newspaper clippings, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 1, OHC.

[76] "Ruthenberg Hurled from Labor Stage," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 4, 1917, 1; "DeWoody Is to Act upon Talk by Ruthenberg," *Cleveland Press*, September 4, 1917, newspaper clipping, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 2, folder 2, OHC.

[77] "Ruthenberg," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 5, 1917, 8.

both the soldiers' actions and the suggestion that his speech was deserving of suppression. Writing to Newton D. Baker, who was appointed President Wilson's Secretary of War after the end of his mayoral administration in Cleveland, Ruthenberg requested Baker's support as a former political opponent. Ruthenberg appealed to the disagreements they had when speaking in Luna Park together that had not ended in violence, then requested the punishment of the soldiers to demonstrate "the Constitutional rights of free speech and free assemblage still exist in this country."[78] Despite Ruthenberg's abiding distrust of capitalists in political institutions and government, his movement remained heavily reliant upon various elements of the American system of government, including democratic elections and free speech, as it worked to expand.

After the mob in Luna Park, Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland faced far fewer challenges to their organizing from government institutions or fellow citizens, who feared the mob overstepped and played into socialists' charges that the war effort subverted their civil liberties. Ruthenberg's speeches continued to be effective, as Local Cleveland reported that it distributed thousands of pamphlets per speaking event.[79] A variety of issues may have prevented intervention in socialists' rallies, including a federal investigation into the events at the Labor Day event in Luna Park; the fact that Ruthenberg was already convicted and sentenced, pending appeal; and a sense that forcibly stopping Ruthenberg's speeches would be excessive. One letter to the editor asserted that, while Ruthenberg's anti-war speeches fostered disloyalty, preventing them would grant Ruthenberg "the crown of martyrdom" and allow him "to run upon the platform of a citizen who has been denied his rights."[80] The early legal obstacles and later violence experienced by Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland may have been beneficial toward the end of the campaign: they

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[78] Johnson, 124-125.
[79] Al Fromholz, interview by Oakley C. Johnson, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 9, folder 3, OHC, 4.
[80] "Mr. Ruthenberg," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 10, 1917, 8.

were free to continue their rallies, as the city, its officials and its citizens did not wish to overstep into the socialists' rights to political involvement and the free speech it entailed. Nevertheless, the threat of violence was tangible to the socialists and only quelled by federal action. The institutions and people of Cleveland felt justified to suppress the socialists' organizing, but they were tempered by the sense that an overstep could bring the socialists greater sympathy. After the elections, the people of Cleveland could rely on the fact that some of their city's most prominent socialists would be imprisoned and removed from their organizing work – and that they would have greater flexibility to curb socialist organizing, without the presence of federal officials and the need to make politically measured decisions.

Socialists in Cincinnati, however, faced far more explicit institutional scrutiny, as officials used war and security issues as an excuse to intervene in socialist organizing. Like in Cleveland, socialists had been able to steadily hold meetings with high numbers of attendees and to distribute large amounts of literature. But an especially hostile local government and a strong presence of federal informants in Cincinnati threatened to shut the city's socialists out of involvement in local politics. On October 5, 1917, a People's Council meeting, as well as the offices of Colon Schott, the local Council's leader, and Herbert Bigelow, were raided by the combined forces of U.S. District Attorney Stuart R. Bolin and a group of U.S. Marshals. Speaking to the *Cincinnati Post*, the investigators stated their search concerned potential obstruction of the draft and Colon Schott's alleged involvement in pro-German groups prior to the American entrance into the war.[81] These raids were well-covered in both the *Cincinnati Post* and the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, both of which quoted the investigators heavily and were given specific details about materials found in the raids. Investigators revealed that a search of Bigelow's office had turned up letters from Robert La

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[81] "German Newspaper is Raided Here By U.S.," *Cincinnati Post*, October 6, 1917, 1.

Follette, the famous anti-war senator and progressive icon from Wisconsin, and documents regarding contact with the former German consulate in Cincinnati.[82] Law enforcement presented these discoveries as validating its suspicions of American- and German-born radicals in the city and their potential connections to larger networks that were critical of or hostile to the American war effort. As in Dayton, local political behaviors and connections were perceived through national and foreign policy issues, intensifying the stakes posed by radical voices in Cincinnati.

After these raids were prominently reported upon in Cincinnati's local press, the city's socialists contended with greater direct opposition from the local municipal government and law enforcement. As the *Cincinnati Enquirer* asked, "Are the Huns and Vandals here? What shall we do with them?," local officials in Cincinnati and its surrounding communities began imposing greater restrictions where socialists could speak and more closely monitoring them.[83] Police officers began attending socialist meetings more consistently – and halting them, when they found it necessary. At one meeting, Bigelow spoke against the potential economic impacts of a proposed second Liberty Loan: "Who is going to bear such a debt? Our children and our grandchildren."[84] Officers halted the meeting and told Bigelow that he could only discuss municipal affairs. Afterward, Bigelow stated to the press that he had said nothing "treasonable" and emphasized he had spoken against government debt rather than opposition to the Liberty Loan itself.[85] Bigelow attempted to find a patriotic loophole to the pro-war backlash, discussing the war in terms of the harm it did to the American government, rather than the harm the government's war effort did to its own people. But as a result of growing but tenuous charges of collaboration with Germans,

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[82] Ibid.
[83] "Wither Are We Drifting?: Time to Wake Up to the Revolutionary Trend of the Times," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 11, 1917, 4.
[84] "Police Halt Bigelow's Speech," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 26, 1917, 9.
[85] Ibid.

Bigelow's speeches still appeared dangerous to the American war effort; he was still vulnerable to repression.

Restrictions caused the socialists in Cincinnati to adjust their strategy in their municipal campaign, following their struggles with federal and local authorities in October. As the most public-facing socialist in the city, Bigelow chose to hedge his bets with the socialist campaign, facing both local restrictions and an election result that would probably not end in a large, electoral legitimation of the socialists' message. The best Bigelow could hope to do was ensure the party could freely express its message and engage in political issues publicly after the campaign. Bigelow made a double endorsement in Cincinnati's mayoral race, for both socialist candidate Thomas Hammerschmidt and Republican candidate John Galvin. According to Bigelow's endorsement, reprinted in the *Cincinnati Post*, Bigelow had stated that his first choice for mayor would undeniably be Thomas Hammerschmidt, but that "his friends" had received assurances that free speech about the war and other political issues would not be interfered with under a potential Galvin administration.[86] In this way, Bigelow was planning for the long-term success of the Socialist Party in Cincinnati, with the hope that interference with Local Cincinnati's speeches and organizing would end, if they could be treated as a legitimate part of their city's politics by a new municipal administration. The endorsement did not represent an official arrangement or the foundation of a formal coalition between the Socialist and Republican Parties, but it represented a bipartisan agreement that wartime restrictions had become too extreme and needed to be curtailed in Cincinnati.

Like Ruthenberg in Cleveland, Bigelow experienced violence because of charges that his presence represented pro-German influence in Cincinnati. A week before election day, on October

[86] "Galvin Favored by Bigelow as Candidate for Mayoralty," *Cincinnati Post*, October 27, 1917, 1.

28, 1917, Bigelow fell victim to a vigilante attack. After giving a speech in Newport, Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati, Bigelow was kidnapped by a group of masked men and driven south to a spot outside of Florence, Kentucky. There, Bigelow reported that his captors stripped him, whipped him, shaved his head, then finally dumped crude oil over him. Eventually abandoned in the woods, and forced to walk for miles to find help, Bigelow returned to Cincinnati for medical attention. He reported that his kidnappers warned him to leave Cincinnati in thirty-six hours and declared they had kidnapped and tortured him for "the women and children of Belgium" – seemingly blaming Bigelow's anti-war criticism for encouraging the German army's violence.[87] Bigelow attempted to maintain a fine line in his political engagement – a form of anti-war sentiment that was patriotic but alarmed by the potentially long-term damages that the war effort could inflict on American civil and institutional life. However, anti-war speech was increasingly interpreted as contributing to the violence of a wartime enemy. Just as police halted Bigelow's speeches as a disruptive influence on the war effort, fellow citizens sensed that Bigelow's continued presence in their community helped that enemy by making people question their support of the war effort.

Bigelow's kidnapping garnered condemnation from socialists and non-socialists alike, who made idealistic appeals to civil liberties; however, as individual and local political life seemed increasingly securitized, those appeals attracted less support from politicians and pro-war citizens. President Wilson commented that the perpetrators had subverted Bigelow's constitutional rights, and the *Cincinnati Post* declared, "The long offenses of the pacifists against this country, grievous as they are, can never justify mob rule."[88] The attorney general of Kentucky opened an

[87] Herbert S. Bigelow, *The Outrage on Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow of Cincinnati, Ohio* (New York: National Civil Liberties Bureau), 9, in Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, CHLA, box 9; Herbert Bigelow, "Bigelow, Kidnapped and Whipped by Masked Men, Writes Own Story," *Cincinnati Post*, October 29, 1917, 1, 7.
[88] Ibid., 15; "Two Wrongs Do Not Make a Right," *The Cincinnati Post*, October 31, 1917, 4.

investigation into the event, and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, who was an old friend of Bigelow's, provided support in his ensuing legal efforts. Meanwhile, in one editorial a pro-war citizen wrote that he could not "criticize these men too harshly…because there are many cases of disloyalty which the courts are powerless to subdue."[89] Mayor George Puchta agreed with this sentiment, stating to the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, "If a man misbehaves, he gets what is coming to him."[90] While the investigations turned up no suspects, the episode demonstrated how tenuous socialists' involvement in municipal politics became in the face of the American war effort. As support for the war effort was increasingly tied to Americans' fitness for political participation, idealistic appeals to patriotism and moderation proved ineffective to prevent crackdowns against anti-war figures and groups. Socialists were now perceived as a security threat, which needed to be suppressed rather than engaged as a legitimate voice and force in local politics and governing institutions. The socialists increasingly had less political and institutional recourse as a result.

As local politics was increasingly viewed through the lens of national security and foreign policy, socialists' local dissent and connections to anti-war opposition became more intolerable to municipal governments, law enforcement, and pro-war citizens. Connections to larger networks of anti-war and potentially anti-American groups were exaggerated. In turn, pro-war elements used those charges to justify more inflammatory rhetoric, the suppression of civil liberties, and even mob and vigilante violence. Socialists throughout Ohio attempted to balance their anti-war program with municipally minded agendas and policies. Often, these agendas intended to grow the party's popular, electoral support, but in 1917, they played a second important role: they allowed the socialists to avoid entanglement in war issues and attract support by focusing entirely on

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[89] C.H. Antill, "Pacifists Weaken Army," *Cincinnati Post*, November 16, 1917, 4.
[90] Herbert Shapiro, "The Herbert Bigelow Case: A Test of Free Speech in Wartime," *Ohio History Journal* 81, 2 (Spring 1972), 111.

immediate, everyday issues. In other cases, socialists appealed generally to their civil liberties or personal patriotism to achieve these same goals. However, as pro-war elements linked local, national, and foreign policy issues, it was easier to cast socialists as applying "treasonous," radical decision-making to all of its policies. In effect, local politics were securitized: if socialists managed to take power in municipal offices or to speak freely, opponents argued, they could encourage obstruction of the war effort. Therefore, those opponents readily legitimized previously extraordinary means to prevent socialists from open engagement with their communities' politics.

V. Election Results and Conclusions

Although local politics increasingly hinged on issues of national security and foreign policy, the socialists' attempts to balance anti-war activism with municipal reform policies reflected a new iteration of its big tent organizing. On election day, socialists demonstrated that this balance could capture unanswered demands among their cities' voters and lead to improved vote totals. Socialists in Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati made significant gains in their respective municipal elections. The socialists achieved these improved outcomes by aligning with reformist trends among their communities' electorate, connecting local and wartime issues, and attracting broad-based support from various non-socialist constituencies. In sum, even with the compounding factor of wartime frustrations, the socialist big tent's municipally minded programs and efforts at broad appeal proved they were still attractive and viable.

Election day on November 6, 1917, represented the end of a long, fraught campaign season, throughout which socialists attempted to maintain the tactics and approaches to building socialism they had built over the span of the 1910, even as wartime issues, crackdowns, and backlashes put those tactics in jeopardy. Nevertheless, throughout the course of the campaign, socialists had been

able to appeal to voters outside their local parties and come away with promising, improved outcomes. Socialists in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton each managed to significantly increase their vote in 1917, compared to 1915. Ruthenberg's vote total, for example, rose from around six percent of total votes to 19.3 percent, between the two election years.[91] Meanwhile, Thomas Hammerschmidt raised the vote total of Local Cincinnati fourfold, from three to nearly twelve percent.[92] In both cities, socialist organizers, campaigners, and leaders had managed to attract defecting voters from the Democratic Party, despite the increased obstacles presented by wartime crackdowns, hostile presses, and extended legal hurdles. The press in both cities reported voters' feelings of dissatisfaction with local administrations and candidates, as well as with how the federal government and municipal incumbents handled of compounding, war-related issues, like restrictions on speech and certain commodities like coal and foodstuffs.[93] Although pro-war attacks resonated throughout the campaign in community institutions and presses, the socialists demonstrated that they could still attract new voters, by maintaining their focus on community-minded campaigns.

Lower on the ticket, socialists in Cleveland and Cincinnati found greater success in school board and city council races, often based on local movements and issues. In Cincinnati, Lotta Burke received over 2,000 more votes in her school board race than Hammerschmidt earned in his mayoral race – an outcome she credited to votes from non-socialist suffrage and Christian reform movements.[94] As was true since its formation, Local Cincinnati remained reliant on cooperation with non-socialist activists, with whom they collaborated to achieve shared political goals.

[91] Paul H. Douglas, "The Socialist Vote in the Municipal Elections of 1917," *Municipal Review* 7, 2 (1918), 136.
[92] "Pluralities of Winners Shown in this Table," *Cincinnati Post*, November 7, 1917, 6.
[93] "John Galvin Is Elected Mayor of Cincinnati," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, November 7, 1917, 9; "Galvin Victor, but Is Behind Party's Ticket," *Cincinnati Post*, November 7, 1917, 1; "Drys Will Watch Last Count Here," *Cleveland Plain Dealer* November 8, 1917, 1-2.
[94] "Pluralities of Winners Shown in this Table," 6; Lotta Burke, "Christian Fortitude," Maurice McCracken Papers, box 2, folder 22, CHLA, 3.

However, even if the Local had quadrupled its vote totals since the last elections, its prevailing base was still insulated among its reformist allies and groups in Cincinnati, rather than among a broadened coalition.

Meanwhile, two socialist city councilmen and a socialist school board member were elected in Cleveland. While Democratic officials in Cuyahoga County blamed Ruthenberg's strong anti-war organizing for mobilizing defectors in their party, the socialists that won on his coat tails were often more moderate than Ruthenberg and emphasized their municipal platforms. Councilmen-elect J.G. Willert and Noah Mandelkorn stressed their allegiance to Local Cleveland's municipal ownership platform as the concern that had driven their campaign and would define their time on the city council, when speaking to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. [95] Newly elected school board member A.L. Hitchcock promised to follow the Socialist Party's education platform, specifically its peace provisions, and further stated his driving interest as a candidate and on the school board was providing students free meals and textbooks.[96] For Cleveland, the municipal elections of 1917 were further defined by the success of municipal bond initiatives, increasing funding for schools and publicly owned utilities by wide majorities. These results signified that voters had participated in a general trend toward increased local reform and government spending on municipal utilities and infrastructure. In part, this wave of reformist sentiment likely assisted the socialists in their victory. Ruthenberg had been able to mobilize anti-war defectors in the Democratic Party through his weekly speeches and wide distribution of anti-war literature, but municipal ownership, reform, and the alleviation of community issues still significantly contributed to socialists' successes.

[95] Judd, 166; "Drys Will Watch Last Count Here," 2.
[96] "Drys Will Watch Last Count Here," 2.

In the two-way race between the socialists and the Citizens' Committee in Dayton, the courting of Democratic voters in the time between the primary and general elections, including the increased rhetoric of Americanism and the involvement of Democratic officials in the Citizens' Committee's campaign, had been a deciding factor in the outcome of the general election. Local Dayton received forty-three percent of the vote, its largest at-large total since it was formed nearly two decades earlier. While the local had struggled in at-large elections for the city commission since they were instituted in 1913, by courting and receiving Democrats' votes in 1917, the socialists also managed to extend their appeal beyond the low-income, industrial third and tenth wards, from which they had typically drawn much of their membership. The local's candidate who received the highest vote, Willard Barringer, drew an average of forty-four percent of the vote across all of Dayton's wards. Although the party failed to break through in the first, fourth, and fifth wards of the city, among their middle-class, major-party voters, they managed to attract support from trade unionists in the city, from both predominantly German and native-born American wards. As John T. Walker demonstrates, German votes alone were likely not enough to account for the socialists' high election totals in Dayton. The German-dominated tenth, eleventh, and twelfth wards combined to provide Local Dayton around 53.8 percent of Dayton's German vote. Meanwhile, predominantly native-born American wards, like the sixth, seventh, and eighth, provided Local Dayton around forty-five percent of the city's native-born, trade unionist and working-class vote. While the Germans voted for Local Dayton at greater rates, it failed to do so at exceeding rates. Moreover, nearly half of German-born voters still voted for their old parties, showing that wartime factors may not have been enough to sway Dayton's voters, despite the anti-German suspicions which prevailed throughout the war.[97] This result was perhaps a result of

[97] Walker, 123; Judd, 166; "Socialists Are Beaten Here," *Dayton Daily News*, November 7, 1917, 1.

courting these voters from the Democratic Party and Citizens' Committee, which were well-represented throughout the city, compounded by wartime protest votes by around half of Dayton's German population.

Barringer's vote increased between the primaries and election day, but he and the socialists were outcompeted by the Citizens' Committee, who received far greater turnout from their own party's voters and support from Democratic voters, all of whom had been mobilized since the primaries to oppose a potential socialist threat.[98] Local Dayton attempted to preserve its focus on local issues – the source of its success throughout the 1910 – but it had been outcompeted based on the national, wartime issues that became unavoidable, especially among voters who did not vote in the primary and Democrats who did not diverge from their party in August. Municipal issues lost much of their appeal, as the major parties and presses transformed the central question of the election to energize Democratic loyalists and non-voters. Losing on the question of which party had the better vision for the city, the pro-war coalition won by asking which party could best support the U.S. and its values, in the face of an international crisis.

After the municipal elections of 1917, Ohioan socialists found themselves in a more successful party that had achieved public office in the state's largest city and increased its vote totals by thousands in Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Dayton. While the S.P.A. attempted to construct a uniform approach to national issues like the war, in the localities where organizing and campaigning took place. Still, approaches varied as they had throughout the decade, according to the specific demands and constraints socialists experienced in their respective cities, as well as the goals socialists developed for themselves. The socialists of Local Dayton, having reached political office earlier in the decade, attempted to run a campaign that could attract as many voters as

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[98] Socialists Are Beaten Here," 1.

possible to recreate that electoral success. Sensing that repression and backlash could result from hardline opposition to the war, Local Dayton attempted to center their race around citywide issues, which had often been a source of strength for it. Simultaneously, the socialists of Cleveland and Cincinnati never achieved such tangible, electoral success, but they were incentivized to participate in their cities' politics by the idea that they could educate their fellow community members. In these cities, more radical socialists hoped to use municipal campaigns and involvement in reformist efforts to bring class consciousness to greater numbers of people, then enlist them in the class struggle for political and economic power. The eventuality of a socialist government incentivized these divergent parties to remain united under the banner of the Socialist Party. Even if the tactics to achieve socialist political power remained in question, each local party maintained enough autonomy to diverge, when they sensed it was needed.

Initially, this ability to diverge and remain covered by the socialist big tent was a source of success. Local Dayton avoided negative political and legal reactions to their campaign, then decisively won their primary elections, by disengaging from a controversial anti-war platform that had been adopted by their national party and attracting voters through a reformist message. However, the big tent that allowed for Local Dayton's success also eventually led to repression or reaction in Ohio's cities. In Cleveland and Cincinnati, socialists who built power outside of established government institutions, and openly resisted them by advocating resistance and opposition to the war effort, were subject to aggressive crackdowns throughout the war effort. But eventually, pro-war opponents used moderate socialists' membership in the big tent party to connect them to these acts of resistance. Whether they actively resisted the war or not, the moderates of cities like Dayton were allies of their more radical comrades, had accepted the anti-war platform in their party, and according to the Americanist line that emerged in 1917, played

into the interests of anti-American powers. The issue of the war became unavoidable for socialists, even if they moderated their agitation to avoid legal crackdowns and resulting organizational gaps, caused by arrests and lengthy trials.

Even if the socialists increased their vote totals against immense pro-war opposition, these successes came at a severe cost. Increasingly, socialists' engagement in the political sphere was fraught with legal, institutional, and even popular hostility. Dayton's press aggressively portrayed the socialists as traitorous and their engagement in local politics as a threat, negating many of the strides Local Dayton had made by the end of the election. These portrayals of the socialists as traitorous, and the belief that they could spread their treason through their political organizing, came to define them to many pro-war Americans. In Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati, the fear of treason invited greater repression and opposition; it resulted in laws that restricted socialist propagandizing, speaking, and recruitment. The socialist big tent initially represented a style of organizing for the local socialists, who each engaged in aggressive municipal campaigning, even if they were means toward different ends. After 1917, it represented their larger party's ties to anti-war resistance and invited restrictions to socialists' ability to engage in their communities' politics. As a result, pro-war opponents connected the socialists' local organizing to national and international issues, attempting to close socialists out of local political institutions and justifying their actions under national security issues.

2. Socialists and Their Political Rights

After the fraught municipal election cycle of 1917, the socialist entered 1918 with mixed prospects. In Cleveland, where three socialists were elected to positions on the city council and school board, Local Cleveland could directly influence its city's policymaking. Even where the socialists lost their elections in 1917, in Dayton and Cincinnati, the socialists grew their vote totals and demonstrated their party's potential to grow its influence among voters and community members. However, at the beginning of 1918, many of the S.P.O.'s left-wing leaders were due to be tried and imprisoned for violations of the Espionage Act and charges that their agitation was obstructive to American involvement in the First World War. Moreover, facing statewide and congressional elections – which were historically less conducive to socialists' campaign and propaganda efforts than municipal elections – with many of the state party's most effective organizers taken out of the field by legal repercussions, socialists faced numerous challenges to continue building their party's momentum. Still, party leaders urged their comrades to remain committed to socialist organizing. After all, their new positions in government afforded them newfound legitimacy and protection to criticize capitalist interests and the American war effort, and they could still challenge the convictions of party members in the courts, on the grounds that they violated socialists' civil liberties.

However, even as the Socialist Party assumed the government would protect its rights to political expression and involvement, government officials demonstrated that they would go to extraordinary lengths to protect the American war effort, even restricting anti-war dissent in its institutions and in public if necessary. As the government increasingly justified its restrictions of socialist organizing by pointing to the Socialist Party's anti-war platform, which committed the party to resisting the war by all available means, and the potential it had to weaken the war effort,

socialists began to sense a conflict between their position on war issues and their continued involvement in established political institutions. Their "big tent" style of organizing, which oriented them toward seeking government positions, relied on the socialists' ability to legitimately campaign, speak and propagandize about their criticisms of the existing American government, even if those criticisms ended with the eventual dismantling and replacement of that government. Tightened wartime restrictions and accelerating legal consequences for anti-war expression threatened to prevent the socialists from running such critical campaigns. If the government would not protect their rights to do so, they remained open to arrest, prosecution, conviction, and even violence from their fellow citizens. Since the government asserted the socialists' organizing and expression was illegitimate because they represented a danger to the war effort, their anti-war position seemed to come into conflict with the party's political prospects; the socialists became unsure whether their government or fellow citizens would allow them to achieve any political influence. Northern Ohio's left-wing socialists viewed the suppression of their civil liberties and political rights as evidence that the socialist movement needed to confront capitalists and the U.S. government more openly and aggressively. Meanwhile, moderates separated themselves from the anti-war platform to avoid the legal and political consequences of wartime dissent. Because of this conflict between the socialists' anti-war platform and their continued political involvement, the factional divide between left-wing and moderate socialists became more pronounced.

I. Socialists and Civil Liberties

As socialists throughout Ohio prepared for trial or to go to prison for their anti-war organizing in 1918, they maintained their innocence, citing their rights to free speech against government policies they disagreed with and political activism as proof. Nevertheless, the

socialists found the government unwilling to accept these appeals to constitutional rights, as the judiciary and legal thinkers increasingly held that national security concerns were a justifiable reason to limit political expression, against speakers and writers who could potentially convince other citizens to not participate or to actively obstruct the American war effort. As a result, the Socialist Party's legal battles confronted its members with a new constraint: their intuitive assumptions that the ideals and rights of the American government – and the idealism of its liberal leaders – would naturally protect them from prosecution and suppression were not guaranteed. Rather, these institutions' commitments to civil liberties began to appear tenuous and unconvincing to the socialists they indicted and imprisoned.

As Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker prepared for their imprisonment at the Stark County Work House in Canton, Ohio, they maintained their innocence and the illegitimacy of their arrest and legal proceedings. According to a statement he wrote to the *Evening Call*, Ruthenberg stressed that the "ruling class" was only attempting to silence the socialists' "truth telling." Ruthenberg, his co-defendants, and his supporters decried the "ruling class" for finding a "Judas" – a man named Alphonse Schue, who alleged that he did not register for the draft because he listened to speeches delivered by Ruthenberg, et al., in May 1917. Socialists charged that they could not verify Shue's attendance, and that the witness was only trying to "save himself from punishment.[99] As Ruthenberg wrote, "we go to jail smilingly, and at the end of the year we will return to the work we believe in; the cause we fought for and will fight for again."[100] After all, according to figures like Ruthenberg, they were educating workers and supporters about the "truth": capitalists' class interests incurred costs that were suffered by working-class soldiers and

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[99] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "Cleveland Socialists Go to Jail for Cause," *Evening Call*, January 17, 1918, 1, 3; "Preface," *Guilty? Of What?: Speeches before the Jury in Connection with the Trial of C.E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles* Baker (Cleveland: Cleveland Socialist News), 3-4
[100] Ruthenberg, "Cleveland Socialists Go to Jail for Cause," 3.

civilian workers, and the government's decision to go to war reflected the power of the capitalists' interests.[101] The Supreme Court ruled against them, socialists argued, for taking a principled stance against American militarism, U.S. involvement in the First World War, and the class interests those issues represented.

Of course, the Court did not lay out any extended considerations of class interests or their connection to the American military effort, but instead began deciding on wartime civil liberties cases with an interest in protecting against potential threats to national security. According to Chief Justice Edward Douglass White, the socialists' anti-conscription speeches plainly broke the conscription law's restriction against "abetting" draft-dodging, which could threaten elements of the war effort that Congress deemed necessary for American security.[102] A similar, landmark argument was offered in the soon-to-be argued and decided case *Schenck v. United States*, in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes held that the government could restrict civil liberties to safeguard against "clear and present danger."[103] As the legislative and executive branches increasingly used national security as justification to pass laws limiting free speech, the Supreme Court trended toward security interests when they conflicted with civil liberties. Socialists remained confident that idealistic appeals to their free speech rights would protect against prosecution and imprisonment for their rallies and speeches, since the Constitution allowed for no restrictions of political criticism. However, despite socialists' expectations that they would be allowed to criticize the war effort under constitutional protections, the Supreme Court readily justified their suppression, since it was duly passed by Congress and included under the federal government's wartime duties.

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[101] Ibid.
[102] *Ruthenberg v. United States*, 245 U.S. 480 (1918).
[103] *Schenck v. United States,* 249 U.S. 47 (1919).

The socialists' strategy for legal defense, based on an appeal to civil liberties, was broadly established in 1917, nationally and in Ohio, when socialists received their first federal charges. Socialists were not alone in their opposition to the Espionage Act or other government measures to restrict anti-war speech; they were joined by prominent, progressive reformers and figures like Jane Addams and Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin. Nationally, some members of this reformist and progressive milieu joined with socialists to oppose new Acts of Congress and bureaucratic measures to suppress anti-war dissent, like the Postal Service's revocation of second-class mailing privileges for anti-war – and socialist – newspapers. Figures ranging from Addams to Max Eastman of New York, the prominent socialist editor of the *Masses*, sometimes combined their efforts to make appeals to government figures. Both Addams' and Eastman's signed a letter to President Woodrow Wilson, asking Wilson to speak against restrictions to Americans' "immemorial rights and privileges" and warning him that

> "[M]eetings have been broken up, speakers have been arrested, censorship has been exercised not to prevent the transmission of information to enemy countries, but to a free discussion…of [Americans'] own problems and policies."[104]

According to historians like Ernest Freeberg, rather than naïveté such appeals demonstrated a sense of trust in the "liberal inclinations" of the progressives in the presidential administration and the federal government, as well as a sense that progressive and liberal officials would "chime in" and intervene against suppression of free speech, even if they were pro-war.[105]

In some sense, the socialists agreed with this trust in the goodwill of liberal and progressive officials and fellow citizens. In Cleveland, where two socialists took their city council seats in

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[104] Ernest Freeberg, *Democracy's Prisoner: Eugene V. Debs, the Great War, and the Right to Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 52.
[105] Ibid., 53.

1918, after beating major-party incumbents in 1917, the local Socialist Party was rather enthusiastic about the prospects of its program. Even as Ruthenberg prepared for his year-long prison term in Canton, he reported feeling optimism that socialist Councilmen Noah Mandelkorn and J.G. Willert would be able to voice support for labor-friendly, local reforms, sway the council from militaristic policies in municipal institutions, and have their opinions considered equally to those of their colleagues. In his writings, it is ironic that Ruthenberg did not trust Cleveland's municipal government to work in the interests of a "cooperative commonwealth" or to acknowledge the interests of the working class, while still trusting it to take socialist policies into equal, tolerant consideration. Still, Ruthenberg squared this expectation with an appeal to American political norms. Writing in retrospect, in 1919, Ruthenberg stated his expectation that the new city councilmen, "under the American institutions and ideals had a perfect right" to oppose the war, as well as "a right to uphold their views by votes and measures that came before them."[106] These rights for officeholders seemed commonplace in legislative bodies, both in America and internationally. Even under the German Reich, as Ruthenberg pointed out, when radical socialist and political dissident Karl Liebknecht spoke against the First World War and voted against funding the war effort, he was "unmolested" and retained the his seat in the Reichstag.[107] Given the seemingly universal nature of these rights and norms around political speech and engagement, left-wing socialists maintained their acceptance and recognition of American political rights, even if the government that ensured them was necessarily the target of a future revolution.

Arguing their case before a federal court in Cleveland in the summer of 1917, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker displayed their expectation American civil liberties and political norms would be strictly adhered to. Under the legal defense of Local Dayton's Joseph Sharts, a lawyer

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[106] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "News and Views," *Ohio Socialist*, April 9, 1919, 4.
[107] Ibid.

who would defend socialists throughout Ohio over the duration of the First World War, both the moderate and left-wing factions of the socialist big tent demonstrated their continued dependence on America's established political institutions and ideals. In a statement to the jury, Sharts attempted to establish the socialists as part of a prevailing dissident tradition in the United States – one which encompassed beliefs that may have seemed fringe in their own times, but that came to be accepted with the involvement of their communicators in American political and civic life. "I say these men are of the same breed as Abraham Lincoln," Sharts argued, "who opposed the Mexican war, or of the abolitionists, who opposed the Fugitive Slave Law."[108] The socialists were faced with congressmen who argued in favor of the Espionage Act that, "If your speech goes to the point of being treasonous, you are denied that right, and you ought to be," or in President Wilson's case, that socialists and anti-war groups were attempting to "undermine the Government with false professions of loyalty to its principles."[109] To the socialists, Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionists represented loyalty to the U.S. and a truer struggle for freedom and democratic principles; they defeated the Southern aristocracy during the Civil War, and had worked to free the slaves in the South – who existed in their historical memory as an exploited, oppressed workforce. The socialists established a view of loyalty to the U.S. that was based on this perception of events like the Civil War. To legitimize their opposition to the war effort and government policy, socialists claimed to be working in the interest of greater, more prevailing struggles for freedom in the U.S. Even if the socialists could not accept the First World War as part of these struggles, they demonstrated adherence to American democratic principles and struggles for them.

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[108] Joseph W. Sharts, "Argument by Mr. Joseph W. Sharts, Attorney for the Defense," *Guilty? Of What?: Speeches before the Jury in Connection with the Trial of Charles E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht and Charles Baker* (Cleveland: Cleveland Socialist News), 78.
[109] Freeberg, 50, 53.

Still, many socialists understood that their opponents would not accept their right to free speech if they used it to oppose the war. Almost as soon as the declaration of war and S.P.A.'s anti-war platform passed, moderate moved to ensure its radical tenets did not spur local opponents to violate their basic democratic rights. Again, the moderates of Local Dayton looked to the struggles of their comrades in other cities when setting out their organizational strategies, and as in 1917, conditions seemed politically and legally unfavorable to those who opposed the war. When some members of Local Dayton proposed taking a more explicit stance against the war in a meeting, perhaps since the Local was not actively engaged in an urgent campaign, the party's leaders rejected the action. At least until the Local's leadership had time to intensely review their members' remarks and ensure they could not be construed as advocating the destabilization of the U.S. government or its war effort, the party barred its members from engaging in "war expression to…the prejudiced public."[110] As historian John T. Walker demonstrated, Local Dayton leader Joseph Sharts ensured his party did not experience legal struggles similar to those of his defendants in other cities. As party leader and resident legal strategist, Sharts obtained injunctions that prevented police from intervening in socialist rallies and ensured the party used "futuristic" language when party members spoke and wrote about the war. In Dayton, socialist speakers never suggested nonparticipation or obstructionism, only describing how wartime policies could lead to future erosions of civil liberties and escalated militarism.[111] The pragmatism of the socialists in Dayton did not signify an ideological divergence from other local parties, as the party remained anti-war and committed to electoral political action. However, because Local Dayton witnessed the struggles of other parties and sensed the emergence of security-minded limits on the ideals of

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[110] Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, March 1, 1918, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.
[111] Walker, 122-124; Edelman interview.

civil liberties, its members ensured they never attracted sanction for anti-war speech by moderating their rhetoric and proactively implementing legal regulations in their party affairs.

The right of free speech also continued to dominate Local Dayton's anti-war dissent, as it did in the courts of other cities. Although Local Dayton remained untouched by law enforcement, it lent its support to notable socialists charged under the Espionage Act, often incorporating elements of establishment views on civil liberties and reflecting the idealism of notable progressives. Referring to the case of Scott Nearing, a professor at the University of Toledo who faced charges under the Espionage Act, Local Dayton pointed to the opinions of Judge Learned Hand. As a respected thinker in constitutional law who sat on the federal bench, Judge Hand affirmed the right "to think, feel, and express…disapproval of any law or policy…including the declaration of war, the conscription act and the so-called sedition causes of the espionage act."[112] Moreover, in their editorial, the socialists argued the Nearing case was vital because it would determine if Judge Hand's sentiment would survive the war in America's legal institutions and government, so that the expression of disagreement could not be suppressed "even though they are opposed to the opinions or policies of the [Wilson] administration."[113] Even if Local Dayton remained pragmatic in their approach to war issues, attempting to avoid legal repercussions through careful remarks and cautious association with anti-war sentiments, their role in the Socialist Party was to defend their comrades' more radical expression. To legitimate that expression, the moderates of Local Dayton appealed heavily to established, respected legal and political figures.

The socialists' invocation of their rights and the norms of politics and law remained major facets of legal defenses in Cincinnati, as they had been in Cleveland. Characteristically, Local Cincinnati

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[112] "Nearing Case Is Vital to All," *Miami Valley Socialist*, May 31, 1918, 1.
[113] Ibid., 3.

required a great amount of outside assistance in its legal proceedings in 1918, provided by Edward F. Alexander, a progressive, "good government" activist and attorney in Cincinnati, with assistance from Sharts. After lengthy delays, the trial of the thirteen socialists accused of draft resistance, including Lotta Burke and Thomas Hammerschmidt, continued through May. Alexander's notes of the trial portray nearly a year's worth of oversteps and violations by the legal system, which he utilized heavily in his statements to the federal court in Cincinnati. According to the case Alexander made for the thirteen socialists, everyone from the jailers to the investigators to the prosecutors violated the defendants' rights, safety, and privacy. The defendants' personal belongings, such as a copy of the S.P.A. constitution, were admitted as evidence to portray them as members of a vast "political conspiracy," when it effectively only demonstrated their basic adherence to their party's platform.[114] Throughout his defense, Alexander highlighted the apparent superficiality of the case. By admitting such a basic item as the party constitution, bound in its red cover, the prosecutors were attempting to make the jury "see red" – or the defendants' mere involvement in a radical, anti-war political group, rather than the reasons for and effects of their opposition. According to the thirteen socialists' defense, the prosecution relied only on the connotations of their involvement in the Socialist Party, their political beliefs, and their opposition to the war and conscription, not whether they had convinced anyone to resist the draft. Rather than demonstrating the existence of a political conspiracy, the federal charges against the socialists represented political suppression.

Alexander and the thirteen socialists of Local Cincinnati stressed the physical and mental toll their imprisonment and prosecution had incurred. To this end, the defense emphasized the experience of Lotta Burke, who Cincinnati police sent to a jail in Dayton after her arrest. Burke's

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[114] Edward F. Alexander, "Oral Argument at Trial," handwritten notes, Edward F. Alexander Papers, box 1, CHLA, 6-7, 15-16.

lawyers reported their interactions with Burke in the jail, which had few women on staff and where she recounted a guard violently assaulting the only other female prisoner. Alexander and Sharts further stated that Burke had experienced a mental breakdown in the jail, due to stress it caused her, emphasizing that she was a "good woman" who lived a moral life outside of her role in the Socialist Party.[115] Again, in May 1918, the trial was again delayed, when the court agreed with the defense that the trial could be "dangerous and unnecessary," especially considering Burke's health.[116] Beyond being prosecuted for their mere involvement with the Socialist Party, Alexander argued that the thirteen socialists' personal interactions with law enforcement and the legal system were part of a developing undemocratic trend in the United States. Burke's fraught imprisonment was only one of several aspects of the legal process that demonstrated its "prejudice" against the defendants and threatened their ability to obtain justice "with irrelevant cries of disloyalty, pro-Germanism, pacifism, and whatnot."[117] According to the socialists' defense, the trial was an act of political suppression against them, given the prosecution's attempts to tie them to a sort of socialist conspiracy, and their difficulties within the legal system represented unjust, unwarranted punishments for their political engagement. In short, prosecution and imprisonment represented punishments for their free political expression and engagement, covered by their rights as citizens.

Although the effects and severity of prosecution varied between the S.P.O.'s locals, the parties of Cleveland, Dayton, and Cincinnati collaborated to develop a legal defense that stressed socialists' civil liberties and political rights. Local Dayton sought to evade prosecution and legal repercussions that were incurred on anti-war voices by only expressing anti-war sentiment carefully and sparingly, but it helped to develop this strategy, which would be applied uniformly

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[115] Joseph W. Sharts to Edward F. Alexander, July 8, 1917, Edward F. Alexander Papers, box 1, CHLA, 1-2.
[116] Alexander, "Oral Argument at Trial," 2; "Woman Socialist Pleas Illness to Delay Trial," *Cincinnati Post*, April 20, 1918, 3; "Socialists Win Delay," *Cincinnati Post*, May 20, 1918, 6.
[117] Alexander, "Oral Argument at Trial," 2.

by socialists across Ohio's cities. The socialists' legal defense demonstrated an aspect of their politics that still aligned with non-socialist progressives and reformists, some of whom were also critical of the war: the right to free political expression was an important aspect of American democracy, and the suppression and prosecution of anti-war speech represented a break in the United States' democratic norms.

Even to the most revolutionary-minded of Ohio's socialists, like C.E. Ruthenberg, the right to free speech seemed universal and necessary, not only in the U.S. but in other governments he certainly viewed as flawed. As much as they criticized their government, the legal system, and the figures within it, the socialists trusted in the legitimacy of their political rights; their legal defenses attempted to act as a reminder of that legitimacy and the ways in which it was contradicted by the legal restrictions, prosecutions, and imprisonment they faced. In sum, the socialists' invocations of civil liberties represented a basic level of institutional trust, that the party could solve its problems through equal and fair engagement with the U.S. government, even if its current course could not solve larger political and economic issues.

II. Crises in Cleveland: The Breakdown of Socialists' Political Rights

The spring and summer of 1918 represented a period of increasing difficulty for northern Ohio's socialists, in Local Cleveland and in the S.P.O.'s state office, as they were targeted as a potential threat to security and stability in their community. Cleveland's municipal government marginalized, then ousted, its new socialist officials. In the Stark County Work House, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker faced not only hard labor but outright violence from prison officials. Even in a moment of apparent triumph, when the party's icon Eugene V. Debs came to the S.P.O.'s state convention in Canton to lend his support to the imprisoned comrades, he was

subjected to legal repercussions that resembled theirs. In many respects, these succeeding crises for northern Ohio's socialists represented explicit political repression, which they would compare to the regimes of Germany's Kaiser and Russia's Tsar. Witnessing their party's struggles in the face of ever-mounting restrictions, charges, and backlash, the left-wing socialists of northern Ohio ceased to appeal to their rights under the American government. The socialists' appeals to democratic ideals and rights were portrayed as easily subverted according to militaristic and capitalist interests. Whereas the socialists' rights seemed natural in the months and years prior, left-wing socialists doubted that those rights could be legitimate under the government institutions that limited political rights to secure its war effort, as well as whether that government held any utility for their movement whatsoever.

When C.E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker were sent to serve their sentence at the Stark County Work House in February 1918, they expressed their disappointment that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against their case but emphasized there was much reason for enthusiasm in the party. Ruthenberg was cautiously optimistic that his party had elected members to Cleveland's city council and school board. Although they were a minority in these government bodies, representing only two council seats and one school board member, these new officials held newfound influence for Local Cleveland; they could be a voice of opposition against militaristic policies and worker-friendly policies in the city.[118] As leaders of the state party, Wagenknecht and Baker put on a brave face, declaring that their imprisonment only represented a "vacation" from organizing, but that they trusted the S.P.O. and its members to continue their work. From the work the three new convicts had done in January, the S.P.O. and Local Cleveland likely appeared that they would maintain continuity. Arrangements were made to make Hortense Wagenknecht and

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[118] Ruthenberg, "News and Views," 4.

Rose Ruthenberg, the wives of Alfred and Charles, state secretary and secretary of Local Cleveland respectively. At a rally in January 1918, the S.P.O. reported a turnout of three thousand party members in unfavorable winter weather, at a rally in support of the party leaders and in protest of American war measures.[119] Reminding party members to not be intimidated, that it was "not a crime" to oppose government policies, and that the election results of 1917 represented a sign of future success for the Socialist Party – "IT CAN BE DONE EVERYWHERE!" – the three socialists trusted that their party would continue to successfully organize in their absence.[120]

On January 1, 1918, when Cleveland's first socialist city councilmembers and school board member took their seats, their non-socialist peers and local observers raised concerns about their fitness to sit on the city's government bodies because their anti-war platforms contrasted with the city government's active participation in the national war effort. Namely, these groups worried that the socialists would attempt to rally opposition against the wartime measures of Cleveland's government bodies, as well as the local policies suggested by other officials. The city government's major parties intended to collaborate more with local, citizen-led organizations, which could mobilize civilians to contribute to the war effort, and to reassess its rationing of food and utilities. On January 2, 1918, two days after the newly constituted school board and city council were called to order, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that the City of Cleveland had offered four school buildings to the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense, where information about involvement in the war would be distributed. The Council announced that recruitment sessions and Americanization courses would take place in the school buildings.[121] Since the Socialist Party's members were committed by their its platform to oppose these wartime

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[119] "Three Thousand People Stand in Cold and Snow to Hear Protest Speeches," *Ohio Socialist*, January 25, 1918, 3.
[120] "Do Not Be Afraid," *Ohio Socialist*, January 11, 1918, 4.
[121] "War Centers Will Open in 4 Schools," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 3, 1918, 9.

measures, the socialists could present obstacles to the city government's policymaking on these issues.

Suspicions of the socialist city officials came to a head in March, when Republicans and Democrats sought to remove Noah Mandelkorn and J.G. Willert from their seats, as charges that the socialists were a destabilizing force escalated. In some respects, suspicions of socialists' disruptiveness proved overblown in the preceding months, as socialists willingly compromised with their peers. As the socialist councilmen and board members introduced laws that would create city-mandated unions, they instead choose to settle for repeals of city laws banning unions in public jobs, bringing quick solutions to the issue.[122] However, socialists' rigidity on war issues conflicted seemed to prove their peers' suspicions right. On March 20, 1918, the *Plain Dealer* reported that the leading Republicans and Democrats on the city council convened for a "ways and means meeting" to determine how to oust the socialists from their seats. Republican Leader Zmundt asserted that, while the "means" for the socialists' removal were uncertain, the Republican and Democratic council members had cause and the ability to remove Mandelkorn and Willert.[123] According to the Republicans and Democrats, the socialist councilmen violated their oath of office to support the constitutions of the U.S. and Ohio, as well as their governments, when they voted against pro-war resolutions before the council. Republicans and Democrats noted that socialists opposed a resolution in support of the Cuyahoga County Patriotic Service League, in a vote that Mandelkorn and Willert overwhelmingly lost. To justify their opposition, the socialists simply appealed to their ideology and described the war as a capitalist attempt to concentrate wealth; they were attempting to protect their city from control by capitalist militarism.[124] The socialists not only

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[122] "Sets Year's Goal for School Board," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, January 9, 1918, 9; "High School Teachers Vote for Union Overwhelmingly," *Cleveland Citizen*, January 26, 1918, 1.
[123] "Join to Remove Two Socialists," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 20, 1918, 4.
[124] Ibid.

impeded the city's war effort by voting against collaboration with a local, pro-war organization, but they also engaged in disorderly conduct by questioning the legitimacy of a federal law in such terms, according to council members.

To consolidate their shared power on the council and to reverse election results that lost both parties seats on the city council, the major parties further committed to ousting the socialists from office. Some local observers viewed the move as questionable, though, idealistically aligning with the socialists. Representing the Civic League, an organization that concerned itself with voting issues, Mayo Fesler asserted that the decision to oust the socialists was unprecedented, since the council had "no legal authority to expel members expressing opinions, however distasteful those opinions may be."[125] Voters would also lose their say in who represented them on the council if the removal process was allowed to proceed, effectively negating the certified results of the 1917 elections.[126] Nevertheless, the parties held strong in their decision and went so far as to negotiate a plan to fill the soon-to-be empty council seats: one would be filled by a Republican and the other by a Democrat. One source to the *Plain Dealer* surmised that Republican Charles Dickerson and Democrat William Wagner, the incumbent runners-up to Mandelkorn and Willert in their 1917 campaigns, would be the parties' choices to fill the seats.[127] The major-party councilmembers introduced charges against Mandelkorn and Willert on March 26, and proceedings to remove them began on March 27. Even though the council accepted the election results by seating the socialists in January, the major parties on the council effectively used war issues as a justification to reverse those results and to reseat their own members.

[125] "Declares Council Can't Oust Two," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 23, 1918, 3.
[126] Ibid.
[127] "Ordered to Back Socialist Ouster," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 22, 1918, 9.

In response to the city council proceedings, the S.P.O. and Local Cleveland used appeals to their ideology and political rights to legitimize their place on the city council and demonstrate the undemocratic behavior of the council's major-party members. In the *Ohio Socialist*, the Socialist Party described the removal proceedings as retribution by the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and the capitalist interests of the city; the socialists represented a "thorn in the side" of those interests by protecting the "common people" and the workers who elected them.[128] Aside from these ideological contentions, the socialists also condemned the major-party councilmembers for obstructing the democratic norms of the city council. The socialists attended to their "civic duties" on the city council, but the other councilmembers punished the socialists for doing "what the voters who elected them expect[ed] them to do," including the opposition to militarization and the class-conscious municipal reforms that Mandelkorn and Willert campaigned on.[129] Finally, the S.P.O. threatened to initiate recall proceedings on all other councilmembers if their members were indeed removed from office: "We shall then see whether the workers of Cleveland will stand for such a high-handed procedure."[130] The socialists observed the removal proceedings as an uncivil, subversive attack against the socialist officials and the voters – and workers – who elected them to the council. Just as the Civic League's Mayo Fesler asserted in the days before the proceedings began, the socialists had a right to represent an opposition to the more dominant parties and interests that existed in Cleveland's city government. In fact, Mandelkorn and Willert had been elected on a platform that promised such opposition against the war and capital, and the council duly accepted their elections by swearing them into office. Socialists certainly viewed a mass recall as a potential form of democratic recourse and trusted that working-class constituents would not

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[128] "Piker Politicians," *Ohio Socialist*, March 25, 1918, 1.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., 4.

abide by a subversion of their votes. But capitalist and militarist interests in Cleveland seemed to be closing in on the socialists' ability to influence their community, in their government and political institutions.

Appeals to democratic norms in government were unable to defend Local Cleveland's first elected city officials from removal, though, as the security concerns of the war seemed to justify government bodies targeting elements it viewed as subversive. After the proceedings to remove Mandelkorn and Willert began on March 27, they were quickly expelled from the city council. Taking their case to the courts, the socialists were denied reinstatement on the city council. According to Judge Robert M. Morgan, the socialists' case was befitting of removal from their seats for "disorderly conduct…determined by the time, place, and occasion" of their opposition to the war. In his decision, Judge Morgan stated, "Congress, in declaring war, acted for all legislative bodies, all municipalities and all citizens, and it is the duty of all such to uphold the action of Congress."[131] In this way, opposition to the war represented a subversion of the representative functions of Congress, rather than the democratic opposition that the socialists and sympathetic commentators described. An editorial in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* marked the socialists' removal with an editorial describing their victory as undemocratic, rather than their removal. After all, the non-socialist vote was split by Democratic and Republican candidates, who could have feasibly combined their votes to defeat the socialists, who managed to "slip into" the council despite the "unquestioned loyalty" of a majority of their wards' voters.[132] Since the war was legitimized as a struggle for democracy by bodies that represented the will of a majority of Americans, oppositionist positions were portrayed as totally unrepresentative and illegitimate. Even if the socialists were duly elected and sworn into seats on the city council, it was because

[131] "Socialists Lose Council Appeal," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 12, 1918, 4A.
[132] "The Lesson," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 28, 1918, 10.

they managed to subvert the majority will, not because of the strategic shortcomings of their opponents. Opponents could not question the will of the socialists' constituents because their support for the war effort needed to be assumed for it to be legitimate; they could only assert that the socialists received a fluke victory, powered by fringe elements in their city.

On the school board, A.L. Hitchcock experienced a parallel round of removal proceedings, after expressing his own opposition to the American war effort at a board meeting, as fellow board members did not perceive his efforts as rightful political criticism but as subversion of the war effort. Debating a resolution to endorse national legislation for universal military training, Hitchcock followed the Socialist Party line established in 1917: he opposed the teaching of "soldierly skills" to students. However, Hitchcock was one of only two board members to oppose the resolution; a majority of the school board cited their support for President Wilson and Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, who were pushing for such legislation in Washington.[133] Facing a near-consensus on the school board, according to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and other school board members Hitchcock made a "violent," oppositional speech, in which he declared that "big business men" were the only supporters of universal military training. Perhaps most controversially, Hitchcock compared the U.S. Congress and the legislation for universal training to the German Reichstag and its policies – which mandated universal military service for men.[134] Removal proceedings against Hitchcock started soon after and continued through May.

The school board's proceedings were compounded when Hitchcock was charged under the Espionage Act in Toledo, where he spoke against the U.S. government's Liberty Bonds and apparently represented further, explicit subversion of the war effort. Some members of the school board became witnesses in Hitchcock's federal trial, where they supported the case against him,

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[133] "School Board for Universal Training," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, March 19, 1918, 1.
[134] Ibid.

describing his anti-war attitudes as "sneering and contemptuous."[135] Hitchcock's personality conflicts with other school board members compounded with suspicions that his ideology would make him an uncooperative school board member. An increasingly blunt anti-war position and invocation of class interests as a cause of war proved Hitchcock's critics right and led to the removal of yet another socialist official in Cleveland. As of Hitchcock's removal in June, the government bodies of Cleveland completely reversed the socialists' victories from November.

As socialists witnessed the removals of its officials, they increasingly asserted that government bodies were not operating out of adherence to political rights or ideals, using their ideology to understand and explain their political struggles. Writing in 1919, C.E. Ruthenberg described the removal proceedings and their aftermath as a demonstration of "open and avowed class rule and the ruthless suppression of minority opinion."[136] To support the war effort, the Cleveland City Council not only punished the anti-war expression of its own officials, but it removed them from office, and prevented them from fulfilling their duties as elected officials and from working toward the platform on which they had been elected. The S.P.O. and Local Cleveland were enthusiastic when Mandelkorn, Willert, and Hitchcock were elected, since their offices would lend legitimacy and influence to their anti-militaristic, class-conscious policies. When they were ousted, the socialists believed the city government had openly violated their rights to representation to protect the interests of capital and militarism.

In Cleveland, crises continued to mount and compound on one another, as the city government continued to find that socialists' organizing conflicted with community and national security. As Mandelkorn and Willert appealed their removals from office in the courts, and as

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[135] "Gets Data on Hitchcock: School Board Continues Efforts to Remove Socialist," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 17, 1918, 4; "Hitchcock Faces Disloyalty Trial," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 5, 1918, 1A.
[136] Ruthenberg, "News and Views," 4.

Hitchcock fought his charges by the school board and the federal government, the city government took a more direct approach to restricting socialist gatherings and activities. For the socialists, a troubling hint of the city government's more direct hand came in late April, when city officials banned the annual May Day parade and celebration, although organizers from Local Cleveland had already obtained permits. Public Safety Director A.B. Sprosty justified the action as a war measure, out of concern that anti-war expression at the May Day events would weaken the American war effort and strengthen its enemies in turn.[137] The *Cleveland Citizen*, a labor newspaper and sometime collaborator with Local Cleveland, condemned the city's decision: "Some very eminent Czars and Kaisers in Europe have attempted to do the same."[138] Socialists who occupied positions in both their party and organized labor sensed that neither could escape the suppression of rallies, protests, and the public expression that had been so important to recruit supporters. For Local Cleveland's many immigrant members, restrictions were especially pronounced, as they were targeted by police for potentially subversive behavior. Josef N. Jodlbauer, an Austrian-born labor organizer and member of Local Cleveland's German-language branch, recounted that the threats of police, imprisonment, and potential violence seemed ever-present and even condoned by the public and press. Jodlbauer described a general sense that "declared enemies of the country have no [political] rights," especially to publicly engage in "mass action" or criticize government policies.[139] The socialists began to sense that they were being treated as enemies of their country, under the threat of imprisonment and legal reprisals but with no recourse to protect their rights to dissent. Increasingly, as the socialists invoked the policies of

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[137] "City Forbids May Day Fete of Socialists," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 24, 1918, 1; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, April 27, 1918, 4.
[138] "Labor's Politics," 3.
[139] Josef N. Jodlbauer, *Dreizehn Jahre in Amerika, 1910-1923: Eine Autobiografie eines österreichischen Sozialisten* (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 153-154.

the Kaiser and the Tsar to discuss their own suppression, the U.S. seemed to slide toward authoritarianism.

In some cases, the socialists attempted to confront institutional behaviors that seemed to violate their rights, but often this simply led to increased violence – which they increasingly also viewed as arbitrary. Imprisoned in Canton, Ohio, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker remained in contact with the interim leadership of the S.P.O. and observed Local Cleveland's struggles with the city government from a distance. However, the socialists' sense of injustice extended beyond the boundaries of the City of Cleveland and the constitutional arguments they made to dispute their imprisonment; it followed them to Canton. Despite their attempts to reassure their comrades that their prison terms would be a mere delay in their organizing efforts, the socialist leaders' early days at the workhouse were fraught and marked by violence. Assigned to work in the prison laundry, Ruthenberg protested, was accused of impudence, and taken to a windowless isolation cell, where he and Wagenknecht reported they were restrained and beaten. According to Wagenknecht's account, guards strung Ruthenberg from the ceiling by his wrists, then starved and beat him – an episode of protests by Ruthenberg, followed by beatings by guards, that lasted three days.[140] After receiving news of the beatings from a newly released prisoner, Marguerite Prevey and a lawyer went to Canton, where they demanded to check on the injured prisoners. Threatening to publish an exposé in the Cleveland press, the socialists and their lawyer managed to secure better treatment for their imprisoned comrades, according to their accounts.[141] The workhouse contracted Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Baker to work on nearby cabbage farms, where they reported lax supervision, instead of the "stinking steam-laden cellar" of the workhouse laundry.

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[140] Johnson, 131-132; "Socialists Leave Workhouse Soon," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 30, 1918, 1, 11; Alfed Wagenknecht, Interview by Oakley C. Johnson, handwritten notes, Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, box 9, folder 6, OHC, 4-5.

[141] Johnson, 131-132.

Eventually, Ruthenberg worked his way into an office job at the Stark County Work House – an assignment that allowed him to steal paper, so he could secretly write to the socialist presses in Cleveland, at night.[142]

Finding government institutions legally and politically hostile as a result of the war, and that those institutions were willing to go use extraordinary measures to halt socialist organizing, Cleveland's socialist leaders implemented solutions that could come from within the party, outside of traditional politics. From prison, and with the help of their spouses who acted as interim leaders, Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht pushed the socialists on the outside of prison to avoid complacency despite wartime restrictions. Wagenknecht reported that the socialists resorted to underground distribution of their pamphlets to avoid watchful law enforcement. Using the "grapevine" of Cleveland's working class, Local Cleveland continued to distribute its now-illegal pamphlets, some of which urged resistance to conscription and the funding of the American war effort.[143] Still, the S.P.O. urged its locals and members to be careful in their public remarks and published materials about the war effort to avoid prosecution. In many cases, their work would need to be "carried on without reference to the war, the soldiers, the flag or the government" and focused entirely on the broader capitalist system.[144] As the organizational structure of the party weakened due to legal challenged, northern Ohio's socialists instituted some pragmatic solutions similar to those demonstrated by Local Dayton: they moderated their outward remarks and avoided language that could lead them to be legally targeted. However, by doing some underground organizing, northern Ohio's socialists also circumvented overreliance on hostile government institutions for propagandizing and agitating.

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[142] Wagenknecht interview.
[143] Ibid.
[144] "Watch Your Step," *Ohio Socialist*, March 25, 1918, 2.

The leadership of the S.P.O. more frequently looked to international examples of successful agitation and organizing, which it believed could be applied in Cleveland to evade and subvert the "class rule" it observed. To the S.P.O.'s leaders, the Russian Bolsheviks offered the best response to the injustices they experienced in the U.S. After all, the Bolsheviks and other Russian revolutionaries dispossessed the Russian nobility and capitalists of their private holdings, ousted them from government, and ended their own country's disastrous war effort.[145] Deriding the "capitalist press" in Cleveland and the United States for mocking the Bolsheviks, Ruthenberg and other leaders believed that similar ends could be achieved in the United States. The example of the Bolsheviks did "splendid service" to the international and American socialist movements, according to Ruthenberg, who wrote that workers would perceive the Bolsheviks and their followers as proof that wealthy, exploitative ruling classes could be toppled internationally, whether it was Russian aristocrats or American capitalists.[146] In effect, the Bolsheviks exemplified the goal Ruthenberg and his left-wing comrades expressed earlier in the 1910s: that the "revolutionary character" of the socialist movement could prevail, garner widespread support, and empower the socialists and workers, politically and economically. Increasingly, socialists sensed that a true democracy, including workers' control over industry and the extension of civil liberties to proletarians who were disenfranchised, could only come about if it was made according to their ideology.

` In the face of wartime suppression of their political rights, northern Ohio's socialists attempted to demonstrate their dedication to their party's anti-war, class-conscious program. The S.P.O.'s struggles in northern Ohio gained national attention in June 1918 at its state convention at Nimisila Park in Canton, Ohio, across the street from the Stark County Work House. After

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[145] Ibid.
[146] Johnson, 134.

engaging Eugene V. Debs as their marquee speaker, the S.P.O. marketed the event to its locals and members aggressively as an event where they could raise money and refocus themselves on their organizing.[147] In Debs' case, his speech at Nimisila Park was an opportunity to reaffirm the Socialist Party's principles and his commitment to them. Rumors swirled that Debs had recently condemned the national anti-war platform as untenable and called for a convention to reassess its provisions. According to Debs and his remarks before and during the speech, though, this speculation was based in misinterpretation; he told one reporter from the *Plain Dealer* that he only called for a convention to clarify aspects of the platform, but he still believed in its "main ideas."[148] Now District Attorney Edwin Wertz could charge Debs under the Espionage Act, invoking this statement as proof of Debs' intention to obstruct the war effort.[149] This affirmation, along with Debs' speech, became the basis for a nationally covered legal battle over civil liberties – which landed him in a federal penitentiary until 1921.

Anxieties that Debs or other socialists would incur legal penalties for anti-war remarks prevailed at the state convention, as he and the state party leaders were well aware that party leaders' and celebrities' stature in the party offered little protection from prosecution – and, perhaps, made them attractive targets for it. On a speaking tour of Ohio in the two weeks before the convention, Debs reportedly anticipated potential obstacles from law enforcement, though he attracted little noticeable attention from officers. For his remarks in Canton, Debs prepared carefully, only speaking of his anti-war stance broadly as a grab for power among capitalists, and never suggesting resistance to conscription or Liberty Loan funds, as other imprisoned comrades

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[147] "Attend Monster State Picnic, Canton, June 16," *The Ohio Socialist*, June 11, 1918, 1.
[148] Freeberg, 69; Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Debs* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007), 371; C.R. Miller, "Debs Urges Aid to Bolsheviki from America," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 16, 1918, 1.
[149] "Try to Prove Debs Adhered to Party Cry," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, September 11, 1918, 5.

had.[150] After all, prominent socialists proved susceptible to the same legal struggles as their rank-and-file and less well-known party members. Debs' friend Rose Pastor Stokes, a nationally known speaker and friend of Debs, received an indictment, as had national party's moderate power broker Victor Berger. As District Attorney Wertz later stated, "No man in the United States is too big to be prosecuted under the espionage act."[151]

In many respects, Debs' speech was similar to many that he delivered throughout his career, but it also worked as an address on the state of the Socialist Party, using socialists' ideological commitments to make sense of their suppression by security-minded opponents. After visiting Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht, and Charles Baker before his speech, Debs commended them for "paying the penalty for their devotion to the cause of the working class. They have come to realize, as many of us have, that it is extremely dangerous to exercise the constitutional right of free speech in a country fighting to make democracy safe in the world."[152] As Debs pointed to this irony that had frustrated socialists for more than a year, that the government used a war in democracy's name to subvert democratic rights, a court stenographer transcribed the speech for District Attorney Wertz in the crowd. In many points in the speech Debs blamed anti-socialist backlash, as Ohio's left-wing did, on the capitalists, or "Wall Street gentry," which he asserted captured American institutions and manipulated them in their interests.[153] In some ways, the speech was intended to rally the socialists to enthusiasm, as Debs referenced the Bolsheviks' success and the democratic success it represented. But more significantly, Debs used the speech as a platform to vent the party's uncertainty of whether they could trust the idealistic goodwill of

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[150] Freeberg, 69; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 291.
[151] Miller, "Debs Urges Aid to Bolsheviki from America," 1.
[152] Eugene V. Debs, "Canton Speech," in *Eugene V. Debs' Canton Speech* (Chicago: Socialist Party of the United States), 3-4.
[153] Ibid., 7-8, 10-11, 14-16.

their government, questioning the legitimacy of its decision-making because of their perceptions of its class interests.

Debs' legal defense seemed a valuable opportunity to reassert socialists' political rights, but these assertions were negated by legal officials, who forcefully applied a security-minded interpretation of civil liberties. After meeting with his legal team, which included Joseph Sharts, Debs decided to "deny nothing" and argue that his prosecution was a violation of his first-amendment rights.[154] Since Debs was a party icon, the trial became an opportunity for the socialists to demonstrate their resentments for all wartime suppression against them. As John Reed wrote to the *Liberator*, a nationally read socialist magazine, Debs' prosecution seemed to hold great potential for propaganda. According to Reed, Debs' trial was plainly unjust, even to people who "didn't seem deeply moved by…the suppression of the Socialist press…[and] socialist officials," as Debs' appeal often extended beyond the S.P.A.'s membership.[155] This widespread appeal meant Debs' trial could potentially inspire outrage outside of the party and cause Americans at large to understand that wartime speech restrictions were overstepping their intentions. However, a jury and the Supreme Court accepted District Attorney Wertz's argument that Debs caused "insubordination" against wartime policies and endangered them. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes cited his *Schenck v. United States* decision and again held that expression that questioned wartime policies could result in listeners' nonsupport or decision to outright contradict them.[156] Debs' statement of general support for the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform further contributed to the argument that he wanted to agitate resistance and nonparticipation in policies like conscription and which funded the war.[157] Debs' ultimate conviction and imprisonment were an explicit signal that the

[154] Freeberg, 83.
[155] John Reed, "With Debs on the Fourth," *Liberator*, September 1918, 8.
[156] *Debs v. United States*, 249 U.S. 211 (1919).
[157] "Try to Prove Debs Adhered to Party Cry," 1.

socialists could not rely on the government to uphold their civil liberties. As government and legal institutions interpreted laws to benefit the American war effort, and those interpretations had greater influence over juries and legal appeals, socialists had less recourse to protect their organizing, which depended heavily on critical propaganda.

In northern Ohio, the left-wing leadership condemned the Supreme Court's decision but argued that it was all that could be expected of the Court, considering its "class character." The party warned,

> "Capitalism in the country is resting on a slumbering volcano – the volcano of a suppressed and exploited working class…. In Russia and Germany this volcano has burst and is flinging the debris of capitalism to the four winds….Well might the ruling class hesitate before adding another grievance."[158]

Across the country, left-wing leaders and writers discussed Debs' imprisonment similarly. Max Eastman's *Liberator* warned that those who waged "a war for liberty…when it is done…may find left only the name of what they were fighting for."[159] *The Revolutionary Age*, founded to provide the Socialist Party's left-wing an independent, nationally published organ, stated, "constitutionality or unconstitutionality matters of the law matters not…the application of the law is a class act, an act of aggression by the bourgeois class." To *The Revolutionary Age*, Debs' case and "the imprisonment of every member of our class," either through law or economically driven "class tyranny," were "an act of war by the capitalists."[160] In northern Ohio, the left-wing socialists now described constitutional protections for their rights as an impossibility, in the face of hostile capitalists and their attempts to protect the war effort. In fact, the socialists no longer sensed they were in a struggle to assert their rights in American government and politics; they believed they

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[158] "Debs Goes to Prison," *The Ohio Socialist*, March 12, 1919, 1.
[159] Max Eastman, "The Trial of Eugene Debs," *Liberator*, November 1918, 12
[160] "Debs – and the Struggle Against Reaction," *Revolutionary Age*, March 15, 1918, 5.

were besieged by a "ruling class" that may eventually draw them into revolt. Moreover, as left-wing socialists reacted to the outcome of Debs' trial nationally, they demonstrated a larger trend: left-wing socialists no longer viewed the construction of socialism as a struggle to influence their country's and communities' politics, first through existing institutions, then through revolution. Instead, these socialists believed they were in a struggle against repressive "tyranny," under which "constitutionality" was illegitimate and their rights became irrelevant to their opponents, and which they needed to dismantle to assert the political and economic interests of the working class. Northern Ohio's leftists, who bore the brunt of much of their government's suppression of dissent, referenced revolution and the example of the Bolsheviks more openly because they perceived American politics shut them out and would continue to do so. Because participation in government could not guarantee them a legitimate route to express their politics, the left-wing socialists sought alternatives that would allow them to continue organizing toward socialism – a goal that increasingly seemed impossible if the present government remained in place. As a result, government policies that intended to protect against subversive behavior led to self-fulfilling results, as socialists embraced more radical beliefs and more confrontational forms of organizing.

In Cleveland, the radicalization of the socialists emerged directly from the breakdown of democratic norms caused by the war. In 1917, the socialists retained the right of free expression and campaigned for election because the city of Cleveland feared that violating their rights to political engagement and expression would benefit socialist propaganda and organizing. But wartime politics removed these constraints. Major-party politicians used the war effort to justify the removal of rightfully elected socialist officials from their seats in government. Concerns about legal penalties forced the socialists to reduce their public, anti-war agitation, or to hide it, as did imprisonment and intense violence aimed at socialist leaders. By the year's end, northern Ohio's

left-wing leaders found traditional claims to legitimacy, democracy, and political rights to be irrelevant because they seemed so readily abandoned during the war effort. Along with left-wing socialists nationwide, the socialist leaders in northern Ohio foreclosed any potential of working in existing political institutions to work toward a socialist state. Looking to the example of the Bolsheviks, these socialists believed that a true democracy would have to be constructed under socialist rule, the socialists showed they were willing to escalate their organizational efforts toward outright revolution.

III. Moderation in Dayton and Cincinnati

In Cleveland, the left-wing socialists ended 1918 and began 1919 with the suggestion that their organizing efforts would need to escalate and become more radical, but their counterparts in Local Dayton and Local Cincinnati instead moderated their organizing. The socialists in these cities perceived the same threats that Local Cleveland had in its crisis-filled year. Referencing the anti-Bolshevik forces of the Russian Civil War, Local Dayton even termed wartime crackdowns and the suppression of civil liberties to be a "white terror," and described Dayton's capitalists as "more bloated and power only seemingly magnified," in the wake of the war.[161] Local Cincinnati's Herbert Bigelow, after being kidnapped and beaten at the end of the 1917 campaign season, delivered speeches throughout the early months of 1918 expressing his dismay at the violence the war effort encouraged on the home front, even for moderate criticism of wartime policies. Nevertheless, while northern Ohio's left wing responded to the "white terror" by condemning municipal campaigning as an impossibility and taking more influence from the Bolsheviks,

[161] Walker, 117.

socialists in Dayton and activist collaborators in Cincinnati moderated out of commitment to the big tent model of socialist organizing.

Local Dayton and Local Cincinnati's Bigelow chose the pragmatism of their big tent organizing over the revolutionary bent of Local Cleveland because they remained worried about their political prospects. Local Dayton attempted to run a congressional campaign, hoping to recreate the broad success of their 1917 primary elections, while avoiding the charges of anti-war "treason" and radicalism that derailed their last campaign. In their dealings with pro-war elements in Dayton, the local Socialist Party chose to remain absolutely nonconfrontational on war issues. Meanwhile, Bigelow – who had entered the party after first collaborating with it as a non-socialist activist – sensed that its focus on the war distracted from his other political priorities, namely municipal anti-poverty reforms. In prior political efforts, elections, trials, and organizing, even socialists who couched their anti-war speech in patriotic terms or were inactive in anti-war organizing became targets of pro-war backlash. Attempting to find political success in institutions they perceived as biased and antagonistic, the socialists in Dayton and collaborators like Bigelow in Cincinnati tried to give up their association with the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform and its radical connotations. The government in which these socialists sought success was not yet wholly illegitimate, as northern Ohio's left wing argued; it was simply dominated by unworthy officials and incorrect policies that could be ousted through effective organizing and campaigning, which anti-war agitation imperiled. Moderate socialists' impulse to achieve greater influence for their political agendas seemed gravely endangered if their opponents perceived them as overly radical, as it could justify political institutions shutting them out – or, as Herbert Bigelow learned, violence by fellow citizens. The moderates, local party leaders and collaborators alike, understood that perceptions of radicalism could be used as a as a justification for repressive actions; but because

they proactively avoided such repression by moderating their rhetoric and organizing, they did not experience the same breakdown of democratic norms that took place in Cleveland, and still believed their attainment of government positions was possible.

In terms of the coalition it could build in 1918, the S.P.O. was limited. Aside from 1912, when Eugene Debs ran a strong presidential campaign, and socialist candidates for state and congressional followed him to strong showings in statewide and congressional races, socialists were often unable to find success when they ran for statewide and congressional offices. Although the socialists increased their vote totals in the municipal elections of 1917, that success was won because of campaigns that were attuned to locally specific issues and limited in the sheer geographical space and population they had to cover. Moreover, the Socialist Party was able to concentrate its efforts on urban, industrial areas. There, the socialist message could resonate with workers and "good government" reform sentiments that were prevalent in cities and, in some cases, urged parties outside of the Socialist Party to collaborate with it. Outside of the cities, in the rural areas encompassed by congressional districts and statewide races, the socialists failed to find such success, especially with the state party's major organizers like Charles Baker imprisoned and away from the urban industrial issues that garnered demand for the socialists' electoral platform. These struggles were exemplified when the party failed to earn enough petition signatures to have their slate of candidates included on the state and congressional ballots.[162] The war issue indirectly obstructed the party's campaigning due to the imprisonment of State Organizer Charles Baker, who would have otherwise taken charge of the S.P.O.'s rural campaign, and even considering those rural areas' existing local parties, their official membership often remained under fifty.[163] As a

[162] Judd, 168; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, October 19, 1918, 3.
[163] "December Roll Call," *Ohio Socialist*, January 25, 1918, 4.

result, the socialists were left without a viable to campaign in 1918, around which they could concentrate their organizing and propagandizing.

Already hindered by these unfavorable campaign conditions, local parties throughout Ohio spent much of 1918 simply trying to keep their membership involved and mobilized. Even in Cleveland, where doubts about the socialist party's traditional campaigning strategies came into question, it mobilized its base by resuming mass rallies and propagandizing in October 1918. Anti-war criticisms of the government and military remained underground, and left-wing doubts about involvement in government proliferated northern Ohio's socialist newspapers, but the party held rallies and distributed literature about the basic doctrines of socialism and the benefits it could bring workers – a formula that had attracted Local Cleveland several thousand members earlier in the 1910s.[164]

But whereas Local Cleveland was simply attempting to maintain its membership, Local Dayton fully intended to continue working toward success in government and established political institutions. Dayton's socialists remained as concerned as ever about the possibility of finally experiencing backlash, either in terms of the law or violence, and the lessons of 1917 were still fresh in their minds: antagonistic newspapers and politicians would go to extraordinary lengths to cast them as dangerous, despite their moderation. Playing off Ohio Governor James Cox's role in the 1917 municipal elections in Dayton, one labor newspaper remarked that "what he has said about the Socialists can hardly be spoken in polite society" and "Jimmie will be shown as having pretty high regard for the socialists, except those in jail and Dayton."[165]Yet, even facing these antagonisms, which reached as high as the most powerful politician in the state, Local Dayton did

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[164] "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, October 19, 1918, 3; "Watch Your Step," *Ohio Socialist*, June 11, 1918, 2.
[165] "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, November 23, 1918, 2; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, September 24, 1918, 2.

not experience the same crises as Cleveland; its officials were not removed from office, its leaders were not imprisoned, and the party was an outside witness to physical violence against socialists rather than a direct victim. As a result, Dayton socialists framed wartime crackdowns and backlashes as a deficit of democracy, rather than a wholesale abandonment of democratic as Local Cleveland theorized. As Local Dayton's *Miami Valley Socialist* declared, "We are fighting for democracy…. When we get enough of it we will have Socialism."[166] Local Dayton continued to view its political involvement as it had since the early 1910s, and the party's organizing still accepted the assumptions that underpinned the political actionist, "big tent" socialism of that decade. The government was imperfect and behaved undemocratically, but by working within it, the moderate socialists believed they could most effectively reform it toward more just policies and ideals.

Local Dayton nominated its congressional candidates and started their campaigns early, in January 1918. Party leaders Joseph Sharts and Willard Barringer stated their hope that such an early start would allow voters enough time to become acquainted with the candidates and their platforms, which would limit the struggles of earning petition signatures for placement on the ballot and, ultimately, to a strong showing in the November election. Still, in Dayton and nationwide, vigilant presses and political opponents began similar attempts to warn voters against the dangers of socialist congressional campaigns. The *Dayton Daily News* warned readers to "watch the socialists" and "united solidly to prevent the overturning of the whole war program," with districts from New York to Dayton representing fertile ground for successful socialist campaigns. Potential fusion campaigns, which could outperform the socialists through the combined forces of Democrats and Republicans, were suggested as a potential solution.[167] The

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[166] Judd, 169.
[167] "Watch the Socialists," *Dayton Daily News*, March 5, 1918, 6.

major parties seemed prepared to undercut the socialists' momentum as they had in 1917, when Democrats and the Citizens' Committee combined forces to defeat socialist municipal candidates, based on a shared, pro-war stance.

Such a fusion between the Republicans and Democrats did not occur, however, because the socialists failed to gain enough support on their petition to be placed on the congressional ballot. John M. Cahalane ran as a write-in candidate, and Local Dayton backed him to maintain party members' discipline as voters, as well as to demonstrate the presence of some support for the socialist platform among the electorate.[168] In total Cahalane received just over six percent of the vote in the third-district congressional election, many of his votes coming from the urban industrial wards of Dayton.[169] The election again demonstrated how dependent the socialists were on these wards for strength and a continuation of their long-standing struggle to attract voters outside of them.

Although Local Dayton's political efforts were largely decided based on long-standing weaknesses in its campaign organizing, the threat of wartime political backlash still determined much of the party's behavior throughout the campaign. Sometimes, anxieties over such a backlash even led the socialists to act against aspects of the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform. While Local Cleveland faced an outright restriction against its May Day parade and celebration in April 1918, Local Dayton was placed in a potential conflict with Dayton's Liberty Loan committee. Conflicts with the Liberty Loan had already led to steep legal repercussions for socialists throughout the state, as socialists like A.L. Hitchcock were imprisoned for speaking against them and potentially obstructing the funding of the war. But in the case of Local Dayton, a minor scheduling issue between its May Day celebrations and a benefit gathering for the Liberty Loan convention

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[168] Judd, 168; "Third Congressional District Nominees," *Ohio Socialist*, January 10, 1918, 2.
[169] "Summary of Montgomery County Vote," *Dayton Daily News*, November 6, 1918, 4.

threatened to spiral into a political disaster for Local Dayton, just as the absence of an American flag had at a socialist meeting before the 1917 elections. After the socialists rented Dayton's Memorial Hall, owned by Montgomery County, for its May Day celebration, the Liberty Loan committee pressured county commissioners to evict the socialists in favor of their own event. Under pressure to find a venue for their own rally on May 1, 1918, and having already contracted musicians and vendors, the committee worried its fundraising for the war effort would suffer. After negotiations between Local Dayton and the committee, the socialists agreed to provide the committee the hall if it agreed to purchase forty dollars' worth of advertising space in the *Miami Valley Socialist*.[170]

The decision to work with the Liberty Loan committee was a political decision for Local Dayton, especially among its leadership. After all, to give up a celebration on International Labor Day and to accept advertising materials and funds from the Liberty Loans seemed contradictory to the Socialist Party, its concern with workers and its national anti-war platform. Earlier, Joseph Sharts suggested granting the Liberty Loan committee the Memorial Hall venue for 150 dollars in restitution, to account for the party's own expenses in moving the date of its celebration. During the negotiations, Sharts emphasized that he did not "want to appear as an obstructionist" and his concerns that the Liberty Loan committee would publicize that the party was "obstructing them" in the press.[171] While they were ongoing, the *Dayton Daily News* published reports of their proceedings and urged the socialists to "demonstrate a proper spirit of patriotism" by rescheduling with no reimbursement.[172] The decision to advertise the Liberty Loans to party members likely

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[170] Walker, 123; "Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party," April 17, 1918, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.
[171] "Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party," April 18, 1918, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.
[172] "Socialists Ask Pay to Cancel Date for Hall," *Dayton Daily News*, April 10, 1918, 17.

arose from this concern with being viewed as obstructionist, since they were already running an underperforming campaign and had suffered the effects of negative publicity on a war issue in 1917. To avoid making the Liberty Loan committee pay a large sum to reschedule the event, with its implications of stonewalling a "patriotic event," Local Dayton chose to collaborate with the Liberty Loan committee, as it worked to sell war bonds.[173] The advertisements for the Liberty Loans did not mention the war, nor how they fulfilled citizens' patriotic efforts to wage it; rather, they focused on the war bonds as an exciting economic opportunity for socialists and workers, citing cheap initial prices and favorable interest rates, which would "pile up as the months roll by."[174] But even if Local Dayton did not allow the advertisements to approach the war as a patriotic effort, or if they continued to view the war as a benefit to only capitalists and militarists, the party's anxieties about a negative reaction toward its views on the war caused it to make a pragmatic decision. To ensure they could remain politically engaged in their community, Dayton's socialists decided not to follow the national party line – that the war be resisted on all fronts – and cooperated with pro-war elements when necessary.

After being abducted and assaulted for his anti-war views in Kentucky, Local Cincinnati's Reverend Herbert Bigelow also evidently began to see strict adherence to anti-war beliefs as potentially hazardous. In the immediate wake of his kidnapping in November 1917, Bigelow wrote and spoke defiantly; he emphasized his continued commitment to anti-war beliefs, and that the domestic, economic and political developments of the war issue could make the U.S. unable to provide for the needs of poor and working people in the future.[175] Moreover, Bigelow condemned the "widespread business men's mafia which has Cincinnati by the throat," and which he blamed

[173] Ibid.
[174] Walker, 124.
[175] Bigelow, *The Outrage on Rev. Herbert S. Bigelow of Cincinnati, Ohio*, 14-15.

for provoking violent sentiment in fellow citizens, who read disparaging words about anti-war speakers in the press and from their politicians, all of which he believed was done at the behest and coercion of "big business." According to Bigelow, his captors just happened to be a group that put that disparagement into action.[176]

However, although Bigelow joined Local Cincinnati during the war, and became perhaps its most prominent member in 1917, his political focus was never on war-related issues, nor was he attracted by the Socialist Party's anti-war platform. Joining the socialists after a collaborative fight for a new city charter and expanded municipal ownership in Cincinnati, Bigelow defined his membership as based upon a shared fight against poverty. Writing in 1917, Bigelow described concern with how poverty the religious and social morals of the poor: "What of the sanctities of marriage? What of the Holiness of Motherhood?"[177] More often, as early as 1916, Bigelow blamed big business, capitalists, and the lack of representation for workers' interests for worsening the conditions of urban poverty. [178] In the Socialist Party, he saw a logical organization through which he could work toward the measures he long held as solutions to poverty: old age pensions, municipal ownership, and other "good government" reforms, favored by the local reform organizations in which he was a long-admired figure.[179]

As Local Cincinnati increasingly turned to Bigelow as a speaker, Bigelow spent more of his time addressing the war issues he perceived of as secondary to his domestic agenda. Of course, Bigelow's approach to wartime criticism avoided advocating for resistance to the war effort, which

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[176] Ibid., 13-15; National Civil Liberties Union, press release, January 13, 1918, in Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, box 9, CHLA, 1

[177] Herbert S. Bigelow, "Bigelow Tells Why He Joined the Socialist Party," newspaper clipping, 1917, in Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, box 9, CHLA.

[178] Ibid.; Herbert S. Bigelow, *The Religion of Revolution* (Cincinnati: Daniel Kiefer, 1916), 32-34; "Herbert S. Bigelow Wants to Know," newspaper clipping, 1917, Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, box 9, CHLA.

[179] "Herbert S. Bigelow Wants to Know"; "Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party," February 16, 1917, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.

the S.P.A.'s platform recommended; he was far more concerned with the government using the war to justify extraordinary restrictions on its citizens' rights. Writing to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, Bigelow warned his friend that he was going to criticize the war in a speech to socialists in Milwaukee, stating his disagreement with the "so-called majority report of the Socialist Party on the War" but concern that socialists were entirely "misunderstood" in their dissent.[180] Bigelow's anti-war speeches were entirely patriotic and entirely Christian, as he appealed to citizens' speech rights, the importance of representative government, and went so far as to pray that the "Kaiser might be redeemed from pride and lust of power." In one case, socialists and non-socialists alike were upset when Bigelow told them to "work, hope and pray to help [their] government" but warned that government's ideals were endangered by its own war effort.[181] Since Bigelow joined the Socialist Party more for its platform on municipal and government reform, rather than its anti-war stance, Bigelow did not feel bound to follow its wartime platform and rhetoric. Instead, Bigelow followed the party's stance on its municipal platform – where they naturally aligned – and followed his longer-standing approach, influenced by idealistic forms of patriotism and Christianity, on war issues.

After Bigelow's abduction, he moderated his critique of the war, attempting to suggest his views were more nuanced than those of the larger socialist movement. As the investigation into his kidnapping mounted in 1918, Bigelow delivered speeches in which he questioned how supportive of the war effort he needed to be to avoid violence and legal restrictions. Bigelow emphasized that he was not an "anti-government pacifist" and was even willing to fight a war, since it was a citizen's duty, in return for "the benefits he enjoys as a citizen."[182] Instead, working

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[180] Herbert S. Bigelow to Newton D. Baker, September 8, 1917, in Bigelow, *The Outrage on Reverend Herbert S. Bigelow of Cincinnati, Ohio*, 4-5.
[181] Bigelow, *The Outrage on Reverend Herbert S. Bigelow of Cincinnati, Ohio*, 5.
[182] Herbert S. Bigelow, "Bigelow's Patriotism," in Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, box 9, CHLA.

with the National Civil Liberties Union (N.C.L.U.), Bigelow and civil liberties activists emphasized that their only reservations about the war effort were entirely related to issues of "mob violence" and the "vague language" of laws like the Espionage Act, which were part of a larger effort "to crush out all independent expression."[183] In fact, Bigelow and the NCLU argued, superpatriotic "business interests" and their influential support for pro-war restrictions on dissent "tend rather to hinder our effectiveness in war by creating…widespread social and industrial unrest."[184] Increasingly, Bigelow connected himself to a pro-war position and expressed his support for the war effort, even if he was critical of its domestic consequences. Moreover, those consequences did not negate the legitimacy of the war, the government, nor the ideals on which they were based; the misapplied legal restrictions and political violence only revealed vulnerabilities in wartime policymaking, which could potentially be reformed.

As Bigelow spoke more openly about his support for the war effort, his remarks drew dissatisfaction from the largely anti-war members of Local Cincinnati, especially as he positioned himself as their potential congressional candidate in 1918. Bigelow's political aspirations were well-established, and he often proved effective in uniting various movements in which he participated behind them. In one example, Bigelow parlayed his status as an old age pension activist and former Single-Taxer to be elected president of Ohio's 1912 state constitutional convention. However, a speech given to Local Dayton likely derailed his chances of uniting socialists and their allied anti-war reformers behind him. Again, Bigelow discussed the war by criticizing its domestic hazards but affirming its legitimacy as an idealistic, patriotic effort.[185] As Bigelow grew closer to pro-war groups and institutions, either accepting their criticisms of some

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[183] National Civil Liberties Union, 1.
[184] Ibid.
[185] "Gotham Election Tends to Dispel all Uncertainty," *Dayton Daily News*, March 10, 1918, 12; "Bigelow and Socialism," *Dayton Daily News*, March 6, 1918, 6.

aspects of the war or earning their praise, he contradicted the Socialist Party's official, anti-war position. Instead, the party nominated a working-class member, who adhered to its anti-war platform.[186] Bigelow's non-support of the Socialist Party's anti-war platform derailed his political aspirations, both for himself and the party. In September 1918, less than two months from the armistice, Bigelow took a leave of absence from his People's Church, and within months he also left the Socialist Party. In doing so, Bigelow wrote about his hope to "be engaged in some activity which will be more directly useful in winning the war."[187] Bigelow could no longer reconcile his lack of support for the Socialist Party's anti-war platform with his own conceptions of patriotism and involvement in American government and politics. The war and the political consequences it created undermined the collaboration between socialists and progressive activists in Cincinnati that previously benefited both groups.

In Dayton and Cincinnati, moderate party members did not question the legitimacy of the United States government or their continued involvement in it. Rather, seeking to preserve their political prospects in those cities and the organizational strategies they formulated in the early 1910s, moderate socialists in both cities questioned the wisdom of their party's commitment to anti-war agitation. These moderates grew anxious that the socialists could be completely shut out of government and political institutions if they followed the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform and developed a reputation as obstructionists in their communities. Cleveland's socialists were always skeptical of American government, meaning their wartime repression and imprisonments confirmed long-held suspicions. But in Dayton and Cincinnati, socialists and their reformist allies embraced local government, either through collaboration with other political organizations or

[186] "Bigelow Is Not to Run," *Cincinnati Post*, March 4, 1918, 3.
[187] Herbert S. Bigelow to the Members of the People's Church, September 22, 1918, in Herbert S. Bigelow Papers, box 1, CHLA.

through outright election to office, and therefore worked hard to maintain access to these institutions, even if it meant watering down key principles. In Dayton, the issue of the war jeopardized these electoral goals by feeding bad publicity and painting the socialists as a radical element in the city. For activists like Bigelow in Cincinnati, who collaborated with and joined the party to progress their shared, reformist goals, the party's increased focus on war issues both contradicted their own complex views of the war by taking too radical a stance and seemed to imperil their political aspirations – and even personal safety. The Socialist Party's anti-war position conflicted with its local parties' organizational strategies through the political consequences they experienced and witnessed. As the left wing of the S.P.O. urged greater resistance to the government, moderates in Dayton and Cincinnati broke with the national party's antiwar line, fearing heightened political consequences against their organizing.

IV. Conclusions

Despite the socialists' prevailing sense of dissatisfaction with the American government and its abetment of capitalist and militarist interests, at the beginning of 1918, socialists' organizational strategies depended upon the legitimacy of their rights and protection under their government. To campaign for political office, influence policymaking from within the government, or propagandize about their platform, the socialists needed to trust that their criticisms of existing government policies would be protected. As socialist organizing became more concentrated on opposition to the war, though, the government and pro-war political elements targeted the socialists more heavily. The consequences of the socialists' anti-war agitation created a crisis in their party's organizing, pitting their electoral aspirations and anti-war position against each other. As a result, the socialists felt they needed to choose between these aspects of their

organizing: either they could defiantly confront the interests and power of the capitalists and militarists, or they could carefully position themselves to preserve their political prospects and potentially influence established political institutions by electing officials and having direct influence on policymaking.

3. The Party Divide: Reform versus Revolution

As socialists in the United States dealt with new restrictions to their organizing, internationally, left-wing and radical socialists waged successful revolutions. In Russia, Germany, and Austria, where the First World War led to immense casualties and shortages of necessary goods as their governments sought to sustain their war efforts, citizens revolted, monarchs abdicated their thrones, and old, imperial governments dissolved. Afterward, previously exiled and imprisoned radicals attempted to construct socialist states through these revolutions. In America, many socialists of many factions praised these revolutions as hopeful examples that large numbers of people could be mobilized to dismantle authoritarian governments, as well as the landed aristocracy and capitalists who empowered them. American socialists admired leaders like Lenin and Trotsky in Russia as examples of effective organizers, who inspired the masses through their writing and speaking. As paths to political power narrowed in the United States, socialists looked to revolutions abroad and felt reassured that a socialist government could still be constructed, if the working class could be organized.

The end of the war, however, did not mean the end of the socialists' political and legal struggles. The first post-war year of 1919 was filled with upheaval in America, its government, its economy, and its working class. Prevented from striking during the war, large numbers of workers did so frequently in 1919. Political violence, in the forms of bombings and assassination attempts, created a sense of fear among political figures and government officials – and were increasingly blamed on potential "Bolsheviki" and "anarchist" threats, with connotations of foreign agitators shading both terms. In response, the U.S. government adopted harsh measures to frustrate the organizing of potentially radical and violent political elements. State governments broke strikes and, across the country, passed strictly enforced laws against criminal syndicalism. At the federal

level, the Department of Justice, with the help of municipal police departments, raided the offices of radical organizations, including the Socialist Party; a practice that became a hallmark of the Red Scare. While socialists worked to determine the form their post-war organizing would take, government crackdowns continued after the war's end, and to some socialists, it seemed they would be perpetual.

Looking to the examples of international socialist revolutions and facing what appeared to be violence by capitalists and the government they controlled domestically, many socialists began to conceive of their organizing differently. The organizing strategies that defined the socialist big tent, including its reliance on attracting non-socialist support and participation in established political institutions, proved vulnerable during the war. With both wings of the party diverging on their priorities for it, either emphasizing confrontation with the government or continued participation in it, their cooperative relationship weakened. Intraparty divides between direct and political actionists deepened into ideological disagreement, and the direct actionist left-wing was ejected from the party or left it by choice, with Ohioans like C.E. Ruthenberg and Alfred Wagenknecht becoming its national leaders. The cohesion of the Socialist Party's big tent disintegrated, as its moderate and left wings could not agree on whether to prioritize reform or revolution, in the face of continued suppression and restrictions. Eventually, both wings blamed one another for making the party politically and legally vulnerable, each accusing the other of abandoning socialist principles. In 1918, socialists were forced to question the legitimacy of the U.S. government because of its reaction to its anti-war platform, but in 1919, the wings of the Socialist Party questioned each other's legitimacy as members of a socialist movement.

I. International Influences

When the Russian Revolution began in March 1917, followed by the Bolshevik Revolution in November, the reaction among Ohio's socialists was overwhelmingly positive. Although more moderate, trade union-aligned socialists were alarmed by the Bolsheviks' unexpected termination of the Russian provisional government, both left-wing and moderate leaders praised Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and their Bolshevik-led government as a democratic force eradicating tsarist autocracy. Where the left and moderate wings differed was, whether to apply the Bolsheviks' example to their own organizing. The Bolsheviks helped to overthrow the Tsar, a long-standing figurehead of political and economic oppression, of course, but whether the American Socialist Party had enough political strength, support, and organizational resources to do the same remained uncertain. Direct and political actionists alike, many party members agreed that the party needed more time to organize and build support before it waged a similar revolution. Even still, the desirability of such a revolution also remained in contention between the party's wings – a debate that had been ongoing for much of the Socialist Party's existence. Previously, this disagreement was most distinct in 1912, when Bill Haywood and his I.W.W. conflicted with Victor Berger and his moderate faction of the S.P.A. However, as left-wing socialists were disaffected by government suppression during the First World War and sensed the need for a more radical organizing in the party, debates between direct and political actionists resumed in 1919.

The experience of wartime suppression caused left-wing socialists to question the legitimacy and utility of established political institutions in their communities and their country at large, so many began to look abroad for examples of how to organize a successful socialist movement. Some moderates, who eschewed radical, anti-war agitation and the heightening, revolutionary rhetoric of their left-wing comrades, questioned whether the party could effectively

serve their political and reformist agendas and did the same. The moderates of Local Dayton continued to advocate for the standard, political actionist style of socialist organizing, due to their interpretations of socialist ideology and continued sense that success through such organizing was imminent. By 1919, the diverging socialists found their examples in the Russian Bolsheviks or, in the case of the moderates, the Labor Parties that gained momentum in Britain and Australia. Then, they began to reflect the approaches of those international parties in their own, domestic organizing. Since "big tent" socialism grew from a shared approach to organizing – based in campaigning for public office, instituting reforms, and gaining support from disparate groups – these divergences between local parties and their members fractured the party's cohesion. As the tactical and ideological interests of party organizations and members diverged, they debated the best course of action for the Socialist Party. But these debates often demonstrated how fractured the "big tent" was, as common interpretations of socialist principles no longer carried a consensus.

Before the war, old struggles between direct and political actionists merely simmered, as small groups of leftists grew dissatisfied with the rigid, seemingly impenetrable control moderates held over the Socialist Party. Although big tent organizing took varied forms between local and state branches, according to the interests and constraints of each, some left-wing members sensed that the party was diverging greatly from its perceived revolutionary mission. Early in 1917, before the United States entered the First World War, a small group of left-wing, socialist editors and foreign émigrés met in New York to discuss the future of the Socialist Party and its organizing. Among those present were the future founding members of the American communist parties, like Ludwig Lore and Louis Fraina, as well as future Bolshevik leaders Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin. Trotsky suggested that the left wing continue to organize within the existing Socialist Party but build independent organizations that could propagandize independent of moderate party

leaders and create the foundations of more revolutionary ideology in American socialism. [188] Trotsky's suggestions found support among the American socialists present, who formed the Socialist Propaganda League of America (S.P.L.A.),. As Trotsky and Bukharin left New York for Russia in March 1917, the foundations of left-wing, revolutionary organizing were left in the U.S., and a few members the American left wing sensed a clear mission: they had to overcome the dominance of moderate party leaders to establish a more revolutionary American party. In reality, the S.P.L.A. only managed to found several journals for itself – *The Class Struggle*, *The New International*, and *The Revolutionary Age* – and to release a manifesto that called for a reorganization of the S.P.A. under more revolutionary principles.[189] But during the war, the impact of nascent left-wing organizations would be limited. All socialist newspapers experienced reduced readership, as the postmaster general banned them from the mail. Moreover, local- and state-level socialist leaders like C.E. Ruthenberg and Alfred Wagenknecht – who were sympathetic to more radical, direct actionist organizing and could have leant legitimacy to new, left-wing organizations – were imprisoned. The socialists who remained outside of prison often made little mention of the S.P.L.A. or new left-wing organizations, since they were often more focused on campaigning, avoiding backlash for being too radical, or unreached by those organizations, which were based in Boston and New York City. The S.P.L.A. and left wing had to wait until after the war to organize at full capacity, when socialists were no longer focused on simply maintaining their organizations.

Still, by the end of the war, growing frustrations with political action and the example of the Russian Bolsheviks created enthusiasm within the party for distinctly left-wing organizing. C.E. Ruthenberg, who first heard of Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks from a Russian immigrant

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[188] Draper, 80-82.

[189] Socialist Propaganda League of America, "Manifesto of the Socialist Propaganda League of America," *The Internationalist*, January 6, 1917, 2.

in Cleveland, enthusiastically followed reports of the Russian Revolution; read the first widely available translations of Lenin's work in prison; and led Local Cleveland to adopt resolutions in support of the new, Bolshevik-led government. As early as September 1917, Local Cleveland praised the Bolsheviks for "wiping out capitalist imperialism" and pledged its help "in establishing the civilization of the future, the commonwealth of the workers irrespective of nationality."[190] For Ruthenberg, the Bolsheviks' takeover of Russia represented the culmination of his vision for the socialist movement: it revoked the police and military power of the Russian "ruling classes" and used them to establish a state "based upon the interests of the workers."[191] But as socialists in the United States and Ohio often emphasized in their praise of the Bolsheviks, in the face of suppression in the U.S. and abroad, the Russian Revolution represented the first victory in an international struggle, toward a world order that benefitted the working class. Just as Local Cleveland declared that their commitment to that struggle transcended national borders, national figures like Eugene V. Debs declared "I am a Bolshevik," in solidarity with it. Or, at least, in the case of Local Dayton, published supportive articles about the Bolsheviks' efforts to construct a democratic state for the working class.[192] Through the fact of their victory and construction of a new, communist government, the Bolsheviks' organizing seemed legitimate, viable, and even attractive to American socialists.

Often, using their connections to the S.P.L.A. or notable, nationally recognized figures like John Reed, the Bolsheviks encouraged this perception to aid their own national security interests. In Russia, the new leaders sensed that their revolution would not survive if it did not become

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[190] "Cleveland Socialists Greet Bolshevik Revolution," *Cleveland Socialist News*, November 25, 1917, in *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals, and Labor*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 55.
[191] Ibid.
[192] "Lenine, the Man, His Ideas," *Ohio Socialist*, January 25, 1918, 2; Eugene V. Debs, "The Day of the People," *Class Struggle*, February 1919, 1-4; Alexander Tratchenberg, "Russia under the Soviets," *Miami Valley Socialist*, May 31, 1918, 1, 4.

international and feared encirclement by capitalist powers, they propagandized and offered encouragement to radical, potentially revolutionary groups abroad.[193] The Bolsheviks managed to smuggle Vladimir Lenin's "Letter to American Workingmen" to the U.S. for publication in the S.P.L.A.'s journals. Lenin expressed his solidarity with American socialists and described their wartime suppression as part of an international class struggle. For example, the conviction and imprisonment of American socialists was one of many acts of suppression by global capitalist and imperialist interests. To protect themselves as "the best representatives of the American proletariat," Lenin declared that the American socialists would find no benefit in collaborating with "bourgeois" interests or participation in their institutions, reflecting the frustrations of the American left wing. Instead, American socialists needed to mobilize themselves and the working class to act in solidarity with the Bolsheviks and in the American "revolutionary tradition," toward the overthrow of the capitalists.[194] Left-wing American socialists ended 1918 with a sense that political action, working within what Lenin called "bourgeois democracy," lacked any benefits to their movement. Although American socialists previously attempted – and even succeeded – to establish the legitimacy and influence of their programs in established political institutions, they were marginalized and suppressed by those very institutions, demonstrating how insecure their position was. Lenin promised the alternative left-wing socialists like C.E. Ruthenberg called for at the end of the war: they needed to become part of a revolutionary movement to dissolve those institutions, found states designed to represent the working class, and ensure the mutual security of their movements. The American left wing had the justification it needed to engage in explicitly revolutionary organizing.

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[193] Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 339-342.
[194] Vladimir Lenin, "Letter to American Workingmen," *Class Struggle*, December 1918, 523, 527-528, 532-533.

After leaving the Stark County Work House in December 1918, Ruthenberg began advocating that the Socialist Party move away from its program of political action, applying the lessons he perceived from the socialists' wartime experience. Ruthenberg's prominence as a notable left-wing leader in the party was already established, due to his active role as a writer of the S.P.A.'s anti-war platform and for his writings about the party's "revolutionary character" in nationally read party newspapers. In February 1919, the leaders of the national left wing and the S.P.L.A. invited Ruthenberg to help to draft a manifesto, which advocated a shift in the Socialist Party's organizing. Originally drafted for use by Local Greater New York City, the left-wing socialists of Ohio modified the manifesto and published it as a pamphlet in Cuyahoga County. While the manifesto emphasized that the left wing was not a "secessionist movement" against the S.P.A., it asserted that "moderate socialism" led the party to abandon some of its principles in Europe and America. The emphasis on electoral success meant the moderate, European socialists endorsed pro-war positions to preserve their electoral prospects and to not alienate potential, "bourgeois" voters. In America, attempts to "legislate socialism into existence" rendered the Socialist Party ineffective, as major party and capitalist elements in legislative bodies worked to prevent socialists from capturing their communities' political institutions.[195] The Left Wing Section essentially rebuked the big tent organizing that informed many local parties' campaigning and organizing throughout the early 1900s, believing it required socialists to subvert basic principles of their movement to attract outside the support but left them without major political gains.

As an alternative, the left wing of the party cited the example of the Bolsheviks, and as a result, fewer overtures to outside collaboration and more revolutionary tactics. According to the

[195] "Manifesto and Program of the Left Wing Section of the American Socialist Movement," *Ohio Socialist*, February 26, 1919, 2.

left wing, political action needed to play a secondary, far lesser role in the party's organizing. The Left Wing Manifesto of February 1919 asserted that campaigns should only be run for educational purposes and should solely court industrial, working-class people. The true liberation of the working class would only come after workers took direct control of industry and the means of production, so the organization of industrial workers into radical unions, capable of seizing that power, needed to be the Socialist Party's focus.[196] Although left-wing socialists like Ruthenberg always asserted that political campaigns were primarily educational in their purpose, they still conceded that government bodies and established political institutions could be captured and ameliorate some struggles, as part of the party's big tent agreement. As of 1919, the left wing discounted that reforms and government institutions could ever be used to those ends. Instead, the new Left Wing Section adopted a limited, all-or-nothing, purist approach as it attempted to end its reliance upon hostile government institutions and catch up to the Bolsheviks. The left wing traded reformist policies and broad appeal in favor of radicalizing workers, whom they considered the only group that could overturn and replace "bourgeois" economic and political structures.

After the Left Wing Manifesto was written in New York, the left wing of the S.P.O. began to apply its organizational program, with Ruthenberg increasingly sensing that revolution was nearing. Local Cleveland's 1919 municipal campaign explicitly called for "the overthrow [of] the existing industrial order" and "the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship."[197] While noting that it would accept political office if they were elected, the Local described its efforts as "patterned after the example of the Bolshevists," including their targeting of Cleveland's large, industrial workforce.[198] As part of the campaign, Ruthenberg received his fourth nomination as his party's

[196] Ibid.
[197] A.V. Abernathy, "Ruthenberg First Candidate in Field," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, April 7, 1919, 10.
[198] Ibid.

mayoral nominee, but as the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* observed, his platform featured none of the municipal reform planks that he campaigned on in 1917. Left-wing socialists never suggested policies like municipal ownership could completely alleviate workers' struggles or necessarily lead to a socialist, worker-friendly state; their only utility was to attract support and alleviate short-term struggles. By 1919, however, Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland doubted such reforms could even have that political value. For example, Ruthenberg wrote to his party to assert that municipal and government ownership of utilities and transportation would, in fact, be detrimental to the entire working class. The government had, after all, taken control of the railroads and certain utilities during the war and it made deals with their capitalist owners to do so. Since the government was run in the interests of the capitalists, such deals had to profit the capitalists and represented infrastructure "owned by the whole capitalist class."[199] If all capitalists contributed to the ownership of infrastructure, under the administration of the government, they could still oppress workers who would be no closer to increasing their economic and political power. As a result, Ruthenberg disregarded municipal reforms as "not our goal," reminding the socialists that their ultimate end was to establish workers' direct, collective control of industry, disconnected from capitalist interests and "a bureaucracy at the seat of government."[200] Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland's of a class struggle deepened, so that the very existence of the government and its institutions represented the potential for oppression and illegitimate behavior, and so revolution was the only solution to all workers' problems.

Local Dayton, however, eschewed the new left-wing strains of socialism emerging in Cleveland and approached the 1919 elections as an opportunity to rebuild its capability to campaign. Dayton's party members remained committed to political action, hoping to recreate and

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[199] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "Not Our Goal," *Ohio Socialist*, February 5, 1919, 4.
[200] Ibid.

exceed its victories in the 1917 primaries. In their strategy, Local Dayton recognized that rebuilding their political prospects would require reestablishing connections with outside voters, who might have been supportive in 1917 but disengaged due to wartime scandals and ineffective campaigning in 1918. The socialists nominated their candidates in December 1918 and began distributing pamphlets among trade union members.[201] Whereas Local Cleveland completely focused its attention on organizing industrial workers toward revolution, Local Dayton realized that it still needed the support of groups outside of the socialists' ideologically chosen, proletarian base, in trades and professions, to build their influence. Local Dayton still adhered to the big tent impulse to build a large base of support, as suppression did not exclude the party from electoral work during the First World War. Instead, influence in local government remained an open option if the socialists could reobtain – and maintain – enough support from politically aligned groups and build out a coalition of socialists and progressive trade and professional workers.

As the left wing formalized its influence in the American socialist movement and suggested changes to its organizing, splits over tactics emerged between Local Dayton and Local Cleveland, which disagreed about whether alternative organizing was tactically necessary or ideologically acceptable. A debate between the local parties' leaders, C.E. Ruthenberg and Joseph Sharts, demonstrated those growing splits over whether political action should remain the priority of socialist organizing. Ruthenberg began his argument with an anecdote, focusing on the increased violence against socialists in American politics. On a speaking tour throughout Ohio, one of Ruthenberg's stops was in Dayton, after nearly being mobbed in Hamilton, Ohio. After being discretely shuttled by train to Dayton, Ruthenberg used this experience as evidence that socialist organizing had to become more radical to confront anti-socialist sentiment and behavior in the

[201] Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, January 24, 1919, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.

U.S. Ruthenberg reported that "'the younger set' of Hamilton's business circles" packed the meeting and that local socialists perceived that sentiment in the room was growing violent, showing that the business interests needed to resort to violence enacted by their junior members to preserve their power. Referencing Marx, Ruthenberg declared that this demonstrated "industry can no longer function in the capitalist system…we are now in the revolutionary era; we must accordingly adopt revolutionary tactics."[202] The examples of Cleveland's ousted city council and school board members demonstrated, according to Ruthenberg, socialists' position within that state was tenuous. As a solution, he suggested "the abolition of all social reform planks," in accordance with the Left Wing Program, and new propaganda campaigns to spur workers toward "revolutionary industrial unionism" and the seizure of industry.[203] Ruthenberg's argument demonstrated a sense that revolutionary socialist organizing reflected essential elements of socialist ideology. Perhaps, this argument further demonstrated how Ruthenberg and the left wing began to associate political action and broad appeals with a compromise of basic socialist principles to justify their rejection of those efforts.

In his response, Joseph Sharts stressed the threats to party unity posed by the Left Wing Program and condemned it for deemphasizing the formerly agreed-upon political role of the Socialist Party. To angle to dominate the party and to form a separate organization within it was tantamount to creating "degrees of membership within the party," which could lead to a "holier-than-thou" attitude among some socialist sects and lead to attacks against all comrades who were perceived as "right wing." To Sharts, sectarianism could only lead to "small numbers and ineffectualness of propaganda," as potential members would be alienated by intraparty attacks.[204]

[202] "Stirring Socialist Debate at Memorial Hall: Question of Tactics Fought Out," *Miami Valley Socialist*, May 23, 1919, 1.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid.

Moreover, Sharts condemned the left wing for its “defeatist spirit,” especially in America, where “the will of the majority prevails at the ballot box,” and because socialists needed to follow a set course of development from capitalism to socialism, according to Marxist theory. The most viable course for that development was, according to Sharts, to use “the capitalist political shell” as the framework of a new “cooperative commonwealth.” Quoting Friedrich Engels, he finally asserted that the sudden, violent “abolition of the state” represented anarchism, rather than the Marxism to which the left wing claimed adherence.[205]

Although Local Dayton’s *Miami Valley Socialist* stressed the amicability of Ruthenberg and Sharts’ debate, it signaled not only growing tactical divides between the left wing and the moderates but growing, competing claims between them that they represented the more faithful interpretation of socialist doctrine. Leftists like Ruthenberg legitimized their opposition to political action by citing Marxist doctrine and arguing that capitalism had reached a point where revolution was imminent and necessary. Moderates like Sharts, however, argued that increasing sectarianism and radicalism would only deepen fractures in the party and alienate potential supporters; close the party off from the political tools it could use to build a socialist state; and drift away from socialist tenets, into the ideology of competing, non-socialist, radical groups. The debaters essentially questioned the standing of one another’s tactics within socialist and Marxist ideology, either that the other failed to fulfill the revolutionary, worker-oriented elements of the ideology, or its necessary, essential political development. What started as a questioning of the legitimacy of American political institutions became a division between leftists and moderates about whether those institutions could serve any productive purpose for the socialist party, with Ruthenberg and Sharts even reaching different conclusions about the government’s legitimacy. In turn, that tactical

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[205] Ibid., 1, 4.

question became ideological. Marxist and socialist doctrine could be interpreted in varying ways to confirm the approaches of both moderates and leftists. The question of whether to abandon their communities' governing institutions and follow the Bolsheviks into revolution began to fracture the party's consensus, even to the point that standard, ideological agreements were no longer generally accepted.

Among the S.P.O.'s collaborators in progressive, activist, and non-socialist labor organizations, international influence also offered an attractive alternative to long-standing organizational tactics. At the end of 1918, collaborators like Herbert Bigelow left the party, sensing that its increasingly radical stands jeopardized the potential for their reformist political programs. Returning to the major parties did not seem an adequate option for many of these reformists, both in the activist milieu that worked with Local Cincinnati and for organizers who worked concurrently in the moderate wing of the Socialist Party and labor unions like the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L.), like Cleveland's Max Hayes. In speeches throughout Ohio, Bigelow summed up the position of these activists and organizers, especially their concerns about the proliferation of both "Reds" and reactionaries in American politics. Speaking to his People's Church, Reverend Bigelow warned against American interventionism in Bolshevik-led Russia but condemned Bolshevism as suppressive and violent against its political enemies.[206] Domestically, however, Bigelow warned about growing suppressive and violent tendencies among both radicals and reactionaries:

> "Reaction, blinded by self-interest, opposes reasonable change. Revolution, exasperated by injustice, proposes unreasonable change. The need of the hour is a sound liberalism to deal with the Bolshevism in both camps. We want no red flag of revolution. Neither do we want any white flag of reaction."[207]

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[206] "Bigelow on Bolshevism," *Cincinnati Post*, February 10, 1919, 14.
[207] "What Bigelow Thinks," *Ohio Socialist*, February 5, 1919, 3.

Bigelow and fellow activists, despite their earlier work with major parties and their local Socialist Parties, perceived increasingly violent sentiments among both groups – which could continue to limit their political agendas and impede viable reforms. Seeking alternatives to these inhospitable conditions among their traditional political partners, nationally and locally, activists and moderate organizers sought a "middle of the road" method of organizing. The best avenue, some of these ex-collaborators concluded, was to form a party independent of the rigidity and overreach present on its political right and left flanks.

Like the left wing of the Socialist Party, progressive and moderate activists looked abroad to successful parties, who achieved the success they sought in their own countries. Many of these activists particularly looked to the examples of the Labor Parties in Britain and Australia, who made impressive gains among voters in the United Kingdom and won control of the state government in Queensland, Australia. The A.F.L.-affiliated *Cleveland Citizen* covered these successes enthusiastically, just as the left wing-controlled *Ohio Socialist* published similar articles about the gains of the Bolsheviks and German Spartacists. The Labor Party of Queensland, Australia, vindicated American reformists assertions that a reform-minded, worker-friendly government could not only achieve power but also be successful when wielding it. As early as 1918, the *Citizen* enthusiastically reported that the Labor Party government of Queensland reported immense profits in its state-owned enterprises, prevented trusts from raising prices on goods and commodities, and led to the payment of "trade union" rates in state-run enterprises.[208] While American socialists debated the place of political action in their party, the British Labor Party was praised for "carrying on effective work for the organization of British workers," who were standing for parliamentary elections against more established Liberals and Conservatives. The *Citizen*

[208] "Trend of Events," *Cleveland Citizen*, June 22, 1918, 1.

reported that those politicians were "in a panicky state of mind," to the extent that they considered fusion tickets – which former socialists recognized as a tactic used when major parties and their candidates sought to overpower effective campaigning by a third party.[209] Even if these parties were not yet nationally successful, experiencing regionally concentrated success or still undercut by combined opposition by major parties, reformists who were dissatisfied with the Socialist Party observed their growing momentum as a vindication of their political actionist approach.

By early 1919, progressive activists and trade union organizers perceived that an American Labor Party could build to similar successes because they sensed an unfulfilled demand for labor-friendly reformism in the U.S. Since many reformists were alienated by the Socialist Party's increased attention on its anti-war platform and decreased attention on municipal and labor issues, an American Labor Party could potentially refocus political action toward the latter. In Chicago and New York City, as well as Cleveland, labor organizers tested the idea of a Labor Party among union members. At a convention in May, the members of the A.F.L.'s Cleveland branch voted in favor of founding a Labor Party organization in their city, and its leaders like Max Hayes, who worked for nearly two decades in both socialist and A.F.L. organizing, resigned their membership in the Socialist Party. New Labor Party members like Hayes repudiated the S.P.A.'s "anarchistic" anti-war platform and the rejection of political action by its left wing, both of which made even its moderate reforms vulnerable to "anti-labor elements…awaiting the opportunity to display their superpatriotism."[210] The left wing of the S.P.O. attacked the Labor Party's proponents for prioritizing compromise over workers' emancipation from capitalist and militarist interests.[211] However, for many of its progressive collaborators, like Herbert Bigelow, the Labor Party's

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[209] "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, August 31, 1918, 3.
[210] Max S. Hayes, "A Statement," *Cleveland Citizen*, May 17, 1918, 3.
[211] "Socialists Oppose Labor Party," February 5, 1919, 1, 4

strength was its ability to work within established political institutions, while not falling into the anti-reformism of the major parties or the radicalism of the socialist left wing. Bigelow began working with the Labor Party in Ohio and Illinois, using it as a platform to advocate for progressive candidates and statewide constitutional reforms.[212]

In August 1919, when the Labor Party of the United States officially formed at a convention in Chicago, its program reflected the political actionist approach that the S.P.A. developed in the early 1910s. The language of the Marxist class struggle remained in its platform, including its condemnation of capitalist "confidence men" and the major parties who allowed for the exploitation of workers.[213] Moreover, the Labor Party harkened back to big tent socialism by adopting a similar approach to its political actionist and reformist programs. The Labor Party's Declaration of Principles asserted that workers' political power was reduced because their support was split between the Republicans and Democrats, who obstructed necessary reforms. The Labor Party called for aggressively courting voters; government ownership of railroads and utilities; and even measures to expand its constituency in its organizational strategies, by fusing with the Committee of 48, a progressive organization, in 1920 to create a national Farmer-Labor Party.[214] The Socialist Party criticized defectors like Herbert Bigelow for their adoption of liberalism and seeming commitment to capitalist-oriented institutions, rather than committing to the political and economic emancipation of workers that socialism represented.[215] But for former, activist collaborators like Bigelow, who aided smaller, less successful parties like Local Cincinnati, the

[212] "Labor's Politics," August 9, 1918, 3.
[213] Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1928), 379; Labor Party of the United States, "Declaration of Principles of the Labor Party of the United States," *New Majority*, December 6, 1919, 8-9.
[214] "Declaration of Principles of the Labor Party of the United States, 8-9; Fine, 379.
[215] "What Bigelow Thinks," 3; "Socialists Oppose Labor Party," 1, 4.

Labor Party now represented a more attractive alternative to the radicalism they perceived in those local parties.

Since many of those former socialists joined local parties because they represented groups that could be organized toward their reformist priorities, they were alienated by the S.P.A.'s increased focus on war issues and the influence of Bolshevik-influenced, left-wing socialists. These developments seemed to endanger the political prospects of their reformist agendas and political ambitions. Because the Labor Party followed the example of successful, reformist, international examples – and explicitly eschewed the growing radicalism of the Socialist Party – those activist collaborators were attracted more toward an American Labor Party than the existing S.P.A., S.P.O., and their locals. This new party could provide a similar body in which reformist goals could be advocated but without being a target for political and legal crackdowns. Less successful, local socialist parties, like Local Cincinnati, suffered losses as a result. Their non-socialist collaborators, like Cincinnatians Herbert Bigelow and attorney Edward F. Alexander, were attracted away, toward the increasingly influential, international example of the Labor Party. In these less successful, local parties, their political influence and participation in big tent socialism depended upon shared political efforts with progressive activists, but those ends were jeopardized by a competing, labor-friendly party that claimed to better meet the demands of those former collaborators.

Questions of the government's legitimacy and the strength of the Socialist Party's political actionist organizing developed among its members, who reassessed the cohesion of their ideology and tactics in the wake of the First World War. Big tent socialism developed before the First World War with a focus on attaining government offices, promoting worker-friendly reforms, and collaborating with a broad range of organizers and supporters, from a variety of groups and

ideological stances. Through these objectives, the party intended and managed to grow their base of support and use the resources of existing political institutions to develop a socialist state. But as those institutions appeared more illegitimate, and as the interests of those ideologically and politically diverse collaborators diverged, the party became less cohesive, and members adopted distinct, conflicting goals approaches to their organizing. “Big tent” socialism represented a cohesive element in the Socialist Party, tying locals and members to similar strategies and short-term objectives like election to government bodies. Party members’ consensus waned because their interests changed and contrasted, in the wake of wartime political and legal crises.

II. Escalation toward Communism

Throughout 1919, left-wing and moderate socialists held a series of conventions, which they intended to resolve their differences. Rather than offering resolutions, though, these conventions demonstrated that the party’s debates over its tactics, ideology and platform were deepening. While socialists planned and gathered at these conventions, the party continued to be racked by crackdowns by law enforcement and mob violence, against their gatherings, along with labor organizations throughout the country. Some moderates in the socialist and labor movements continued to avoid radicalism, attempting to avert backlash as they had during the war. However, where socialists were already on a track toward more revolutionary organizing, in Cleveland and Cincinnati, they approached their interactions with law enforcement and anti-socialist elements in their communities more radically and confrontationally. As a result of this continued moderation and radicalization, party members questioned one another’s fitness to be in the party. Moderates wondered whether the socialists could be trusted as responsible party members, or if they would merely bring greater, negative attention to the party. However, the left-wing questioned the

moderates' resolve, and whether they could be trusted in a movement that seemed to be accelerating toward a final, revolutionary confrontation with capitalists and the government. After several years of gradually diverging in their tactics, the power struggle that led to the Socialist Party's split emerged because party members could not agree on a new program of organizing tactics that was ideologically satisfactory to wings of the party, so they questioned whether they could effectively work together under any new regime or program within the party.

Radicalism in the labor movement reached new heights in 1919, seemingly as a reaction to wartime restrictions on striking. Starting in January, workers went on strike against their employers and their working conditions at exceeding rates, as wartime laws against striking expired. The high-profile Seattle General Strike, followed by protracted police and steelworker strikes, created a sense of enthusiasm among American radicals and security concerns among government officials, law enforcement, and major presses. In some cases, especially among left-wing socialists and anti-socialist politicians, the cause seemed clear: Bolshevik influence. Although the two sides of this emerging Red Scare approached that influence differently, with enthusiasm among leftists and dread among their opponents in government and political institutions, they believed American workers began to reflect the example of Russian revolutionaries, either through the power of their reputation or direct influence by Bolshevik agitators.

For the left-wing leaders of the S.P.O., reacting to news of the Seattle General Strike, clearly employers' demands for high production in shipyards, for wages that did not meet the cost of living, caused workers to reject the A.F.L.'s moderate style of organizing – which included compromise and cooperation with the government during the war. Unable to trust the concessions of their government, employers, or compromise with them, the *Ohio Socialist* argued, they – and strikers as far away as Paterson, New Jersey – sought to organize outside of their bounds and

adopted the independent, solidaristic strategies demonstrated by the Bolsheviks. Namely, these workers build their own presses and formed councils to govern their efforts to reject government and employer control. As the A.F.L. and its president, Samuel Gompers, suggested compromise in both strikes, the socialists praised the workers' actions for deciding to "simply ignore the rights and titles of capitalists…and simply take control of industry, themselves."[216] To socialists like Ruthenberg, whose strategies began to emphasize workers' uprisings and takeovers of industry, these strikes reflected a new era in the American labor movement – one in which workers were no longer constrained to work within compromises and bounds set by the government and employers but became "Bolshevik" in their desire to take forcible control over their workplaces and industries. The left wing of the S.P.O. applied its own experience to nationwide strikes, including the illegitimacy of negotiation with government and industrial officials and the necessity of aggressive direct action.

In many respects, more radical labor leaders reflected the S.P.O.'s assertions that compromise among workers had run its course and more confrontational action was necessary. Longtime A.F.L. organizer – and later communist leader – William Z. Foster touted the Great Steel Strike of 1919 for its ability to mobilize thousands of steelworkers nationwide, across their states' borders, and to not accede to unsatisfactory compromises with employers that did not address demands for reductions in working hours and raised wages. Before he became a Communist Party head, Foster even used the steel strike as evidence of trade unions' utility as anti-capitalist organizations, against left-wing condemnations of the A.F.L.[217] In some sense, radical union

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[216] "Seattle Strikers Frighten Capitalist Class," *Ohio Socialist*, February 12, 1919, 1; "Paterson Strikers Adopt Soviet Form of Organization," *Ohio Socialist*, February 12, 1919, 1.
[217] William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (New York: B.W. Huebsch, Inc., 1920), 257-262

organizers and socialists both perceived workers' mass preparedness for more confrontational tactics, against their employers and the larger capitalist system.

Nevertheless, an escalatory cycle began between radicals in the socialist and labor movements and their opponents in government and business, who sought to confront what they perceived as one another's undue, destabilizing influence. The Great Steel Strike, for example, may have refused to compromise its position, but business leaders waged a publicity campaign against the potential radical, immigrant elements in its ranks and several state governments sent the National Guard to halt the strike. In Ohio, late in 1919, Governor Cox and the State Assembly instituted laws against criminal syndicalism in response to the steel strike, banning the use of criminal acts "as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform."[218] Similarly, in Boston, the chamber of commerce and politicians like Governor Calvin Coolidge decried striking police officers as deserters and "agents of Lenin." In Seattle, Mayor Ole Hanson was hailed as the city's "savior" for using thousands of policemen and federal troops to break the general strike and halt the "anarchists in this community."[219] For Cox, Coolidge, and Hanson alike, the strikes brought positive publicity and political opportunity, as Democrat Cox and Republican Coolidge respectively earned their parties' presidential and vice-presidential nominations in 1920, and Hanson became a national celebrity. The use of law enforcement to halt radical organizing in the U.S. and its cities continued into peacetime, even as anti-striking laws and the Espionage and Sedition Acts expired. As the Red Scare developed, these legal measures maintained the pressure socialists and radicals experienced during wartime; officials closely watched their rallies and maintained the power to arrest them, if it seemed they posed a threat to domestic stability. After

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[218] Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 232-233.
[219] Ibid., 63, 126.

being arrested on a trip from Russia to the U.S., John Reed reportedly heard American officers bragging about their surveillance of socialists in Cleveland: "You can't eat your dinner in a restaurant, you can't go to the theater, you can't lay down to sleep, without we hear every word you utter."[220]

Nationally and within their communities, some radicals and left-wing socialists further escalated their own resistance to the government and its crackdowns. Bombings were a particular source of anxiety among politicians and business leaders in 1919, as small contingents of anarchists and would-be assassins touted them as a revolutionary tool. As the Red Scare accelerated in Boston, anarchists ostensibly posted fliers throughout New England warning, The senile fossils ruling the United States see red! …You have shown no pity to us! We will do likewise. . . .We will dynamite you!"[221] Many of these bomb plots ended unsuccessfully, however, as anti-radicals like Mayor Hanson of Seattle and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer each avoided assassination attempts on their lives. Even if the bombings were confined to small groups of radicals, they demonstrated a developing sentiment that violent action was needed to overcome those elite figures and the policies they instituted against striking workers and potential revolutionaries.

In Cleveland, where law enforcement bragged of its unceasing surveillance of socialists, C.E. Ruthenberg and Local Cleveland came to blows with police and groups of recently returned veterans, as part of this escalatory cycle. On May Day, as news broke in Cleveland of mail bombs and potential anarchist plotters, socialists held a parade and rally, knowing they were being closely observed by law enforcement. Unlike the year earlier, when the city government forcibly cancelled the May Day celebrations out of concern for the war effort, socialists were allowed to hold the

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[220] Rosenstone, 327.
[221] Murray, 69.

rallies. From its beginning, the May Day parade was a reaction to city and state regulations against revolutionary influences. Local Cleveland displayed red flags despite a recently passed state law that banned them. According to the account of the S.P.O., thousands of socialists and union members, from the I.W.W. and A.F.L. alike, attended the rally. As Ruthenberg wrote, "no more glorious sight could be imagined in the minds of those inspired by the ideal of the Social Revolution than…to see scores red banners waving, and then…to see a veritable cloud of red as thousands of pennants were thrust high over the heads of workers."[222] At the parade, calls for revolution mixed with calls for the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and, among contingents of unemployed veterans in the parade, calls for jobs and improved working conditions.[223] The revolutionary potential of the May Day parade was not lost among its leaders. Although some members of the crowd merely asked for their post-war working conditions and economic prospects to be improved, their very participation seemed indicative of the need to show solidaristic force in the face of constraints.

Aside from the ideological significance of the parade, it was significant as a direct clash with police, troops, and fellow citizens in Cleveland, which seemed to further confirm assumptions of widespread radicalism. Writing to Boston's *Revolutionary Age*, Ruthenberg reported, "The workers of Cleveland who are striving to throw off the yolk of oppression and exploitation have received their baptism in blood."[224] As the parade entered Cleveland's Public Square to hear speeches by Ruthenberg and others, police rode on horseback through the crowd and began attempting to seize red flags in the crowd – an action that was met with skirmishes between marchers and policemen. As these skirmishes took place, onlookers in the crowd joined to assist

[222] Charles E. Ruthenberg, "The Cleveland May Day Demonstration," *Ohio Socialist*, May 10, 1919, 4.
[223] Johnson, 142; Hortense Wagenknecht, "First Authentic News of Cleveland May Day Demonstration," *Miami Valley Socialist*, May 16, 1919, 1.
[224] Ruthenberg, "The Cleveland May Day Demonstration," 4.

the police; socialists reported that some veterans in the crowd attacked veterans in the parade.[225] Eventually, trucks full of police, troops, and deputized groups of American Protective League members arrived at the ensuing riot, followed even by several tanks. Police arrested Ruthenberg for attempting to intervene, charging him with assault with promoting a disturbance, although he was released soon after and never convicted. By the end of the riot, Local Cleveland's headquarters on Prospect Avenue were trashed, as "hoodlums" broke furniture, trampled red flags inside, and lit a fire in front of building.[226] As one German-language leader recalled, socialists' anxieties lasted for days afterward; they stationed guards in front of Ruthenberg's house, and when the police released socialists on bail, they had to cooperate with the socialists to shuttle them home under the cover of night, one at a time.[227]

In the aftermath of the riot, two people were killed, and scores were treated in local hospitals for lacerations to the head, caused by nightsticks and fights between fellow citizens. Escalation continued after the riot, though, as federal District Attorney Edwin Wertz opened cases on all foreign-born marchers, and Cleveland's mayor and police chief asserted they "would not tolerate the use of the red standard in the city."[228] Much of the socialists' organizing after the riot was dedicated to raising funds for arrested marchers, offering rewards for information about the "attack" on the socialists, and protecting themselves against retaliation. Nevertheless, as his local party's leader, Ruthenberg stressed that the riot was a sign that workers were organized to the point of resistance, and business and political leaders could not halt their future organizing. Charging

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[225] Ibid.; "Cleveland Socialists' Greatest Parade Ends in Riot and Bloodshed," *Ohio Socialist*, May 8, 1919, 1.
[226] Jodlbauer, 158-159; Ruthenberg, "The Cleveland May Day Demonstration," 4; Cleveland Socialists' Greatest Parade Ends in Riot and Bloodshed," 1; "1 Killed, 40 Injured in Riots: 125 Arrested in Red May Day Here," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 2, 1919, 1.
[227] Jodlbauer, 160-161; Johnson, 143.
[228] "Red Meetings: Chief Gives Orders to Socialists," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, May 3, 1919, 1.

the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce as a potential organizational force for the police intervention and participants from the crowd, he wrote,

> "The workers have their lesson. They have learned how "democracy" meets peaceable protest. They know from the thousands who marched that their power is greater than ever. Another day is coming. They will go on until victory is achieved."[229]

Since the workers experienced their "baptism in blood," Ruthenberg asserted, they also experienced the illegitimate actions the government was capable of, firsthand, and could organize toward a revolutionary victory as a result. Although May Day ended in disaster, as Ruthenberg noted, its high turnout and violent results signified that workers were capable and willing to organize toward revolution.

As politicians and law enforcement sought to confront threats of radicalism and foreign agitation, continued legal and political suppression, anti-radical rhetoric and legal actions spiked again in Cincinnati and Dayton too. In Cincinnati, the federal court resumed the trial of thirteen socialists in June 1919, after delaying charges under the Espionage Act the year earlier for Lotta Burke's dire health issues. Again, Dayton's Joseph Sharts and progressive lawyer Edward Alexander represented the socialists, but they simultaneously contended with being removed from organizing in the field and declining relationships with Cincinnati's larger activist milieu. In Dayton, socialists again mostly avoided crackdowns on their organizing, though they failed to recreate their primary victory in 1917, as the Citizens' Committee and Democrats ran on platforms stressing good government reforms and national security concerns. As the Citizens' Committee used the motto "Safe, Sane, Sensible Citizens – Real Americans," the Democrats resurged along similar lines, so Local Dayton was relegated to running a "campaign of education" for the general

[229] Ruthenberg, "The Cleveland May Day Demonstration," 4.

election.[230] But as local presses and politicians spread reports of violence by "Bolshevist" and I.W.W. violence throughout the country, they attempted to tie that violence to Local Dayton. The *Dayton Daily News*, owned by anti-radical Governor of Ohio James Cox, remained a major anti-socialist force in the city, advocating for "patriotic workingmen…[to] rise up and swat the reds."[231]

Local Dayton condemned the behavior of the *Daily News* and the suppression of comrades in other cities, but because of their prevailing moderation, Dayton's socialists confined tensions to rhetoric and the press. The Local condemned the *Daily News* for "[going] crazy with bloodlust," but it preferred an indoor "dance and euchre" with socialist speeches and campaign rallies to mass rallies and marches with revolutionary slogans, unlike Local Cleveland.[232] This choice likely prevented severe attention and repercussions by law enforcement, when the socialists gathered. Moreover, as notable community members and organizations refused to participate in anti-radical organizing, calls for action against the socialists dissipated. National Cash Register president John Patterson, along with major unions and city commissioners, decried the potential of mob action because they were "contrary to principles of justice."[233] Local Dayton was able to continue its organizing and campaigning unscathed, except in the press; there was no need for it to escalate to calls for confrontation and revolt against anti-radical elements.

Amid the radical, tense atmosphere of 1919, the left wing redoubled its efforts to take control of the S.P.A. At party conventions, held between the summer and end of 1919, the leftists hoped to build off the momentum of more radical labor organizing and continued advocating that

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[230] "Contest in City May Be Between Two Old Parties," *Dayton Daily News*, April 6, 1919, 12; "A Big Job Ahead," *Dayton Daily News*, August 3, 1919, 6; Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, September 15, 1919, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.
[231] Walker, 125; "Emboldened Socialists," *Dayton Daily News*, April 3, 1919, 6.
[232] Walker 125; Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, April 4, 1919; Regular Meeting of Local Dayton Socialist Party, April 11, 1919, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU.

[233] Walker, 126.

the S.P.A. join the Bolsheviks in the international revolutionary struggle. As the party's political actionist program continued to suffer, with Victor Berger being denied a congressional seat to which he was duly elected, the *Ohio Socialist* suggested "the political henchmen of the capitalist class will leave no stone unturned" to prevent socialist political success.[234] Looking toward nationwide party referenda and a string of conventions, the denial of Berger's seat was yet more evidence that the government could not be trusted to accept political gains by the socialists, even if they were "duly elected."[235] With the party's moderate leadership reeling, as it contended with legal and political struggles in its own ranks and throughout its party, and because the left wing had a strong, independent infrastructure to work from, the S.P.A.'s leftists seemed prepared for a successful takeover.

As the left wing of the party strengthened itself to challenge the S.P.A.'s leadership, conflicts arose between the national office and state, local, and foreign-language organizations. Often, these conflicts concerned whether democratic guidelines in party proceedings were being followed. In many instances in 1919, the leftists argued that moderate, national leaders like Berger, Adolph Germer, and Morris Hillquit behaved autocratically, without referenda to approve major decisions, or to reinforce their own influence. Such disagreements arose as early as March 1919, when the S.P.A. announced it would use party funds to purchase a building for its headquarters to avoid rising costs of rent. Local Cincinnati responded in protest that the national party had not complied with the party constitution in making such a decision because it had not held a referendum to ask members' approval.[236] But soon, these questions over party process began to concern whether the moderates would respect dissent or divergence within the party. Left wing-

[234] "Victor Berger, Socialist Congressman, Denied Seat in Congress," *Ohio Socialist*, May 28, 1919, 1.
[235] Ibid.
[236] "Cincinnati Protests," *Ohio Socialist*, March 19, 1919, 2.

dominated state, local, and foreign-language branches began organizing along the lines of new, proposed platforms and claiming adherence to the Bolshevik example; as a result, a process of backlash and confrontational escalation took place in the party, like what socialists experienced from the government throughout the war.

An emergency in the party became evident when the state party of Michigan and various foreign-language federations came into conflict with the S.P.A.'s National Executive Committee. As foreign-language members of the party received word of revolutions in Europe, many began suggesting the adoption of more radical organizing, to eschew any appeals to "immediate demands," and to enshrine these tactics in their organizations' programs. Meanwhile, at state parties' conventions, left-wing members attempted to do the same, even if they were not dominant within them. When the National Executive Committee caught word of proposed amendments to the Socialist Party of Michigan's constitution in May 1919, which proposed to ban organizing for ameliorative, short-term reforms, it met and voted to expel the Michigan party from the S.P.A.[237] At the same time, the Committee voted to ban a slate of foreign-language federations, including the Russian, Polish, Lettish, Latvian, and Ukrainian organizations, throughout the country. What is more, as left-wing candidates dominated recent elections to the National Executive Committee, the incumbents voted to nullify the results, citing irregularities in vote counting. As the moderates on the Committee outnumbered leftists, including Ohio's Alfred Wagenknecht, these decisions passed easily. As moderate national leaders like Adolph Germer wrote, the left-wing threatened to convert "some of our most active locals into mere debating societies" and alienate membership through their stringent adherence to revolutionary ideology.[238] Such fears of decreased

[237] Weinstein, 197.
[238] Ibid., 196.

effectiveness for the party, if it veered toward left-wing leadership, likely drove the moderates' attempts to consolidate their control over the party.

However, the costs were steep: thousands of foreign-born, active members of the party were ejected from the party nationwide, and they did not return when their branches were reorganized soon after. For left-wing members of the party, who stressed their desire to avoid "secession," the moderate leadership demonstrated its "autocracy." The state organizations of Ohio and Massachusetts, led by strong, left-wing contingents, passed resolutions in solidarity with those affected by the Executive Committee's actions and demanded their reinstatement.[239] The nullification of party election results also alienated left-wing members of the party, as their success offered their clearest path to taking over the S.P.A. by being duly elected to its national posts. In Ohio, C.E. Ruthenberg won his state election to the National Executive Committee. Proposing resolutions for an upcoming referendum, Local Cleveland demanded the election results be accepted by the Executive Committee. Nevertheless, the crisis within the party continued; moderates in New York proposed to expel left-wing members from the party and to reorganize Local New York's left wing-dominated branches – another clear sign that the moderates were consolidating power, according to the left wing.[240] In Ohio, the left wing took to calling the National Executive Committee a "little group of reactionary autocrats," and its actions an attempt to "isolate the party from the vitalizing currents of Revolutionary Socialism."[241] For a left wing that increasingly rebuked "bourgeois democracy" for empowering capitalist interests, the actions of the moderates demonstrated that they, too, were reinforcing those political structures and sought to offer no economic alternative to those interests. As the *Ohio Socialist* described, "It is the

[239] Ibid., 199; Fine, 345; "Rebuke the Autocratic Acts of the National Executive Committee by Endorsing this Motion for National Referendum," *Ohio Socialist*, June 4, 1919, 3.
[240] "Party News and Views: Resolution," *Ohio Socialist*, June 4, 1919, 3.
[241] "Forty Thousand Expelled By Despotic Group of Seven," *Ohio Socialist*, June 4, 1919, 3.

struggle between the Right Wing and the Left Wing – between moderate petty bourgeois socialism and revolutionary, proletarian socialism."[242]

By the time the S.P.O. held its state convention in Cincinnati, in June 1919, it reported that half the national party membership was expelled by the national leadership. In New York, moderates managed to force out leftists; proceedings to expel the entire Socialist Party of Massachusetts were ongoing; and the German Socialist Federation and state parties of Washington and New Jersey were each threatened with expulsion for adopting the Left Wing Section's program. The S.P.O.'s leadership warned its members, "Eventually, most of the Socialists will be outside the official party," as expulsions continued, and former members of the Jewish Federation and the New York City organization began forming competing socialist groups.[243] Preparing to meet in Cincinnati, the convention's main question was, how it would respond to the expulsions of other state organizations and whether the state organization would officially adopt the Left Wing Program. Many of its local organizations already had done so, and left-wing leaders in northern Ohio endorsed it, but it was not yet the official organizational program of the S.P.O. Unlike the other state conventions of 1919, there were no proposed resolutions to expel certain groups of members or ban certain forms of organizing. But the state convention would decide whether the socialist movement would officially adopt a revolutionary stance in Ohio.

The S.P.O.'s leadership expected that the Left Wing Program would be adopted with some certainty, assuming that the party was overwhelmingly left-leaning. In many respects, this was accurate; the left wing-dominated State Executive Committee was reelected twice, statewide, between 1917 and 1919, and the state party elected leftist National Executive Committee members throughout the 1910s. However, Ohio's moderates, especially in Dayton, were reticent about the

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[242] Ibid.
[243] "Report of the State Secretary, 1919 Convention, Socialist Party of Ohio," *Ohio Socialist*, July 2, 1919, 2.

adoption of the left-wing program and its implications for the party. Some of Local Dayton's members wrote letters to the editor in the *Ohio Socialist*, reporting frustrations that their party contributed few writings to the newspaper and remained on the sidelines of national debates about the Socialist Party's program.[244] Nevertheless, Local Dayton's leadership avoided any choices that made it appear too radical and, therefore, deserving of hostile or disciplinary responses that could disrupt their organizing. Already, Local Dayton faced attacks in the press, threats from anti-radical elements in their city, and a sudden decline in its electoral success. Corresponding with moderate comrades in Local Detroit as left-wing members attempted to exert more influence in it, party leaders in Dayton agreed that the left-wing "reds" were exacerbating underlying tensions in the party, relitigating old disputes, and threatening to separate state and local branches from the resources and coordination of the national party leadership.[245] Since nationally published propaganda, touring speakers, and even organizational consultants helped socialists in their campaigns, by attracting potential voters and providing them attractive propaganda, disconnection from that national structure would mean the removal of these important resources. Reporting back to Local Dayton, its state convention delegate Joseph Sharts recommended that it oppose the S.P.O.'s adoption of a left-wing organizational program because of these factors.[246] Again looking to its future electoral prospects, Local Dayton acted as it had when the 1917 anti-war platform passed the emergency convention in St. Louis: it avoided tying itself to a platform that could make it a target of suppression in its community and, now, from their own party. As a result, Local Dayton diverged from the larger S.P.O.

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[244] "Read This, Dayton Comrades," *Ohio Socialist*, July 2, 1919, 4.
[245] Adolph [last name missing] to Oscar E. Edelman, March 24, 1918, in Oscar E. Edelman Papers, box 1, file 1, WSU.
[246] "Stirring Socialist Debate at Memorial Hall," 1, 4; Regular Meeting of the Local Dayton Socialist Party, June 30, 1919, in Local Dayton Socialist Party Records, box 2, file 1, WSU; "Official Proceedings – State Convention – Socialist Party of Ohio," *Ohio Socialist*, July 9, 1919, 2; Richard A. Folk, "A Study of the Socialist Party of Ohio, 1900-1925," M.A. Thesis (University of Toledo, 1965), 139.

As the left wing predicted, it dominated the state convention, and the resolutions it adopted reflected those that led to the expulsions of other state, local, and federation branches. Against the trepidations of Local Dayton, the S.P.O. reacted to the political and legal struggles it had experienced since 1917 and the national party's decisions by adopting the Left Wing Program and completely deemphasizing political action. With a national emergency convention scheduled for late August, the proceedings had added significance. The S.P.O. voted overwhelmingly, moderates and leftists alike, to condemn the actions of the National Executive Committee, and the dominant left wing swung the vote to compel S.P.O. delegates to vote in favor of the Left Wing Program. Moreover, the party voted against seating delegates from "reorganized" branches, reinstating expelled delegates, and warned that "the Right Wing party officials, with the possible help of the capitalist police state," may attempt to coerce the convention.[247] Because expelled, left-wing members organized a parallel meeting to found a communist party the same day, if such coercion occurred, delegates from Ohio were instructed to join it. To the left wing of the S.P.O. the moderate, political actionist leadership of the party appeared similar to its political opponents throughout the war; it jeopardized due party processes to retain its power and, therefore, could potentially use more coercive actions to achieve those ends.

Preparing for a potential confrontation at the emergency convention, the S.P.O. increased its commitment to the Left Wing Program and its opposition to political action. Writing the state party's municipal platform, C.E. Ruthenberg and several other delegates rejected that political action or election to government office held any utility, except in the party's capacity to propagandize. As Ruthenberg and his co-writers asserted,

> "[the Socialist Party] recognizes that the problems of capitalism cannot be solved in one community, but…through the establishment of the Dictatorship of

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[247] "Official Proceedings – State Convention – Socialist Party of Ohio," 2.

> the Proletariat....The Socialist Party enters the municipal campaign because [it] affords the opportunity for organization and propaganda that will eventually lead to the emancipation of the working class. The Socialists elected to office shall carry on a propaganda for the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. They will analyze the laws proposed by capitalists…[and] show the impossibility of solving the problems of socialism short of the abolition of the entire system."[248]

Even when Ruthenberg and other leftists asserted that propaganda was the main function of socialist campaigns in the early 1910s, they still acknowledged the ability of reformist agendas to win the party's "greatest victories" and attract voters toward education about the socialist movement. As of 1919, they rejected this political strategy, like the expelled party branches throughout the country, and adopted an all-or-nothing approach. Combined with commitments to support those expelled branches, this statement signaled that the left wing was ready to abandon the big tent organization and strategies, defined in part by local electoral success and legislating in city governments. The S.P.O. was determined to either transform the national Socialist Party into a completely revolutionary party, or to leave it, if they were impeded.

The S.P.O. further escalated its maneuvering in the leadup to the national emergency convention by establishing a new national executive committee, which it claimed to be the legitimate, rightful leadership of the party. Electing Ohio's Alfred Wagenknecht as its temporary national secretary, the committee consisted of many party leaders who were elected to the National Executive Committee in the nullified referendum. In many respects, the purpose of the new committee was to attract support from those affected by the old National Executive Committee's actions throughout 1919. In establishing itself, the new committee declared that the actions of moderate party leaders were illegitimate; it claimed they lost their party election, so the National Executive Committee they sat on "constitutionally ceased to function" and their decisions were

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[248] Ibid.

null. Therefore, the new committee ordered that all expelled party members be reinstated and admitted to the emergency convention.[249] With Wagenknecht, Ruthenberg, and Akron's Marguerite Prevey sitting on the committee, the Ohioans succeeded in having the national headquarters moved to the S.P.O.'s offices in Cleveland, until they could gain possession of the S.P.A. offices in Chicago. Finally, Wagenknecht wrote to the local parties throughout Ohio and the United States, asking them to "PLAY SAFE" and send party rolls to the new headquarters in Cleveland.[250] The new committee still planned to attend and take control over the S.P.A at the emergency convention, but it now viewed this takeover as a mere formality. The left-wing body was only attending to be recognized as the official Socialist Party of America.

The emergency convention was not so simple, though, as the old National Executive Committee met its left-wing counterpart with sanctions, which were intended to halt its momentum. To begin, the Executive Committee initiated proceedings to expel the S.P.O. from the national party just more than a week before the convention, citing its contradiction of party policies by again recognizing previously expelled branches and federations, and because it took funds from the payment of dues stamps by its locals, intended to fund the emergency convention.[251] Proceedings were ongoing by the time the national party convened, but the S.P.O.'s delegates were still excluded. Even still, delegates from expelled branches, and expelled members more generally, still attended the convention in Chicago on August 31, 1919. Outside of Machinist's Hall, expelled party members protested demanded entry into the convention. Meanwhile, in a room upstairs in the hall, Alfred Wagenknecht and many members of his left-wing national executive committee called their own conference when moderate party leaders refused to seat them. Eventually,

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[249] "New National Executive Committee Meets," *Ohio Socialist*, August 6, 1919, 4.
[250] "Send Roster of Your Delegates to New National Executive Committee," *Ohio Socialist*, August 6, 1919, 4.
[251] "Former National Executive Committee Thinks It Can Rule By Divine Right," *Ohio Socialist*, August 20, 1917, 3.

Wagenknecht's group passed a motion to convene the national emergency convention, claiming itself to be the genuine S.P.A. and its meeting to be the real convention. As its first act, the new convention "renamed" the S.P.A. "the Communist Socialists of America." Soon, however, earlier predictions were confirmed, as National Secretary Adolph Germer called Chicago police to eject Wagenknecht's group from the building.

Elsewhere, another group of leftists met, led by C.E. Ruthenberg. According to Ruthenberg's biographer and later Communist Party leader William Z. Foster, en route to Chicago, Ruthenberg met with members of the Socialist Party of Michigan and several foreign language federations, who urged him to lead an independent convention.[252] The differences between Wagenknecht's and Ruthenberg's groups were rather negligible, except that Ruthenberg's was larger and contained more foreign-born delegates: both emphasized noncommitment to reformist platforms, asserted their desires to join the Soviet Union's newly formed Communist International, and a desire to bring about a dictatorship of the proletariat in America.[253] Perhaps the decisive difference was whether the groups were going to Chicago to form a new, independent organization, or to seek further solutions within the Socialist Party, even by capturing its convention as Wagenknecht's group intended to. Articles published in the conventions' immediate aftermath and later party histories provide little clue about why the two left-wing groups never coalesced in Chicago, with Foster generally blaming the outcome on their hasty formation. However, it seems that the group that formed around Ruthenberg urged a total split from the S.P.A. when they consulted with him. Forming the Communist Party of America (C.P.A.) at their meeting, Ruthenberg's group suggested that Wagenknecht's group illegitimately formed another

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[252] Johnson, 145-147; Foster, 171-172.

[253] Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States*, 172-174; "Tactical Problems," *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, 3.

communist party because it was denied entry to the old S.P.A.'s convention, but up to that point, it intended to work within the party. As the C.P.A. suggested of the "Communist Socialists," who changed their name to the Communist Labor Party (C.L.P.) by the end of the year, this suggested a willingness to compromise with the remaining moderate section of the S.P.A. – "a party of the middle class and reactionary craft unions."[254] Altogether, this suggests that Ruthenberg's group did the opposite of Wagenknecht and his, meeting in Chicago to secede from the S.P.A., effectively suggesting that it no longer represented the most basic element of the socialist class struggle: an industrial, proletarian working class. Even though the groups that founded the C.P.A. and C.L.P. originally stressed their shared desire to remain in the S.P.A., any remnants of that body seemed illegitimate because of their connection to the "bourgeois" democracy that targeted them from 1917 onward.

Returning to Ohio, the two new communist parties set out to establish themselves as the dominant force for creating a dictatorship of the proletariat, jockeying for the support of Ohio's radicals and organizational resources against one another, the remaining S.P.O., and even the newly formed Labor Party. Because of Wagenknecht's former position as state secretary of the S.P.O., he maintained access to the state office and continued to use its resources over the coming months to build support for his smaller party. Eventually, however, as the S.P.O. was reorganized by the national Socialist Party, Wagenknecht lost control of the state office to many of the moderates he displaced when he was elected state secretary in 1916. Moderate figures like Cleveland's John G. Willert, a moderate who conflicted with C.E. Ruthenberg during the rift between direct and political actionists in 1912 and was displaced by Ruthenberg as Cleveland's socialist leader, regained control of state and local branches in Ohio. In the reorganization process,

[254] "Tactical Problems," 3; "The Socialist Party," *The Communist*, September 27, 1919, 3.

Local Dayton also remained in the Socialist Party and committed its electoral platform, which was never delegitimized in the opinions of its leaders.[255] Eventually, Local Dayton members took control of the state party, as the most influential, remaining branch; members like Oscar Edelman became state secretary, the *Miami Valley Socialist* became its leading periodical, and Dayton became the city where it was headquartered.

Even if the moderates asserted greater control over the remaining socialist organization in Ohio, the C.P.A. and C.L.P. separated from the party with a large share of its resources and membership. In Cleveland, the former State Executive Committee members used their access to the state office to take possession of the party press and its organizational supplies. Moreover, in October 1919, as the three parties met with their combined memberships in Cleveland, so undecided radicals could determine which party they would join, a majority of Local Cleveland members split between the new communist parties, whose left-wing leaders had more consistent influence over the local party. New local leader John G. Willert condemned the new parties because they "grabbed everything in sight and walked off with it."[256] With few supplies left from the local office, its membership siphoned, and its presses captured by the communists and alienated trade unionists, Local Cleveland's membership fell from several thousand to 450 in under two months, between the official formation of the communist parties in late August and the parties' meeting in October. In Cincinnati, Lotta Burke and several other members of Local Cincinnati joined the C.L.P., though their organization remained small and dependent on sympathetic allies; the party's headquarters consisted of one rented desk in the offices of the Cincinnati local of the Machinists' Union. Even this amount of external support was likely dependent on Lotta Burke's

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[255] "Municipal Platform of Local Dayton Socialist Party," September 29, 1919, in Oscar Edelman Papers, box 3, file 2, WSU.

[256] "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, October 11, 1919, 3.

connections with union organizers in the city, as an organizer for the Amalgamate Clothing Workers of America, and was more limited than Local Cincinnati's coalition with its cities progressives, who were alienated by leftist radicalism.

In sum, big tent socialism in Ohio was shattered. Elements of the big tent's style of organizing remained in Dayton, and the non-communist moderates in other cities, who remained in local branches under left-wing control, regained control over their locals in the left wing's absence and shifted them back to political action. However, political action no longer held its former power as an organizational program that could unite the wings of the socialist movement. In 1919, labor radicalism reached new heights in the United States, as did repressive measures against it. In this context, left-wing socialists – who were previously spurred by long-standing organizational disputes and reports of success by international, revolutionary movements to form independent organizations – now sensed that the timing was right to escalate toward direct confrontation with the U.S. government and American capitalists. Workers seemed to have the beginnings of revolutionary sentiment, to take control of political, economic, and industrial power by force. After years of repression of socialists, the self-described representatives of the working class, by government and legal institutions left-wing socialists sensed that their previous electoral organizing was no longer viable, possible, or useful. Therefore, a Socialist Party that pushed for such an organizational program also held no utility, as it would be locked in futile, unwinnable struggles in "bourgeois" democratic institutions. As a result, not yet seeking to split from their party despite their sense of its flaws, the left-wing socialists and their emerging leaders in Ohio accelerated efforts to take control of the Socialist Party, just as they escalated efforts to organize workers and themselves for a revolutionary confrontation with the government.

However, similar to the escalatory cycle that played out when socialists in Ohio confronted their communities' institutions – of increased revolutionary rhetoric and behavior leading to more drastic repressive measures – the moderate leadership of the S.P.A. reacted to the leftists with expulsions and efforts to lessen their influence. Worried that the left wing would destroy the party's political prospects at all levels of government and politics, from local to national, the National Executive Committee expelled entire branches and federations for deviating from the national, political actionist program. For a left wing, who attempted political action during the war but received backlash and violations of their political rights nevertheless, electoral politics was already unattractive; its cover offered no political or legal protection, and their successes were brazenly reversed. Leftists perceived of the National Executive Committee's behavior as similarly brazen, when it reversed their gains within the party by nullifying referendum results and banned them for revolutionary activity in their communities, states, and country. The Executive Committee's behavior illegitimate in the sense that it was generally undemocratic; but in such a combustible, post-war environment, when leftists sensed they could follow the revolutionary example of the Bolsheviks in their own communities, it also appeared unwilling, and even obstructive, to the organization of a homegrown socialist revolution in the U.S. With the repression of the war and its aftermath still fresh, and their revolutionary aspirations growing, Ohio's left-wing leaders, Alfred Wagenknecht and C.E. Ruthenberg, split decisively from the S.P.A. because it was rendered illegitimate in its undemocratic actions – and because of its ostensible noncommitment to build a revolutionary movement and, in turn, a socialist state. In their own state, they were followed by socialists like Lotta Burke, whose Local Cincinnati experienced similar repression and a breakdown in political organizing with the dispersal of its non-socialist allies. Ohio became an early stronghold for a more revolutionary form of socialism because, for the left wing in Cleveland

and Cincinnati, political campaigning was disrupted, imperiled, and closed off by the war. The state became an early communist stronghold because the moderate leadership of the S.P.A. seemed to comparably suppress the influence of its left-wing comrades.

III. After the Big Tent: Conclusions

In the wake of the socialists' three-way split, their parties' local influence declined for several years because of continued legal repression. In some cases, the groups that remained in the Socialist Party, or joined the communist and Farmer-Labor parties, found that socialistic political action could capture popular support and increase their party's influence. However, the big tent style of socialism never rebounded in Ohio or in the United States. The former collaborators could never agree on the ultimate ends of the socialist movement – and often failed to definitively decide what the place of political action was in their own parties. Some vestiges of big tent organizing remained in Ohio, as remaining socialists maintained their municipal campaigning, or the divided parties combined their influence to support certain candidates. But after the big tent, remaining, anti-radical measures and the lack of consensus on how to justify political action meant the old socialist coalition was permanently split – and that even though demands for more aggressive, reformist alternatives remained in Ohio's politics, the former coalition members were unable to meet them.

In the wake of the C.P.A.'s and C.L.P.'s founding conventions, their leaders returned to Ohio and were able to attain the support of much of the S.P.O.'s membership; however, in their cities, they found limited opportunity to gain support. Politically, C.P.A. and C.L.P. leaders disengaged perhaps too suddenly. Despite ongoing mayoral and municipal campaigns, continuing from their tenures in the Socialist Party and now solely acting as avenues for propaganda,

communist candidates like C.E. Ruthenberg largely disengaged from any pretense of gaining votes to win their elections. In fact, in its early days, much of Ruthenberg and the C.P.A.'s efforts in Cleveland focused on agitating shop committees to take over their industries in secret meetings; enduring government raids, in which mailing lists were seized; raising a defense fund; and attempting to expand and maintain support among old Socialist Party members. Ruthenberg even promised to immediately resign from office if he was elected. [257] Eventually, Ruthenberg was effectively removed from the 1919 mayoral election, as the Board of Elections alleged irregularities in the paperwork he filed, leaving him a write-in candidate. Unwilling to offer any political concessions in his campaign and engrossed in his work to organize a revolutionary party, Ruthenberg's candidacy barely registered in Cleveland's municipal election results and attracted less attention from the public than his indictment under Ohio's criminal syndicalism laws.[258]

Increasingly, party organizing was forced underground – and into the meeting halls of the Soviet Union's Communist International – as all communists were targeted under syndicalism laws and bans on their rallies. Under the Palmer Raids, the Red Scare, and prevailing, constant surveillance, both communist parties decided to organize underground. Beginning in late December of 1919, Ruthenberg notified his comrades that their names were known to the federal government – a result of earlier raids on socialist offices and recent raids on communist headquarters – and asked them to provide pseudonyms.[259] As Theodore Draper described the situation, from 1920 "[t]o the day of his death, Ruthenberg was never free of appeals from convictions."[260] Under such conditions, the leadership of the C.P.A. ordered its members "DON'T

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[257] Judd, 175; Charles E. Ruthenberg to Edward S. Smith, October 16, 1919, in Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, Collection P2, MSS 2917, OHC.
[258] "Wet and Dry Issue in Balance: Cleveland Elects Davis as Mayor," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 5, 1919, 1-2; "State Calls Davis in Trial of Ruthenberg," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 14, 1919, 1.
[259] Draper, 204-205; Charles E. Ruthenberg to Edward S. Smith, December 31, 1919, in Charles E. Ruthenberg Papers, Collection P2, MSS 2917, OHC.
[260] Draper, 204.

shirk party work because of the risks connected with it," but simultaneously, "DON'T divulge your membership in the party without necessity." Between late 1919 and early 1920, the C.L.P. retained "few members" and the C.P.A. estimated that it lost around fifteen thousand dues-paying members nationwide, likely a result of anxieties and arrests caused by the widespread raids.[261] Forced underground by the Palmer Raids and similar state-level actions, like New York's Lusk Committee, communists often shuttered the presses they brought from their former socialist organizations and they were largely unable to engage in any public organizing until 1921, when they joined to form the "legal" Workers' Party of America. For around two years, the communists' domestic political influence waned almost entirely, as they could not organize en masse without attracting unwanted attention.

Increasingly, Comintern affairs dominated the American communists' work, as domestic and local organizing seemed untenable. For more than a year, the C.P.A. and C.L.P. competed with one another for recognition by the International as its branch in the U.S. – a conflict that was only resolved through a Comintern-mediated unification of the American parties. Under the United Communist Party, which became the basis for the Workers' Party and the Communist Party of the U.S.A. (C.P.U.S.A.), another round of debates occurred between members about the place of political action in their movement. As "normalcy" returned to the United States, the suppression of radicals that occurred during the war and the Red Scare subsided; although legal struggles continued to follow communist organizers, wartime prisoners like Eugene Debs and large numbers of I.W.W. members were released. To the Comintern and Soviet leadership in Moscow, who sensed the radicalization of labor was subsiding internationally and the chances of global revolution with it, it was unconscionable for the C.P.A. to remain underground and disconnected

[261] Ibid., 206-207.

from American political affairs. As the danger of repression decreased, figures like Lenin met with American communists to express his frustrations with their marginalization and published theoretical works to urge communists to again work to build relationships with mainstream unionists and even build politically influential, above-ground parties.[262] In the U.S., Ruthenberg pushed his party to also reestablish its political actionist work, calling American communism "valueless" unless it could apply its ideological principles to workers' struggles and thereby appeal to potential supporters.[263] The Russian example was instrumental as a justification for American socialists to disconnect from mainstream unions, political action, and older styles of local organizing. Between 1921 and 1924, however, it became clear that political action would be necessary if the communists sought to have any influence, even if they believed they were working in captured, illegitimate institutions. Together, American and Russian communist leaders attempted to turn communists' attention back to their own country and communities, as the easing of repression enabled more open organizing, and frustrations with marginalization led to pragmatic solutions.

In Ohio and nationally, big tent radical organizing experienced a modest resurgence between 1921 and 1924, as communists, socialists, and even the Farmer-Labor Party sensed some pragmatic benefits to working together, and their communities relaxed anti-radical rhetoric and attacks after the war. Local Dayton, for example, remained a small pocket of influence for the shrunken Socialist Party, and much of its platform and strategy remained unchanged from the pre-war years. Although the Local never again won any city commission seats, and often complained that it was beset by a "political Ku Klux" of competitors collaborating to oppose it, calls for

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[262] Brian D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left: 1890-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 129-134.
[263] Draper, 217.

municipal ownership and the reversal of city manager governance remained attractive to many Dayton residents.[264] In 1921, Local Dayton recreated its primary election victory of 1917, beating both the Citizens' Committee and the Democrats in terms of votes received. Again, frustrations with the governance of the Citizens' League, combined with a sense that the socialists offered a more energizing alternative to the League than the major parties, led to Local Dayton's win.[265] Local Dayton was, however, subject to another repetition of its 1917 election: the defeated Citizens' Committee pushed its supporters to vote for resurgent Democrats and Republicans in the city, who took power in Dayton for the first time in nearly a decade. Free of wartime constraints, Local Dayton showed that big tent-style organizing could still potentially work for American socialists and radicals. Voters outside of the party could still be attracted to the socialist coalition and strong, reformist platforms could still be key to increased influence.

In 1924, the presidential campaign of Senator Robert La Follette briefly reunified the efforts of the elements that were once in the socialist big tent, as communists, socialists, and Farmer-Laborites alike sought to confront the policies of Republican administrations and reassert the influence of labor-friendly policies. The communists experienced harsh internal factionalism; balked at the choice of La Follette to lead the ticket because of his connections to the Republican and Progressive Parties; and was dissatisfied by its minority status within the coalition, which it originally hoped to parley into a "mass communist party."[266] However, for each group La Follette's candidacy offered potential political benefit in its policy proposals and potential to attract greater influence. For the Farmer-Labor Party, it was an obvious opportunity to establish itself as a major

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[264] "A Political Ku Klux," *New York Call*, August 5, 1921, newspaper clipping, in Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, file 9, WSU.
[265] "Three Socialist Candidates for Dayton Commission Who Won in Primary Election," August 5, 1921, newspaper clipping, in Oscar Edelman Papers, box 2, file 9, WSU.
[266] Palmer, 229-230.

political force in America, like its forerunners in Britain and Australia. However, La Follette's platform of nationalized utilities and railroads reflected the proposals of the Farmer-Laborites and remaining moderate socialists. Meanwhile, even if the communists sensed they were relegated to junior partners, La Follette's proposal to limit the U.S. Department of Justice's power attracted Communist Party members facing lingering legal struggles.[267] Together, the elements of the coalition collaborated on rallies for the Farmer-Labor cause and directed their respective members to support La Follette along with their parties' independent tickets.

However, with La Follette's base of support limited to his home state of Wisconsin, as well as the northern Midwest, Plains, and western states, the coalition was defeated soundly by President Calvin Coolidge. In Ohio, the results of the campaign were especially disappointing, as the La Follette-socialist-communist coalition only received large vote totals in Cleveland, where the Labor, socialist, and communist parties had established roots.[268] Elsewhere, statewide candidates received no boost from La Follette voters, as the Debs campaigns had offered in earlier decades. Socialist gubernatorial candidate Joseph Sharts did not even receive enough petition signatures to be on the state ballot. For the communists, who sought political action that better reflected their ideological commitments, presidential campaigns became an effective way to propagandize between the 1920s and the Cold War, but they were independent affairs led by figures like William Z. Foster and Earl Browder. Communists rarely found much utility or support for their propagandist campaigns at the municipal and state levels. Afterwards, collaboration between the parties was rare, if it happened at all, as the campaign failed to offer any political gains for the member parties and old resentments resurfaced.

[267] Folk, 156-157.
[268] Judd, 180.

Prior to the First World War and the S.P.A.'s split in 1919, socialist moderates and leftists were able to collaborate and avoid conflict because of shared organizational strategies and shared interpretations of socialist ideology that justified political actionist work. Even if the moderate-directed organizational program of the Socialist Party frustrated left-wing socialists in some respects, before the war, they could assume that reformist platforms could attract voters who could become party members and that they could safely work within their local political institutions. However, wartime repression and crackdowns on radical labor organizing in 1919 spurred leftists to organize toward more revolutionary ends, as they believed capitalists shut them out of political influence, and after the socialist revolutions of the war years and strikes of 1919, that revolution was imminent. As a result, left-wing organizing disconnected from the pragmatic campaigning of moderate party members – who believed repression merely signified deficiencies in the American system that could be reformed and that overly radical organizing could jeopardize the political prospects of the socialist program. The common interpretations of socialism that underpinned the big tent, including a baseline confidence in the legitimacy of government and that political action held any utility for the ends of the socialists' programs, were no longer so standard between the party's wings. As of 1919, whether socialists held these interpretations was dependent upon whether they presented themselves as direct actionists and revolutionaries, or as political actionists and reformists.

This tactical and increasingly ideological disagreement translated into a power struggle for leadership of the S.P.A. However, informed by their experience of wartime and post-war crackdowns, left-wing socialists increasingly viewed the party as illegitimate and ineffective, due to mass expulsions and moderate leaders' continued commitment to political action. Only new communist parties could offer the dedication to revolutionary organizing the leftists sought, as the

moderate leadership consolidated its control over the S.P.A. However, the example of the socialists in Ohio demonstrates that these struggles were not simply matters of international influence or national debates in the party, although both compounded the ultimate radicalization of some S.P.A. members and their divergence from the moderates. The courses of action taken by the socialists depended heavily on their local experiences of politics in the pre-war years, then repression and conflict with the communities' political institutions and law enforcement during and after the First World War. Moderate socialists who achieved pre-war political success tended to accept the continued legitimacy of the government; they could viably regain their political positions and directed their organizing to achieve that potential. As a result, these socialists avoided the radicalism of their party's left wing, as it could justify a repressive response by law enforcement and shut them out of the political institutions in which they competed. For left-wing socialists, who were less successful during the war and had fewer expectations of political success, adherence to political action and reformism failed to increase their influence, even if they managed to increase their vote totals or achieve political office. Rather, the left-wing socialists found that such successes could be swiftly reversed and offered no protection from the suppression of their organizing. The result was, pockets of left-wing and moderate organizing, concentrated in separate local parties, and a deepening of pre-war disputes between the party's wings.

The big tent prevented the socialists from having to answer an all-important tactical question of which ultimate end their movement was working toward: the construction of socialism through violent revolution or government reform. Socialists were aware this question could rend the party, as it threatened to before the war, but they could all justify big tent-style, political actionist organizing no matter which party wing they were in – either as a gradual educational movement toward revolution, or as an electoral movement toward decisive power in the existing

government. However, the domestic policy of the First World War forced many socialists to reconsider the question, as their ability to propagandize and agitate were no longer guaranteed. The big tent's solution of municipal campaigns, reformist platforms, and courting a broad range of supporters from various political backgrounds no longer seemed possible to some, even as party members in other cities sought to preserve it. Forced to decide whether to be a moderate, political actionist party or to transform into a revolutionary party, the socialists' experiences of the war varied so much that their answers contrasted, too. Unable to compromise again, because socialists reacted to wartime policies by transforming their political commitments in differing ways, the big tent fell apart, and each faction claimed to have the most legitimate, feasible vision to create a socialist state.

Conclusion

Prior to the First World War, socialists in Ohio conceived of their movement differently, but they believed political action to be a necessary path for it to grow its influence, whether they leaned leftward or followed the national party's moderate line. Existing under a big tent, which united the revolutionary and moderate wings of the movement, success in municipal politics became vitally important to Ohio's socialists. Indeed, as some socialists remarked, many of the Socialist Party's most significant electoral successes in the United States came at the local level. Moreover, because municipal institutions were those in which socialists could have the most direct influence, they represented a starting point for socialists to begin building a workers' state. Though questions remained about whether a revolution or reforms toward a socialist state represented the ideal model for the socialist movement, socialists of all ideological stances could justify their work within existing political institutions, even those who did not trust government institutions to solve issues of political and economic power in the long term. At least, these institutions could be used to introduce policies that benefitted the construction of a socialist state, or to attract more popular support for the movement.

As the socialists in Ohio demonstrated, though, the application of big tent organizing varied between local parties, in reaction to the political conditions that existed specifically in their municipalities. Since the big tent allowed for a variety of political and ideological backgrounds, socialists could organize their campaigns around differing, receptive constituencies and use locally specific issues to attract them. In Dayton, for example, socialists could represent an alternative, reformist vision to progressive "good government" movements, alongside representing the interests of trade workers. In locals that failed to attract direct influence over government, similar progressive movements represented logical allies with which socialists could build their influence

– a particular necessity in Cincinnati, where working-class and immigrant constituencies were already solidly captured. Sometimes to attract constituencies, socialists attempted to use reforms that were already broadly popular to attract workers toward their ideological ends. Local Cleveland, for example, adopted calls for municipal ownership of streetcars and utilities to educate workers toward revolutionary ends. As a result, the big tent was represented differently, depending upon local conditions, but socialists everywhere were generally committed to reformist platforms, even if their goals for the movement were not.

These pre-existing ideological commitments and local conditions similarly caused socialists' organizing to diverge during the war. Socialists continued advocating for their reformist platforms and attempted to encourage opposition to the war, using municipal politics to do so. Often, the socialists' reform platform maintained their appeal to voters, but increasingly, opponents linked national security issues to local politics. This securitization of municipal governments and politics allowed socialists' opponents to discourage voters from supporting socialist candidates, by associating them with a national S.P.A. platform that committed the socialists to anti-war resistance. As a result, even for moderate socialists and those who framed their opposition to war in patriotic terms, the issue of the war became unavoidable and more determinant of election outcomes. Local issues and reformist platforms no longer guaranteed the Socialist Party's ability to win elections, in which outcomes were more often determined by national security considerations.

The securitization of local politics further led to breakdowns in socialists' beliefs in democratic norms and governmental legitimacy. In cities where socialists held more revolutionary ideologies and approached the war by agitating to outright resistance and nonparticipation, government officials used more extraordinary measures to overcome socialists' influence. While

the socialists held a baseline of belief in the protection of their civil liberties and democratic norms, legal officials and courts justified limits on political rights in cases where threats to national security were perceived. In Cleveland and Cincinnati, these legal standards justified the suppression of socialists' propaganda and speakers, either through national legislation like the Espionage Act or municipal public safety orders. Even where socialists managed be duly elected to public office, if they attempted to vote in accordance with their party's anti-war platform, opposing parties similarly justified overturning their elections for reasons of national security. For socialists' progressive collaborators, these developments seemed to negate the utility of their combined political work, as socialists work within and outside the government could be more easily obstructed by their opponents in the government. Altogether, these developments weakened socialists' big tent, as their non-socialist collaborators withdrew from work with the party and recourse within existing political institutions was totally restricted.

As socialists' ability to work within mainstream politics faltered, so did their faith in the legitimacy of the government. Even before the war, socialists doubted the ability of municipal and national government institutions to solve root political and economic issues, at least as it was presently constituted. For all socialists, a workers' state had to be established to end the exploitation of American workers, whether that new government used the old one as a shell or came about through a revolution. In either case, however, established government institutions were necessary, either to make the first reformist steps toward the new state, to institute ameliorative policies, or to attract support for revolution. At least, socialists believed, their work toward any of these ends would be fairly and legitimately treated by government officials, who were assumed to be idealistically attached to democratic norms and rights. These assumptions diminished during the war because issues of national security gained priority over political rights to dissent.

Differences in the severity of backlash and repression existed between cities, and accordingly, fed into differences in local parties' beliefs. Especially in cities like Cleveland, where socialists were more inclined to question the continued existence of the present government before the war, their doubts deepened because of the overt repression and violence they faced. In Dayton, however, socialists were more willing to assume their ability to engage with government institutions; they experienced more early successes and prioritized the use of old institutions to shape new ones. Since socialists in Dayton did not engage in anti-war organizing that advocated nonparticipation or obstruction, the backlash against them was not as violent or extraordinary and was limited to political rhetoric. Because of these limited repercussions, the socialists in Dayton believed that their involvement in existing institutions remained governed by democratic norms, although they had to overcome the political consequences of the war. Socialists between these cities, which represented strongholds for the left wing in Cleveland and moderates in Dayton, diverged more in their assumptions about political work, as a result. The assumption that political action could be legitimate and useful to the party was no longer shared between the wings of the party, as leftists' suspicions about the government were confirmed and they viewed work within the government as impossible.

Increasingly, left-wing socialists diverged from the big tent, as their domestic political prospects diminished, but international revolutionary movements seemed to successfully construct socialist states. Encouraged by Bolshevik propaganda, alienated, left-wing socialists attempted to institute revolutionary organizing in their communities and in the national socialist movement. Similarly, socialists' progressive and trade unionist allies began to organize along the lines of the British and Australian Labor Parties, sensing that the prospects of American socialism were negated by security concerns and an American Labor Party could institute the worker-friendly

reforms they sought. International influences became attractive because of new, wartime constraints, and because leftists and moderates sought examples to justify their differing visions for the future of their movement.

Finally, as socialists diverged in their organizational visions for the future of their movement, their interpretations of socialist ideology diverged as well. As leftists demanded a more revolutionary course for their movement, long-standing – but previously concealed – tensions between reformists and radicals grew more salient. Socialists no longer held the same conception of democracy, and could not agree whether it could exist outside of a socialist state. Moreover, party members derided one another for adopting organizing that diverged from Marxism, either charging others with disregarding its revolutionary tenets, or its prescriptions that political and economic institutions needed to evolve toward a socialist state. As tensions within the party reflected those with opponents outside the party, including ousters and the repression of left-wing sects, radical party members entrenched further into their revolutionary ideology. Meanwhile, moderates simply attempted to maintain their successes in and outside of the party, leading them to eschew revolutionary organizing as a threat to their movement's stability and political potential. As with local politics, security concerns began to dominate intraparty affairs, though it was to ensure the stability, competitiveness, and unity of the party. Because moderates and leftists began to view one another as threats to the party's future, rather than as like-minded, fellow party members, the big tent disintegrated. The war cemented moderation and radicalization in the party's wings, and neither could accept the other's ideological and organizational visions for the party as legitimate or useful.

As socialists in Ohio chose their sides in the post-war split of their national party, their local experiences guided their decision-making and ideological development. Each of the local

parties was previously dominated by one ideological wing of the movement or another, and their organizing differed, depending on their idealistic ends for the movement and the constraints they perceived in their communities. The room for variation was initially a strength for the socialist big tent, in which different sects could behave differently according to their political priorities but still justify their shared participation in a political actionist socialist party. As wartime experiences diverged between communities, and local socialist parties experienced dissimilar repercussions, their behavior became more prone to variation. At the same time, socialists' ideologies transformed to make sense of the declines they experienced in their communities, then developments in other communities and countries. These changes and variations between communities meant socialists could no longer agree on the best course of action for their entire movement, as specific, local conditions seemed to demand either greater moderation or confrontation. Ideological divides were ever-present in the S.P.A. and S.P.O., but the wings broke away from one another because their varied experiences made their commitments to political or direct action more rigid. By 1919, in both wings of the party, these commitments became entirely inflexible and unable to accept ideological differences, breaking the socialists' big tent.

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