

# **Socialist Municipal Administrations in the Progressive Era Midwest: A Comparative Case Study of Four Ohio Cities, 1911-1915**

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Scholars commonly emphasize the significance of Socialism in the history of early twentieth century American politics. From the election of Victor Berger to Congress in 1910, to Eugene Victor Debs's presidential bid of 1912, when the leader of the Socialist Party of America (SPA) won nearly a million votes, the SPA's successes are portrayed as both a barometer of public opinion and a harbinger of positive change. Since the Socialists promoted a much more ambitious program than those of the major parties, scholars conclude that voters were expressing discontent with the slow pace of Progressive Era reform under mainstream politicians, and pushing the country's policy-makers "farther to the left." Much of the subsequent national reform in the United States, particularly that enacted during the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, can therefore be attributed to the political power and gadfly influence of America's leading Socialists.<sup>1</sup>

Often ignored, however, are the Socialist Party's impressive gains in municipal and state elections throughout America in 1911. From Berkeley, California, to Schenectady, New York, candidates representing the SPA won election to legislatures, mayor's offices, and city councils.<sup>2</sup> Although the party's idealistic national program of government ownership of railroads, female suffrage, black equality, and opposition to war garnered the most publicity, at the state and local levels the SPA ran candidates on a "results oriented" platform which included a number of immediately-practical measures. Chief among these were the initiative, referendum, and recall; workmen's compensation; a guaranteed minimum wage; protection for child and female labor; municipal home rule; urban renewal and public works projects; municipal ownership of public utilities; tax reform; and improved recreational facilities.<sup>3</sup>

The SPA's pragmatic platform seemed tailor-made for Ohio, where reform had lagged behind that of more progressive states, and in 1911 no fewer than 25 Ohio municipalities, ranging from tiny Mineral Ridge, in Mahoning County, to large cities such as Dayton, elected Socialists to school boards, city councils, boards of assessment, and other important offices. Additionally, at least three declared SPA candidates won election as delegates to the 1912

state constitutional convention in Columbus. This strong showing by the Socialists earned for the state the sobriquet, "Red Ohio."<sup>4</sup> The conservative *Cleveland Leader*, ever-vigilant in its crusade against threats to the Republican-dominated business establishment, was unimpressed, and dismissed the results as "only a false dawn . . . when skies seem to light up with the red of coming revolutions which never amount to anything." Meanwhile, the *Leader's* more balanced and sober competitor, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, commented that "the Socialist gains indicate seemingly that both the old parties must turn square about and indorse [sic] the progressive movement."<sup>5</sup>

Both of these seemingly contradictory assessments were, paradoxically, accurate and prescient in their analyses of the election results. Not only was the impressive showing by the SPA a barometer of the popular mood in Ohio, it also served as a catalyst for a flurry of reforms during the period 1912-1917. Nonetheless, the final tallies of November, 1911, hardly indicated a sudden radicalization of the state's voters, nor should the results have been so surprising, as the electorate was venting a pent-up demand for action on a number of relatively-mainstream Progressive Era issues. Prominent among these was prohibition, which historian Hoyt Landon Warner has called, "the chief emotional issue of the day."<sup>6</sup> While Socialism had traditionally enjoyed its strongest support in cities with large percentages of recent European immigrants, this strength grew as prohibition became an increasingly hot-button topic. With the state's urban areas under-represented in the legislature, "wet" voters were attracted to the Socialist Party's advocacy of the initiative and referendum, which would supposedly give anti-prohibition voices the political clout which it otherwise lacked.<sup>7</sup> But the widespread support for the SPA throughout Ohio was also indicative of frustration with the lack of home rule, a desire for educational reform, and a general interest in any number of issues which the state's voters felt had languished on the political "back burner" for too long.

Prodded by the results of the 1911 election, both Republicans and Democrats supported amendments to Ohio's constitution which enacted initiative and referendum and the direct primary; created civil service protections; made mandatory the eight-hour day for public work; empowered the legislature to pass protections for workers; and established home rule for all municipalities with a population of at least 5000 persons. Dozens of Ohio cities followed by framing modern city charters, and the state assembly passed an enlightened workman's compensation bill and child labor legislation; enacted penal reform; established consolidated rural schools; and created the Ohio Conservancy District. By the time of American in-

volvement in World War I, Ohio had taken its place among the nation's most progressive states.<sup>8</sup> Socialism, meanwhile, faded as a significant political movement, in both Ohio and the United States as a whole, as the SPA's erstwhile supporters drifted back to the mainstream parties, while its most vocal advocates fell victim to the hyper-patriotism of the war years.<sup>9</sup>

The SPA's rapid decline in the Buckeye State may also be partially attributable to the political failings of the most high-profile Socialist mayors. While it is obvious that the party's impressive showing in 1911 was a measure of the public's impatience, and that this protest vote, in turn, pushed the major parties into initiating reform, it is impossible to measure just how influential Socialist city councilmen in Dayton, school board members in Akron, or delegates to the constitutional convention in Columbus may have been in actually shaping public policy. This is not the case, however, with Socialist mayors, elected on "results-oriented" platforms and placed in decision-making positions. In an increasingly-urban state, perhaps the starkest indication of voter discontent in 1911 was the election of Socialist chief executives in no fewer than 14 cities and towns throughout Ohio.<sup>10</sup> The elections of so many Socialist leaders raises a number of questions. For example, how "radical" were these men and their programs? Were they able to coexist and work productively with Democratic and Republican city officials? How much control did the SPA organization wield over these leaders? Finally, and most importantly, did these Socialist mayors manage to implement significant changes and make their cities better places to live? What ultimately emerges is a less-than-flattering picture, one which not only reveals the unfocused and undisciplined nature of Socialism in the Buckeye State, but also lends credence to the *Leader's* conclusion that the SPA triumphs of 1911 constituted little more than a "false dawn."

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Prior to 1911 Ohio had been fertile ground for a milder form of socialism: the Social Gospel, also known as "Christian Socialism," a movement within American Protestantism that applied Biblical teachings to problems associated with industrialization. The Reverend Washington Gladden of Columbus, for example, found state socialism too secular, commenting that "it is not worthwhile to be kinder and better than God."<sup>11</sup> From the pulpit, and as a Columbus city councilman, Gladden fought government corruption, promoted programs to help the sick and the poor, and campaigned for a revised state charter that would provide home rule to Ohio's cities.<sup>12</sup> The state's foremost proponent of Christian Socialism was Glad-

den's friend, Samuel M. "Golden Rule" Jones. As mayor of Toledo from 1897 to 1904, Jones's efforts to make his city a kinder and gentler place for working people, his close alliance with organized labor, and, especially, his advocacy of municipal ownership of public utilities, became known as "gas and water socialism."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Mayor Tom Johnson, though not a Christian Socialist, borrowed many of Jones's ideas in turning Cleveland into a model progressive city during the first decade of the century.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the efforts of leaders in Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland, however, many other Ohio cities continued to lag behind in enacting reform and in weeding out government incompetence and corruption. As a result, urban voters throughout the state, in the words of the *Plain Dealer*, grew "tired of trying to get honest and efficient public officials through the medium of the old parties," and opted, instead, for new Socialist mayors, such as railroad worker William Ralston, who promised Fostoria, in Seneca County, "an honest and efficient administration." Canton's voters, meanwhile, were attracted to Socialist mayoral candidate Harry S. Schilling, a mild-mannered and little-known printer, whose platform included a commitment to the initiative, referendum, and recall; "municipal ownership of telephone, ice, railway, milk and coal plants"; kindergartens and playgrounds for all schools; free hospitals; free legal counsel for the poor; and the eight-hour day for municipal employees. In addition to Canton and Fostoria, other Ohio cities electing Socialist administrations included the Ashtabula County city of Conneaut; Salem, in Columbiana County; tiny Dillonvale and Toronto in Jefferson County; the town of Sugar Grove in Fairfield County; the Akron suburbs of Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls, in Summit County; the village of Brewster, in Stark County; and St. Marys, in Auglaize County.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, these new administrations did not fare well. With but a single Socialist elected to city council, for instance, William Ralston found it difficult to initiate his programs. In 1913, the Democrats and Republicans formed a fusion ticket which defeated Ralston, limiting him to a single term in office. The Socialist mayors in the other towns listed above met similar fates, while the bizarre outcome of the election in Canton was emblematic of the comic-operas which played out in a number of those Ohio cities choosing Socialist mayors in 1911. Harry Schilling outpolled the Republican nominee and two independent candidates, finishing in a dead heat with the Democratic incumbent mayor. The two finalists were forced to draw lots, declaring "odd or even," based on the number of kernels in a bowl of corn. When Schilling chose "odd" and the count revealed 110 kernels, he lost the election. Contending that there had been irregulari-

ties in the original balloting, Schilling filed suit over the objections of local SPA officials, who immediately expelled him from the party. Months later, when the courts finally ruled in Schilling's favor, he assumed office as an independent, rather than as a Socialist, serving an abbreviated and undistinguished single term as Canton's mayor.<sup>16</sup>

Four additional Ohio cities – Lima, Lorain, Mount Vernon, and Martins Ferry – chose Socialist mayors in 1911, and they provide an opportunity to study the true scope of Socialism's appeal and, more importantly, the party's tangible successes and failures. The contrasting scenarios presented by these municipalities, located in diverse geographic areas of the state, and each with distinctive political, economic, and social realities, provide a useful picture of the goals, methods, meager accomplishments, and ultimate failure of Socialism in Progressive Era Ohio. In one case, the party's mayor eventually lost his reelection bid to a fusion candidate supported by conservative business interests. In the other three instances, the electorate witnessed the expulsion from the Ohio SPA of those mayors who refused to conform to strict party doctrine. Finally, in some cases these mayors were unknown quantities, both to the voters and to the party itself, and may have been mere opportunists, cynically using the SPA as a stepping-stone to elective office. This was certainly the case in Lima, where the result was a nearly-farcical administration, one which provides a prime example of Socialism's shortcomings at the municipal level.

Located on the Ottawa River in Allen County, in the heart of northwestern Ohio's farm belt, Lima emerged in the post-Civil War era as a distribution center for agricultural products and oil and gas from the area. Even after the region's petroleum had been exhausted around the turn of the century, Lima remained an important refining center, railway hub, and a manufacturing city for agricultural equipment and road-building machinery.<sup>17</sup> In the first decade of the twentieth century, Lima's largely native-born population grew by over 40 percent, to a total of 30,508 residents in 1910.<sup>18</sup>

Although Lima could be classified as a "working class" city, with a strong union base and a large number of railroad employees, the election in 1911 of a Socialist mayor, 45-year old printer Corbin Shook, took the local political establishment by surprise. A six-year veteran of the party, Shook held no high position in the organization, describing himself as "a private in the ranks." He had declined to purchase newspaper ads, nor had he even bothered to campaign, later claiming that he had been too busy printing literature for other candidates. Yet, appealing for support

from Socialists and non-Socialists alike, Shook won 36 percent of the vote, and an 81-vote plurality over his closest opponent. A “rather serious faced man” with strong religious beliefs, Shook adopted as his motto the Biblical passage, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.”<sup>19</sup> Shook would be aided by the election of two Socialists to Lima’s nine-member city council, one of whom was his cousin; another cousin, a Republican, also won election to council.<sup>20</sup>

Unfortunately, even before he took office, Corbin Shook began exhibiting some of the erratic behavior which would characterize his two-year term. He invited charges of nepotism when he appointed yet another cousin to serve as a street repair superintendent and, apparently surprised by election to an office he never expected to win, got “cold feet,” telling friends that he was too ill to serve, and waiting until the last moment to post the \$2000 bond required of Lima’s mayor. Shook then ran into difficulties when he “flaunted the flag of defiance in the faces” of the Socialist Party’s leaders by appointing officials of his own choosing, including non-Socialists. Expecting Shook to take orders from the local, the party was especially taken aback by the mayor’s refusal to accept local Socialist and labor activist Samuel Kleinberger as his chief advisor. Shook also ignored a special advisory committee elected by the party to guide his decisions while in office. The local Socialist organization, meanwhile, purged members whom it deemed as disloyal, forcing Shook appointees, including an African-American city hall janitor, to choose between their jobs or membership in the party.<sup>21</sup> By the time of his inauguration on New Years Day, 1912, Corbin Shook’s expulsion from the Socialist Party was a foregone conclusion, and in a bizarre incident which would be repeated in other Ohio cities electing Socialists, Shook had to repudiate his own resignation. The Ohio Socialist constitution required that upon nomination all candidates sign a letter of resignation, which the party would then submit to the municipality if the official failed to march lock-step to SPA doctrine. Fortunately for the mayor, only the two Socialists in council voted to recognize the document as binding, and Shook was able to continue in office, albeit as a man without a party.<sup>22</sup>

After stumbling out of the gate in this fashion, the new administration never righted itself. In his first address to council, Mayor Shook proposed an idealistic program, including a pay raise and the eight-hour day for city employees; a crackdown on usurious loan companies; street repairs; and improvements in public health facilities.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the pay raise fell victim to Lima’s chronically-starved treasury, and the other goals soon took a back seat to Shook’s myopic crusade to cleanse Lima of ungodly vice.

He ordered police to enforce Sunday saloon closing laws and evening curfews, denied applications for liquor licenses, banned "objectionable" dancing by females, and used the mayor's court to impose disproportionately heavy fines for minor offenses.<sup>24</sup> Shook's puritanical morality had the support of Lima's religious community but alienated the working class voters that had elected him.<sup>25</sup> Most damning for the mayor, however, were charges of incompetence, including poor administration of city services and the "bonehead" failure to publish a notice for the sale of municipal bonds. This error killed off an ambitious street lighting program and the construction of a children's playground, turned the local newspapers against the mayor, and resulted in angry citizens hanging Shook in effigy.<sup>26</sup>

Undaunted, Shook ran for reelection in 1913 as an independent. But polls indicated a dramatic decline in support from factory workers, while the local papers condemned the excesses of "Shookism" and told readers that Lima needed a real mayor, "not a police judge." The Democratic candidate added that Lima was "too good a city for its chief executive to have no conception of his duties other than to . . . collect 'the costs' . . . from the mouths of the family or some poor unfortunate who might happen to be dragged into police court."<sup>27</sup> Shook still enjoyed the support of what the *Lima Daily News* termed, the "dry, reform and make-the-world-over following," but even the backing of Lima's ministers and the importation of out-of-town evangelists to stump for the mayor could not counter the public's enmity against him.<sup>28</sup> He fell to the Democratic candidate, earning only 25 percent of the vote, and winning only three of Lima's 28 precincts. The Socialist mayoral candidate, meanwhile, garnered only 308 votes, for five percent of the total, and the entire Socialist ticket went down to defeat. Socialism in northwestern Ohio's agricultural heartland was a dead issue.<sup>29</sup>

Meanwhile, a similar scenario unfolded in Lorain, on Lake Erie at the mouth of the Black River. Incorporated in 1894, by the turn of the twentieth century Lorain was home to the National Tube Company, the American Shipbuilding Company, and sundry other heavy industries. The city enjoyed particularly strong growth in its manufacturing output from 1904 to 1910, and by 1911 it ranked fourth of all Lake Erie ports in tonnage received.<sup>30</sup> This economic growth attracted rural migrants and European immigrants to Lorain, and the city's population boomed, growing from 16,000 in 1900 to almost 29,000 in 1910. Nearly 11,000 of these residents, close to 38 percent of the total population, were foreign born, with the largest nationality groups being Germans, Poles, and Slovaks.<sup>31</sup>

The Socialist candidate for mayor of Lorain in 1911 was Thomas Pape, a 44-year-old plumber. No stranger to the city's voters, Pape had entered politics soon after moving from Cleveland to Lorain in 1901, winning election to city council as a Republican in 1904, and as council president in 1907.<sup>32</sup> It cannot be determined what convinced Pape to switch to the Lorain County Socialist Party, one of the state's strongest locals, but his campaign literature expressed "allegiance to the Principles of International Socialism," particularly that "the first consideration in all municipal affairs should be the interests of the working class." These interests included not only the radical goals associated with international socialism, such as the elimination of the wage system, but also policies which any mainstream progressive platform might have proposed in 1911. The Lorain Socialists called for municipal ownership of public utilities; initiative, referendum, and recall; the eight-hour day for all city employees; and free textbooks in the public schools.<sup>33</sup> The *Lorain Daily News* predicted that Pape would receive strong support from the city's working-class electorate, citing "unusual strength for him at the steel plant and at the shipyard."<sup>34</sup>

But it was undoubtedly Pape's promise of "an honest and efficient administration" which resonated with the majority of voters.<sup>35</sup> Lorain's Republican newspaper, the *Times-Herald*, had pounded away at the incumbent Democratic mayor, alleging countless shady political deals and fiscal mismanagement.<sup>36</sup> Rather than help the GOP candidate, however, the headlines convinced voters to reject both of the established parties; in a five-man race Thomas Pape, despite spending a mere \$6.75 on his campaign, won 14 of 16 precincts, pluralities in five of six wards, and a 39-percent plurality citywide. Pape would be aided by two Socialist candidates elected to the nine-member city council, as well as two Socialist tax assessors.<sup>37</sup>

It is impossible to find a single, overriding, explanation for Socialism's success in Lorain in 1911; there was not, for example, a violent strike causing working class discontent, nor was there any scandal in municipal government, despite the partisan accusations made by the *Times-Herald*. The reasons appear more subtle, and no doubt include Lorain's cosmopolitan makeup. Many voters were either foreign born or of mixed parentage, with one or both parents coming from areas of Europe familiar with Socialism, and there was heavy voter turnout in wards with high ethnic concentrations.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the electorate was already familiar and comfortable with Pape, while neither of the daily newspapers had shown any hostility to the Socialist candidate. Perhaps the biggest factor was the blurring of partisanship, as all three parties promoted a "progressive" platform. Even Anna Storck,



a Socialist member of the School Board best known for her advocacy of free school textbooks, admitted that "Socialism in its entirety" was unrealistic for Lorain at that time. She instead proposed a modest program, including "the education of the people by means of literature, speakers and socialist schools, [and] also a more complete and efficient organization."<sup>39</sup>

Assuming office in January, Pape inherited a nearly-empty municipal treasury, and the city auditor lamented that the new mayor would face "probably the heaviest [odds] . . . any administration has been asked to cope with in several years." This necessitated a fiscal belt-tightening and rendered impossible any dramatic programs.<sup>40</sup> Instead, Pape initially concentrated on "cleaning up" the wide-open city of Lorain, shutting down gambling establishments and houses of prostitution, and enforcing saloon closing hours and Sunday blue laws against dancing and roller skating.<sup>41</sup> But over the course of his administration Pape did manage to promote, fund, and oversee a major street paving program, turning the city's often impassable streets into modern thoroughfares and eliminating dangerous railroad grade crossings.<sup>42</sup>

For the bulk of his administration, however, Thomas Pape served not as a Socialist, but as an independent. Within ten weeks of assuming office, Pape ran afoul of the local party when he dismissed his service director, George Storck. The director and his wife, Anna, were the most important Socialists in Lorain County; a power struggle followed Pape's election, and the mayor had grown weary of the director's desire to run his department independently. In March, 1912, Pape replaced Storck with a Republican, leading to the mayor's expulsion from the Socialist Party. What followed was the same scenario that had transpired in Lima, as a meeting of angry Socialists voted to submit Pape's pre-signed resignation. Lorain's city council, with the exception of its two Socialist members, declined to accept the resignation, agreeing with one legislator that the mayor "was elected by the people, not the Socialist Party." Pape remained as mayor, but Socialist administration of Lorain had come to an abrupt end.<sup>43</sup>

During his remaining time in office, Pape continued Lorain's street paving program; won improvements from the street railway company in exchange for a franchise extension; took decisive action to minimize loss of life and property damage during the Ohio floods of March, 1913; practiced economy in government with reductions in city expenditures; initiated an annual spring clean-up campaign; ordered the euthanization of hundreds of stray dogs during a rabies scare; and modernized Lorain's fire department.<sup>44</sup> Pape ran as an independent candidate for reelection in 1913, but

finished a surprisingly poor third, as Lorain opted to return to a Republican administration. The entire Socialist ticket went down to defeat, and Socialism in Lorain soon became a faded memory.<sup>45</sup>

Mount Vernon, located in Knox County, 40 miles northeast of Columbus on the Kokosing River, provides yet another example of a Socialist official falling out of the graces of his local party. The city served as a rail depot for agricultural products, and also manufactured farm machinery and road grading equipment. The smallest of the municipalities considered in this study, Mount Vernon had grown slowly in the 1890s, but the discovery of natural gas in the area led to the construction of five glassmaking plants in the first decade of the twentieth century, and the city grew by 40 percent between 1900 and 1910, reaching a population of 9087 residents.<sup>46</sup>

Prior to November, 1911, the local Socialist Party chapter had drawn little notice. Typical of small-town dailies, Mount Vernon's two newspapers emphasized national and state news, and stories such as the appearance of a large flock of sheep on public square, or the election of a Mount Vernonite as vice president of the Ohio Squirrel Hunters Association, dominated local news coverage.<sup>47</sup> Municipal politics was typically relegated to the back pages, where the *Daily Republican-News* boasted of the competence of the incumbent GOP mayor, who had collected more money in fines "than by any three mayors in the town's history." The paper also portrayed Mount Vernon as "the most orderly city in this section of the state," a veritable island of efficient government and contented citizens, where "a police court sensation [was] a rarity, boot-legging [was] kept at a minimum, and no suspicion of graft" existed.<sup>48</sup> On election day the *Republican-News* speculated that the Socialists might manage to elect a school board member or two, but the paper was more interested in Socialist councilmanic candidates in Columbus. Meanwhile, the Democratic-affiliated *Daily Banner* published only a single brief election-eve article on the Socialist Party's municipal slate.<sup>49</sup>

The claims of the *Republican-Gazette* notwithstanding, the citizens of Mount Vernon had grown weary of what they considered lax law enforcement and, spurred on by religious leaders, on November 7 they elected 36-year-old railroad machinist Alfred Perrine as the city's first Socialist chief executive. A former Democratic committeeman, Perrine had joined the Mount Vernon local only one year earlier. He and his fellow-Socialist city candidates had run a low-key campaign, relying on an October visit by Eugene Victor Debs to raise voter interest, and on an election-eve flyer to get their message of clean and efficient government to the voters. Spend-

ing less than five dollars on his own campaign, and accepting a significant pay cut to become mayor, Perrine won nearly 41 percent of the ballots for a 41-vote plurality over the Republican incumbent, and more than doubled the Democratic candidate's total. Although Socialists also elected one city council member and a ward tax assessor, political observers were struck by the large number of voters who selected a straight party ticket, with the exception of the mayor's race; clearly, Perrine's message of clean, efficient, government had resonated with the people of Mount Vernon.<sup>50</sup>

Alfred Perrine spent his first two-year term cracking down on vice, including unlicensed pool halls, illegal saloons, and slot machines. Although he collected a significant amount of money in fines while running the mayor's court, there is no evidence that he resorted to the draconian measures practiced by his counterpart in Lima. Perrine also battled Mount Vernon's budget crisis by cutting back on unnecessary spending, including a refusal to support the Socialist councilman's proposal to raise the wages of city laborers. He did, however, undertake a street paving program, while advocating the construction of both a county children's home and a new city hall. The mayor also earned high marks for decisiveness during disastrous floods which ravaged the city in March, 1913; Perrine's orders that all citizens residing near the Kokosing River evacuate the area prevented the loss of a single life.<sup>51</sup>

One faction not impressed with the mayor was the local Socialist organization. Perrine had been in office only two weeks when the party began criticizing him for his "non-partisanship," questioning his appointments of non-Socialists to city positions. The *Cleveland Citizen* placed Perrine in the same category as Corbin Shook of Lima, citing the "maudlin sentiments" of both men, which helped "perpetuate the old party machines." Unlike Shook, Perrine had nonetheless managed to remain a Socialist in official good standing for much of his first term, even as the party constantly lobbied him to replace old-party appointees with Socialists. But in late March, 1913, the party ran out of patience and submitted Perrine's pre-signed resignation. Following the lead of Lima and Lorain, Mount Vernon's city council promptly rejected the resignation. "They can bounce me out of the party as far as I am concerned," exclaimed an angry Perrine and, soon after, the Socialists did just that; Alfred Perrine became a mayor without a party.<sup>52</sup>

In November, 1913, Perrine ran for reelection as an independent, winning the endorsement of a bipartisan committee of Mount Vernon's most prominent citizens, who cited the mayor's "honest and economical" administration. Despite this, Perrine won by a razor-thin plurality of only

six votes. The Socialist candidate for mayor, meanwhile, garnered only 185 votes, and the party lost every local race in which it ran a candidate. The following two years were uneventful, and the Mount Vernon dailies provide little evidence that Perrine fulfilled any of his significant pledges and programs, other than to oversee a competent, honest, administration. The mayor declined to run for a third term in 1915, nor was there a single Socialist candidate on the municipal ballot. Alfred Perrine and the Socialist Party of which he had once been a member became insignificant footnotes in the history of Mount Vernon.<sup>53</sup>

Of the four cities examined in this study, Martins Ferry, located in Belmont County across the Ohio River from Wheeling, West Virginia, presents the most classic example of working class protest bringing about radical political change. Although Martins Ferry was known as the “Stogie City” for its production of cigars, it was the railroads, steel mills, and tin plants which attracted both Eastern European immigrants and rural migrants; between 1890 and 1910 the city grew by 46 percent, to reach a population of 9133.<sup>54</sup> In 1911, citizens angry over the abuses of the local gas company and made desperate by an economic downturn which had closed many businesses, joined forces with workers embittered by a two-year strike against United States Steel, and elected Socialist printer Newton Wycoff as mayor. After an acrimonious campaign in which local corporations poured significant money into the campaign of the Republican incumbent, Wycoff won a 41 percent plurality; Socialists also won the majority of Martins Ferry’s council seats and other municipal posts. Turnout was unusually high, as voters responded to the party’s pledge to fight corporate abuse, as well as promises of free school books, public baths, and free water for laundresses.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the obvious class enmity and labor militancy extant in Martins Ferry, the daily papers in nearby Wheeling downplayed the significance of the Socialist victories.<sup>56</sup> The progressive *Register*, which billed itself as the “Only Newspaper Published in Wheeling Independent of the Trust,” dismissed the fears of the corporations, and suggested that the voters had chosen Wycoff and his associates not in a spirit of radicalism, but rather in response to poor city management by the incumbent administration. “That’s socialistic, all right,” the paper commented, “but it isn’t necessarily Socialism.”<sup>57</sup> A writer to the paper added that the voters of Martins Ferry “do not know what Socialism means and they do not care. They merely want a change, and are willing to try a Socialist mayor as an experiment.”<sup>58</sup> The pro-corporation *Intelligencer*, meanwhile, largely ignored the Wycoff administration.

A dearth of source material makes it difficult to determine whether the mayor and his associates enacted any of their more ambitious reform proposals. But Wycoff, mirroring the actions of Ohio's other Socialist mayors, immediately cracked down on crime and corruption, eliminating slot machines and other forms of gambling. He also announced that all mayoral decisions would be made by a committee consisting of his fellow-Socialist office holders; this committee soon evolved into a "Socialist Club," comprised of local party leaders. The propensity of this body to meet in secret caused consternation among some citizens and criticism from the *Register*, but Wycoff's general adherence to the committee, or "club," system allowed him to survive party squabbles and remain a Socialist in good standing; unlike the leaders in Lima, Mount Vernon, and Lorain, he won renomination in 1913 as a Socialist.<sup>59</sup>

What had most angered Martins Ferry's conservative power structure was Wycoff's discontinuance of low rates for the local steel companies from the city's municipally-operated electric plant. Backed by these industries, Republicans and Democrats joined to nominate a fusion candidate in 1913. After a campaign described in the local papers as "exciting," "colorful," and "long and bitter," the fusionist candidate managed to win nearly 41 percent of the vote. But Mayor Wycoff actually increased both his vote total and his percentage from 1911, winning a plurality of 45 percent, with a renegade Republican garnering the remaining votes. The fusionists took solace, however, in their capture of some of the offices previously held by the Socialists, including a majority of the city council.<sup>60</sup>

Wycoff won the Socialist nomination for a third term in 1915, but after another exciting and divisive campaign was unable to withstand the well-financed Republican candidate. The mayor's vote total increased slightly, but his percentage fell to only 38 percent. Likewise, the entire Socialist ticket lost, although the local in Martins Ferry, unlike those in Lima, Lorain, and Mount Vernon, survived and ran candidates for a number of years afterward.<sup>61</sup> The *Intelligencer*, long the mouthpiece of local corporate interests, gloated that the Republican victory was a triumph of "strong American citizenship." More accurate was the accompanying analysis that, "it was not that the people [in 1911 and 1913] endorsed Socialism, but that their voting that ticket was simply a protest against the existing order of things," the exact observation made four years earlier by the *Register*.<sup>62</sup>

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The ultimate failure of the Ohio Socialist Party to enact significant and radical change at the local level, to reelect its incumbents or, in some cases, to keep these mayors in compliance with party expectations, illustrates the nebulous and undefined nature of Socialist Party goals and methods. During municipal campaigns the party tended to blur the contrasts between its policies and those of mainstream progressivism. Yet, once its candidates had taken the mayor's chair, the party expected total and unrealistic conformity from them; citizens then witnessed an embarrassing, almost-comic, purge of these candidates from the Socialist Party. In addition, some of these men, such as Corbin Shook in Lima, may have been pure opportunists, with dubious commitment to Socialist principles. As nonpartisans these mayors managed – at least in the cases of Lorain and Mount Vernon -- to run competent and honest administrations, but this in no way distinguished them from progressive-minded Republican and Democratic mayors in other Ohio cities; indeed, their accomplishments paled in comparison to those of the state's most prominent reformist mayors. The Socialist mayor in Martins Ferry, meanwhile, managed to please the party and get reelected, but accomplished little of note and eventually fell to an establishment candidate.

Although a number of other Ohio communities elected Socialist mayors in 1911, and their histories are yet to be examined in depth, there is nothing to indicate that the outcomes in these places were starkly different from the disappointing results seen in the four focus cities. The scenario in Canton, for example, was characterized by embarrassing and counter-productive internecine squabbles, and mirrored those of Lorain, Mount Vernon, and Lima. And the single-term experience of Mayor Ralston in Fostoria was repeated throughout the state, as only one Socialist elected in 1911, Newton Wycoff of Martins Ferry, managed to serve more than a single term in office as an SPA-endorsed mayor.<sup>63</sup>

The negative examples provided by cities such as Lima, Lorain, Mount Vernon, and Martins Ferry are not necessarily indicative of the entire Socialist political experience throughout Ohio, but they can help explain why the SPA's star shone so brightly for a brief period of time, yet faded so quickly. Certainly, the *Cleveland Leader* exaggerated when it proclaimed that Socialism in the Buckeye State would "never amount to anything," as many of the SPA's elected officials undoubtedly served conscientiously, and the Socialist triumphs of 1911 helped prod Ohio's lawmakers out of their non-progressive lethargy. But of all the SPA-endorsed candidates elected in 1911, mayors provide the most obvious and easily-observed ex-

amples of success and failure, and upon examination Ohio's Socialist municipal administrations were starkly unimpressive. This helps explain why the Ohio SPA of 1911, which in the words of one historian, "led its sister organizations throughout the country and posed its greatest threat to the major parties,"<sup>64</sup> atrophied in a few short years and disappeared as a major factor in Buckeye State politics. It was, indeed, a "false dawn."

## Notes

1. This assessment is most apparent in survey-level college history textbooks. For example, see John Mack Faragher, et. al., *Out of Many, A History of the American People*, Brief Second Edition, combined volume (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999), 406; and Jeanne Boydston, et. al., *Making a Nation: The United States and Its People*, combined volume (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2004), 501-502.

2. James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 23, 116; "No Milk and Water Dilettant [sic], I'm a Revolutionary Socialist -- Schenectady's Mayor-Elect," *Cleveland Press*, 9 November 1911, 4; "Democrats Lose in this State and New Jersey; Harmon Gains," *New York Times*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Socialist Gains Put Party on Map," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1911, 4.

3. H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *American Socialism, 1900-1960* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 2-4; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 1-5.

4. Hoyt Landon Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 296, 298, 300, 302, 306-307, 308-309 n. 8, 311 n. 25, 313, 339, 344 n. 6; Richard A. Folk, "A Study of the Socialist Party of Ohio, 1900-1925" (M.A. Thesis, University of Toledo, 1965), 70-79; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 116; "Ohio Socialists Elect Nine Mayors, Win in Many Councils," *Cleveland Press*, 8 November 1911, 15; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, 18 November 1911, 3.

5. "One False Dawn for Socialism" (editorial), *Cleveland Leader*, 10 November 1911, 4; "Democrats Win in Cities as Socialists Make Gain," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 8 November 1911, 1.

6. Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 298.

7. *Ibid.*

8. George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People, Second Edition* (Kent, Ohio, and London, England: Kent State University Press, 1997), 333-342; Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 330-339; "People Throw Off Shackles," *Cleveland Press*, 4 September 1912, 1, 2; "Home Rule's Here, Workers Wait Pay," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 1 January 1914, 1; "Progress of Municipal Home Rule in Ohio," *National Municipal Review* 3 (July 1914), 594.

9. For a thorough analysis of Socialism's decline as a major force in Ohio politics after 1912, see Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 103-163.

10. The actual number of Socialist mayors elected in 1911 is unclear, and varies according to the source consulted. Warner, for example, gives the number as 14, but identifies only ten of these; Folk, meanwhile, writes that there were 20 cities electing SPA mayors, yet identifies only 19, omitting Martins Ferry. In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether, in fact, a mayoral candidate was actually endorsed by the SPA, or was merely a

self-declared "Socialist." Some of the cities identified by Folk are unusually small and obscure, such as Mineral City and Osnaburg. Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 311 n. 25; Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 71 n. 26.

11. Peter J. Frederick, *Knights of the Golden Rule: The Intellectual as Social Reformer in the 1890s* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976); Jacob H. Dorn, *Washington Gladden: Prophet of the Social Gospel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1967), 231. See also, Ronald C. White, Jr., and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976).

12. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 318, 329.

13. On Jones, see Marnie Jones, *Holy Toledo: Religion and Politics in the Life of "Golden Rule" Jones* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998).

14. On Johnson, see Eugene C. Murdock, *Tom Johnson of Cleveland* (Dayton, OH: Wright State University Press, 1994).

15. Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 311 n.25; Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 71 n. 26; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 116; "Socialist Mayors are Picked in 11 Ohio Cities," *Toledo Blade*, 8 November 1911, 2; "Socialists Sweep Brewster Offices," *Canton Evening Repository*, 8 November 1911, 1; "What Socialists Pledge to City," *Canton Evening Repository*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Democrats Win in Cities as Socialists Make Gain"; "Ohio Socialists Elect Nine Mayors, Win in Many Councils."

16. "Official Count Early Makes Mayoralty Race a Tie," *Canton Evening Repository*, 11 November 1911, 1; "Official Count on Head of Ticket," *Canton News-Democrat*, 12 November 1911, 11; "Socialists Plan to Wage Legal Battle After Turnbull Wins Mayoralty by Lot," *Canton Sunday Repository*, 12 November 1911, 1, 21; Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 75, 77-78, 80.

17. "Lima, Ohio," [http://www.greatestcities.com/North\\_America/ USA/Ohio\\_OH/Lima\\_city.html](http://www.greatestcities.com/North_America/USA/Ohio_OH/Lima_city.html) (accessed November 28, 2004).

18. U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), I, 305; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1910*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), III, 368.

19. Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 37; "People Choose Third Party Standard Bearer," *Lima Daily News*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Former Newspaperman is Corbin Shook," *Lima Daily News*, 8 November 1911, 3; "Good Rule First of Socialist Pledges," *Cleveland Press*, 9 November 1911, 4.

20. "Count Made of Return From Polls," *Lima Daily News*, 9 November 1911, 1.

21. "Kleinberger Now Looms in Public Eye Chief Adviser of New Mayor," *Lima Daily News*, 9 November 1911, 1; "Drastic Action by the Socialists is Expected Sunday," *Lima Daily News*, 8 December 1911, 5; "Shook Weathers Socialist Storm Colors Flying," *Allen County Republican-Gazette* (hereafter, *Republican-Gazette*), 12 December 1911, 3; "Mayor and Appointees Hold Session," *Lima Daily News*, 14 December 1911, 10; "Rumored That Shook Will Not Qualify as Lima's New Mayor," *Lima Daily News*, 17 December 1911, 1-2; J.W. Beall, "Politics and Politicians," *Lima Daily News*, 17 December 1911, 7; "Shook Qualifies for Mayor, Puts Quietus on Rumor," *Republican-Gazette*, 19 December 1911, 6; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, 6 January 1912, 3; "No Rest for the Weary in Camp of Lima Socialists," *Republican-Gazette*, 16 January 1912, 8; "Four Socialists Expelled From the Lima Local," *Republican-Gazette*, 27 February 1912, 8.

22. "Formal Censure From Socialists Falls to Shook," *Republican-Gazette*, 19 December 1911, 8; "Socialists Fail in Effort to Force Mayor's Resignation Through Council," *Republican-Gazette*, 5 January 1912, 3; "Lima Socialists Soon in a Scrap," *Wheeling* [West



Virginia] *Register*, 8 January 1912, 2; "Shook is Not of Their Party Say Socialists," *Republican-Gazette*, 9 January 1912, 6; "Labor's Politics," *Cleveland Citizen*, 13 January 1912, 3.

23. "Mayor's Message to the New Council, Lima, Ohio, January 2, 1912," *Republican-Gazette*, 5 January 1912, 3.

24. "Socialist Reign in Lima Will Begin New Year," *Republican-Gazette*, 2 January 1912, 3; "Saloons Close at 10 P.M. Under Shook's Order," *Republican-Gazette*, 2 January 1912, 8; "Police Report Saloonists for Ignoring Order," *Republican-Gazette*, 16 January 1912, 8; "City Can't Pay Wage Increase Says Council," *Republican-Gazette*, 20 February 1912, 1; "Saloonists Appeal From Mayor's Ruling," *Republican-Gazette*, 23 February 1912, 5; "No Saloon Says Shook," *Lima Times-Democrat*, 1 April 1912, 2; "Mayor Puts Ban on Objectionable Dance," *Republican-Gazette*, 17 May 1912, 3; "Defies Mayor Court: Is Jailed," *Republican-Gazette*, 22 July 1913, 1; "Many Offenders Face the Mayor," *Lima Daily News*, 29 September 1913, 7; "Another Saloon Keeper Held for Sunday Sales," *Republican-Gazette*, 16 October 1913, 7; "Mayor Fines Walsh for Sunday Sales," *Republican-Gazette*, 18 October 1913, 5. Lima's daily papers are rife with similar news stories throughout Shook's two-year administration.

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29. J.W. Beall, "Lima Voters Rally to Support of Democracy and Landslide Results," *Lima Daily News*, 5 November 1913, 1; "Comparative Vote 1911-1913," *Lima Daily News*, 5 November 1913, 2; "Robb Sweeps City -- Shook's 1911 Vote is Slaughtered," *Republican-Gazette*, 5 November 1913, 1; "How the Precincts Voted," *Republican-Gazette*, 5 November 1913, 2; "Official Count of Votes Cast at Lima Polls," *Lima Daily News*, 7 November 1913, 2.

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31. *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*, I, 313; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, III, 378, 419.

32. "Something About Mr. Pape," *Times-Herald*, 8 November 1911, 1.

33. "Attention Voters!" (political ad), *Times-Herald*, 4 November 1911, 5.

34. "The Present Campaign a Real Political Puzzle," *Lorain Daily News*, 4 November 1911, 1; Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 40.

35. *Ibid.*

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in Political Deal," *Times-Herald*, 17 October 1911, 1.

37. "Fight is Now Between Thos. Pape and F.J. King," *Lorain Daily News*, 6 November 1911, 1; "Thomas Pape, Socialist, Elected Mayor," *Times-Herald*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Socialists Run Riot at Tuesday's Election -- Tom Pape is Elected Mayor," *Lorain Daily News*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Socialists Win Tuesday's Election," *Lorain Daily News*, 8 November 1911, 6; "Votes by Precincts on Mayor, Pres. Council and Auditor," *Lorain Daily News*, 8 November 1911, 1; "Six Republicans, Two Socialists on Council," *Times-Herald*, 8 November 1911, 3; "Socialists Elect Assessors in 2 Wards, Republicans Four," *Lorain Daily News*, 1; "The Democrats Spend \$663.38, Socialists \$79," *Lorain Daily News*, 20 November 1911, 1.

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56. Original issues of the Martins Ferry newspapers for this period were destroyed in a fire before they could be microfilmed, forcing researchers to rely on the Wheeling dailies.

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58. "Socialist Victories" (letter to the editor by "Quiet Observer," dated 11 November 1911), *Register*, 12 November 1911, 4.

59. "Will Enforce Laws," *Register*, 25 January 1912, 10; "Martins Ferry Socialists Hold Meeting," *Register*, 15 January 1912, 8; "Martins Ferry Battle of Ballots On," *Register*, 4 November 1913, 12; "Socialist Party Held the Boards"; Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 76-77.

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62. "Martins Ferry Election," *Intelligencer*, 4 November 1915, 4.

63. Folk, "Socialist Party of Ohio," 80.

64. *Ibid.*, 71.

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