

READ ALL OVER

THE READING LABOR ADVOCATE AND SOCIALIST POWER IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1927–1936

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ABSTRACT: “Read All Over” offers fresh insights into the history of the Socialist Party movement in Pennsylvania by focusing on the *Labor Advocate*, the major socialist-labor newspaper based in Reading. Its news coverage and behind-the-scenes operations are examined, showing how the weekly shaped the most vibrant period of SP activity in Pennsylvania. From 1927 to 1936, the *Labor Advocate* helped socialists organize and sustain a viable party, both in Reading and beyond city limits, even as the national party waned. Also analyzed are the *Advocate’s* never-before-studied organizational documents. This approach reveals numerous insights into the paper’s social and political importance as a source of news, a community hub, and an institution that grounded an ambitious labor movement.

KEYWORDS: Socialist Party, Reading, PA, *Reading Labor Advocate*, Great Depression, New Deal era, the Left

INTRODUCTION

When Pennsylvanians elected three self-identified socialists to the General Assembly in 2018, many saw it as a surprising development.¹ Yet in the not-so-distant past, Pennsylvania was at the very center of American socialism. During the Depression years, one city in particular was at the leading edge of the Socialist Party of America (SP) organizing. Reading, the world’s capital of hosiery production, was also home to the fastest growing and largest SP chapter in the United States. Local Berks, the county SP body, was among

the most electorally successful and longest-lasting SP locals in US history.² For about a decade at the height of the Great Depression, its activities offered a path forward for a movement that struggled to build and maintain footholds in much of the country.³ The story of the Reading socialists adds to the growing literature on the persistent viability and significance of the SP long after its well-known successes in the 1910s, complicating scholarly understandings of the movement's rise and fall.⁴

Local Berks, granted its charter by the SP in 1902, was among the fastest growing and most electorally successful SP branches in the country in the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1927 socialists won control of the city's municipal government. For the first time Reading's radical workers defeated a political elite that had become infamous for weighting the property tax system in favor of large property owners and corporations. In 1932 Reading's socialists made Berks the most densely socialist county in the United States. They sent 21 percent of the vote to Norman Thomas's presidential campaign and 27 percent to Raymond Hofses's congressional campaign.⁵ Thomas was the national leader of the SP and Hofses was a long-time SP organizer, Local Berks treasurer, and editor of the *Reading Labor Advocate* newspaper. Later, in 1935, the SP made an unprecedented sweep of city offices.

Combining protests against unemployment, struggles for worker organization, and a bold left-wing political program (one that harshly critiqued the New Deal and the socialists' Democratic competitors), the SP enrolled hundreds of city dwellers, suburbanites, and rural people alike into the party. This effort extended to tiny communities such as Womelsdorf, a far-flung borough of about 1,400, where fifty-two people founded a party branch in 1932.⁶ By 1935 the *Advocate* listed thirty-nine distinct branches, including women's committees, in Berks; it was the largest SP organization in the state. Reading became a focal point of the SP's national organization. In an era of mass social upheaval among working people and the political left that remade US politics, Reading had some of the SP's most dramatic triumphs.⁷ They created protest organizations, formed new unions, and undertook a successful electoral program that propelled socialists to the statehouse, city council, and school board alike.⁸

None of the Berks Local's notable achievements could have been possible without its longstanding ties to the labor movement or its key institutions that built and sustained a socialist community. The *Labor Advocate* newspaper stood at their center. The weekly publication, founded at the turn of the century, was a joint labor-socialist newspaper that reached thousands of

readers for several decades. Its reporting and internal documents reveal this weekly newspaper's central role in the life of one of the country's most successful and least understood socialist cities.⁹

During Local Berks's highwater period, stretching roughly from 1927 to 1936, the *Labor Advocate* played a key role in organizing and sustaining a viable SP, both in Reading and beyond, even as the national party struggled to find a path forward. The newspaper mattered both as a rich source of information on the developments among labor activists and radicals *and* as an institutional base for the radical labor movement. Examining the *Advocate's* never-before-studied organizational documents found at the Pennsylvania State Archives offers numerous insights into the publication's social and political importance. The *Advocate* knit together a dense community of radicalized workers and their supporters in a period of rapid politicization and organization; it provided institutional support, both behind the scenes and in its pages, for the twinned rise of industrial unionism and socialist politics.

This article also offers new light on two broad areas of scholarship. First, an examination of the *Advocate* reveals novel dimensions in the relationship between radical press and radical labor politics. Scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have long recognized the importance of the labor and radical press. Publications like the *Advocate* could make or break working-class social movements. Yet scant attention has been given to a publication such as the *Advocate*, a socialist-labor newspaper.¹⁰ Second, this contribution opens a view of the radical press during the Depression era of labor's explosive growth, which heretofore has received only minimal scholarly attention.¹¹ Study of this weekly reveals a process marked by growth and vitality, a paper that forged a political community. By also studying its editors' and writers' activities, we uncover the *Advocate's* successful efforts to build and sustain industrial unionism and socialism. This is a process that stands in contrast to their colleagues at the *Jewish Daily Forward*, the era's most-famous SP-adjacent publication.¹² This adds to the broader literature on the contributions of the radical press to the formation of radical social movements, in and beyond the Depression.¹³

The story of the *Advocate* also offers new vantage points into the broader history of the Socialist Party of America after 1920, and in particular during Reading socialism's growth. This vantage provides evidence of a vibrant post-Debsian SP movement in a period of its history that otherwise has been seen as one of decline when seen from the national level. The story of

the Depression-era Socialist Party has been focused primarily on its many sectarian splits, which have largely minimized the organization's presence in the historiography of labor and radicalism in that period. Most histories of industrial unionism consider communists as the prime organizers of the new unionism.¹⁴ By following the threads of the *Advocate's* behind-the-scenes efforts, we discover that socialist organizing and reporting gave Reading's consequential industrial unionism a decidedly socialist hue. While the history of socialists and the hosiery industry, whose Depression-era center was Reading, has recently received renewed attention, socialists in the city spurred more than knitting mill militancy.¹⁵ They formed or sponsored new labor organizations, from massive hosiery industry organizing to lesser-known campaigns in smaller industries. The *Advocate* could make or break such efforts, and this article considers its central role in such areas as supporting a little-known militant pretzel workers' union. By looking back on the decade of Reading's SP climax through the *Advocate*, a new picture emerges of the period. In the pages and behind the scenes of a widely circulated weekly newspaper a vibrant SP movement galvanized a suffering city into a radical political community.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIALISM IN PENNSYLVANIA AND THE RISE OF THE RADICAL PRESS

Local Berks of the Socialist Party of America was founded in 1902 and within a decade became an SP hub by developing a mass base among the city's growing working class. In 1912 Pennsylvania's SP had the largest membership of any state; Reading was its nexus. For the next decade Pennsylvania remained among the top states in terms of dues-paying membership.¹⁶ Throughout the teens and twenties, Local Berks survived even as socialists splintered along factional lines or were driven out of public life by national Red Scare suppression. In the face of intense opposition for their antiwar stance, Local Berks maintained a foothold in the city.¹⁷ Throughout the decade, they continued to operate within local unions where the party maintained a base of support among labor leaders and rank-and-file members. In 1924 Local Berks began new outreach strategies, becoming early adopters of radio as a tool for political education.¹⁸ It kept a close eye on developments in the city of 100,000 where wages stayed stagnant compared both to the country at large and to neighboring industrial communities.¹⁹

By 1927 the organization realized it had a shot at capturing real power. Under the incumbent administration, new tax assessments went into effect that appeared weighted in favor of the wealthy. Working-class homeowners experienced sharp property tax hikes. The SP leveraged mass frustration with these tax discrepancies into a vigorous campaign. They made a play for power and won.²⁰ By the Depression Local Berks was one of the largest and most stable of the SP's branches. From 1927 until the late 1930s Reading's socialists ceased to be simply a third-party nuisance to the Democratic and Republican parties; they formed, instead, the city's central political community, against which all opposition reoriented itself.

If its rank-and-file members and dedicated volunteers were the lifeblood of the movement, its weekly newspaper, the *Labor Advocate*, was its beating heart.²¹ The paper was founded in 1900, the same year as the Federated Trades Council (FTC), which was the county-level affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL).²² Within a few years, the *Advocate* would reflect the deep crossover between the FTC and the SP. In the early years, though, it had a limited following. Paid subscribers numbered under 100 in the first decade. Charles Maurer, brother of Reading socialist and labor leader James Maurer, bought the weekly around 1910 and rapidly transformed it. He reportedly brought subscription rates up to 7,000 within a year of acquiring the paper. Almost immediately, the weekly took on a dual role. It was a source of news and a tool of local social movements. In 1910 the *Advocate* gave extensive coverage to James Maurer's campaign for a seat in the General Assembly. The paper's role did not stop there. The Maurer campaign gave away thousands of copies of it to educate voters about the race. Maurer carried the day, becoming the first socialist legislator in the state's history.²³ From its early years, the *Advocate* served this two-pronged role in the life of Reading's radical workers.

The *Advocate* was a consistent venue for views marginalized in the major dailies, giving organized labor and socialists space to broadcast their own political analysis and narrative in service of the movement. The city's widely read newspapers, the *Reading Times* and the *Reading Eagle*, were founded in 1853 and 1868, respectively. They tended to uphold the old parties' political lines. Both gave little space to socialist views and generally unsympathetic coverage to their activities. While the *Advocate* never achieved the reach of either daily, it became a force in educating its readers and forging a socialist presence in the region. It peaked in the mid-1930s, boasting around 10,000 subscriptions. The vast majority were delivered to homes and offices.²⁴ In a city with 108,000 residents, a significant portion of the population likely

received the paper at its home or union hall.²⁵ The newspaper survived several waves of SP expansion and contraction. Printed by a cooperative, it remained a formally labor-socialist entity well into the decade.

The *Advocate* was also part of a national surge in radical press that took shape in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.²⁶ It was one of nearly sixty SP-affiliated publications founded in the United States in the first decade of the century and an early SP voice in Pennsylvania. Three other SP newspapers were founded in the state at the turn of the century. Two were foreign-language publications, *Kova*, a Lithuanian-language newspaper in Philadelphia, and *Union des Travailleurs*, a French-language newspaper. Another, the *Free Press*, was an English-language paper in the western part of the state.²⁷ A flurry of short-lived publications joined the *Advocate* over the next two decades. By 1925 it was one of only two Pennsylvania-based SP papers, the other being the *Philadelphia Tageblatt*. Of them, only the *Advocate* published in English.²⁸ On the eve of the country's dramatic economic and labor upheaval, a process that played out most intensely in the state's textile factories, coal fields, and steel mills, the *Advocate* was the last newspaper standing that could serve the movement as an SP and labor publication.

Scholars have long recognized the dual role radical publications played as tools for educating and organizing movements. Before 1920 the SP's center of gravity was in the lower Plains states and the Upper Midwest.²⁹ Founded in 1895 Oklahoma's *Appeal to Reason* was the country's first mass socialist publication. The *Appeal* forged a vital link between the movement and its widely dispersed base until the paper folded in 1922. At the turn of the century, it regularly boasted subscription figures above 100,000. It was also an institutional home for SP leaders. Eugene Debs at times relied on the paper's financial support.³⁰

Founded in 1897 the *Jewish Daily Forward* played a similar role in a different context: it connected the SP movement with its Yiddish-speaking New York base. The *Forward* took on special importance with the SP's shifting center of gravity in the wake of Red Scare repression and factional tumult that diminished the SP in 1919 and 1920. Like the *Appeal*, it reported the news and served as an institutional center of the movement. The *Forward's* editor, Abraham Cahan, was also a major SP figure. He used newspaper and labor resources to fund organizing, including Local Berks's historic 1935 race.³¹ In Milwaukee, the largest city with a strong SP, the *Leader* occupied a similar position to the *Advocate*. It stood out, though, as one of the country's few leftist dailies. The *Leader* folded two decades before the *Advocate* did.³²

ANCHORING SOCIALIST COMMUNITY AND INDUSTRIAL UNIONISM

In a city with two mainstream dailies and a number of weekly publications, the *Advocate* knit together a community of labor and socialist supporters through its own reporting and by giving readers access to national networks of radical politics. The paper's content informed readers of major events—often of news that went un- or underreported in the larger newspapers—and interpreted local, national, and international news through its editorial lens. It also instructed its audience on how to respond to developments in their community as well as in their movements. Despite employing a small staff, the *Labor Advocate* consistently produced unique stories on labor and political news and events each week. As a mouthpiece for the radical workers' movement, the paper's coverage was always, to a certain degree, in service of their political projects. During the period of SP resurgence from 1927 to 1936, the *Advocate* tracked major developments in the local, state, and national labor and radical movements. It provided detailed reporting on workplace organizing campaigns as well as sympathetic coverage of mass protests by groups of the impoverished and homeless fighting for relief. The paper also connected its local readers to the activities of their SP representatives in Harrisburg, regularly reporting on the legislative advocacy of Darlington Hoopes and Lilith Wilson. Hoopes (fig. 1) was an attorney who moved to Reading from Montgomery County to be part of the Socialist Party movement in the mid-1920s. Wilson, an Indiana native and an SP lecturer and organizer throughout the early twentieth century, was the most prominent woman in the Berks organization. Both were elected in 1930 to the state legislature, winning reelection in 1932 and 1934.

The *Labor Advocate* also connected readers to the broader world of labor and leftist action. It was the local venue for wire services such as the Federated Press, a labor-affiliated resource that published both national and international news.³³ As a result, the *Advocate* printed multiple articles in almost every edition that offered straight reporting on major events around the world, mostly with a labor bent. This coverage helped Reading's workers keep abreast of the troubling developments in Germany, Austria, and Spain during the early 1930s. Placed alongside local reporting on the fascist links held by the area's hosiery barons as well as reports of local meetings and events to fight fascism, such reporting helped round out the newspaper's own close focus on the rising threat of fascism abroad and at home. In the early and middle years of the decade, it also supplied readers with a source



FIGURE 1. Darlington Hoopes. Courtesy of the Pennsylvania State Archives, the *Reading Labor Advocate* Papers (MG-184).

of sympathetic coverage of the Soviet Union, often holding up advances in workers' rights and social equality in implicit comparison to stagnation in the United States and right-wing repression in central and southern Europe. This in turn helped shape both the rhetoric and the intensity of workers' efforts to establish their own power in a growing hosiery industry dominated by owners showing unsettling affinity for European fascists and their antisocialist repression.³⁴

Just as the paper linked readers to national and international news pieces, it also brought major figures into homes through op-eds and reprinted speeches. Norman Thomas, for example, regularly published nationally syndicated op-eds in the pages of the *Advocate*. This ensured that local supporters directly received his analysis and stayed connected to the national movement. See, for example, an October 1935 op-ed by Thomas in the *Advocate*, discussing a key theme of the 1935 election: the fate of the unemployed under the Great Depression (fig. 2).³⁵

Thomas was not the only SP and labor leader to use the *Advocate's* pages to advance political lines. In a period of narrowing choices for socialist writers, the *Advocate* printed opinion and editorial pieces from around the country, as well as from rank-and-filers, who interpreted the news and called for action on a wide variety of topics. Local leaders and activists as well as nationally prominent socialists sought out the *Labor Advocate* as a venue for their own writing, such as Hannah Biemiller, a Midwest-based textile organizer who was married to Andrew Biemiller, a prominent Milwaukee-based SP figure. She asked *Advocate* editor Hofses's permission to publish op-eds in the paper as options narrowed elsewhere.³⁶ The *Advocate* became a forum for socialists who found themselves barred from the few remaining national publications and who lacked their own local or regional newspapers. Others sought out work at the paper, like William Kennedy of Bennington, Vermont, a young union member and budding socialist who wanted to build a life in the movement.³⁷

Local notables and rank-and-file members similarly took to the *Advocate's* pages. Whether through opinion essays or through reprints of radio speeches, figures like Raymond Hofses, Darlington Hoopes, George Rhodes (a Federated Trades Council leader and a business manager of the *Advocate* who would later serve for two decades in the US Congress as a labor-backed Democrat), and Birch Wilson (the husband of Lilith M. Wilson), published a range of political education essays and speeches. At the same time, the paper became a forum for local rank-and-filers whose voices filled weekly

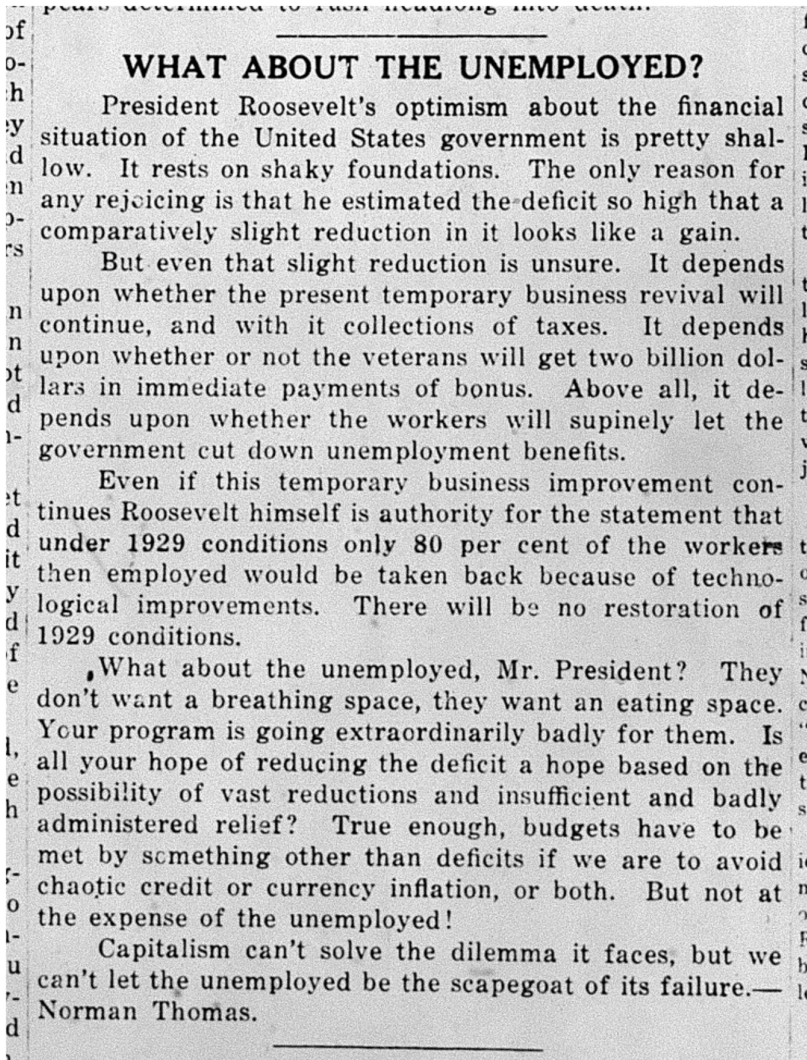


FIGURE 2. Norman Thomas editorial from the *Reading Labor Advocate*, October 11, 1935.

columns reflecting the talk of the town. Though rarely signed, these pieces fleshed out regular people's responses to the deprivations of the Depression (fig. 3).³⁸

Even as the Depression-era *Labor Advocate* sought to keep its audience up to date on local and national news and ideas, it was also a vital source of information on the social and cultural activities that kept the movement

vibrant. Each edition included a calendar of upcoming SP events. Weekly listings included card parties, symposia, the massive picnics Local Berks held in the warmer months, as well as an endless stream of women's club activities, theater groups, sports clubs, and other social activities. It similarly advertised political education for workers. The *Advocate* often highlighted the activities of the Reading Labor College, encouraging readers to engage with it, through coursework or other public events, such as plays or performances showcasing Labor College student work. Even a brief glance through the newspaper from 1927–36 offers a glimpse of the dizzying variety of socialist and labor union activities that animated the movement. The *Advocate* was indispensable to narrating the life of the city's socialist and labor radical milieu (fig. 4).³⁹

The newspaper did far more than print a weekly that shared socialist ideas and activity. It created an institutional home for organizers and leaders who used their base in the *Advocate* to sustain party efforts both locally and nationally. Run by key SP members and elected leaders of the labor movement, perhaps one of the paper's most significant Depression-era achievements was its critical support for the fledgling industrial union movement, from hosiery mills to pretzel bakeries. Labor and socialist organizers from the city and across the region regularly corresponded and planned with the *Advocate's* editors to grow and strengthen the movement. It thereby helped constitute a kind of nerve center for an emerging, if rapidly squashed, regional movement.

In 1933, one of the most dramatic years in US labor history, the *Advocate's* staff used the paper and its institutional connections to support mass organizing in the city's key industries. It was a time of deep poverty and widespread unrest. Facing wage cuts in the hosiery industry, which had for several decades been the region's core industry, Reading's workers helped stir the national wave of mill-based militancy, making Berks, for a time, the center of textile unrest.⁴⁰ While the story of Reading's hosiery workers has received some scholarly attention, the city was in fact rocked by work actions in a wide range of industries. Looking at activities beyond the hosiery industry both captures the broad range of action and demonstrates the centrality of the labor-socialist alliance housed in the *Advocate*.

As Reading's hosiery workers were putting National Industrial Recovery Act's promise of workers' rights to organize to the test at the federal level, Reading's pretzel workers, who numbered upwards of 500, were building a militant union. They undertook this project with the crucial support of the *Advocate's* George Rhodes, also the head of the FTC.⁴¹ Pretzel bakers were

What Reading Folks Are Talking About

READING'S LOVE MURDER

A Reading doctor has been slain by a young woman who admits that she was deeply but morbidly in love with her victim. Most people who are interested in the case see only the surface of this problem. Back of incidents (they can scarcely be called crimes) of this kind is a social and economic system which forbids young men and women from the carefree exercise of natural sex functions.

The normal thing for boys and girls in their late teens is to love each other. Given an economic system which would guarantee decent living conditions to families, young folks would mate, rear families and live natural lives. But Capitalism⁴ is not such a system. So boys and girls either have illicit sex relations or fly in the face of Nature by practicing a celibacy which almost inevitably dislocates nervous systems and results in biased social viewpoints.

FIGURE 3. "What Reading Folks Are Talking About," from the *Reading Labor Advocate*, January 12, 1934.

Activities of the Reading Socialists

SOUTHERN BRANCH CARD PARTY SATURDAY NIGHT AT LYCEUM

The Southern Branch will hold its first card party of the year at Labor Lyceum on Saturday night, and an effort has been made to start the New Year right by making it a big affair.

The excellent array of prizes will make for keen competition. And don't forget, starting Saturday night, all scores will be entered in the final contest for the quilt that will be offered as the "month of January prize."

The usual good "eats" are promised, too.

The regular low price of 25c per corner will prevail.

The Southern Branch takes this opportunity of thanking all people who helped in securing and removing the piano that it now has at its disposal; also we wish to thank Comrade Ream for tuning it and putting it into shape.

WOMEN SOCIALISTS ELECT OFFICERS

At the meeting of the Women's Socialist League at the Labor Lyceum last Thursday, officers were elected for the new year.

Mrs. William C. Hoverter was elected organizer, Mrs. Cecelia Bachtlin, secretary, and Mrs. Hannah Soliday, treasurer.

Mrs. Annie Hoyer, Mrs. Minnie Kleinsmith, Mrs. Helen Wentzel, Mrs. Loretta DeMott and Mrs. Lottie Wentzel were elected as the committee visit sick comrades.

At the meeting it was decided to hold a card party for the benefit of the Chorus on January 18th at the Labor Lyceum. Plans were laid to hold a social nite once a month. The first event to be held on Thursday, January 19th.

enth and Oley streets in Berkshire Heights.

Remember, it's only 10 cents per corner, refreshments free of charge, and a prize for every table. Don't miss it!

SOUTHERN WOMEN, ATTENTION!

Tonight (Friday) marks the first of a new series of programs that will be sponsored at the women's meetings. A program committee has arranged a special attraction for each Friday night of the month. After the regular business meeting an entertainment awaits you. So come and enjoy it with us.

WEST READING BRANCH CARD PARTY

West Reading Branch wishes to announce that they are going to hold a card party Saturday, January 7th, at their headquarters, beginning at 8 p. m. Lunch will be served and coffee free. The price, 15c per corner. Everybody is welcome and urged to come.

BAND REHEARSAL NEXT WEDNESDAY

The newly organized Socialist Band will have rehearsal next Wednesday evening at 8:15 o'clock at the Labor Lyceum.

Their first rehearsal was held this week, with 35 members present. Comrade Arnold, president of the new organization, and Comrade McLean, band leader, who were instrumental in the forming of the Socialist Band, were well pleased with the first rehearsal and extend an invitation to other musicians to join the Band if they have not yet done so.

LOST—DERBY

The finder of the derby at the Victory Dinner at the 18th Ward last Sunday night is asked to kindly

FIGURE 4. "Activities of the Reading Socialists," from the *Reading Labor Advocate*, January 6, 1933.

among the largest groups of workers in Reading's sizable food production industry; they were also among the lowest paid and most poorly treated.⁴² That April, bakers in a major factory, Bachman, staged a successful strike. Their win encouraged workers to organize formally and fight for a contract.⁴³ The bakers formed the Pretzel Workers Union the next month. Rhodes assisted their campaign to organize across the industry. He worked behind the scenes of the FTC and in the pages of the *Advocate*.⁴⁴ Pretzel workers in other factories took notice and took action themselves.⁴⁵ Bakers shut down multiple factories over the next several months. Their organizing wave rangled a not-insignificant sector of the local economy, paving the way for union growth in low-wage food factories (fig. 5).⁴⁶

At every step of the way, the newspaper provided detailed and sympathetic coverage of the workers' plight and their organizing. Eager to translate workers' initial success into long-term organization, Rhodes put labor and newspaper resources into supporting the fledgling union for the several hundred pretzel workers across the city's industry.⁴⁷ He personally involved himself in the organizing work, both internally and externally. He directly solicited major international unions to take on the Pretzel Workers Union. This was a difficult task as their low pay concerned the internationals. The major unions worried the bakers would not be able to financially support membership dues.⁴⁸ He also advocated for the pretzel workers at the federal level. At one point, Rhodes dressed down Hugh Johnson, the administrator of the National Recovery Administration. Johnson's agency had negotiated a lower wage and longer work week in its industry-wide agreement with pretzel manufacturers than the unions had achieved on their own and Rhodes pilloried him for it.⁴⁹

Throughout 1933 Rhodes did his best to hold together a pretzel workers' movement that had little outside support. Even the existing international unions that might have taken them on were noncommittal.⁵⁰ The workers and Rhodes persisted and, between 1933 and 1934, organized the industry citywide. They established themselves as a major presence in Reading's industrial union movement.⁵¹ In May 1934 the union scored a win at the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), who ruled in favor of requiring companies to discharge closed shop employees who refuse to pay dues.⁵² Within a year of forming, the union went from an unorganized mass into a formidable force.⁵³ By fusing consistent and dramatic coverage of pretzel worker organizing with behind-the-scenes support, the *Advocate* translated worker actions into durable organizations aligned with the growing, and SP-shaped, industrial union movement.

BACHM'N PRETZ'L WORKERS STRIKE AGAINST CUTS

Walkout of 50 Men Results
From Low Wage Policy.
Strikers Charge Law Viola-
tions

FIRM IMPORTS "SCABS"

Strikers Meet Daily to Plan
Aggressive Campaign.
Three Pickets Arrested This
Week

FIGURE 5. Bachman Pretzel Strike article from the *Reading Labor Advocate*, April 21, 1933.

In addition to expanding and electrifying organized labor in Reading, the *Advocate* was a nerve center of an incipient effort to build a viable state SP movement in the 1930s. Despite the geographic concentration of the paper's audience in and around Berks County, the *Labor Advocate* had a wide reach. Unions and activists across the state received the paper. Letters from labor organizers elsewhere in southeastern Pennsylvania, as well as in coal country, and other parts of the state indicate that the paper made its way far beyond county lines. For example, in northeastern Pennsylvania's Mount Carmel, socialists fielded competitive election campaigns and wrote to the *Advocate* regarding their work. Socialists even swept small Berks County communities, including Laureldale and Kenhorst, where socialists won borough and school board positions.⁵⁴ From across the state, SP members, labor organizers, and sympathizers regularly wrote into the paper asking for column inches or support for their drives.⁵⁵ Hofses even sought to intervene in other Pennsylvania locals when tensions or questions arose.⁵⁶

HOLDING THE CENTER: THE *LABOR ADVOCATE* AND THE SPLITTING OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY

Behind the scenes, *Labor Advocate* leaders also tried to hold together the Socialist Party at the national level. The organization was on the brink of collapse in the middle of the 1930s. Though long wrought by sectarian divisions, the SP was increasingly undermined by infighting. In 1934 it began to openly splinter among several competing factions. Some sought to align the party with communists in a united front. Others opposed cooperation with them. Yet others aimed to pull the SP, especially in New York, firmly into the New Deal coalition. In 1935 and early 1936 the *Advocate* sought to carve out a position to unify warring factions.

In those years, the *Forward*, the largest socialist publication with its huge New York base, took a different route. That paper's editor, Abraham Cahan, and his supporters actively undermined the national organization by playing internal ideological divisions off one another. Cahan was a central figure in the efforts to oppose the communists and to pull the party's apparatus away from young, militant activists and into the service of the New Deal. Long a purveyor of a moderate brand of socialism, the *Forward* was also deeply tied to unions that were becoming major labor backers of Roosevelt. Eventually, the more conservative leadership of the New York

state SP chapter, with the weight of Cahan and his publication behind them, succeeded in splintering the party. It would only be a matter of time before their project played out nationally. As these events transpired, almost entirely cut off from the goings-on of actual centers of SP growth and activity, correspondence between the *Advocate's* Hofses and leading figures in the SP leadership shows a concerted effort on the part of the editor to use Reading's electoral wins as a chance to bring the movement back together.

In the lead-up to the 1935 election, SP members from across the country, especially elected politicians and organizational leaders, watched the developments in Reading closely. Despite ideological and strategic differences, many were hopeful that a decisive win in Reading might reawaken the SP's fighting spirit.⁵⁷ Even the state's biggest supporter of the *Forward's* efforts to split the party saw an opportunity to resuscitate the SP through a 1935 victory. Sarah Limbach, also the state director of the SP, successfully appealed to the *Forward* for funds to help Local Berks, arguing that a win that year would set up the basis for the extension of the party into the rural areas around the city and beyond.⁵⁸

With financial support from the outside and an electrified voting base—fired up by three years of nonstop labor unrest—Reading's socialists took the day. They swept every race in the county as well as some suburban boroughs. Almost immediately, support came pouring in from across the spectrum. Norman Thomas, the face of the party and a militant sympathizer was joined by James O'Neal, an anticommunist hardliner, as well as more moderate figures like Milwaukee mayor Dan Hoan and Bridgeport, Connecticut, mayor Jasper McLevy, in celebrating Local Berks.⁵⁹ Thomas and other national figures joined Local Berks for a massive celebration parade that filled the city's streets with more than 10,000 people.⁶⁰ Speaking to the crowded mass, Mayor-elect J. Henry Stump offered a vision of Socialist Party renewal, and a national purpose for the movement. "If every city in the nation," he boomed, flanked on the stage by Hoan and Thomas, "were to follow the example of the three . . . Socialist strongholds, the people of Reading could stop begging for charity and start going places. We could . . . take over this nation and produce abundance instead of scarcity for the people of America."⁶¹ Hearing his words, who could imagine the deep and painful split underway?

The celebration would not last. Controversy over the *Advocate's* coverage signaled that, soon, the local would be pulled into the national drama. Less

than two weeks after the election sweep, Murray Baron penned Hofses upon reading the *Advocate's* coverage of Reading's post-election celebration. After effusively praising the paper, the SP member and New York union organizer pushed Hofses to explain a discrepancy between a nearly identical version of the story that appeared in an SP press release, written by Leo Krzycki, and the version of the same piece that appeared in the *Advocate*.⁶² Krzycki was a leader of the Polish wing of Milwaukee's SP; he was also a solid left-winger. In the full version of the essay, Krzycki recounted in glowing terms the effusive reception the mass of Reading socialists and supporters gave Thomas. Hofses's *Advocate* reprint deleted reference to Thomas. Sensing tension, Baron pushed Hofses to explain the deletion.⁶³ Hofses pushed back hard, writing, "In Reading the rank and file of our party is not keenly conscious of the bitterness which prevails" in New York. He continued, "I have been trying to prevent it from becoming an issue, not as an ostrich who sticks his head in the sand at the approach of danger, but as one who . . . has been hoping possibly against hope, that your trouble might be localized and eventually dissipated."⁶⁴ Arguing that mention of Thomas's reception would inflame the intraparty dispute, Hofses tried to shield Reading's SP members and supporters from the ugliness of the New York fight. Copying the fervently anti-Thomas director of Pennsylvania's SP, Sarah Limbach, as well as Krzycki, a Thomas backer, on the letter, Hofses sent a signal to both sides urging de-escalation.⁶⁵

With their 1935 sweep, Hofses thought the party might escape dissolution by reorienting around the relative stability of socialist centers outside of New York, including Milwaukee and Bridgeport, Connecticut. In February 1936, before the final blows had been dealt to the SP, Hofses wrote to the mayors of the other two centers of SP power, Milwaukee's Hoan and Bridgeport's McLevy, to seek a coalition. "In Reading," he wrote, "political success has made most of our rank and file indifferent to the national situation." Of Local Berks leaders, he noted that "[our] belief is that personality out-weighs principals," and went on to urge the two prominent socialists to close ranks around a strategy of de-escalation, even floating a policy of partial cooperation with communists.⁶⁶ Socialist cities, he seemed to recognize, engendered a markedly different, and more promising, politics than New York's inward-looking conflicts. Just a week before, Local Berks's nominating caucus for that year's elections had gone smoothly, with the *Advocate* predicting a strong slate and good showing.⁶⁷ At the same time, as spring inched closer, local tensions intensified.

Frustrations over the distribution of jobs under the socialist administration and the slowness of relief mingled with the more general national divides that had until recently been kept out of Reading. Amidst all this, the *Advocate* tried to project an open mind in its reporting, informing readers, for example, that at an upcoming event featuring an anti-united front speaker, there would be “ample opportunity to raise questions [and] a lively discussion is anticipated.”⁶⁸ The 1935 win was still fresh and the *Advocate* continued to project a unified future, even as storm clouds darkened on the horizon.

Unfortunately for Hofses, the *Advocate*, and the members of Local Berks, tensions in the national party only intensified over the following months. In May and June of 1936, New York’s “Old Guard,” sensing they would soon lose their grip over their increasingly militant state party, brought tensions to a head by purging the New York organization, thereby provoking a confrontation with the left wing of the SP. The national party was put in a bind: appease the Old Guard, which had a firm grip on much of the SP’s infrastructure, or side with the growing majority of militants. The National Executive Committee sided with the militant base, which led the New York Old Guard to bolt the SP, threatening to take allies in other states with them.⁶⁹

Even as seemingly irrevocable damage was being done to the party at the national level, the *Advocate*’s Hofses continued to believe the movement could piece together a way forward. He worked behind the scenes to mend the fractured SP by trying to forge a new coalition of socialist municipal leaders beyond New York. Ultimately, despite the paper’s efforts to project a unified future, he failed. The *Advocate* could not bring together the divided organization. Nonetheless, their attempt stood in stark contrast to that of Cahan and the *Forward*. From Cahan’s position at the newspaper, and after gaining control of the main socialist magazine, the *New Leader*, the long-time editor had used the *Forward* to bludgeon opponents on the party’s left and center, beginning as early as 1932 and culminating in the 1936 split.⁷⁰

It was as a result of these efforts that the splits into which Hofses, like most of Reading’s socialist leadership, was unhappily drawn, ever occurred. Therefore, in the early months of 1936, as Hofses pled for support from Hoan and McLevy, Reading’s organization was drawn into the fight. Split between an “Old Guard” faction and a militant youth wing, the party devolved into chaos. This turn offered salacious distractions to the nonsocialist press. It also

dissolved the relatively unified base that had so dramatically dominated the local scene. In the end, Hofses could not pull together a coalition of electorally victorious socialists to hold the party from breaking in two. Ultimately, he allied himself with Pennsylvania's right-wing SP faction. By August Hofses's paper declared "Disaffiliation—A Socialist Duty."⁷¹ Lines were drawn. The Reading Old Guard, which stood on dubious legal footing, shut out the militant youth. They commandeered the local's property and purged their younger opponents.⁷² Hofses's desire for reconciliation could overcome neither his fealty to the institution nor the institutional strength of the Old Guard of which he was a central figure.⁷³ The paper sided with the splitters and moved decisively toward the SP's right.

As New York's Old Guard leadership moved what remained of the SP toward firmer cooperation with the New Deal coalition of CIO unions and the Democratic Party, though, Hofses still imagined possibilities for a dynamic, left-wing alternative to the Democratic Party and the New Deal. He continued to write to colleagues about the possibility of forming a federation of progressive organizations. He was especially taken with the examples of the Upper Midwest.⁷⁴ From a seat of real socialist power, the *Advocate* could imagine a different world. Though far more electorally successful than their New York comrades, however, Reading's SP leaders never developed a viable alternative path for the movement on the national level.

Like the local party, by 1936 the *Advocate's* future began to appear uncertain. The stunning victories of the prior year quickly lost their sheen. The paper's accounts took a turn for the worse. It brought in thousands fewer in revenue than at the beginning of the decade.⁷⁵ The local party was in shambles.⁷⁶ Both the party and the paper survived and persisted, though without the unity or vigor they displayed in the lead-up to their historic sweep. Miraculously, labor stuck with them in 1936. The FTC was committed to Local Berks as a "labor political party."⁷⁷ The historic, though unsuccessful, Berkshire Knitting Mills strike began late that year and persisted through much of 1937. It energized a militant labor movement and provided fodder for *Advocate* coverage. Local Berks also experienced a minor resurgence in the late 1930s as well as in the 1943 mayoral election.

The year 1936 cast a long shadow on Local Berks. Its fate appeared sealed after this once-viable local, possibly even regional, alternative to the Democratic Party was sidelined. By the decade's close, much of the labor movement's leadership abandoned the Reading party, ending the county's

longstanding left-labor tradition. Rhodes, the noted socialist leader and FTC president, bolted the SP just a few years after the split. He joined the Democratic Party and became its local standard bearer for organized labor. In 1942 he founded a new newspaper for the local union movement, the *New Era*, ending the *Advocate's* role as the voice of the unions.⁷⁸ Even after the local Socialist Party lost its formal and informal ties to the labor movement, its newspaper remained an anomaly. As late as the 1960s, the *Advocate* continued to publish in the city, making it the only surviving local socialist newspaper in the country in its final years.⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

The *Reading Labor Advocate* was a major left-wing publication that has been overlooked in the historiographies of the radical press and the Socialist Party. By revisiting it during the Depression-era period of SP growth and electoral success, this article has improved our understanding of the socialist and labor movements in Pennsylvania while it also has complicated received wisdom about the era's labor press, industrial unions, and radical politics. Contrary to accounts that emphasize the irrelevance of the post-1920 SP or that dwell solely on its internal strife, by returning to the *Labor Advocate* during the Depression and New Deal, a nuanced view of the SP emerges. Reading socialists built one of the most successful SP organizations in US history. The *Advocate* was at the center of that process. A key communications tool and a hub of organizing and strategizing, it forged a community in its pages that sustained the movement in a period widely known for socialist decline. This article has provided new perspectives on the period of industrial unionism's expansion, furthering our understanding of the direct and indispensable role SP actors played. It has also followed the traces of an impassioned, though ultimately unsuccessful, effort to save the Socialist Party from its divisions; an effort based in the concrete triumphs of this socialist city.

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NOTES

Ian Gavigan was one of two recipients of an award in 2018, the first year of the revitalized Scholar in Residence Program. The SIR Program currently is jointly operated by the Pennsylvania State Archives and the Pennsylvania Historical Association.

1. Eliza Griswold, "A Democratic-Socialist Landslide in Pennsylvania," *New Yorker*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/a-democratic-socialist-landslide-in-pennsylvania> (accessed August 1, 2020).
2. For a partial account of SP victories in Reading, see Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015), 627–29. See also William C. Pratt, "The Reading Socialist Experience: A Study of Working Class Politics" (diss., Emory University, 1969), 512.
3. Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr., "The Socialist Administration in Reading, Pennsylvania, Part I, 1927–1931," *Pennsylvania History* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 1972): 417–42.
4. In recent years, scholars of US history have begun to reconsider what was long written off as a minor anomaly in political and labor history, the persistence of a politically viable Socialist Party. In works by Cecelia Bucki, Michael Kazin, Gail Radford, Shel Stromquist, Eric Fure-Slocum, Tula Connell, Sharon McConnell-Sidorick, and Kit Smemo, among others, historical work has revisited and revised the history of the Socialist Party of America. Scholars have found a long history of SP relevance and power, especially in its municipal bases, from the turn of the century through the 1940s. They have also begun to tell a more complex story of the movement's decline than the existing historiography.

An older literature tended to marginalize the Socialist Party in both its Progressive Era and Great Depression/New Deal phases. In it socialist cities were written off as anomalous, despite the fact that they represented the most vital loci of Socialist Party organizing in the country's history. One of the most influential accounts of US socialism is Daniel Bell's *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967). Bell argued that Marxism and US culture were incompatible, brushing aside clear counterexamples in cities like Reading. The first synthetic account of the party's history is David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History*. (New York: Macmillan, 1955). James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), is a major account of the party's heyday, which ends well before the Depression-era resurgence of the SP. Jack Ross's recent synthetic account *The Socialist Party of America* attempts to bring the 1930s and beyond into the broad story of the Socialist Party but tends to follow factional feuds and dramas among national leaders, leaving aside the substantive work socialists did on the ground, electorally and otherwise. Nonetheless, it is a major work with much information to offer.

5. James Gregory, "Socialist Party Votes by County and State, 1904–1948," *Mapping American Social Movements Project* website (hereafter MASM), University of Washington, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/SP_map-votes.shtml (accessed November 24, 2019), and Ross, *The Socialist Party of America*, 327.
6. Dues Reports, Box 3, Folder 15, Darlington Hoopes Papers (hereafter DHP), Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Eberly Family Special Collection Library, Pennsylvania State University.
7. On the upheavals of the 1930s staged by the US working class, see Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920–1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960); Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933–1941* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
8. James Gregory and Rebecca Flores, "Socialist Party Membership by States, 1904–1940," MASM, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/SP_map-members.shtml.

The vast majority were in Reading itself. "Directory of Socialist Party Branches," *Reading Labor Advocate* (Hereafter *RLA*), January 11, 1935.

9. Despite the relative significance of Reading's Socialist Party, both in the sheer number of members and disproportionate success the organization had at winning elective office well into the 1940s, there is only a small literature detailing its experience—and an even smaller one relating it to broad changes in US politics. Nonetheless, this small literature has mapped the broad contours of Socialist Party organization and activities in Reading and Berks County from 1900 through the 1940s, giving enormous insight into the internal dynamics of Local Berks and its institutional growth. Kenneth E. Hendrickson, "The Socialists of Reading, Pennsylvania and World War I—A Question of Loyalty," *Pennsylvania History* 36, no. 4 (1969): 430–50; Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience"; Hendrickson, "Socialist Administration in Reading," 417; Hendrickson, "Triumph and Disaster: The Reading Socialists in Power and Decline, 1932–1939—Part II," *Pennsylvania History* 40, no. 4 (October 1, 1973): 381–411; Henry G. Stetler, *The Socialist Movement in Reading, Pennsylvania, 1896–1936: A Study in Social Change* (Philadelphia, PA: Porcupine Press, 1974); William C. Pratt, "Women and American Socialism: The Reading Experience," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 1 (1975): 72–91; Donald Kennedy, "Corporate Structure, Technology, and Unionism in the Full-Fashioned Hosiery Industry: The Berkshire Knitting Mills Strike of 1936–1937," *Labor Studies Journal* 3, no. 3 (Winter 1979): 257; Sharon McConnell-Sidorick, *Silk Stockings and Socialism: Philadelphia's Radical Hosiery Workers from the Jazz Age to the New Deal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

10. The classic account of labor and radical press, which argues that such publications were among the most effective tools of politicization for the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century labor movement is Jon Bekken, "No Weapon So Powerful": Working-Class Newspapers in the United States," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (July 1988): 104–19.
11. Karla Sclater notes the relative paucity of work on both AFL central labor council newspapers and on the Depression's labor press more generally. Karla Kelling Sclater, "The Labor and Radical Press 1820–the Present," *Labor Press Project*, 2001, <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/laborpress/Kelling.htm> (accessed January 25, 2020). There is a notable body of work on earlier periods of Socialist Party and labor movement press, including two books by Elliott Shore, *Talkin' Socialism: J. A. Wayland and the Role of the Press in American Radicalism, 1890–1912* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988), and *German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1850–1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), as well as works by Dirk Hoerder, *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s–1970s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), and Hoerder, ed., *Essays on the Scandinavian-North American Radical Press, 1880s–1930s* (Bremen: Labor Newspaper Preservation Project, Universität Bremen, 1984). Also, on the *Appeal to Reason*, see John Graham, "Yours for the Revolution": *The Appeal to Reason, 1895–1922* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1990).
12. Ross, *The Socialist Party*, 336–78.
13. Bekken, "No Weapon So Powerful," 104–5. Even as the radical press has recorded an enormous amount of social movement activity, providing an invaluable source base for generations of historians, it has also been, more generally, a focus of a wide range of analyses in terms of the social and political function of the press in shaping radical political movements in multiple periods. In the Depression-era United States, for example, recent work has addressed the anarchist press's central role in cultivating political community. See Morris Brodie, "Rebel Youths: English-Language Anarchist Periodicals of the Great Depression, 1932–1939," *Radical Americas* 3, no. 1 (November 2018): 12.
14. The historiography of the US left during the Great Depression has focused mostly on the rise of a wide-reaching and successful Communist movement, which helped to spur the formation of a powerful industrial union movement and cemented the power of labor in the Democratic coalition. Socialists, on the other hand, have been treated as marginal players whose concerns were mostly with group infighting and not building organization. This article joins a number of works from the past two decades in fleshing out the vitality and significance of the SP well into the Depression—an exercise made possible by turning close attention to one of the key centers of Socialist power, Reading, which has remained mostly outside the historiography of the US left, even of the socialist left.

15. McConnell-Sidorick, *Silk Stockings and Socialism*, 63, 190.
16. Gregory and Flores, "Socialist Party Membership by States, 1904–1940"; Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 364.
17. Hendrickson, "Socialists of Reading," 430–50.
18. Lilith M. Wilson, "Socialism and Christianity," Box 1 Folder 16, General Manuscript Collection, Pennsylvania House of Representatives Archives; radio addresses, Box 6, Folder 16, DHP.
19. James Maurer, *It Can Be Done: The Autobiography of James Hudson Maurer* (New York: The Rand School Press, 1938), 296; Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 7.
20. Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 77.
21. William C. Pratt, "Jimmie Higgins' and the Reading Socialist Community: An Exploration of the Socialist Rank and File," in *Socialism and the Cities*, ed. Bruce M. Stave (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975).
22. On the shared origins of the modern labor movement and the Socialist Party in the city, see Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 27–31.
23. Maurer, *It Can Be Done*, 147–48; Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 35.
24. "American Stores Co. Phila," MG-184, Roll 1, *Reading Labor Advocate* Papers, 1917–1954 (hereafter LAP), Pennsylvania State Archives.
25. Nationally, the average household size in 1930 was just over four persons. US Census Bureau, *Size of Family and Age of Head* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1944), 4.
26. As one historian of radical and labor press has termed it, the period stretching from 1880 to 1940 was the "golden age for working-class newspapers." The *Advocate* was by no means unique when it appeared on the stage; it was, rather, part of a flood of working-class publications that helped shape what some scholars have theorized as a "counterpublic," or an alternative public sphere in which supporters or sympathizers of a radical politics forge a sense of shared purpose and community. In the context of the period in question, the *Advocate* fits uncomfortably within such a framework. Rather than the unifier of a dispersed or marginal political community, the *Advocate* was the central publication and meeting place of a powerful, well-organized movement. At the same time, it worked hard to frame events in Reading and beyond in ways the reigning news sources did not by highlighting socialist and labor projects. It was also a clearinghouse for a mass cultural alternative in which Reading socialists partook, a far cry from the bifurcated media landscape that plagued other radical movements, divided between a radical left in the labor press and a reactionary right in the tabloid press. Cynthia Gwynne Yaudes found this regarding an earlier period. On the "golden age," see Sclater, "The Labor and Radical Press." For a recent study of labor and radical press invoking the counterpublic thesis, see Holly Nazar, "Reasoning Americans: The Lost Counterpublic of American Socialists and their National Newspaper" (M.A. thesis, Department

- of Communication Studies, Concordia University, 2012). On the origins of the counterpublic as an analytic, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80. On the bifurcated media sphere, see Yaudes, "Working an Image: Radical Labor Newspapers and the American Tabloid Press, 1919–1922" (Ph.D. diss., Department of History and American Studies, Indiana University, 2008).
27. Rebecca Flores, "Socialist Newspapers and Periodicals, 1900–1920," MASM, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/SP_map-newspapers.shtml (accessed January 14, 2020).
28. Joshua Estrada and James Gregory, "Labor and Radical Newspapers and Periodicals 1925," MASM, https://depts.washington.edu/moves/LaborPress1925_map.shtml (accessed January 14, 2020).
29. James Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).
30. Elliott Shore, "Selling Socialism: The Appeal to Reason and the Radical Press in Turn-of-the-Century America," *Media, Culture and Society* 7, no. 2 (April 1985): 147–68.
31. Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/The Jewish Daily Forward Building, 175 East Broadway: A Capitalist Venture with a Socialist Base," *New York Times*, July 19, 1998, sec. II, 5.
32. For an overview of the newspaper, see Brian Mueller, "The Milwaukee Leader," in *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee* (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/milwaukee-leader/>. For a recent treatment of the paper in its early years, see James Kates, "Editor, Publisher, Citizen, Socialist Victor L. Berger and His Milwaukee Leader," *Journalism History* 44, no. 2 (2018): 79–88.
33. Founded in 1920, the Federated Press was for three decades a consistent source of national and international news by and for the organized labor movement. See Bekken, "No Weapon So Powerful," 111–12.
34. Coverage in the paper between 1934 and 1936 in particular showed extensive focus on the events in Germany and Austria. In 1934, for example, the paper gave much coverage to the destruction of the Austrian Socialist movement and even helped coordinate a letter-writing campaign in defense of Austrian workers. The crisis of the central European left remained a key concern of Local Berks, which continued to focus on the Austrian situation as well as the plight of German Socialists; many of those members visited Reading to offer first-hand insights into the crisis. On immediate responses to the Austrian situation, see "The Austrian Slaughter," *RLA*, February 16, 1934; "Young Social'ts laud Austrians," *RLA*, February 16, 1934; "Austria," *RLA*, February 23, 1934; "Rally to Support of Austrian Comrades," *RLA*, February 23, 1934; "How War on Austrian Masses Was Planned by Dollfuss, the Infamous, on Heimwehr Orders," *RLA*, March 2, 1934; "Socialists Will Hold Two Big Mass Meetings,"

- RLA*, March 9, 1934. On solidarity with Austria after 1934, see Harry Gross to Austrian Ambassador, February 12, 1935, Roll 1, LAP, as well as public memorials to slain Austrian Socialists, such as "Local Socialists Plan to Honor Austrian Workers," *RLA*, February 15, 1935. On exiled German Social Democratic Party visitors to Reading, see "German Socialist Will Speak at Picnic" *RLA*, June 8, 1934; "Says Labor Must Fight to End Hitler Tyranny," *RLA*, February 11, 1935; "Nazi Refugee to Speak in English Tongue Here," *RLA*, February 15, 1935; "German Socialist Refugee Will Tell Thrilling Story of the Nazi Terror," *RLA*, March 1, 1935.
35. Norman Thomas, "What about the Unemployed?" *RLA*, October 11, 1935.
 36. Hannah Biemiller to Raymond Hofses, June 1, 1936, Roll 1, LAP.
 37. William G. Kennedy to Editor, January 14, 1935, Roll 1, LAP.
 38. "What Reading Folks Are Talking About," *RLA*, January 12, 1934. Similar columns appeared weekly, some with more rank-and-file quotes than others.
 39. "Activities of the Reading Socialists," *RLA*, January 6, 1933.
 40. On the development of the regional textile industry, of which Berks was the hosiery capital, see Philip Scranton, *Figured Tapestry: Production Markets, and Power in Philadelphia Textiles, 1885-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For a view of the hosiery strikes that touches on Reading, see McConnell-Sidorick, *Silk Stockings and Socialism*.
 41. Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 174-76.
 42. In 1930 there were nearly 1,600 food industry workers in Reading. Bureau of the Census, "Composition and Characteristics. Table 20," *Population*, vol. 3, part 2 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office), 715. In his correspondence, Rhodes notes that the number of pretzel workers who eventually formed the union was above 500.
 43. "Bachm'n Pretz'l Workers Strike Against Cuts," *RLA*, April 21, 1933, 1; "Pret'l Strkers Standing Firm," *RLA*, April 28, 1933, 1; "Pretzel Strike Settled, Old Wage to Be Restored," *RLA*, May 5, 1933, 1; "Pretzel Bakery Workers Will Meet Sunday," *RLA*, May 19, 1933, 5.
 44. Earl White, "Activities on the Local Union Front," *RLA*, March 23, 1934.
 45. "Organization Wins Raise for Pretzel Workers," *RLA*, June 30, 1933; "Labor Will Boost Only Union-Made Pretzels," *RLA*, July 28, 1933, 1; "Will Urge Workers' Aid for Union Pretzel Firms," *RLA*, August 11, 1933, 1.
 46. "New Strike on Reddy Pretzels," *RLA*, September 8, 1933, 1; "Union Officials Send Special Call to Bachman Strikers," September 8, 1933, 1; "Local Workers Drive Forward," *RLA*, September 15, 1933, 1; "Pretzel Strike Still On," *RLA*, October 6, 1933, 1-2; "Krouse Pretzel Pickets Are Giles' Latest Victims," *RLA*, October 13, 1933, 1; "Reddy-Krouse Pretzel Strikes Are Still On," *RLA*, October 20, 1933, 1; "Arbitration Ends as Pretzel Firms Hedge," *RLA*, December 1, 1933, 1; "Pret'l Workers Strike Against 10% Wage Slash," *RLA*, December 15, 1933, 1.
 47. "Federated Trades Aided in Organization Work," *RLA*, September 1, 1933, 9.

48. The Pretzel Workers' Union eventually joined the Bakery and Confectionary Workers' International Union. "Will Quit Reading," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 3, 1934, 5.
49. George Rhodes to Hugh H. Johnson, September 2, 1933, Roll 1, LAP.
50. All Roll 1, LAP: George Rhodes to John Geiger, May 29, 1933; John Geiger to George Rhodes, June 13, 1933; George Rhodes to Bakers International Union, December 4, 1933.
51. "Pretzel Workers' Union Has Picturesque Growth," *RLA*, September 1, 1933, 11.
52. "Sturgis Bros. Lose Label," *RLA*, May 11, 1934, 1; Quinlan Pretzel Co. and Pretzel Workers' Union, N. 4863 (National Labor Board, May 5, 1934).
53. They were joined by pretzel workers elsewhere in southeastern Pennsylvania. "State Police Sent to Protect Pickets in Lansdale Strike," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 11, 1933, 1, 9.
54. Pratt, "Reading Socialist Experience," 227.
55. Mildred McWilliams, letter to Raymond Hofses, July 5, 1935, and Wilson Eshnel to Raymond Hofses, October 23, 1935, Roll 1, LAP.
56. Correspondence between Charles Young and Raymond Hofses, August 4, 1935, Roll 2, LAP.
57. National party leaders also hoped a win in Reading would help jumpstart fundraising. See Clarence Senior to Darlington Hoopes, December 25, 1935, Box 8, Folder 14, DHP.
58. Sarah Limbach to *Jewish Daily Forward* Board of Directors, October 23, 1935, Roll 1, LAP.
59. Congratulations streamed in from around the country. See Telegrams in Box 8, Folder 14, DHP.
60. "Socialists Sweep Reading," *RLA*, November 8, 1935.
61. "Thousands March and Cheers," *RLA*, November 22, 1935. Here Stump is referring to Bridgeport, Connecticut—where on the same day an SP administration was reelected—and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. All three were Socialist Party strongholds where the movement grew during the Depression.
62. On Krzycki and his role in the party's politics, see Ross, *Socialist Party of America*, 336.
63. Murray Baron to Raymond Hofses, November 19, 1935, Roll 1, LAP.
64. Raymond Hofses to Murray Baron, November 20, 1935, Ibid.
65. Hofses has been described as one of the "solid Old Guardsmen" by Jack Ross. Though he eventually threw his weight behind the Limbach-orchestrated purge of militants from the Reading organization, his efforts around the 1935 election and later conflicts in the local party show that he tried hard to keep Reading out of the fight and saw in the Socialist cities a path forward. See Ross, *Socialist Party of America*, 364.
66. Raymond Hofses to Daniel Hoan and Jasper McLevy, February 19, 1936, Roll 1, LAP.
67. "Socialist Party Caucus Selects Strong Ticket," *RLA*, February 21, 1936, Ibid.

68. “‘United Front’ Labor Forum Topic Tonight,” *RLA*, April 3, 1936.
69. Ross provides a detailed account of the split as it played out in New York, alongside other shifts among the SP’s base. *Socialist Party of America*, 336–77.
70. *Ibid.*, 313–35.
71. “Disaffiliation—A Socialist Duty,” *RLA*, August 21, 1936.
72. Pratt, “Reading Socialist Experience,” 343–80.
73. As Pratt has shown, Hofses was, along with Maurer and Rhodes, a key leader whose willingness to go along with the Limbach-led split helped seal the Local’s—as well as the national party’s—fate. Pratt, “Reading Socialist Experience,” 226–335.
74. Just as the local was about to purge their left element, Hofses was writing to a known SP left-winger, envisioning a shared future. Raymond Hofses to Andrew Biemiller, September 23, 1936, Roll 1, LAP.
75. Accounts Annual and Semi-Annual Statements, 1930–1931, 1936, Roll 3, LAP.
76. Pratt offers a detailed account of the local’s cleavages in “Reading Socialist Experience,” 269–376.
77. “Important Committees Named to Administer Labor’s Political Party” *RLA*, December 18, 1936.
78. M. L. Wolfskill to Sir and Brother, September 29, 1942, Folder 5, Box 2, United Labor Council of Reading and Berks County Records, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Eberly Family Special Collections Library, Pennsylvania State University.
79. Hugh G. Cleland, “The Effects of Radical Groups on the Labor Movement,” *Pennsylvania History* 36, no. 2 (1959): 119–32.