

# THE MARCH TO SOCIALISM



**This Is Your Ballot—Do Not Destroy or Lose**

## Declaration of Principles

of the Socialist Party of the U. S. A.

**T**HE SOCIALIST PARTY is the party of the workers, regardless of race, color or creed. In mill and mine, shop and farm, office and school, the workers can assert their united power, and through the Socialist Party establish a cooperative commonwealth forever free from human exploitation and class rule.

If the workers delay and drift, they will prolong the period of their enslavement to a decadent capitalism. This uncreative, wasteful and brutally oppressive social system takes jobs away and turns millions of would-be producers into the streets with no assurance that ever again they may be

national government; for the extension of their economic domain they expose to the appalling menace of new imperialist wars the innocent youth in our own and other countries, on whom they will lay the ruthless clutch of conscription and send to fight those wars. To confuse the voting masses and retain their authority, they maintain great political parties whose appeal fluctuates between frank reaction and fictitious liberalism, neither of which offers to the workers any substantial or enduring program for the acquisition of their birth-right.

Only those who labor with hand and brain in their own right can



**VOTE**  
**SOCIALIST**  
*1932*  
**FEED THE HUNGRY**  
**HOUSE THE HOMELESS**

Will war come to America?

hear  
**NORMAN THOMAS**  
Socialist Candidate for President of U.S.  
and others

Wed., Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup> at 8:30 pm  
**HARLEM LABOR CENTER**

# Socialist Party of America Papers: A Resource Guide

Compiled by Eric Arnesen, Professor of History, The George Washington University

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## Introduction

From the dawn of the twentieth century through the 1960s, the Socialist Party of America represented an intellectually vibrant tendency in American political thought and a dynamic current in the radical and reform movements in the nation.

The Socialist Party, declared Eugene V. Debs in his acceptance speech as the party's presidential candidate in 1912, "is fundamentally different from all other parties... Its spirit is militant and its aim revolutionary," for it "expresses in political terms the aspiration of the working class to freedom and to a larger and fuller life than they have yet known." Debs, a former locomotive fireman and union leader, was perhaps the most prominent Socialist in the United States. An impassioned speaker, he held crowds spellbound with oratory that wove together radical politics and moral imperatives with an almost religious fervor. In an election that pitted him against Republican President William Howard Taft, former president Theodore Roosevelt, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, Debs won over 900,000 votes. Hardly enough to challenge the dominant political parties, the six percent of the vote Debs received, and the considerable attention his campaign attracted, signaled that Socialism, while a distinct minority current, was gaining a substantial hearing during the Progressive Era.

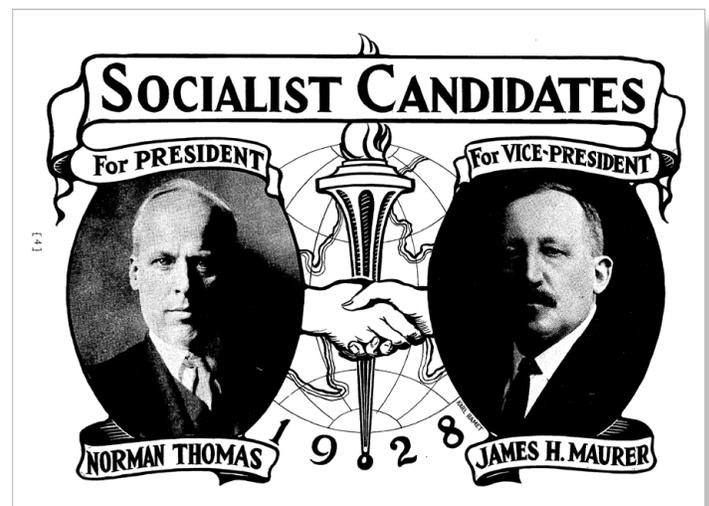
The party Debs led was formed in 1901 with the merger of a number of small left-wing political organizations. Committed to working through the American political system and using electoral means to win office and influence, the Socialists differed from their Democratic and Republican counterparts in significant ways. Unlike the dominant mainstream parties, Socialists identified the economic system based on the pursuit of profit – capitalism – as fundamentally problematic. Capitalism produced "[p]overty, high prices, unemployment, child slavery, widespread misery and haggard want in a land bursting with abundance." That system had divided society into two classes – "capitalists and workers, exploiters and producers" – that allowed the capitalists, "while comparatively few," to own the nation and control the government, with "the courts and the soldiers" at their command to hold the great majority of workers "in slavish subjection," Debs declared in 1912; the purpose of government was to keep workers as a "subject class" at the "mercy of their masters." (Eugene V. Debs, "Address of Acceptance" in *Socialist Campaign Book* (1912), Folder 201901-140-0370. Note: all folder references in this guide are to the Socialist Party of America Papers in ProQuest History Vault) By the early 20th century, Socialists believed workers were awakening, rubbing the "age-long sleep from their eyes" to understand the cause of the "brutalizing effect of class rule" that they had long experienced. Becoming class conscious, they were "no longer on their knees; their bowed bodies are now erect." With the arrival of the socialist movement, "despair has given way to hope; weakness to strength; fear to courage." Through the growing power of the Socialist Party, "industrial slavery" would be abolished, all people would win economic freedom, and the working class

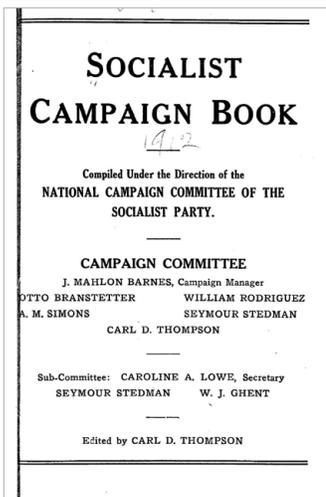
would be emancipated. The result would be the "birth of a new civilization and the dawn of a happier day for all humanity."

That was the utopian dream. The reality was more complicated. The Socialist Party never swept to power; it never succeeded in its declared mission of overturning capitalism, abolishing private ownership of the nation's factories, mills, and mines, and ushering in the "collective ownership and democratic management" of railroads, telegraphs and telephones, land, banking sectors of the economy; and its presidential candidates never won more than a small fraction of the vote. Yet its vision of capitalism's abolition terrified leading politicians and industrial leaders.

But this sweeping, transformative vision was accomplished by a more prosaic program that attracted considerable support: equal rights for all men and women; women's suffrage; the abolition of child labor; the adoption of the initiative, referendum, and recall; greater support for education; the promotion of health and other social insurance measures; minimum wage scales; and the graduated income tax. These were pressing issues during the Progressive Era and, in many instances, after as well. Socialists may have seen themselves as revolutionaries, but their greatest impact came as reformers. Indeed, Socialists, from the early 1900s through the 1960s, played central roles in many of the nation's most important battles over political, economic, and social reform. Their imprint can be found in myriad social movements extending over half a century. It is impossible to understand the history of many reform movements without recognizing the contributions of Socialists to these struggles.

ProQuest's History Vault module containing the Socialist Party of America Papers and the Addendum to the Papers offers scholars, teachers, and students an abundance of resources to reconstruct both the history of one of the century's most important revolutionary movements as well as Socialists' role in a countless reform campaign. The following are a sample of the many topics that can be explored in depth through the module.





1912

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**The 1912 Presidential Election.** Candidates William Howard Taft (the sitting Republican president), Theodore Roosevelt (the former president and Bull Moose Party candidate), Woodrow Wilson (the Democratic Party candidate), and Eugene V. Debs (Socialist Party candidate) squared off in a contest for the presidency, each offering different analyses of what ailed American society and visions for addressing those problems. ProQuest History Vault documents allow students to analyze the Socialists' platform and vision and examine the Socialists' critique of the two major parties and the insurgent Bull Moose party.

For documents on the 1912 election, see especially the "Socialist Campaign Book" (Folder 201901-140-0370), "Eugene V. Debs, But Two Parties and But One Issue. This Is Our Year" (Folder: 201901-136-0992), "Eugene V. Debs, Address of Acceptance" (Folder: 201901-136-0965)

**World War I:** The Socialist Party of America viewed the "Great War" that began in Europe as a tragedy in which workers had no genuine interest. Its stance against the war and U.S. involvement in it put the party on a collision course with the Federal government, which criminalized anti-war activism. Socialist Party offices were raided by local and federal officials; radical periodicals were banned from the U.S. mail, and the government arrested and pursued the conviction of numerous Socialist Party leaders under the newly passed Sedition Act. The repression of the war and postwar years was severe, delivering an almost crippling blow to the party.

For documents relating to trials of Socialist Party leaders under the Sedition Act, search on the "trial of Victor L. Berger" or "Sedition Act" or "Eugene V. Debs." For the search on Debs, see especially "Eugene V. Debs, The Heritage of Debs. The Fight Against War" (Folder: 201901-136-1064), "Eugene V. Debs, Debs and the War. His Canton Speech and His Trial in the Federal Court at Cleveland" (Folder: 201901-136-1009), "Eugene V. Debs, Debs's Address to the Jury and Statement to the Court" (Folder: 201901-136-0998), "One Hundred Years—For What? Being the Address of Victor L. Berger, Adolf Germer, J. Louis Engdahl, William R. Kruse, and Irwin St. John Tucker" (FOLDER: 201901-139-0168), and "The Trial of Scott Nearing and the American Socialist Society" (Folder: 201901-141-0644).

**Politics in the Progressive Era.** The first decades of the twentieth century have been dubbed "the Progressive Era," a period of reform during which activists targeted some of the more egregious abuses of urban and industrial life. The Socialist Party embraced that reform at the same time it considered it inadequate to address the genuine problems confronting American society. Socialists vigorously pursued reform and sought to push it to the left. They also actively participated in local, state, and federal campaigns for political office; in the party's heyday, voters elected hundreds of party candidates as to office as assemblymen and city councilmen, mayors, and even congressmen.

For documents on politics in the Progressive Era, try searches within the Socialist Party of America Papers for keywords such as "minimum wage," "child labor," "initiative, referendum, and recall," "social insurance," "graduated income tax," and "women's suffrage." Some examples of documents on this topic come from Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, page 29 "Why Should a poor man vote the rich man's ticket" and page 44 "Throw your vote here." See also Folder 201901-136-0632, August Claessens and William Morris Feigenbaum, "The Socialists in the New York Assembly" (1918).

**The Bolshevik Revolution and American Communism.** The Russian Revolution of 1917 brought the Bolshevik faction to power in Russia and sparked the formation of Communist parties in numerous countries. In the United States, the Socialist Party initially celebrated the overthrow of the Tsar and the Bolshevik

Let the truth be known!

**MASS MEETING**  
on the

**MOSCOW TRIALS AND TROTSKY**

at the  
Capitol Bldg.  
159 N. State St.  
Drill Hall

Speakers:  
**Norman Thomas**  
Albert Goldman  
Frank W. McCulloch

Sunday,  
Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>  
3 P. M.

**The "New" Communist Line**  
Another Bolshevik Fraud and a Danger

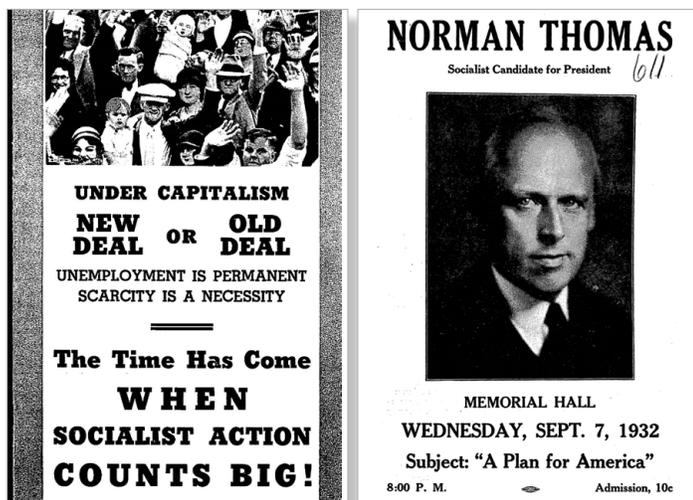
American Communists have announced another hairpin change in their "line." Out of the bowels of their organization come grunts and growls of distress. Battles are on, Browder versus Foster, name calling, threats and dire predictions. If the USA were a totalitarian country, all this would be followed by more "Moscow" trials, confessions, purges and disappearances.

In nearly every ordinary kind of democratic organization, internal differences mean very little to outsiders, to the public at large. Such private quarrels have no serious social repercussions. But among Communists, who are totalitarians and bitter enemies of democratic governments and practices, their policies and tactics are of concern to multitudes outside of their comparatively small numbers. A drop of prussic acid can poison gallons of perfectly good wine. Communist scheming and maneuvers, their deviations of line and new directives, here in America as well as in other countries, can become, if conditions are favorable for mischief, a source of much danger.

Stripped of camouflage and deceit, the program of all varieties of Communism is to provoke the masses of a country to eventual civil war, through which they hope to seize power. They have no patience with the slower processes of democratic persuasion and gradual change. Taking advantage of situations of widespread discontent and possible disorder they aim to gain mass support during such turmoil, to oust duly elected public authorities and install dictators. Lenin, the father of modern Communism, described in detail the ruthless methods necessary for the retention of such seized power and the efficient suppression of all opposition to the dictatorship. Lenin writes of the necessary "maneuvers, stratagems and retreats," as "legitimate and essential in

revolution, but the party split sharply over whether to emulate their Russian colleagues by pursuing a non-electoral, overtly revolutionary path. One significant faction of Socialists broke away from the party to form several Communist parties which eventually merged into a single unit. Although both Socialists and Communists were sharp critics of capitalism from the late 1910s onward, they were also sharp critics of each other. Many Socialists remained fiercely anti-communist for decades to come. That conflict manifested itself on countless occasions and in many political battles.

For documents on this topic, try searches within the Socialist Party of America Papers on "Bolshevik," "communist," or "communism." Interesting broadsides and leaflets on Communism can be found in Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, page 280, "Let the truth be known! Mass Meeting on the Moscow Trials and Trotsky," page 365-366, "The 'New' Communist Line: Another Bolshevik Fraud and as Danger," and page 433, "Read this, then ask yourself these questions."



**The New Deal during the Great Depression of the 1930s.** The New Deal – a heterogeneous number of programs advanced by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his congressional supporters following the 1932 election, aimed at ending the Great Depression through economic reform and providing jobs and welfare to the victims of the Depression. If conservatives blasted the New Deal as socialism, for their part Socialists criticized the New Deal from the left, insisting that President Roosevelt's programs to stabilize capitalism would do little to end the Great Depression. The New Deal, the party concluded in 1936, "has utterly failed," with big business granted "almost unheard of powers" while twelve million Americans remained "jobless and hunger and destitution exist throughout the land." ("New Order, Not New Deal, Party Goal," *Socialist Action* (May 29, 1936): 3 in Folder: 201901-129-1258) In addition to analyzing and critiquing the New Deal, Socialists continued to run their own candidates in elections, advocated for the creation of a farmer-labor party, and participated in campaigns to organize the unemployed, build trade unions, and support strikers.

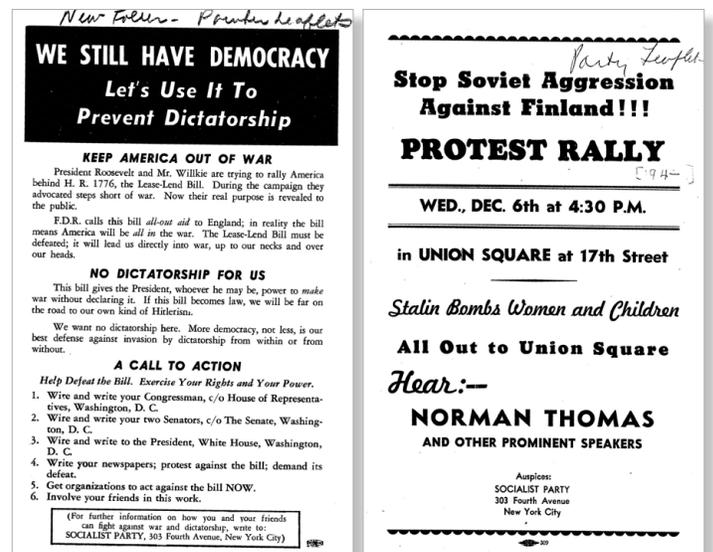
For documents on the New Deal, try searches on "New Deal" or on some of the New Deal agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Recovery Administration or the Tennessee Valley Authority. For broadsides and leaflets pertaining to the

New Deal, see Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, page 8, "Norman Thomas, Socialist Candidate for President," page 12, "America for All," page 143, "The NRA is Dead! What Next for Labor? Public Meeting;" and page 215, "Under Capitalism New Deal or Old Deal."

**Anti-War Activism and Pacifism Prior to and during World War II.** The aftermath of World War I disillusioned large numbers of Americans. Socialists shared with a substantial majority of their fellow citizens the conviction that war in general was evil and that the United States should refrain from any involvement in the impending conflict in Europe in particular. During the 1930s, Socialist leaders and rank-and-file members participated extensively in the Keep America Out of War Committee, urged "non-interference by the U.S. in foreign affairs," advocated the "liberation of colonies and withdrawal of troops from such territories," and called for "complete disarmament" and for legislation prohibiting the war loans and the "manufacture, transportation, or sale of munitions or war materials to all belligerents in a conflict." After the outbreak of the war in 1939, the Socialist Party opposed peacetime conscription as diminishing democracy at home and making American entry into the war more likely, insisted upon U.S. neutrality, and defended conscientious objectors imprisoned for refusing to serve in the armed forces. ("F.P.A. Meeting October 19, 1937," National office correspondence and records, Folder 201901-035-0681)

For documents on anti-war activism surrounding World War II, try searches on "Keep America Out of War" or "pacifism." For broadsides and leaflets on this topic, see Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, Page 123-124, "Dividends of the Dead," Page 245 "How to Keep America Out of War" by Norman Thomas; Pages 256-258 "Keep Out of War! Statement of the Socialist Party U.S.A in the War Crisis;" and Pages 305-307 "No More War!"

**Antifascism in the 1930s and 1940s.** Socialists opposed war, but they equally opposed fascism, condemning the growing fascist movements in Europe which were, they charged in 1935, preparing "for a new World War" and "menacing the entire world with a new blood bath." ("Man's Only Hope – Our Duty- A Great



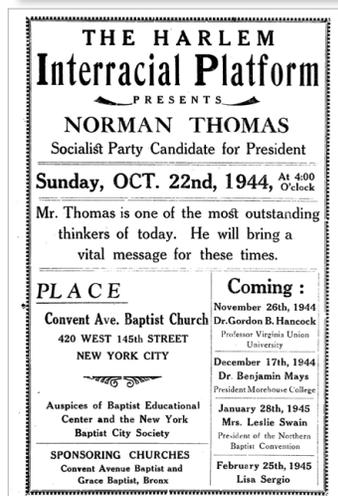
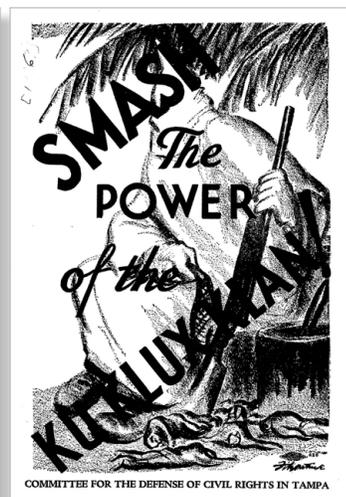
and Powerful Party. Present Tasks of the Socialist Party," *Socialist Action* (October 31, 1935): page 41-42, Folder 201902-129-1258) They contributed to the Spanish Solidarity Fund, participated in the North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy (which backed the Republican government in Spain against the insurgent fascists in the Spanish Civil War), condemned anti-Semitism, and, after continental war broke out in 1939, endorsed the admission into the United States of fascism's European victims. But as the "Fascist juggernaut moves across middle Europe," the party's branch in Washington, D.C. cautioned in 1939 that a determination to destroy fascism should not turn into hatred of "Germans, Italians, ... and Japanese" in the United States." If it did, America will have succumbed to fascism itself. In Socialists' eyes, antidemocratic policies of local and state governments, the suppression of civil liberties and democratic rights, and the subjugation of African Americans in the South portended fascism on the American home front. "Ours is the task to make real the ideals of democracy, of religious tolerance, of racial equality of human brotherhood," the D.C. chapter concluded. "These will be weapons more powerful than poison gas in the final struggle against Fascism." (District of Columbia serial *The Socialist* [Washington, Washington Local of the Socialist Party], 1935-1951, Folder 201901-130-1272, "Hatred is Not Enough," pages 23-27 [Volume 4, Number 3, March 21, 1939])

Other Documents: Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, Page 250, "Stop Soviet Aggression Against Finland!!! Protest Rally" and Page 297 "We Still Have Democracy, Let's Use it to Prevent Dictatorship."

**International Solidarity Committee.** Formed in 1946, the committee extended moral and financial support to "democratic anti-fascists" in Europe following World War II, sending food and clothing parcels and medical supplies abroad to aid "labor, socialist and democratic anti-fascists" in need. Prominent figures active in Committee affairs included Roger Baldwin, James T. Ferrell, Sidney Hook, A. Philip Randolph, among others. (A search on International Solidarity Committee includes numerous folders, such Folder 201901-113-1317, May 1-17, 1946; Folder 201901-116-0556, March 1948; Folder 201901-113-0605, January 1946; Folder 201901-113-0430, December 1945; and Folder 201901-118-0258, January-March 1950)

**Civil Rights.** The Socialist Party opposed racial inequality from the Progressive Era through the 1960s and 1970s. It denounced Jim Crow laws and lynching, supported the passage of civil rights laws, and aided local and national movements for racial advancement. A variety of African American activists – A. Philip Randolph, Frank Crosswaith, and Layle Lane, for instance – found a political home in the Socialist Party and engaged in their own Socialist Party-backed campaigns for Black unionization, fair employment, and equal rights. The March on Washington Movement during World War II, the marches on the Democratic and Republican Party national conventions in 1960, and the 1963 March on Washington drew enthusiastic Socialist Party support and participation.

For documents on civil rights, try a search on this topic and also see Folder 201901-141-0355, Norman Thomas and A. Philip Randolph, "Victory's Victims? The Negro's Future;" and Folder



201902-001-0537, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, General Material, 1919-1976, Page 59 "March for Freedom Now!"

Broadsides and leaflets on civil rights include Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, Page 228 "Smash the Power of the Ku Klux Klan," and Page 409 "The Harlem Interracial Platform presents Norman Thomas."

**The Labor Movement.** Socialists viewed trade unions as important institutions for advancing reform and revolution; they constituted a main vehicle by which the working class organized itself, fought for improved conditions, and, ideally, engaged in the broader class struggle against the capitalist system. "To unite means union, union means organization and organization means POWER to improve living conditions," the Socialist Party insisted. But it meant more: Through unions workers wrested concessions from corporations, giving them a "consciousness of power, a sense of that human solidarity and brotherhood that gives life and joy to those who feel it." (Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, "Why Join a Labor Union" page 130-132) Socialists fiercely supported the labor movement while simultaneously critiquing its conservative elements. Socialists were well represented in many trades and industries and, over time, thousands of union members and leaders, first in the American Federation of Labor and, by the 1930s, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, participated in party activities.

# LABOR ON THE MARCH

## Where? By What Road?

The CEO, the A. F. of L.—The Auto Strike and organization drives in Auto, Rubber and Steel—the meaning and method of the sit-down strike.

Hear:

**GENORA JOHNSON**  
Leader of Flint Auto Workers' Women Emergency Brigade.

**B. J. WIDICK**  
Editor of Rubber Workers Journal  
Active in first big Auto strike.

**VINCENT R. DUNN**  
Organizer, Minneapolis General Union  
Chairman of 1934 Minneapolis General Strike

**FRANK TRAGER**  
National Labor and Organizational Secretary Socialist Party

**Arthur McDowell**  
Chairman—Seely's Cook County Socialist Party.

at Ashland Boulevard Auditorium  
(Carmen's Hall) Ashland and Van Buren  
**Friday, Feb. 19th, 8 P.M.**

ADMISSION 25c  
Aspirics—Local Cook County Socialist Party  
35 So. Dearborn Street

A new strike tactic is shaking the nation.

# THE SIT-DOWN STRIKE

What are its revolutionary implications?

A staff of trained writers, most of whom are sending their despatches from the front lines of labor's struggle in that great heart of American industry, from Pittsburgh, Pa., to Flint, Mich., where auto, steel, and rubber workers are today on the march, send us the stories and give to our readers the significance of

Goodyear, Bendix, Toledo,  
Detroit and the seething militancy  
of the heart of Industrial America!

For documents on the Socialist Party and the labor movement, try searches within the Socialist Party of America Papers on terms such as "organized labor," "labor unions," "American Federation of Labor," "United Mine Workers," "Congress of Industrial Organizations," "Samuel Gompers," "George Meany," "Sidney Hillman," and "Philip Murray." For broadsides and leaflets on labor, see Folder 201901-142-0003, Socialist broadsides and leaflets, 1901-1959, Page 157, "The Sit-Down Strike," Page 233, "Labor on the March, Where? By What Road?" and Page 236, "Steel Workers vs. The Police, The Courts, The Bosses."

**Southern Tenant Farmers Union.** From 1934 through the 1940s, black and white sharecroppers in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and elsewhere organized to protest the oppressive conditions suffered by agricultural workers in the South. The STFU, led by H.L. Mitchell, the party's white state secretary in Arkansas, and E. B. McKinney, a local African American socialist, brought national

attention to sharecroppers' plight, combatted government repression, and engaged in strike activity. The Socialist Party celebrated this "revolt of the sharecroppers" to "throw off [the] yoke of [the] plantation system" and offered substantial moral and financial support for sharecroppers, defending their right to unionize, backing their 1936 strike and ongoing organizing efforts, publicizing landowners' "acts of tyranny and terror," and advocating the wholesale reform of southern agriculture. (*Socialist Action* [February 23, 1935], "Share Croppers Fight Serfdom," pages 13-15, Folder 201901-129-1258; and Southern Tenant Farmers Union, 1935-1942, "Acts of Tyranny and Terror Committed against Innocent Men, Women and Children of the Southern Tenant Framers' Union in Northeast Arkansas" Folder 201901-126-0003)

Other documents on the Southern Tenant Farmers Union include Folder: 201901-129-1258, *Socialist Action* (February 23, 1935), "Share Croppers Fight Serfdom," pages 13-15; Folder 201901-129-1258, *Socialist Action* (April 27, 1935), "Socialists Discuss Arkansas Terror," pages 21-24; and Folder 201901-126-0003, Emergency Committee for Strikers' Relief, January 27, 1936, Southern Tenant Farmers Union, 1935-1942.

**Workers Defense League.** Beginning in 1936, Socialist Party members spearheaded a legal support group that served as a non-communist alternative to the International Labor Defense, a communist organization. The Workers Defense League, which defined itself as a "militant, politically non-partisan organization" devoted "exclusively to the protection of labor's rights," fought against peonage in Florida and Arkansas and led the highly visible but ultimately unsuccessful campaign to save the life of Odell Waller, a Black sharecropper convicted of killing an abusive landowner in self-defense.

Documents on the Workers Defense League include Folder 201901-126-0600, Workers Defense League, "The Job of the Workers Defense League," pages 9-11; Workers Defense League, National Convention Call, page 39; Workers Defense Bulletin, Winter 1943, pages 95-97; "You Can Save This Sharecropper's Life," page 194.



