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Keeping the Cause Alive: Gottlieb A. Hoehn and the Socialist Party of St. Louis

Historians have studied the Socialist Party of America, evaluated national leaders such as Eugene V. Debs and Victor Berger, and addressed the role of German immigrants in the American labor movement.¹ Few, however, have evaluated the thoughts, actions, and contributions by individual leaders, who were the backbone of the party, spread its message, recruited members, ran for office, and created true comradeship. Gottlieb A. Hoehn was such a leader. Several scholars have referred to him as the “most significant individual” or “undoubtedly the single most influential member of the Socialist party in St. Louis,” and asserted that his influence was equal to that of Debs and Berger; but none have written an in-depth analysis of the man.² Hoehn was a founding member of the Socialist Party of America and repeatedly served as its candidate for city, state, and national office. His actions and thoughts reveal a deep commitment to reform and the electoral process. He was the quintessential agitator who encouraged workers during strikes and taught them about the benefits of Socialism. His undying commitment as editor and manager of the St. Louis Labor and its German-language counterpart, the Arbeiter-Zeitung, kept these newspapers alive for over thirty years despite financial challenges. Government censorship during World War I, the schism in the party in 1919, and the anti-radical mindset during the 1920s did not deter his belief that the movement was larger than any obstacle in its way. Hoehn is significant because his actions and words help us analyze the success and failure of the Socialist Party as well as the divisions among German Americans. As a trade unionist, he did not believe in revolutionary or anarchist ideology but the reform and political ideals of the social democratic, or “right” wing in the Socialist Party.³ Although an immigrant, ethnicity was not the driving force for Hoehn’s actions or philosophies; for him labor interests
always trumped ethnic issues. He may have never held public office, but his dedication kept the cause for labor alive in St. Louis, Missouri, and the nation.

Gottlieb Andreas Hoehn was born in Presseck, Oberfranken, Bavaria on April 1, 1865. His mother came from a prosperous farming family and as Hoehn’s ability to read and speak in French and English attest, instilled a desire for learning in her children. Hoehn’s father, however, mismanaged his wife’s dowry, forcing the young Hoehn to end his schooling and enter into an apprenticeship as a cobbler, a trade he would dislike most of his life. At the age of sixteen he left his widowed mother and sisters to join an uncle in Baltimore, Maryland who had paid for his journey to America. He worked for two months in his uncle’s furniture business until he found employment as a “custom shoemaker.” He was successful enough by age twenty-three that he could get married, establish an independent household, and open his own shop.

Hoehn began his lifelong commitment to the labor movement in Baltimore by entering the German Central Labor Union and the Custom Shoemakers Union. He served as secretary for the shoemaker union and members elected him as a delegate to the Baltimore Trades and Labor Assembly, the local chapter of the American Federation of Labor. As a bilingual “enthusiastic worker and propagandist,” he often served as a “link between the Trades and Labor Assembly and the United German-speaking Unions of Baltimore.” Fellow shoemakers converted him to Socialism and he joined the Socialistic Labor Party (SLP), then still a mostly German political organization calling itself the Sozialistische Arbeiter-Partei. Devotion and taking advantage of opportunities soon led to new prospects. In early 1887 the editor of the Baltimore Journal, a daily German-language newspaper, hired Hoehn as a part-time journalist to write several articles about labor news, including lectures Paul Gottkau, labor leader and editor of the Chicago Arbeiter-Zeitung, delivered in the city. Meeting Gottkau would lead to Hoehn’s full-time career as an editor when several positions opened at the Arbeiter-Zeitung in 1889 after the arrests, trials, imprisonments, or execution of several employees owing to the Haymarket Riot.

During what Hoehn called his three year “editorial apprenticeship” at the Zeitung, he continued his involvement in the Socialist Labor Party. As a member of the platform committee for the city local he helped shape its municipal policies, as a recently naturalized citizen he initiated his political drive by running for Collector of West Town in the 1891 municipal election, and represented Chicago as a delegate at the party’s national convention in September 1889. Appreciating his commitment and ability to speak French, the SLP sent him as their delegate to Europe to attend the International Working-
men’s Convention in Paris in 1889 and the International Labor Congress in Brussels in 1891. Although these activities enhanced Hoehn’s reputation as a dedicated Socialist, he nevertheless became a casualty of the growing divisions within the Chicago labor movement when “the Anarchist majority in the Board of Directors” of the newspaper dismissed him for holding moderate views. But misfortune soon turned into opportunity when chief editor Adolf Hepner of the German-language *St. Louis Tageblatt* offered him a position.\(^{11}\)

Hoehn arrived in St. Louis, Missouri at a time when the state’s and city’s labor movement had become well organized. In 1887, the Central Trades and Labor Union (CTLU) had combined the city’s major labor organizations, including the German Arbeiter Verband, into one city-wide federation of trade unions. Laborers representing various trade unions in the state had also established the Missouri Federation of Labor (MFL) in 1891. Workers, who held socialist ideologies and advocated political engagement in addition to union activism, also helped to create city as well as state chapters of the Socialist Labor Party. German Americans, who had arrived in Missouri since the 1830s and represented the largest immigrant group in the 1890s, participated in this drive to organize labor, and dominated leadership positions in the CTLU, MFL, and SLP.\(^{12}\) Publications addressing labor issues and advocating socialist ideology had existed in St. Louis since the early 1870s, including the *Volkstimme des Westens* and *Voice of Labor*. By the early 1890s, the *St. Louis Tageblatt* had become the daily paper that represented the “*Interessen des arbeitenden Volkes*” (the interests of workers).\(^{13}\)

Gottlieb Hoehn thrived in this environment. After he joined the *St. Louis Tageblatt* in 1893, he assisted lawyer, journalist, and labor activist Albert E. Sanderson with the creation of the *St. Louis Labor*, an English language paper that aimed to address workers across ethnic lines in one common language and educate them about socialism. By 1895, Hoehn assumed the duties of general editor for both publications. As a member of the Central Press Committee he also helped establish the Socialist Newspaper Union that oversaw the sharing of articles with over thirty-four weekly *Labor* newspapers in Midwestern cities.\(^{14}\) Although subscriptions were rising, debt and declining advertisements, especially after strikes, forced the Newspaper Union to dissolve in 1897 and *Anzeiger des Westens* absorbed the *Tageblatt*. Competition with the *Westliche Post*, the premier German-language newspaper serving German readership in St. Louis, Missouri, and several neighboring states, also played a role. Hoehn often denounced the *Post* as the organ of capitalists and the city’s political machine. At the same time, the *Post* and *Anzeiger des Westens* successfully influenced the city council to reject the *Tageblatt*’s bid for printing the council’s proceedings in German although it had submitted the lowest bid.\(^{15}\)
Hoehn was not discouraged by such tactics and remained determined to establish a strong labor press to more effectively assist the labor movement and teach Socialism. Following the cooperative model, similar to the Social Democratic press in Germany, and the characteristics of existing German-language newspapers, Hoehn and likeminded Socialists established several publication companies between 1898 and 1910 that were the property of the Socialist Party, thus turning any issued newspaper into the party organ. Offering workers the ability to purchase shares created a large pool of investors who held a vested interest in the company’s survival. This strategy raised enough money to revive the Tageblatt as the Arbeiter-Zeitung in 1898 and establish the four-page Missouri Socialist in 1901 that in 1902 expanded into the eight-page St. Louis Labor with Hoehn as chief editor. In 1910, investors agreed with Hoehn that the publication company should be restructured and own its own press as well as building. The resulting Labor Publishing Company bought a new Mergenthaler Linotype Machine and Miehle printing press financed through a public fundraiser, and moved the operation, as well as the party headquarters, to a larger building on Chouteau Avenue.

The newspapers continued to face financial problems but yearly excursions, special fund raisers, and increasing yearly subscription prices from $0.50 in 1901 to $2.50 in 1928 kept the papers afloat until 1930.

Under Hoehn’s editorial leadership, the Arbeiter-Zeitung and Labor fulfilled their dual purpose as “The Fearless Champion of Organized Labor” and the “Official Organ of the Socialist Party of St. Louis.” Several articles on the cover page, editorials on page 4, and announcements on page 8 addressed local political, social, and economic events, while the remaining columns offered a Woman’s Page, a weekly serialized novel, and material related to labor developments and the party in the United States, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany. Although much of the material is identical in both papers, the Arbeiter-Zeitung also included cultural news from the old homeland. The papers solicited “communications from our fellow workers throughout the world” and promised to “give them all the attention they merit and our space will permit.” Articles tirelessly advocated for the rights of unskilled and skilled workers and informed readers about strikes by miners in Colorado, iron molders in Milwaukee, textile workers in New England, machinists in Vermont, and bricklayers in Canada. Articles or editorials appealed to workers’ class consciousness, asking them to participate in boycotts and raise money for suffering workers, their disadvantaged children, or victims of oppression in the United States or Europe. Most importantly, Hoehn constantly reminded his readers of past struggles and successes, including positive developments in Europe that would surely spill over to America.
Most articles and editorials focused on local labor conditions. By 1900, St. Louis was the fourth largest city in the country and its diverse economy offered opportunity to many American and immigrant laborers. Workers, however, confronted a tightly controlled political machine and employers who united across industries, controlled the local labor market and lowered wages to compete with eastern industries. Businessmen created the local chapter of the Citizens’ Industrial Alliance, a national organization that assisted with city-based action against unions through tactics such as black lists and spies to limit union agitators, hiring not just municipal but private police forces to break up strikes, establishing company specific training programs to reduce reliance on unionized skilled workers, and using court injunctions to limit boycotts. These policies effectively limited union power and contributed to divisions in the labor movement.

Hoehn’s frustrations over the power of organized business and the city’s political machine become clear in his many editorials, lectures before labor organizations, or impromptu speeches “on the steps of the old court house.” He, for example, called upon his readers to offer moral support and financial aid for garment workers locked out by Marx and Haas Jeans Company and in muckraking fashion revealed some of its unfair business practices in the St. Louis Labor. He accused the Citizens’ Industrial Association of secretly controlling the grand jury and police department and called Mayor Rolla Wells the “Little Czar of St. Louis” for denying socialists freedom of speech and ordering police to break up protest meetings. Editorials criticized the monopolistic habits of business elites or the city’s “Big Cinch,” denounced the “boodle politics” of Republicans, including German Americans such as Mayor Henry Ziegenhein and Councilman Emil Meysenburg, accused Congressman Richard Bartholdt of protecting “capitalist class interests,” and defined the Democratic Party as “a danger to organized labor” because it too promoted capitalist interests. Hoehn did not hesitate to speak out against attempts to eliminate the House of Delegates and opposed efforts to redraft the city charter in 1911 and 1914, believing that such changes would deny the working class the vote and representation, thus limiting the democratic process. Although Hoehn supported Joseph Folk’s and Herbert Hadley’s efforts to destroy political machines and break up monopolies, he resented their political ambitions and enforcement of blue laws.

Gottlieb Hoehn could have limited his involvement in the labor and socialist movement to publication of newspapers, writing a few editorials, and giving speeches but he also remained active in unions. He served as a representative for the Federal Labor Union 6482 and the Federation of Labor of St. Louis in the CTLU, the MFL, and the American Federation of Labor, served on several of their committees, regularly attended their monthly meetings or
yearly conventions, helped draft resolutions, and tirelessly advocated for the rights of workers on behalf of these organizations. His participation in these organizations reflected the short-lived cooperation between them during the early 1900s.27

In addition to being editor and union member, Hoehn was also a political activist. As a Lassallean Marxist, or Social Democrat, he believed in the inevitability of Socialism and that “every class struggle is, necessarily, a political struggle.” The clash between the diametrically opposed interests of capitalists and wage earners encouraged both groups to organize. He understood that labor organizations had helped improve the lives of workers but he also believed they could not reform the capitalist system. Instead, he insisted that workers extend “this struggle . . . to the political field,” to “the final decisive battle . . . for the emancipation of mankind from wage slavery.” Only a political party of and for unionized workers, similar to the SPD in Germany or Labor Party in Britain, could represent the interests of labor in the political process, endorse candidates, and pass legislation. As his many articles and pamphlets indicate, he fervently believed Socialism as the “Savior of the Human Family” was not only possible during his lifetime but also necessary, especially in the wealthiest nation on earth. In his opinion, the use of military force during strikes at Homestead and Cour d’Alene to assure the prosperity of big business, threatened the republican ideals upon which America was founded. Frequently citing Thomas Paine, Wendell Phillips, and Abraham Lincoln, Hoehn argued workers had the same basic constitutional rights as every other citizen and that they could change the capitalist system by organizing “into one solid political organization, independent of all capitalist parties.”28

The belief in victory through electoral process not mere trade unionism soon led to conflict with more radical members in the party who advocated militant unionism. Since the First International in 1865 and Karl Marx’s establishment of the International Workmen’s Association, the socialist movement had a long history of divisions between anarchists, revolutionaries, and reformers. Hoehn, although calling for unity among all unions, also contributed to the disagreements by referring to SLP leaders like Daniel DeLeon and Hugo Vogt as “shyster professors of the Pseudo-Marxist heroism” who freely quoted Karl Marx or Ferdinand Lassalle without truly understanding either man’s philosophy.29 Disillusioned like so many Socialists by DeLeon’s dictator-like leadership, Hoehn abandoned the SLP and followed Eugen V. Debs, Victor Berger, and others Social Democrats, Populists, and union leaders to create the Social Democracy of America in 1897, the Social Democratic Party in 1898, and finally the Socialist Party of America in 1901.30

As well-respected labor leaders, Hoehn and fellow St. Louis Socialists influenced the party’s decision to select St. Louis as its first headquarters.31
By serving on the party’s National Executive Committee (NEC) and shaping decisions as a member on platform, rules, or resolution committees during national, state, and city conventions Hoehn became “a national figure of the second echelon.” Hoehn’s leadership position on the NEC, however, lasted barely two years. In 1903, delegates to the national convention “ousted” the St. Louis leadership, including Hoehn, for suspected disloyalty to the party and voted to move the party headquarters to Omaha, Nebraska. Although the individuals never held national office again, they remained nationally influential as delegates and committee members, tirelessly agitated for the Socialist party, raised funds locally for election campaigns, and organized the Socialist Voters’ Union, an “auxiliary body” of loyal Socialists who helped workers with voter registration and immigrants with citizenship applications.

Hoehn also led by constantly running for elected office. Shortly after arriving in St. Louis, he was the SLP nominee for President of Board of Assessors, then ran for city council, and in 1896 was the party’s candidate for the Tenth Congressional District. After joining the Social Democratic Party, he was its candidate for municipal council in 1899, state representative for the First District in 1900, and President of Board of Assessors for St. Louis in 1901. Upon creation of the Socialist Party, he served as its candidate during nearly every municipal, state, and national election, including the St. Louis House of Delegates and state’s First District. In 1904, 1906, 1908, 1910, and 1912 the Socialist Party nominated him for the Tenth District in Congress, held at the time by Richard Bartholdt, a fellow German American, whom labor unions in St. Louis defined as “unfriendly to labor.” In 1920 he was a candidate for Committeeman for the Eleventh District of St. Louis; in 1922 and 1924, he again attempted to represent the Socialist Party in the Tenth Congressional district; in 1925 he ran for mayor of St. Louis; and finally in 1928 he was the party’s candidate for Missouri Secretary of State. Although Hoehn came close only once to winning, his drive encouraged other Socialists from St. Louis to become candidates for virtually every municipal position, state office, and Congressional seat. Election results may have not been what voters expected but Hoehn encouraged his readers to stay the course and take solace in already achieved accomplishments.

Voter support for the Socialist Party in St. Louis indeed increased steadily during the first decade of the twentieth century, following national trends. 1911 and 1912 were years of euphoria because national as well as local election results indicated realistic possibilities of victory. Candidates for the Board of Education and City Council, including Hoehn, received nearly 12,000 votes each, or 14 percent of the total number cast, coming in as close seconds to Republican candidates and outnumbering Democrats in the Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh wards; a “most gratifying” result, according to Hoehn. In the
Tenth Ward, William Brandt, Secretary in the St. Louis chapter, was a mere twenty votes short of defeating the Republican incumbent Georg Eigel, a fellow German-American. A rematch in November resulted in Eigel defeating Brandt but Hoehn, evermore the optimist, called the election a “splendid” success because Brandt had gained nearly 5,000 votes over the previous election.\textsuperscript{40}

One reason for this success was that candidates and the party’s platform reflected the reform-oriented wing in the Socialist Party of America preferring educational reform, political empowerment of ordinary people, legislative action, and gradual transformation of the capitalistic system over the more revolutionary oriented arguments espoused by radical members of the party. In St. Louis, Socialists like Hoehn supported municipal ownership of the street railway system, public utilities, ice plants, and lodging houses, public works for the unemployed, warm meals and medical services in public schools, free legal advice, housing and food inspections, free public restrooms, additional public parks, old age pensions, graduated income tax, temperance not prohibition, and democratic measures like the woman’s vote as well as initiative and referendum. By concentrating on improved working conditions, better wages, and enriched lives through a “gradualist” or “evolutionary” approach, Socialists and labor leaders contributed to the implementation of eight-hour day legislation and a workmen’s compensation law in Missouri. These ideals appealed to a number of people, not just Socialists or German Americans, who faced an ever changing world that seemed beyond their control. The Socialist Party, therefore, was a realistic alternative for many voters to the existing national parties that despite their rhetoric of progressivism seemed to cater to the interests of the upper classes and were riddled with corruption. In 1912, the enormous success by Social Democrats in Germany, heavily advertised in the \textit{Labor} and \textit{Arbeiter-Zeitung}, may have also encouraged voters to attempt a similar feat in St. Louis.\textsuperscript{41}

Considering this positive appeal begs the question why Hoehn and Socialists like him were not more successful in St. Louis, especially when compared to cities like Milwaukee where residents elected Socialist mayors, councilmen, and a representative to Congress.\textsuperscript{42} Smear campaigns and suspected voting irregularities may have played a role. One accusation in particular emerged during several election campaigns. On the day prior to the election for state offices in 1902, over 100,000 flyers appeared depicting Hoehn as a deputy sheriff, standing gun in hand over the prostrate form of a strike victim, suggesting that he had taken part in “the heinous massacre of unarmed, defenseless strikers” during the 1900 transportation strike. Hoehn, a candidate for the state assembly that year, initially dismissed such propaganda as the work of “Democratic pothouse politicians.” After the accusation resurfaced in 1903
and 1905, he admitted being deputized but only to gain access to weapons with intent to distribute them to strikers, an offense he realized in hindsight could have led to charges of “treason and conspiracy against the state.”

One can interpret such accusations as Hoehn becoming a serious threat to opposing candidates and it appears from the voting record that this gossip slightly increased the number of votes for Hoehn in 1903 when compared to other Socialist candidates. He denounced similar attempts to damage his character as the work of capitalist “spies or stool-pigeons” who intended to destroy the labor movement in St. Louis and appreciated “vile” attacks because they evidenced the “good work” he was doing on behalf of labor.

Additional factors limiting Socialist Party success nationwide and locally included ideological differences between reform-minded Socialists, advocates for militancy through strikes, dual unionists, and radicals, as well as the AFL’s decision to separate from the Socialist Party and instead support Democratic candidates. Ironically, Hoehn, who constantly advocated unity in the labor movement also invited controversy and contributed to divisions through his own actions. Few ideological differences had existed in St. Louis during the early 1900s. Stalwarts, such as Hoehn, and newcomers like Kate and Frank O’Hare believed in reform and the possibility of social change through political action. Leaders in the CTLU, MFL, and the Socialist Party worked with each other as well as with “progressive, Civic-minded groups when their interests converged.” Yet, disagreement existed. For example, on the issue of immigration, Hoehn supported restrictions and O’Hare opposed them.

Hoehn, in particular, did not hide his disagreements with Samuel Gompers. As a delegate to AFL national conventions and through editorials he critiqued the organization’s unwillingness to align with the Socialist Party for political purposes. Hoehn did not object to collective bargaining and agreed that passage of laws was as important as voting; but as a social democrat he believed even the AFL, despite its many accomplishments for workers, could not succeed in changing the capitalistic system because negotiations and support for existing parties subjugated workers to capitalists. Hoehn truly believed that only a labor party could bring about the implementation of Socialism and was encouraged by recent political successes in Germany, Britain, and Wisconsin that victory was at hand. On a more personal note, Hoehn also objected to Gompers calling Eugene Debs a “failure” and resented Gompers’ “unexplained decision” to revoke the charter for Federal Labor Union No. 6482 after its fifteen year existence. The union had only three members; all Socialists, including Hoehn, and without it they could no longer serve as delegates to the CTLU, MFL, or AFL. Articles in the Globe Democrat, St. Louis Republic, and Labor suggested Hoehn’s effectiveness in passing “any
measure he advocated” may have led to resentment. But so could have his outspokenness.

Hoehn was just as disapproving of dual unionism, or the creation of several national union federations, because resulting competition would split the trade union movement. This stance placed him at the center of conflict locally and nationally. For example, Hoehn’s resistance to establishment of an American Labor Union chapter in St. Louis in 1903 led to members of the Seventeenth Ward branch censuring him and instructing him “to ‘keep hands off’ union matters.” More divisive for the party in general, and Hoehn in particular, was the creation of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905. Hoehn supported workers’ right to strike to illustrate their economic and bargaining power, but abhorred violence because it created public resentment rather than acceptance for unions. He demonstrated repeatedly that he could rally behind any union or labor activist, including the United Mine Workers and William Haywood, when business owners and a corrupt legal system suspended their legal and human rights. The creation of the IWW as a national organization, however, deeply concerned him because of the divisive powers industrial unions and militants like Haywood could have. Hoehn used his influence to limit their impact in St. Louis by convincing the CTLU to oppose the creation of a local IWW chapter. In a 1911 opinion piece he denounced the “freakish notions” of IWW “impossibilists” because these so-called Socialists caused serious problems for the party instead of helping to establish the cooperative commonwealth, or Socialism. In 1912 Hoehn asserted that Haywood’s attacks on “political Socialists” and the St. Louis Labor made him no different than the city’s “cheap Democratic soupbone labor politicians.” That same year, St. Louis delegates to the national party convention, including Hoehn, supported the “trade union resolution,” an anti-violence and anti-sabotage declaration, that called for the “expulsion of a party member who advocated the use of sabotage.” Accordingly, the Executive Committee ousted Haywood in February 1913. Hoehn was certainly not the only person to denounce the IWW, but in doing so, he too contributed to rifts and limited his own political success.

After 1912, cooperation between the AFL, SP, and IWW, as during the massive garment worker strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, was short lived. By the second decade of the twentieth century the labor movement had become so diverse that workers, who had felt left out during the industrial revolution, could now join societies whose agendas, ranging from moderate, progressive, to radical, met their personal needs. The Socialist Party had become but one of several groups appealing to worker interests. Ideologically it remained very distinct with socialists talking about the class struggle, denouncing corrupt business and government leadership, and calling for the
“replacement of the capitalist system . . . with a collectivist one.” For most Americans, however, Socialist ideals of cooperatives and state ownership were just too contrary to American individualism. Progressives, on the other hand, favored a capitalist system in which government regulated corporations or broke them up into smaller businesses so that “small entrepreneurs could function in a marketplace that was not skewed against them.”

In Missouri, Joseph Folk had improved public health and safety as well as removed the corrupt political machine from St. Louis thus proving to workers they did not have to turn to a third party in order to accomplish reform. As governor he opposed bribery and partisanship, favored direct democracy, and backed Attorney General Herbert Hadley’s antitrust efforts. Although Socialists like Hoehn supported these issues as well, cooperation between Socialists and progressives declined by the time Hadley became governor in 1909 because “civic leaders shifted their emphasis toward reliance on experts and regulations” instead of sweeping social or economic reform.

Workers also increasingly followed Gompers into the Democratic Party because the AFL had received modest yet tangible gains through collective bargaining, including fewer hours, increased wages, workplace safety, and child labor laws. One of the most important reasons why Hoehn and Socialists like him were not more successful was the Great War.

For Hoehn, World War I was both an exciting and deeply disappointing time. It offered unprecedented opportunity for revolutionary changes in the world that would cause “the old Capitalist-Imperialist order” to collapse and gain rights for labor. Troubling developments, however, included the limitation of basic freedoms on the home front, an anti-Socialist as well as anti-German sentiment, and the brief suspension of the Arbeiter-Zeitung.

Labor unions and the Socialist Party in St. Louis, as in the nation, declared their opposition to the war in Europe, insisted that the United States remain neutral, and interpreted the American preparedness movement as the work of munitions manufacturers and evidence of “American militarism.” Hoehn maintained a pacifist position as well, described the conflict as a “boss’s war,” accused the “capitalistic press” and “commercial interests” of stampeding the country into war, and opposed Gompers’ support for the Wilson administration if the country entered the war. Hoehn attended the Socialist Party’s emergency national convention in April 1917 and voted for its decision to oppose participation in the conflict. He was also disappointed that upon American entry in the Great War, the Missouri Federation of Labor aligned with the AFL to support the war effort, cut its ties to the Socialist unions, and took advantage of Congress’ pro-labor legislation, including the Emergency Construction Wage Commission, Shipbuilding Labor Adjustment Board, and War Labor Board, to create new union affiliates and increase
membership.\textsuperscript{59} Despite such divisions, unions and Socialists asserted their right to resist federal control over local affairs. For example, labor leaders in St. Louis refused to transmit government requests for workers to purchase Liberty Bonds until such advertisements included the Allied Printing Trades Council label, unions refused to discuss correspondence related to the draft at meetings, and the CTLU and Socialist Party opposed the creation of the Home Guard in Missouri arguing that similar organizations had been used in the past to break up strikes.\textsuperscript{60}

Although federal legislation appeared to recognize the rights of workers, Missourians witnessed widespread labor unrest in Springfield, Kansas City, Moberly, and St. Francois County. In February 1918 a wave of strikes also brought St. Louis to a virtual standstill. The transit worker strike against United Railways (UR) over wages and union recognition lasted only four days because a commuter boycott and threats of a government takeover convinced UR to accept the union and negotiate wages. This success inspired other workers to walk off the job. Women at the Liggett & Meyers tobacco plant, male and female clerks at downtown retail stores, and hundreds of grocery store and hardware clerks went on strike hoping to organize. Soon, workers at several companies with war contracts went on strike, including at Wagner Electric, the city’s largest munitions producer, and at Mallinckrodt and Monsanto, the city’s two largest chemical plants. Striking garment workers caused a drastic slowdown in the production of uniforms and striking laborers at Plumb Tools caused a reduction in manufacturing of bayonets. Reports estimated that over a time period of two months about ten thousand workers, or 11 percent of the city’s workforce, had gone on strike, drastically impacting the ability to produce anything in St. Louis. War Labor Board officials affected an end to the uprising by April 1918 convincing employers to earnestly recognize unions, increase wages, and investigate poor working conditions. Labor relations remained relatively calm thereafter because St. Louis, unlike Chicago or Seattle, did not have an active militant labor component, in part owing to Hoehn’s opposition to the IWW. Headlines in the \textit{St. Louis Labor} detailing the events reflected an excitement that indicated to Hoehn this was a time of empowerment because strikes as well as war labor board arbitrations resulted in authorization to organize, wage concessions, and general acceptance of unions.\textsuperscript{61}

From the perspective of the war effort, however, such labor activism represented disloyal behavior. Several St. Louisans began to question Hoehn’s loyalty because he obviously supported strikers through editorials in both papers. He also realized that federal legislation, although beneficial to labor during the war, could have negative consequences, especially for socialist publications. As early as June 1917, the St. Louis postmaster confiscated and
refused to deliver individual issues of both the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Labor* that appeared to contain un-American material. Hoehn then experienced the impact of the Trading-with-the-Enemies Act requiring editors to file English translations of articles published in foreign languages that relate to the war effort. This added new financial burdens to already stretched budgets for both papers. Hoehn repeatedly appealed to readers to expand circulation among workers, but the campaign to attract 10,000 new readers resulted in only 1,824 new subscribers by August 1917.\(^6\)

Then in October 1917, the United States Postmaster General suspended the Labor Publishing Company’s second class mailing privileges. This action did not deter Hoehn’s adherence to the publications’ motto, “The Fearless Champion of Organized Labor.” He, and the shareholders of the Labor Publishing Company, called for the establishment of the *Daily Herald*, a not-for-profit publication for working men and women that would challenge the power of the for-profit “capitalist press” as well as help educate, organize, and emancipate the working class. Considering the anti-German and anti-Socialist mindset during the war, the campaign was surprisingly successful. By April 1918, Hoehn had raised nearly $6,000 for the establishment of the *Herald*. New subscriptions for the weekly papers also temporarily surged and subscribers donated additional funds to cover first class mailing costs.\(^63\) Such support perhaps indicated a general resentment toward government interference. Possibly, the trials and convictions of St. Louis Socialists Thomas Connally and Kate Richards O’Hare for violating the Espionage Act also inspired defiance. But it is also interesting that Hoehn did not encounter further government interference, a stark contrast to Victor Berger’s experience with the *Milwaukee Leader*. A circulation rate of 6,000 for the *Labor* and 3,000 for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* did not present the same danger to national security as the Leader’s 44,000 subscribers. Furthermore, Berger, unlike Hoehn, was also a successful politician who was elected to Congress. He, therefore, represented a real threat to the traditional American political system in the minds of Republicans and Democrats.\(^64\) More likely, since Department of Justice investigations did not find any connections between Hoehn, his papers, and the German government, Title 12 of the Espionage Act giving postmasters the authority to declare publications as “nonmailable” did not apply and limited control to translation requirements and suspension of second class mailing privileges.\(^65\)

These constraints did not curb Hoehn’s critique of the capitalistic system through weekly “Editorial Reflections” and brief notes on the benefits of Socialism continued to appear throughout 1918. Instead, he adopted a pragmatic approach to divert further attention. The papers did not become government organs; for example, the *St. Louis Labor* contained few government
advertisements with the exception of one brief note about Liberty Bonds in May 1917, one short article about sugar by the Food Administration in June 1918, and American flags appeared on the front page of only the “Labor Day Supplement” in 1918. At the same time Hoehn toned down his anti-war rhetoric and published Woodrow Wilson’s speeches if he agreed with the president’s thoughts. Any reference to war-related events was positive, such as the Young Socialists patriotic festivities, Socialist Party Masquerade Balls, charitable events, and Fourth of July celebrations. Hoehn also expressed his opposition to the Kaiser, denounced German “Autocracy and Junkerism,” and predicted that under the leadership of German workers, who were “longing for the republican form of government,” Germany too would inevitably reform.}

This approach of being neither quiet nor overtly loud allowed Hoehn to attract new subscribers, convince readers to supplement publication costs, and claim an increase in party membership by 3,000 in 1918. As the editor of the city’s two socialist publications, Hoehn had a unique insight to labor relations in St. Louis and understood that as long as he did not advocate radical social or political changes his publications would survive. Yet, there is evidence of pressure to appear patriotic. Hoehn decided in September 1918 to suspend publication of the Arbeiter-Zeitung for six months and to postpone updates for the Daily Herald fundraiser in the St. Louis Labor. He explained in March 1919 that although “we were never officially told to quit collecting funds for the Daily Herald during the time of Liberty Bond, Red Cross, . . . collections . . . we received numerous official hints which made it plain to us that it was safe for us to heed the warning.” Hoehn, like most publishers of Socialist papers, had to wait until the appointment of Will Hays as the new Postmaster General in 1921 for the St. Louis Labor to regain its second class mailing privileges.

Hoehn may have been able to negotiate the attempts to censor the Labor and Arbeiter-Zeitung, but events in 1919 challenged his dedication and optimism. The Bolshevik Revolution and resistance to radical ideology during the First Red Scare inspired left-wing members to secede from the Socialist Party and create the Communist Party. St. Louis was not immune to this schism. Several city ward branches, including the Lithuanian and South Slavic Federations, as well as several German Americans in the Eighth and Ninth Ward, joined the break-away movement. Hoehn initially reacted to the factional crisis with a nearly 4,000 word essay reminding party members of the difficulties they had survived during World War I, denouncing the divisions as a capitalist ploy to destroy the party from the inside, and calling for unity in the name of working class interests. The Official Minutes of the City and State Central Committee reveal the seriousness of the crisis. The Socialist Party of
Missouri on August 21, 1919 revoked the charter of the St. Louis chapter owing to internal fragmentation and establishment of the Communist Party by members of said chapter. The state party then immediately named Gottlieb Hoehn, Otto Pauls, and William Brandt as the trustees of the former chapter’s property and instructed them to hold a general meeting on August 24, 1919 for the re-organization of the St. Louis Socialist Party. With the assistance of National Secretary Adolph Germer, the city Executive Committee, upon approval by the general committee, reorganized and realized that with the “exception of the language branches and the 8-9 ward branch, there would be very little desertion from the party.” The Socialist Party had survived, as did most of its original German American leadership. The division, however, had weakened the organization at the local as well as national level and the ongoing Red Scare did little to empower it.

Once the crisis abated Hoehn applied himself to the party with renewed enthusiasm, helped update its national platform during its emergency convention in Chicago in 1919, and attended its state and national conventions throughout the 1920s. When in 1921 the party’s national office appealed to its members to raise $20,000 for the National Office Sustaining Fund and thus rescue the party from the brink of bankruptcy, Missouri socialists, including Gottlieb Hoehn and William Brandt, rallied the faithful, set the example through large individual donations, and demonstrated that Missouri could step up to the challenge. By October the state ranked second nationwide in proportional giving by nearly doubling its quota.

The terror of the Palmer Raids, likewise, did not discourage Hoehn’s support for labor or party. He denounced lawlessness but also condemned the Justice Department’s “Czarish raids, arrests and persecutions,” arguing that workers, regardless of their anarchist or Communist ideology, were still American citizens or residents and thus had the right to fair legal treatment, free speech, and peaceful assembly. Hoehn also remained a staunch supporter of Eugene Debs, campaigned for his presidential aspirations in 1920, and signed telegrams to President Harding requesting the release of Debs and other political prisoners incarcerated during the Great War. As a long-time friend and ardent supporter, he was among the thousands who welcomed Debs home after his release in December 1921 and had the privilege to personally interview the family during the happy occasion. Hoehn also resumed his scathing remarks about St. Louis’ “capitalist newspapers,” including the Westliche Post, denounced Mayor Kiel’s corrupt political machine, and renewed the efforts to establish the Herald.

Despite all the challenges, Hoehn remained confident that the world war and Red Scare had created an environment “extraordinarily favorable to the Socialist movement” and that American laborers would “throw off” the
“capitalist government in a perfectly legitimate and orderly manner...at the ballot box” through a “constitutionally elected” government. He, therefore, backed the Committee of 48, former Progressives who had long worked with Socialists and in December 1919 initiated a movement for a national labor party. By 1923 he was deeply involved because he believed that working people were finally uniting into a “movement that counts” to overcome “the spirit of indifference and irresponsibility” underlying the nation’s festering corruption. With a number of union officials from the CTLU and MFL, he helped form a branch of the American Labor Party and ran as its candidate for the school board. As a delegate to the National Socialist Party Convention and the National Conference for Progressive Political Action, he supported the fusion of labor and farmer interests into a strong independent third party and its selection of Robert M. LaFollette and Burton K. Wheeler for the 1924 presidential race. Although LaFollette did not win, Hoehn was not disappointed; instead he congratulated the “young new movement” for its success and was confident that just like in England and Germany this “great popular movement” would succeed in the future.

Although inspired by this brief unity and excitement, Hoehn could not stop the tide of change. Evermore the champion of trade unions, in 1925 he became deeply involved in the almost three month long, bitterly fought strike by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers against the anti-union Curlee Clothing Company. The event impacted him personally because his son-in-law, Otto Kramer, was seriously injured during “czarist police brutalities” that aimed to break the strike. Hoehn did not blame the garment workers for voting to end the strike but attributed their failure to “the lack of manhood in the general local Union movement” as well as unwillingness by local unions to express moral or financial support. Hoehn began to realize that leaders like himself, who had survived the challenges of World War I, the post-war depression, the first Red Scare, and the Schism of 1919, were getting older and few younger workers replaced them. Eugene Debs’ death in 1926 also weakened the Socialist Party. In St. Louis, the party’s influence waned after brewery workers, once at the forefront of the city’s union and socialist movement, declined drastically in numbers and influence owing to prohibition, and the AFL “reasserted its influence” in the CTLU. The city local soon became “inactive” despite efforts to revitalize it. These trends also affected the St. Louis Labor and the Arbeiter-Zeitung. Persistent financial problems, reductions in subscriptions and advertising owing to the loss of union power during the booming as well as turbulent 1920s, and the deepening depression in 1930 finally convinced Hoehn to retire from the publishing business. Both papers ceased publication in December 1930 after the board of directors sold...
the Labor Publishing Company to the newly established Progressive Publishing Company.\textsuperscript{81}

Retirement allowed Hoehn to remain active on behalf of labor. Union organizers in the Amalgamated, respectful of his experience and influence, asked him to join their staff “and work on publicity and strike leaflets.” In addition to this work, he gave speeches on behalf of unions, reported important events in the movement to labor publications, and authored published opinion pieces.\textsuperscript{82} He, for example, encouraged workers to view the Great Depression as a worldwide “industrial and social collapse of our capitalistic order,” an event predicted by socialists, such as August Bebel, decades ago. Although disappointed that Herbert Hoover, who had helped rescue Belgians during the Great War, was now unable to stop the growing crisis, he had high expectations for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “a man of sound character” and a politician who “stands high above the average among our American party politicians.” Hoehn assured his audiences that FDR, who had nominated a woman as the Secretary of Labor, would bring about true reform, despite opposition from the “capitalistic and financial barons.” Pro labor legislation during the Great Depression through the New Deal, such as the Wagner Act, convinced not just workers but also Gottlieb Hoehn to support the Democratic Party and vote for FDR in 1936. The right to organize had finally been established beyond any doubt.\textsuperscript{83}

Hoehn also used the extra time to further his civic and intellectual pursuits, becoming more deeply involved with the \textit{Arbeiter Fortbildungs Verein} and Tenth Ward Improvement Association. Participation in events sponsored by freethinker organizations in North and South St. Louis, as well as his service on the board of directors for the German House, demonstrate not only his personal intellectual interests but also reflect the continuing influence of the freethinker movement in the city’s German American community.\textsuperscript{84} In speeches he revealed his confidence that Hegel and Marx’s interpretation of history, an inevitable progression toward perfection through a path of violence, was correct and that through trial, error, and repeated crisis, the democratic principles espoused by great leaders such as Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Ferdinand Lassalle would eventually rise to rule the world. In his opinion, even dictators, like Adolf Hitler, were mere temporary specks in history and could not stop the certain progress toward “worker’s and economical liberation.” Hoehn predicted “a world of free thinkers and free business” would replace Nazi Germany in due time.\textsuperscript{85} Perhaps because of advancing age, Hoehn also began to contemplate the role of religion and culture in daily life. For example, he contemplated why the children of German Americans no longer maintained their parents’ cultural traditions. He hypothesized that modern developments, such as automobiles, radios, airplanes,
and televisions, had irreversibly changed the world, communication, even the democratic process. Sadly, mankind lost “Gemütlichkeit,” “worthwhile” conversations, and energetic political campaigns, characteristics that for him had defined the German American community in St. Louis.  

Gottlieb Andreas Hoehn died on April 9, 1951, having outlived most of the pioneers in the American labor and socialist movement. Obituaries were understandably brief during the era of McCarthyism and lacked analysis of his significance. Evaluation of his life and thoughts reveals a well-educated and persistently optimistic man dedicated to Socialism and labor. Hoehn joined the socialist movement and helped found the party in America, not in Europe, and within the context of American industrialization. Although he read the German and French Socialists’ thoughts and published them, he remained an American Socialist and adopted a political liberalism in the traditional sense of freeing someone from oppression and politically empowering that person. At the same time his expressions evidence what might be called a sentimental, almost utopian view of Socialism, or how the world could be in the future. Having witnessed improvements in the lives of workers, political gains for voters, including women, and first successes in the Civil Rights Movement, Hoehn truly believed the United States was the place where Socialism would take root and grow into the cooperative commonwealth because of the country’s unique democratic republicanism and commitment to equality.

Yet, Hoehn also represents the divisions among Socialists and union leaders. Initially a member of the SLP and advocate for “industrial unionism,” by 1900 he was a social democrat calling for unity among unions and political action through one labor party. He perceived the creation of the IWW as divisive and destructive to the labor movement. Although he “considered himself as much a trade unionist as a Socialist,” he viewed Gompers as selling out to big business by joining the Democratic Party. While not alone in expressing these contentious beliefs, Hoehn limited his own aspirations for elected office by contributing to these divisions.

Socialists in St. Louis did not achieve the same electoral successes as Socialists in Milwaukee or New York because social, political, and economic circumstances were different. Wisconsin Socialists were more reform oriented and able to unite trade unions, progressives, and municipal reformers across a variety of ethnic lines to pass meaningful legislation on behalf of workers. In St. Louis, by contrast, the political machine was strong enough to limit cross cultural interaction. Furthermore, workers, despite several attempts, could not create a strong united front; there were too many divisions within. In Milwaukee, Socialism also became synonymous with Germanism. Not so in St. Louis. While most Socialists in St. Louis were German, most Germans
were not Socialists. Instead, Germans living in St. Louis and Missouri were more divided politically, socially, religiously, and economically than in Wisconsin.

Indeed, Hoehn represents but one of many different German American identities. They were divided, despite some overlapping ideals, into freethinkers, communitarians, Lassallean Socialists, orthodox Marxists, anarchists, Republicans, and Democrats. Consequently, and despite American perceptions to the contrary, German Americans did not represent a unified ethnic group or political block. Although St. Louis offered strong cultural institutions for anyone wishing to preserve ethnic identity, Hoehn preferred to associate with fellow Socialists through May Day or Labor Day parades, theatrical plays, masquerade balls, bazaars, river excursions, and community picnics. At times divisions between German Americans in St. Louis became evident in who or what they celebrated. For example, in 1895, the Liederkranz met at the Germania Theater to celebrate Bismarck and his historical significance while Socialists, including Hoehn, conducted an “anti-Bismarck demonstration” at the office of the Tageblatt.89

Gottlieb Hoehn was not an insignificant person; instead we learn through him about the rise and decline of the Socialist Party of America, the disagreements within the American labor movement, and the heterogeneity of German Americans. He may not have attained national attention like Eugene Debs and Victor Berger, but his unwavering optimism, steadfast support, and sense of civic duty made a difference in the lives of ordinary people and defined him as one of the principal leaders of the labor movement and Socialist Party in St. Louis.

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Notes


5 Hoehn kept a journal of meticulously transcribed German and French poetry, poems and essays he composed in German, French, and English, and letters of introduction he copied from original documents. Red Book, in large box, Gottlieb A. Hoehn Papers (1887-1936), Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis (hereafter cited as Hoehn Papers, MSHM-A).


Gottlieb A. Hoehn and the Socialist Party of St. Louis


The St. Louis Labor is on microfilm and readily accessible through the State Historical Society of Missouri. In contrast, the Arbeiter-Zeitung has not been transferred to microfilm.
and is available in paper in the St. Louis Public Library only upon special arrangement and with limited use.


Gottlieb A. Hoehn and the Socialist Party of St. Louis


36 In 1904 Hoehn received 2,792 votes out of 58,533 cast or 4.8%; in 1906 he received 3,102 out of 51,077 cast or 6%; in 1908 he received 3,557 out of 81,318 cast or 4.4%; in


39 Statistical analysis of voting results reveal that Debs, the presidential candidate, receives .6 percent of the vote in Missouri in 1900, 2.9 percent in 1904, 2.8 percent in 1908, and 6 percent in 1912, as well as .8 percent of the vote in St. Louis in 1900, 2 percent in 1904, 2.1 percent in 1908, and 6 percent in 1912. *Official Manual of the State of Missouri*, 1905-1906, 440-41, 443, 445; *Official Manual of the State of Missouri*, 1909-1910, 673; *Official Manual of the State of Missouri*, 1913-1914, 756. In 1912, candidates for Congress, state assemblies, or municipal offices in several states received between 9% and 40% of the vote. Ross, *Socialist Party*, 140-42. See also Miller, “Germans on the Mississippi,” 84-85.


Miller, “Germans on the Mississippi,” 83-84, 88. Hoehn expressed these thoughts at the CTLU meeting in December 1897. “Amerikanische Arbeiter und die Einwanderung,” Deutsche Correspondent, December 1, 1897.


“Haywood in St. Louis,” St. Louis Labor, December 21, 1912. Ross, Socialist Party, 133-34, 139, 147; Miller, “Germans on the Mississippi,” 84, 93.

Historians Ira Kipnis, James Weinstein, and Jack Ross, disagree whether 1911, 1912, or 1914 represent the high point of the Socialist Party’s political success. Ross, Socialist Party, 121-22, 130-31, 142-45, 159-61.

Miller, “Germans on the Mississippi,” 88.

Ross argues that Socialists, who held many common ideals with Progressives and Populists and often had originated in these movements, missed several opportunities to incorporate ideals and persons into the American Socialist Party as both movements declined. Ross, Socialist Party, 95-96, 161-62. Primm, Lion of the Valley, 364, 371, 380-81, 393.

Stahl argues that AFL membership rejected the “Marxist concept of ‘declining status’ and increasing misery” as a necessary stage before social change. Stahl, “St. Louis Socialists,”


60 Forsythe, “The St. Louis Central Trades and Labor Union,” 133-34. See *St. Louis Labor* March 15, 1901, June 12 and June 18, 1902, May 28, 1910, and February 17, 1912 for opposition to use of state militias or national guards.


65 Miller, *From Prairie to Prison*, 142. “An Act to punish acts of interference with the foreign relations, the neutrality, and the foreign commerce of the United States, to punish espionage, and better to enforce the criminal laws of the United States, and for other purposes,” Pub. L. No. 24, Ch. 30, 40 Stat. 217 (1917).
Gottlieb A. Hoehn and the Socialist Party of St. Louis


Hoehn claims that the postmaster did not suspend the *Arbeiter-Zeitung’s* second-class mailing privileges although virtually identical to the *Labor* and printed in the “Hun language” but fails to note that voluntary suspension of publication eliminated scrutiny during a crucial time. “Return of Second Class Mail Privilege to ‘St. Louis Labor,’” *St. Louis Labor*, June 11, 1921. Donald Johnson, “Wilson, Burleson, and Censorship in the First World War,” *Journal of Southern History* 28 (February 1962): 58.


Minutes of Meetings, General Committee, June 16, 1919-September 15, 1919, folder 3, roll 1, Socialist Party, SHSM-SL. Ross, *Socialist Party*, 216-244.


“Why we Advocate the Overthrow of the Government”: We Want the American Working Class to Establish Industrial Democracy,” *St. Louis Labor*, January 31, 1920.


85 “Benjamin Franklin und unsere Zeit,” speech presented at Vertrags Versammlung der Süd St. Louis Freien Gemeinde, March 6, 1935; “Die Hitler Bewegung in Deutschland – ihr Wesen and Treiben,” presented to the combined meeting of both Free Congregations, Dodier Hall, April 23, 1933; “Kulturgeschichliches von Campanella und Thomas Muenger bis Mussolini und Hitler,” speech presented at Süd St. Louis Freie Gemeinde, Deutsches Haus, October 3, 1934; “Ein Soziales Panorama des Neuen Europas,” presented to the Nord St. Louis Freie Gemeinde, November 4, 1934; all in Hoehn Papers, MHMA.


87 Fink, Labor’s Search, 27.

