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# *"No Make-Believe Class Struggle": The Socialist Municipal Campaign in Los Angeles, 1911*

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When the votes were finally tallied after the December 1911 election, the Socialist party of Los Angeles was greeted with both failure and triumph. While they had failed to win a single city office, they did successfully forge a viable working-class coalition which gave them over 37% of the total vote. Historians have characterized the Socialist campaign of 1911 as a slightly more radical variation of middle-class progressivism, depending for its appeal upon themes of efficient government and municipal ownership. David Shannon argued that the Socialist candidate for mayor, Job Harriman, was indistinguishable "… from progressives of either of the two major parties." This assessment was echoed in Robert Fogelson's *The Fragmented Metropolis*, which is still considered one of the best overall monographs on the history of Los Angeles. Fogelson asserts that the Socialists received support from "municipal ownership advocates, trade union members, and Socialist Party sympathizers" who were agitated by the progressive administration's slow rate of municipalization. The Socialists, he argues, ran a very moderate reform campaign, promising a "more efficient and equitable administration … municipal ownership … and improved conditions for the laboring class." This issue of social welfare reform was emphasized by Martin Schiesl who, using John D. Buenkers' concept of "urban liberalism," argued that the progressive administration lost the support of the city's workers because it was perceived as interested simply in efficient, businesslike government, rather than with improving the living and working conditions of the city's poorer folk.[1]

These interpretations fail to consider the actual content and impact of the Socialists' rhetoric during the campaign, in which issues of efficiency or social welfare reform were undercut by radical attacks upon the perceived class biases of the progressive administration. The moderate leadership of the party did try to inject issues of "gas and water" socialism, in an attempt to win the votes of middle-class citizens. These efforts, however, were seriously damaged both by radicals within their own party and by the successful efforts of their opponents to portray them as radicals. Ultimately, the electoral support for the Socialists came almost entirely from working-class voters who,

[1]David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 40–42; Robert Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850–1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 213–215; Martin Schiesl, "Progressive Reform in Los Angeles under Mayor Alexander, 1909–1913," *California History* 54 (1975), 37–56. See also William Knox Mellon, Jr., "Job Harriman: The Early and Middle Years, 1861–1912" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate School 1972), 149–183; Tom Sitton, *John Randolph Haynes: California Progressive* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 109–110; Leonard Pitt, "Red Flag Over City Hall? The Socialist-Labor Ticket in the Los Angeles Mayoral Election of 1911" (paper delivered at the American Historical Association Meeting, Dec. 29, 1989), 6–7.

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on the available evidence, voted for the party because they were angry at the favoritism shown to corporations and business elites in Los Angeles, favoritism which the Socialist rhetoric associated with clear and simple class tyranny.

Those scholars who have linked the Socialist appeal to the pragmatic interests of labor unionists have a stronger case, but their argument is also incomplete. George Mowry and Grace Stimson emphasized that the Socialists represented the institutional interests of the city's labor unions, a theme echoed by ensuing historians. Undoubtedly the bulk of the party's organizational and financial support came from the union movement, as well as the larger portion of its votes. But trade unionism was still too weak and its members too few to carry the election on their own: the Socialists had to articulate issues which appealed to a broader constituency which included, not only the labor elite, but also unskilled workers, racial and ethnic minorities, and women.[2]

In the past, historians largely focused on understanding why socialism failed, rather than trying to understand how in some instances it succeeded in mobilizing a significant voting constituency. More recently, attention has been devoted to analyzing grass roots support for the Socialist movement in an effort to identify *who* voted for Socialist candidates and, to a lesser extent, *why* they did so. Although many scholars assert that the Socialists won support among working-class voters primarily by stressing pragmatic social-welfare issues and immediate demands, some historians have come to recognize that larger class issues which transcended simply reform sometimes played an important role in mobilizing voters. As David Nord argues for Minneapolis, the boundaries between reform and radicalism blurred as "reform itself required an assault upon capitalism."[3] In the 1911 election campaign in Los Angeles Socialists mobilized working-class voters not only by appeals to their pragmatic interests, but also by tapping into their resentment of what they perceived as class government by social and economic elites.

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[2]Grace Stimson, *Rise of the Labor Movement in Los Angeles* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1955), 331–419; George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1951), 39–49, 92–93. See also Paul Greenstein, Nigey Lennon, and Lionel Rolfe, *Bread and Hyacinths: The Rise and Fall of Utopian Los Angeles* (Los Angeles, CA: Classic Books, 1992), 43–69.

[3]David Paul Nord, "Hothouse Socialism: Minneapolis, 1910–1925," in Donald T. Critchlow, ed., *Socialism in the Heartland: The Midwestern Experience, 1900–1925* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 160. For recent studies of municipal socialism see: Jerry W. Calvert, *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895–1920* (Helena, MT: Montana Historical Society Press, 1988); Critchlow, ed., *Socialism in the Heartland*; Richard W. Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989); Michael Nash, *Conflict and Accommodation: Coal Miners, Steel Workers, and Socialism, 1890–1920* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1982); Bruce M. Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975); Stephen Cresswell, "Grassroots Radicalism in the Magnolia State: Mississippi's Socialist Movement at the Local Level, 1910–1919," *Labor History*, 33 (1992), 81–101; Chad Gaffield, "Big Business, the Working-Class, and Socialism in Schenectady, 1911–1916," *Labor History*, 19 (1978), 350–372; Sidney L. Harring, "The Police Institution as a Class Question: Milwaukee Socialists and the Police, 1900–1915," *Science & Society*, 46 (1982), 197–221; Charles Leinenweber, "The Class and Ethnic Bases of New York City Socialism, 1904–1915," *Labor History*, 22 (1981), 31–56; Errol Wayne Stevens, "Labor and Socialism in an Indiana Mill Town, 1905–1921," *Labor History*, 26 (1985), 353–383; Jerry Calvert, "The Rise and Fall of Socialism in a Company Town, 1902–1905," *Montana*, 36 (1986), 2–13; Elliot J. Kanter, "Class, Ethnicity, and Socialist Politics: St. Louis, 1876–1881," *UCLA Historical Journal*, 3 (1982), 36–60; Douglas E. Booth, "Municipal Socialism and City Government Reform: The Milwaukee Experience, 1910–1940," *Journal of Urban History*, 12 (1985), 51–74; John T. Walker, "Socialism in Dayton, Ohio, 1912 to 1925: Its Membership, Organization and Demise," *Labor History*, 26 (1985), 384–404.

Little serious historical attention has been given to class tensions in progressive-era Los Angeles largely because of Robert Fogelson who characterizes the city as uniquely free from the social divisions which plagued other major municipalities in this era. Fogelson argues that the vast majority of citizens, both blue-collar and white-collar, shared more commonality than diversity, in terms of cultural, economic and political attitudes. He observes that by 1911 Los Angeles had not yet become an industrial city, ensuring that a very large percentage of the working-class population were skilled workers. Also unlike the large industrial municipalities of the Northeast, Los Angeles had relatively little ethnic, racial or religious diversity: only 19% of the population was foreign-born, and the vast majority of the city's citizens were white, Protestant migrants from the Midwest.[4] Given these factors, Fogelson asserts that the city was "remarkably homogeneous" and that "most fit well within the broad range of the middle class," leading to a situation where minorities were "isolated socially, and ignored politically …"[5]

Although demographically correct, Fogelson's inferences are less certain. A number of factors *did* divide workers, even native-born, skilled workers, from the middle-class. Geographically, working-class neighborhoods were clustered on the city's east side, while the homes of the affluent could be found to the west. Newspapers of the period commonly observed this distinction by using the phrase "east of Main Street" when referring to the city's blue-collar population. In precincts located east of Main Street, 60% of the males eligible to vote were blue-collar workers, compared to only 33% in precincts west of Main Street. If one also considers males who were not eligible to vote, including Asians and other non-citizens, the former figure becomes even higher.[6] Similarly, although native-born, Protestant workers and managers may have shared a common language and religion, this did not necessarily lead to intimate association in common institutions. For instance, a study of L.A.'s religious life during this era found that only 7.8% of the membership of the city's "voluntaristic" Protestant churches were working-class.[7]

Modern labor history is replete with evidence that segmentation along lines of ethnicity, race and skill was commonplace in the United States during this era. Yet, the very demographic factors that set Los Angeles apart from the industrial cities of the northeast also reduced the political significance of this fragmentation. Because Anglo-skilled workers constituted such a large majority, demographically, culturally, and politically, they had less reason to fear the influence of minority members of their class. Eastern and Southern European immigrants accounted for only 3% of the city's population, while African–American citizens constituted a further 2%. The largest group of immigrants were Northern and Western Europeans, who were culturally closer to the native-born, Protestant whites, a consideration enhanced by the fact that most of these immigrants had arrived in the 1880s or 1890s, giving them more time to become acculturated. Economically, the largest group of blue-collar workers were involved in the building trades and other crafts which remained, at this time and place, largely

[4]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Vol. 1, *Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 207–213; Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*, 63–84, 186–204.

[5]Fogelson, 189, 201.

[6]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Manuscript*. These figures are based on a sample of 46 of the city's 235 precincts, examining males who were eligible to vote and had an identifiable occupation.

[7]Gregory Singleton, "Religion in the City of the Angels" (unpublished PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1976), 338. Singleton defines "voluntaristic" as those sects whose creed included an emphasis on political activism. This category included most of the Protestant churches in Los Angeles at that time.

immune from the de-skilling of mechanization or the reorganization of the production process.[8] Thus, unskilled workers were typically not perceived as a threat to the livelihoods of skilled workers. These demographic and economic conditions undoubtedly lessened the significance of racial or cultural identity and increased the importance of *class* in municipal politics.

The polarization of the community along class lines was certainly not a new phenomenon in Los Angeles politics. In 1906 the regular political parties and an independent labor party had successfully mobilized working-class voters against a ticket of middle-class "reform" candidates.[9] This opposition was manifested again in March 1909, when a special election was called to replace the Democratic mayor who had resigned his post in disgrace under threat of a recall. Conscious of the need to defuse working-class opposition, the progressive "Good Government" coalition, an organization independent of either major party, nominated former County Supervisor George Alexander. The progressives were confident that his record as an anti-corporate reformer would win support from the labor unions and the *Los Angeles Record*, the city's principal working-class newspaper. Their confidence was also boosted by the fact that Alexander's nomination was challenged only by the Socialist Party, a party which had demonstrated little strength in previous elections. To their dismay, however, the *Record* endorsed the Socialist candidate, Fred C. Wheeler, while the Central Labor Council remained neutral. Although his campaign was grossly underfunded and poorly organized, Wheeler, a popular union organizer, came within a few thousand votes of winning the mayoralty, taking five of the six working-class wards in the city.[10]

Nine months later, in the regular municipal elections, the Good Government slate did slightly better in the working-class precincts east of Main Street. Almost immediately following his elevation to mayor, Alexander had sought to defuse union opposition by appointing Ben Robinson, a local labor leader, as Fire Commissioner. Despite this gesture of conciliation, the Central Labor Council refused to support the reformers and gave nominal support instead to the slate of the regular Republicans, the only party which was able to muster enough strength in the primaries to place their candidates on the general election ballot in opposition to the Good Government organization. The *Record*, on the other hand, reluctantly backed the progressive organization, considering

[8]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Vol. 1, *Population*, 168–173. Socialism often flourished in cities with large immigrant populations, such as Milwaukee, St. Louis or New York. However, several historians writing about Socialism's success in small and medium-sized towns, particularly in the midwest, have noted that ethnic and racial homogeneity in these settings helped create an environment conducive to class solidarity and support for Socialist appeals. See Judd, 24–25; James R. Simmons, "The Socialist Party in Indiana, 1900–1925," in Critchlow, *Socialism in the Heartland*, 52–53, 56–57, 64; Errol Wayne Stevens, "Main-Street Socialism: The Socialist Party of America in Marion, Indiana, 1920–1921," in Critchlow, ed., *Socialism in the Heartland*, 68; Stevens, "Labor and Socialism in an Indiana Mill Town," 382–383.

[9]*Los Angeles Record*, Dec. 3–5, 1906; *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 5, 1906; Albert H. Clodius, "The Quest for Good Government in Los Angeles, 1890–1910" (unpublished PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate School, 1953), 138, 148–150. The election returns show that the progressive (Non-Partisan) candidate for mayor did poorly in all the working-class wards, except for the First Ward. Similarly, all the wards with a blue-collar majority, again with the exception of the First Ward, rejected Non-Partisan candidates for the City Council.

[10]Meyer Lissner to Francis J. Heney, Feb. 2, 18, 1909; Meyer Lissner to Edgar A. Luce, Feb. 2, 1909; Francis J. Heney to E.W. Scripps, Feb. 11, 1909; Francis J. Heney to Meyer Lissner, Mar. 6, 1909, *Meyer Lissner Papers*, Box 2, File 21, and Box 17, File 344; Stimson, 324–325; *Record*, Mar. 19, 22, 25–27, 1909; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Feb. 26, Mar. 5, 19, 1909; *Los Angeles Times*, Mar. 27, 1909.

it a lesser evil than the "machine" dominated Republicans. Although the Good Government movement still failed to win most of the east-side precincts, the *Record*'s endorsement helped to ease working-class opposition, enabling the reformers to capture every municipal office.[11] In the post-election afterglow, the progressives' chief political strategist, Meyer Lissner, praised the city's workingmen for their "loyal support", and noted, "to them particularly I desire to extend my thanks and congratulations."[12]

Despite this seeming cordiality, class relations quickly began to deteriorate. The Good Government reformers, suspicious of organized labor, refused to include working-class representatives in their political councils. Their distrust was heightened when the Los Angeles Central Labor Council, financed by the well-organized San Francisco unions, began a determined effort to unionize the city. Their efforts culminated in a devastating series of local strikes. Lissner, who had so recently praised blue-collar voters, confided to Hiram Johnson, the governor of California and a key figure in the state's progressive movement, that the business interests in Los Angeles were growing restless and would abandon the reform movement rather than allow the city to " ... be thrown under the sort of tyrannical domination of labor unionism that exists in San Francisco."[13] Frightened by this prospect, the Alexander administration responded to the strike wave with a draconian anti-picketing ordinance, that quickly flooded the jails with protesting workers. The political climate became even more tense on October 1, 1910, when an explosion destroyed the headquarters of the vehemently anti-union *Los Angeles Times*. The *Times* owners, as well as many others in Los Angeles, immediately presumed that this explosion had been the result of a bomb deliberately set by union forces trying to silence the newspaper's opposition to their organizational efforts.[14]

As the summer of 1911 drew near the situation was approaching open class warfare. Local unionists were regularly being jailed for violating the anti-picketing ordinance. In May of that year detectives hired by the city went to Indianapolis to arrest John McNamara, a high official of the national Structural Iron Workers' Union, and his brother James, to stand trial in Los Angeles for bombing the *Times'* building. The city quickly became a focal point for industrial struggle in America, as both moderate labor forces, such as the AFL, and more radical organizations, such as the IWW, coalesced in their unshakable belief in the McNamaras' innocence.[15] For the unions and the

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[11]Stimson, 325; Frederick William Viehe, "The Los Angeles Progressives: The Influence of the Southern Pacific Machine on Urban Reform, 1872–1913" (unpublished PhD dissertation, UCSB, 1983), 281–283; Thomas Sitton, "Walter F.X. Parker and Machine Politics in Los Angeles, 1903–1910" (unpublished MA essay, California State University, Fullerton, 1973), 106–108; Janice Jacques, "The Political Reform Movement in Los Angeles, 1900–1909" (unpublished MA essay, Claremont Graduate School, 1948), 111–115; *Record*, Nov. 23, 1909; *Citizen*, Dec. 3, 1909.

[12]*Los Angeles Examiner*, Dec. 9, 1909.

[13]Mowry, 92; Lissner to Hiram Johnson, Mar. 23, 1911, *Meyer Lissner Papers*, Box 2, File 38. The rise of the Socialist parties in municipal politics has often been closely associated with union organizing campaigns and volatile strike activity. See, for instance: Kanter, "Class, Ethnicity, and Socialist Politics," 36, 44–46; Judd, 8, 25, 70, 80; Stevens, "Labor and Socialism," 366–375.

[14]Stimson, 334–342; Mowry, 50; Greenstein, *et al.*, 48–56.

[15]For details of the *Los Angeles Times*, bombing and the subsequent trial of the McNamara brothers, see the following: Graham Adams, Jr., *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910–1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 1–25; Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Struggle in America* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith (originally published 1934), 1960), 200–229; Robert Munson Baker, "Why the McNamaras pleaded Guilty to the Bombing of the *Los Angeles Times* essay" (unpublished MA essay, UCB, 1949); William J. Burns, *The Masked War* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1913); Geoffrey Cowan,

Socialist party, now firmly allied, it seemed a perfect moment to flex their political muscles and seize control of the municipal government that, they contended, had unfairly shielded and favored corporate interests and enabled the city's employers to exploit labor.

Socialist chances for electoral victory were greatly enhanced by the virtual destruction of both the Democratic and Republican parties in Los Angeles by progressive reforms. The traditional political parties had long been structured at the local level as a network of semi-autonomous ward machines built upon patronage, party loyalty, and control over nominating conventions. In 1902 the imposition of civil service had weakened the ability of the parties to dispense municipal patronage. Two years later the creation of a non-partisan, non-elective Board of Public Works further eroded their position by depriving them of influence over the awarding of municipal contracts. The Board also gained direct control of the Street Department, eliminating a particularly rich source of jobs for loyal party workers. The final blow came in 1909 when the charter was amended to eliminate the ward system and provide instead for a council elected-at-large, direct primaries, and nonpartisan elections. These changes greatly increased the importance of highly centralized business and civic associations in mobilizing voters. They did not require patronage to hold them together and were readily able to raise the large amount of cash necessary for a new style of campaigning. These associations, which formed the backbone of the Good Government movement in Los Angeles, were almost exclusively middle class. This new political environment hugely increased the significance of the city's labor unions in mobilizing working-class voters, since they were virtually the only city-wide organization capable of doing this.[16]

In the municipal elections of 1911 working-class voters, alienated from their traditional party loyalties and vigorously proselytized by the unions, were much more likely to support the Socialists. The only other competition came from W.C. Mushet, an independent candidate for the mayoralty. Although Mushet did strive to attract the labor vote with his attacks on Alexander's administration, he was a fiscal conservative who gained most of his support from the *Los Angeles Times* and disgruntled businessmen who were not in favor of the "Socialistic policies" of the progressives.[17]

Political strategists for both organized labor and the Socialists were all too aware that

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*Footnote 15 continued*

*The People v. Clarence Darrow: The Bribery Trial of America's Greatest Lawyer* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 69–244; Sidney Fine, "The National Erectors' Association and the Dynamiters," *Labor History*, 32 (1991), 5–41; Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* Vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1980), 7–31; Richard Cole Searing, "The McNamara Case: Its Causes and Results" (unpublished MA essay, UCB, 1947; Herbert Shapiro, "The McNamara Case: A Crisis of the Progressive Era," *Southern California Quarterly* 59 (1977), 271–288; Herbert Shapiro, "The McNamara Case: A Window on Class Antagonism in the Progressive Era," *Southern California Quarterly*, 70 (1988), 69–94; Stimson, 366–419.

[16]Richard Judd similarly observes in his study of Ohio municipal socialism that "Many Socialist victories took place in cities in which traditional party machines had been fragmented by the municipal reform movement …" (Judd, 75). For a general discussion of the structural changes in municipal politics during this era, see John F. Reynolds, *Testing Democracy: Electoral Behavior and Progressive Reform in New Jersey, 1880–1920* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 3rd. edn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 151–201; Raymond A. Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860–1920* (Arlington Heights, IL: H. Davidson, 1985), 81–133.

[17]Harris Newmark, *Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853–1913*, 3rd. edn (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), 639. The arch-conservative *Times* hated the progressive reformers almost as much as it hated labor unions.

they could not depend on union loyalty and influence alone to carry the day. Twice before, in 1902 and 1906, independent parties drawing their strength from unionized workers had failed, and as of 1911 there were only about 15,000 union members in Los Angeles, out of a potential male electorate of over 100,000. This reality would shape their strategy for choosing the candidates and issues with which they could forge a viable political coalition.[18]

The outlines of this coalition became visible in August 1911, when the Socialists met with the newly formed Union Labor Political Club to select candidates. Job Harriman, ideological leader of the party local and a staunch advocate of political fusion with organized labor, was the logical choice to run for the mayoralty. Nine council candidates were also selected. Four of these were union officials: Fred Wheeler, carpenter and former president of the Labor Council; A.J. Mooney, secretary of the Building Trades Council; Daniel Regan, treasurer of the Metal Trades Council; and C.F. "Curly" Grow, a machinist and strike manager, who was spending time in jail for an assault on a scab worker. Alexander Kane, a San Pedro millhand, was nominated to represent the largely unskilled workers. Two other candidates were clearly chosen because of their ethnic background: Fred Knerr, a waiter, was selected by the German language branch of the party, while G.W. Whitley, an African–American junk dealer, was chosen in an effort to appeal to the black community. T.W. Williams and Frank E. Wolfe, the remaining candidates, were nominated largely because of their leadership roles in the Socialist party, although Wolfe was also a member of the Commercial Telegraphers' Union.[19] As one union official noted, "... by coupling the Labor Union Party with the Socialist Party ... the Afro-American League of this city ... and with what recruits we can gain from the unskilled laborers ... I think we can win the city of Los Angeles at the coming Municipal Election."[20]

These choices were shaped by certain demographic and political realities. In California as a whole, 60–70% of immigrant groups such as the Germans, Irish, and English enjoyed citizenship, while only 5.7% of the Mexican population was naturalized and only 17.9% of the Italians. Not surprisingly, the Socialists focused their efforts on those groups which were more likely to be eligible to vote, with particular attention being paid to the German population.[21] Even had the Socialists desired to oppose union hostility towards the Asian population, they would have benefitted little. Both Japanese and Chinese immigrants were prevented by law from becoming citizens, thus rendering them unable to vote. On the other hand, the African–American population was largely native-born and hence entitled to the suffrage. To tap this relatively large pool of potential supporters, the Socialists created a special chapter of the party, nominated a black candidate for the city council, and set aside $1400 for campaign efforts in African–American neighborhoods.[22]

The Socialists also came out strongly in favor of female suffrage. On October 10, just

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[18]Stimson, 360.

[19]*Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 11, Sept. 23, 1911.

[20]George Gunrey to Frank Morrison, Feb. 10, 1911, *American Federation of Labor Correspondence*, cited in Foner, 15.

[21]U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States. 1910. Abstract* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 611.

[22]Stimson, 362, 364; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Oct. 6, 28, Nov. 4, 1911; Douglas Flamming, "African-Americans and the Politics of Race in Progressive-Era Los Angeles," in William Deverell and Tom Sitton, eds., *California Progressivism Revisited* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 208–210.

a month-and-a-half before the general municipal elections, the California electorate was due to decide whether to grant women the vote. Many within the party worried that, without adequate time to educate women to their cause, suffrage would prove disastrous. Yet, encouraged by their ideals and bolstered by one of the most powerful and militant women's socialist movements in the country, they spared no effort to promote this cause. Somewhat to their surprise, the suffrage initiative passed. Determined to incorporate this new constituency into their coalition, they added several women to their central committee and gave them an increasingly visible role in the campaign.[23] These efforts underscored the manner in which the Socialists, although sometimes limited by their practical political goals, sought to reach across many of the barriers of skill, race, ethnicity and gender which fragmented the city's working-class.

The Socialists' choice of campaign issues also stemmed from their desire to create a broad coalition. Although issues specifically relevant to union concerns were an important part of the campaign, the primary topic which Socialist speakers and writers addressed was of more general concern: the construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct which would bring water to the semi-arid city. This project, begun in 1905, promised cheap water for the consumer, while the harnessing of the rushing current would enable a municipally owned power company to produce cheap electricity. By 1911, however, the project had still not been completed and its potential benefits remained vague promises. Nor was it completely clear who would really profit from the waterway. As Lincoln Steffens observed to a middle-class reform group when he visited the city during the election, most of the economic reforms instituted by the progressives seemed designed less to aid the poor than to "… increase the value of your property, your rents, your capital."[24]

Seizing upon working-class wariness towards Alexander's administration, the Socialists accused the Good Government alliance of subverting the aqueduct project for selfish, class purposes. They pointed out that plans for the waterway extended only as far as the San Fernando Valley, not the city itself. At the same time, they noted, several major speculators, including Harrison Gray Otis of the *Times*, had cornered the market on farm land in the valley: land that would be worthless without sufficient irrigation water. In blazing headlines and in scores of speeches they hammered home this point.[25]

At the same time they proposed a wide variety of genuine social welfare reforms, which included municipal ownership of every public utility as well as a publicly owned hospital, ice plant, cement plant, laundry, newspaper, cold storage warehouse, municipal farm, baths, markets, employment offices, and social centers. They also vowed to implement significant improvements in the city's schools, parks, streets, housing, libraries and garbage collection. Examples were drawn from Socialist municipalities throughout the country, but most particularly from Milwaukee. They argued that the success of the party in that city had demonstrated the practicality of a similar makeover for Los Angeles.[26]

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[23]Alexander Irvine, *A Fighting Parson: The Autobiography of Alexander Irvine* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1930), 98; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998, 1981), 119–120, 230; Sherry Katz, "Dual Commitments: Feminism, Socialism and Women's Political Activism in California, 1890–1920" (unpublished PhD dissertation UCLA, 1991, 287–295, 297–298; *Los Angeles Examiner*, Nov. 8, 1911; *California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 25, 1911; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Nov. 25, 1911.

[24]Schiesl, "Progressive Reform," 94–95; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Dec. 1, 1911.

[25]*California Social-Democrat*, Sept. 23, Oct. 13, 28, 1911; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Sept. 22, Oct. 27, 1911.

[26]*Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 11, Oct. 6, Nov. 10, 1911.

Neither the Socialist attack on the aqueduct nor their welfare proposals were necessarily radical. The rhetoric surrounding the water issue could just as easily have been produced by a muckraking progressive, campaigning on issues of corruption and inefficiency.[27] Similarly, although the number and range of the social reforms presented by the Socialists were vast, individually each was scarcely distinguishable from the proposals of the more radical progressives. Alexander himself argued that he had always supported "... the socialistic drift of modern opinion to a common sense degree ...", and he made mild social welfare reforms such as lower utility rates part of his campaign rhetoric.[28]

The Socialist leadership, moreover, was quite clearly interested in attracting support from the city's middle-class voters. Alexander Irvine demonstrated this at a rally in September, arguing that "... no business man in this town, from the man who runs a peanut stand up to the biggest business in the town, need fear that his business will suffer. It is only crooked business that will suffer."[29] This distinction between "good" business and "bad" business strongly echoed the sentiments of many middle-class reformers. This message was reinforced by J. Stitt Wilson, the Socialist mayor of Berkeley, California. Wilson, a Protestant minister, had a demonstrated talent for bringing middle- and upper-class people into the party fold, since the population of Berkeley contained almost no working-class elements. Applying his talents to the Los Angeles campaign, he informed an overflowing crowd at the Temple Auditorium that Socialism had nothing but respect for private property. Encouraged by Wilson's performance, Irvine suggested hopefully, if somewhat prematurely, that "small businessmen feeling the pressure are getting together, organizing to support the Socialist ticket."[30]

Others within the party, however, rejected the attempt to win over the petit bourgeois, expressing their opinions within the pages of the widely distributed *California Social-Democrat* and the *Los Angeles Citizen*, the local union paper. "Capitalist politics would corrupt the elect," complained one editorialist. "Must we forever be slaves to false ideas of expediency? ... It is not a question of whether some or many capitalists are crooked scoundrels or hallowed saints. This is a crooked system ..."[33] Their political program was similarly blunt: "It is an industrial campaign and the Socialist Ticket stands for the Labor side of the battle, while the Goo Goos [Good Government] and other capitalist candidates stand for the M & M [Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association] and other capitalist bodies of citizens ... This is a class campaign."[32]

Using this perspective, the more radical Socialists sought to interpret the aqueduct controversy as an example of class struggle rather than simply corruption. They noted that the principal landowners who profited from the deal were the city's political and economic elite: Henry Huntington, real estate magnate and owner of the local trolley monopoly; Harrison Gray Otis, publisher of the politically conservative *Times* and a

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[27]Fogelson, 214. Indeed, A.C. Mushet, the independent Republican candidate, used precisely the same theme in his bid to replace Alexander as the city's mayor, and while he sought to tap into some of the same working-class audience that the Socialists were wooing, it was clear he did not have class warfare in mind. *Los Angeles Examiner*, Oct. 24, 1911.

[28]*Los Angeles Herald*, Oct. 31, 1911; Schiesl, "Progressive Reform," 47.

[29]*Los Angeles Citizen*, Sept. 22, 1911.

[30]*California Social-Democrat*, July 15, Aug. 26, 1911.

[31]*Los Angeles Citizen*, Dec. 1, 1911.

[32]*Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 11, 1911.

leading figure in the powerful Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association; and E.T. Earl, publisher of the *Los Angeles Express* and one of the principal spokesmen for the progressive movement in Los Angeles. The apparent alliance of the city's corporate interests with both conservative and progressive political factions within the civic elite was held up as an illustration of the inherently oppressive nature of a non-working-class government. Frank Wolfe, publicity manager for the campaign and council candidate, thus characterized "... the attempt by a group of capitalists through connivance with the Alexander administration to capture and convert to their own use the water owned by the city ..." as simply "exploitation." Presented in this manner, these attempts to move the campaign towards class issues made it much more difficult for the party as a whole to attract middle-class voters.[33]

Some Socialist campaign workers also warned against an over-reliance on social welfare reforms. "Reform," they argued, "will be of no avail. Reform, tied by dollars as truly as is the brigandage of Big Business, is not what is needed in American municipalities. Reform is but a buffer between the people and their municipal salvation."[34] Even the public ownership of the water supply, or any other utility, was futile without a working-class government. These attacks demonstrated a significant departure, in rhetoric at least, from simple "gas and water" socialism.[35] On other issues both radical and moderate members of the party were in perfect agreement. The Socialist attack on the administration's abuse of police power, which became a key component of the campaign, contained no ambiguities. The passage of the anti-picketing ordinance in June of 1910 had opened up a serious rift between the progressive administration and unionized workers which the Socialists vigorously sought to widen. Fred Wheeler observed:

> Hundreds of our brothers and citizens have been insulted, persecuted, sneered at and thrown into foul dungeons for no reason but the one of being workingmen who refused to stultify their manhood at the behest of their "masters." ... They promised us a square deal and we got a round club and a square jail from the plunderers that now we know mask behind the control of misnamed good government (Democrat and Republican and non-partisan) groups in power and out of power in this city, built by the toil and sweat of the laborer.[36]

The Socialists pounded home this message with examples of how the capitalist classes abused their control over local government. In July, when a minor newspaper war broke out, Otis quickly deployed picketers in front of his rival's newsstands—a violation of the anti-picketing ordinance which the police ignored. The labor journals cried out: 'When two capitalist newspapers fall out picketing is fair in the war, so laboring men should learn that what is right for the capitalists and masters to do, is wrong for the workers and slaves to do."[37]

The McNamara case offered an even more powerful example. Both the *California Social-Democrat* and the *Citizen* pointedly noted the role which Alexander's administration had played in the "conspiracy": that it was the mayor himself who had hired the detectives who "kidnapped" the McNamara brothers and brought them to Los Ange-

[33] *California Social-Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1911.
[34] *California Social-Democrat*, Oct. 28, 1911.
[35] *California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 18, 1911.
[36] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 25, 1911.
[37] *Los Angeles Citizen*, July 14, 1911.

les; it was a municipal commission which concluded that dynamite was the cause of the explosion which destroyed the *Times*' building, contrary to the findings of the AFL commission.[38] The *Social-Democrat* issued a special "jail issue" on September 2nd, featuring portraits of the brothers behind bars, surrounded by pictures of local unionists who had been jailed as a result of the anti-picketing ordinance. The McNamaras and their fellow inmates—including C.F. "Curly" Grow, a Socialist candidate for City Council—issued a statement which appeared in the same issue. "We are here," they asserted, "because we are what you are—workingmen … Capitalism controls the courts, the jails—makes the laws and enforces them to suit their ends … (but) labor is in the overwhelming majority. Standing together labor can make the laws …"[39] As one outside observer noted from his conversations with both unionists and Socialists, the need to "capture the policemen's clubs" provided a key issue, "… for it makes all the difference in the world who issues orders to the cops."[40] Only by voting Socialist could the employers' abuse of the city's police power be ended.

Judicial and police injustice was not simply a labor union issue. For years the LAPD had had a poor reputation east of Main Street, where arrests for drunkenness or other minor infractions were commonplace. As one reader of the *Record* noted in 1905, "these unfortunates" were "hurried to the chain gang on the most vague charges, while the rich rascals escape with a light fine or scot free."[41] By tapping into this basic distrust of the city's justice system, the Socialists were able to mobilize a broad spectrum of working-class voters.

The Good Government alliance, sarcastically referred to as "Goo-Goos" in the opposition press, frequently employed moral and religious arguments to woo the church-going middle class. They warned that a Socialist government would allow the city to become "wide open" to prostitution and other types of vice.[42] These accusations failed to alarm their opponents. As the Socialists' campaign manager calmly observed, they had no chance anyway of attracting the "church vote." Thus, they felt free to blast the progressives as hypocrites, declaring that such vice was not the product of immorality, but rather the end result of capitalistic exploitation. Alexander's efforts to "clamp a lid" on vice, said Irvine, represented nothing more than "sticking a plaster over a cancer."[43] Here again, the Socialists were able to utilize a fundamental blue-collar resentment towards middle-class reformers who had long struggled to shut down working-class saloons and restrict Sunday entertainments.

The Socialists sought to communicate their message and encourage a sense of solidarity among their constituent groups with numerous public events. On Labor Day a mass demonstration flooded the downtown area with more than 20,000 marchers, who paused only to raise a cheer before the jail where the McNamaras were incarcerated and in front of the headquarters of the women's suffrage movement.[44] Similarly, on the eve of the primary elections, a huge torchlight Victory parade wound its way

[38] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 14, Sept. 15, 1911.

[39] *California Social-Democrat*, Sept. 2, 1911. The importance of "controling the policeman's club" was also a significant issue in Milwaukee's Socialist politics. See Harring, 199–211.

[40] Max Hayes, "The World of Labor," *International Socialist Review*, 11 (March 1911), 564–566.

[41] *Los Angeles Record*, Mar. 1, 1906. For a similar experience in Milwaukee see Harring, 211–219.

[42] *Los Angeles Herald*, Oct. 22, 24, 1911.

[43] *California Social-Democrat*, Oct. 13, 1911.

[44] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Sept. 9, 1911.

through the heart of the working-class districts with a band playing the Marseillaise. In this instance, as in the Labor Day rally, unskilled workers marched alongside the AFL "elites"; Mexican and black laborers alongside white craftsmen; women alongside men.[45]

Speech-making provided an even more important method of communication. The Socialists pursued an exhausting round of political rallies, renting 35 to 40 meeting halls a week. Speeches from the candidates and various guest speakers were heard nightly. Job Harriman would sometimes speak at four different places in one night.[46] Almost all of this activity occurred in the districts of the east and southeast, centered on the downtown Labor Temple, headquarters of the labor movement. At the same time, as one editorialist observed, they were careful to utilize as well the smaller auditoriums and meeting halls which catered to the "non-union" elements of the working-class.[47]

The campaign benefited as well as from the speakers who were drawn to Los Angeles because of the McNamara trial. "Big Bill" Haywood, a leader in both the national Socialist party and the radical IWW, visited the city in August 1911. Although Haywood had bitter ideological quarrels with Harriman, the Wobbly leader swallowed his criticisms on this occasion and devoted his speech to blasting the Alexander government for its role in the McNamara case.[48] Even more important was the arrival of Samuel Gompers in September. The AFL president, who had long nourished a deep animosity towards socialism, threw aside his conservative prejudices and soundly endorsed the Los Angeles campaign: "Let your watchword be 'Harriman and Labor,' " exclaimed Gompers amid a storm of cheers that echoed wildly through the hall … "Make it your cry and keep it up until the last ballot shall be counted and Job Harriman elected triumphant."[49] The presence of both Haywood and Gompers indicated the degree to which the McNamara case had brought disparate parts of the labor movement together and focused national attention on the Los Angeles elections.

The Socialist campaign and the vortex of excitement generated by the McNamara case undoubtedly helped radicalize the city's working-class. Aside from the rallies sponsored by the Socialists, there were also swarms of street corner orators, who represented the "… I.W.W., the Anarchist movements and also the Single Tax movement … [who] were all having themselves a merry-go-round in Los Angeles."[50] Local branches of the IWW reported a rapid increase in their membership, indicating that their unquestionably radical message was becoming more popular.[51] Indeed, one Socialist street-corner orator reported that the discussion of moderate social welfare issues simply left his audiences cold. What moved them was anger against the employers and the municipal government which had aided them in their campaign against

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[45] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Oct. 21, 1911.

[46] *Los Angeles Examiner*, Nov. 8, 1911; *California Social-Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1911.

[47] See lists of meeting locations in the following: *California Social-Democrat*, Sept. 16, 1911; *Los Angeles Citizen*, Oct. 13, 1911. A description of the campaign areas for the primary can be found in the *Los Angeles Citizen*, Sept. 23, 1911.

[48] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Aug. 11, 1911.

[49] *California Social-Democrat*, Sept. 16, 1911.

[50] Harold H. Story, "Memoirs of Harold H. Story" (UCLA Oral History Program), 165; W.W. Robinson, "From Land Titles to Book Titles" (UCLA Oral History Program), 232.

[51] *The Industrial Worker*, July 20, Aug. 3, 10, 1911.

TABLE 1. Voting returns in the 1911 Los Angeles elections

| *Social characteristics of sampled precincts* | *Mayoral candidates—Primary Election* Harriman | Alexander | Mushet |
|---|---|---|---|
| % Blue-Collar | 0.8943 | − 0.8686 | − 0.3644 |
| | ($P = 0.000$) | ($P = 0.000$) | ($P = 0.018$) |
| % Home-Owners | − 0.0961 | 0.2627 | − 0.3358 |
| | ($P = 0.545$) | ($P = 0.093$) | ($P = 0.030$) |
| % Foreign-Born | 0.1903 | − 0.3043 | 0.2005 |
| | ($P = 0.227$) | ($P = 0.050$) | ($P = 0.203$) |

Numbers cited are the Pearson *R* correlations for these six variables, based on a sample of 42 of Los Angeles' 235 precincts: + 1.00 represents a perfect correlation between two variables; − 1.00 a perfect negative correlation, and 0.00 indicates the absence of any linear relationship.

labor.[52] Buoyed by this working-class frustration with the progressive administration, the Socialists went into the primaries on October 31 predicting that they would win a plurality of the votes, making a run-off election unnecessary.

Although this prediction proved overly optimistic, the reality was almost as rosy. Harriman polled 20,183 votes to Alexander's 16,790, with an additional 8,191 cast for the independent Mushet. Socialist candidates as a whole scored similar victories over their Good Government rivals, enabling them to boast of the "momentous spectacle that Los Angeles afforded of a unified working class." The union newspaper observed jubilantly that "it is evident that the entire working element must have gone solidly for Harriman."[53] The *Los Angeles Examiner* concurred, noting that "in the section East of Main Street, everywhere the workingmen make up a large percentage of the vote, the results were a triumph for the Socialist candidates."[54] An analysis of the actual voting returns, shown in Table 1, demonstrates the truth of this perception (see also Fig. 1). Both Alexander and Mushet, the independent candidate, did poorly in blue-collar precincts. The level of support for the Socialist Harriman, however, can be closely correlated to the number of potential working-class voters in each precinct. Other social variables, such as home-ownership or foreign-birth, appear less significant.

Shocked by the election results, the city's social and economic elite lost little time in shedding the apathy and internal divisions which had made this catastrophe possible. The Los Angeles Realty Board proposed the creation of a Citizen's Committee of One Hundred to coordinate and rally the forces opposing working-class socialism. This suggestion was quickly taken up, creating a motley but powerful political organization comprised of Democrats, Republicans, and progressives, and supported by every major business association and virtually all the city's churches.[55] Amply funded and drawing

[52] *California Social-Democrat*, Aug. 12, 1911.

[53] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Nov. 25, 1911. Election figures are from the *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 2, 1911.

[54] *Los Angeles Examiner*, Nov. 1, 1911.

[55] *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 12, 1911; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 1, 2, 3, 1911; *Los Angeles Examiner*, Nov. 5, 6, 1911; *California Social-Democrat*, Dec. 8, 1911.

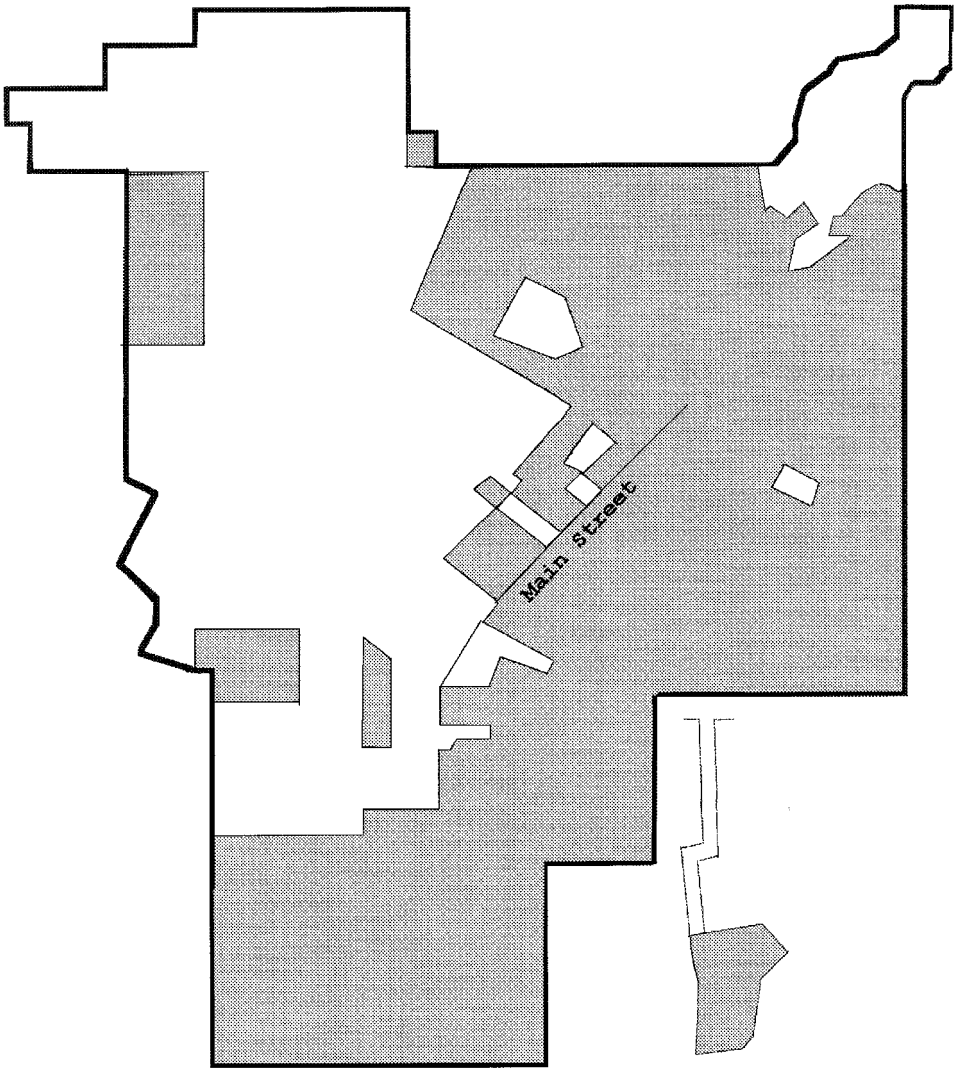


FIGURE 1. Los Angeles Primary Election, October 31, 1911. The shaded areas indicate precincts with a Socialist majority.

upon the knowledge and guile of the old party hacks (the very people the progressives had set out to destroy), they created an impressively thorough campaign machine, complete with district commanders, precinct captains and block lieutenants. This organization penetrated into every region of the city in a massive effort to energize the stay-at-home votes of the affluent districts, and to seek converts within the poorer ones.[56]

[56] *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 14, Dec. 6, 1911; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 11, 1911. See also footnote 36.

The Socialists immediately recognized that the political atmosphere had changed and they were no longer dealing with a complacent and disorganized opposition. Harriman himself warned his comrades that they must "realize that it is no make-believe class struggle in this campaign from this time on. 'Tis the real thing."[57] For the more radical members of the party, this development was greeted with joy. A month after the primaries one editorialist noted the change which had been wrought by that election:

> Every corrupt power in the community was called and responded. This made the alignment clearer than ever before. There was no middle ground … Those who stood with the Socialists stood solidly with them; those who stood with capitalism stood solidly there. The fusion is complete and it is just what the Socialists have sought all this time. It is a two-handed fight.[58]

From this perspective, the development of the fusion coalition rebounded to their benefit, giving a renewed clarity to the class lines which were being drawn in the electorate.[59]

Moderates within the party, however, perceived a real threat, not only in the coalition opposing them, but also in the fierce jubilation of the radicals. One such moderate concluded that the radicals' lack of "tact" had prevented the party from achieving any great success in attracting middle-class voters. "The Socialists," she observed, "like the churches, make the mistake of concentrating too much force on the 'already converted' …"[60]

Even when the Socialists did attempt to attract a broader spectrum of voters, their efforts backfired. Following the primaries the party leadership decided to take the "fight into the Alexander precincts on the westside," distributing literature and going door-to-door to canvass the voters.[61] The city was flooded with tracts and newspapers.[62] The radical content of much of this literature, however, gave the fusion forces a potent weapon. The Good Government campaigners declared that "one has only to pick up the literature which is nauseously distributed in every dooryard to observe that the Socialist party frames its arguments for control of the city government upon envious hatred of those who have money … upon a desire to wreak vengeance upon the police administration."[63] The fierce rhetoric of the Socialist radicals ensured that the party would have limited success in attracting voters from outside the blue-collar precincts.

Both sides also devoted considerable energy to the registration of new voters. Just as the Socialists were failing to sway middle-class voters on the west side, the fusionists were encountering similar problems in east-side working-class districts. The *Herald* concluded that the people who had voted Socialist in the primaries "are determined and sincere … and granting this, it may readily be seen there is not the shadow of a chance for changing one single Socialist vote."[64] The key, then, lay in new voters, particularly the large number of women who would be voting for the first time. Recognizing this fact, the fusion forces, including those who had previously opposed the suffrage issue,

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[57] *California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 4, 1911.
[58] *California Social-Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1911.
[59] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Nov. 10, 1911.
[60] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Nov. 17, 1911.
[61] *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 13, 1911.
[62] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Sept. 2, 1911.
[63] *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 23, 1911.
[64] *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 6, 1911.

made the registration of women a primary concern.[65] The Socialists also predicted that "the final battle rests with the women …" In light of this conclusion, the registration and education of women had become "the most vital part of the campaign."[66]

The advantage lay initially with the Socialists. The conservative Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association had fiercely opposed female suffrage, in marked contrast to the enthusiasm of the Socialists. With their prior commitment to the cause and active support of the Socialist Women's Union, they had been busy registering women even before the primary. Overall, however, the process had been a sluggish one, with only 23,962 women registered by October 31.[67]

The fusion forces, using every resource available to them, quickly caught up to and then surpassed the Socialist effort. The Women's Progressive League, aided by the Realty Board and by almost all the city's women's clubs, put 550 workers into the field. In a meticulous door-to-door campaign, this army registered thousands of women voters, paying particular attention to the affluent west-side precincts from which Alexander drew his greatest support. They were assisted as well by the city's clergy who used their pulpits to urge women to register and vote against "godless Socialism."[68]

The combination of these efforts yielded great results for the Good Government coalition. When the register closed on November 9, the 110 precincts which had given Harriman a majority had added 28,000 women voters, but the remaining 125 precincts had added 54,000. The difference between these figures signaled a clear victory for the conservative alliance. Although cultural differences between working-class and middle-class women may account for some of this disparity, a more likely explanation is that middle-class women were already better integrated into quasi-political clubs and organizations, such as the WCTU, the Ebell Club, the Friday Morning Club, and the Civic League, all of which had been active for years in trying to influence local government policy making. The existence of this activist social network gave the Good Government alliance a solid structural foundation to build upon. The Socialists were also undoubtedly hindered in their efforts to register working-class women by the fact that most foreign-born women had never bothered to obtain citizenship. Prior to 1911 they had had little reason to do so, since the principal benefit of becoming naturalized, the right to vote, had been withheld from them anyway.[69]

The fusion forces used their control of the municipal government to institute a massive drive to rid the registry of ineligible voters. Special police squads, aided by private detectives hired by the city and members of the Women's Progressive League, scoured the registration lists, looking for people who lacked the proper citizenship or residency requirements. Not surprisingly, these efforts worked more heavily against the

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[65]Jacqueline Braitman, "Katherine Philips Edson: A Progressive-Feminist in California's Era of Reform" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1988), 144; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 2, 1911.

[66]*California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 4, 1911.

[67]*Los Angeles Herald*, Oct. 31, Nov. 8, 1911.

[68]*Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 9, 10, 1911; *Los Angeles Examiner*, Nov. 3, 10, 1911; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 6, 1911.

[69]Precinct registration lists are from the *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 17, 1911. Election results are from the *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 2, 1911. The fusionists estimated in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 9, 1911, that the Socialists had registered only 30,000 women. There were some quasi-political organizations which existed among working-class women, such as the Union Label League, but they paled in comparison to the membership and influence of middle-class women's organizations. The Los Angeles County branch of the WCTU, for instance, was the largest in the country. For a discussion of women's clubs in Los Angeles see Judith Raftery, "Los Angeles Clubwomen and Progressive Reform," in William Deverell and Tom Sitton, 144–174.

Socialists, whose working-class constituents were more likely to be foreign-born or residentially mobile. Ultimately some 1200 voters, largely from the boarding house districts of the east side, were struck from the rolls.[70]

Although these triumphs restored confidence to the Good Government camp, they continued to campaign vigorously, recognizing that complacency could still destroy them. To ensure that voter interest remained high, they emphasized an issue which vitally concerned all elements of their coalition: the preservation of business prosperity. They argued that a Socialist victory would destroy the economy, causing financial institutions to shun the city's bonds and driving down property values. They used these assertions not only to invigorate their established constituencies, but also to weaken the Socialists' hold on the city's workingmen, emphasizing that a decline in economic prosperity would hurt employees as well as employers.[71]

Moderate Socialists reacted with alarm, seeing this as a potentially devastating issue. They attacked the fusionist claims as outright lies, using Milwaukee as an example of the prosperity which an efficient, honest Socialist administration would bring to the city. They provided detailed reports of that city's finances and published a letter from Milwaukee's treasurer, assuring Los Angeles voters that bankers from across the nation still avidly purchased Milwaukee's bonds. This defense of "gas and water" socialism reflected the similarities between moderate Socialists and their progressive opponents.[72]

The more radical members of the party formulated a very different response to this challenge. For them the fundamental question was not one of prosperity versus famine: it was a question of freedom versus slavery. When faced by the fusionist threats of a devastated economy, they defiantly replied:

> It would be better that every business interest of Los Angeles should become paralyzed, that every dollar should take to it "wings and flee away," that every street of our splendid city should choke with grass and weeds than that the people of Los Angeles should surrender private honor and public integrity to the "needs of business," to the "perpetuity of prosperity."[73]

For them, the fusionist forces represented more than just corruption and inefficiency. They represented a class-based despotism "... vastly more oppressive and more exasperating than that against which the thirteen colonies rebelled."[74] This attitude of radical defiance against the city's employers and corporate interests increasingly set the tone for the campaign.

This militancy also infused the Socialist leadership with an unrealistic confidence. Their failure in the race to register new voters or to tap into middle-class votes faded before their great success in building a viable working-class coalition, which they viewed as the key to political success. Harriman became so sure of his ultimate triumph that he began drawing up lists of people to be given offices and commissions. Irvine, the campaign manager, would later recall that it seemed "only something akin to an earthquake would prevent us from winning the election." The earthquake he referred to was not long in coming.[75]

With just five days remaining in the campaign, the McNamara brothers suddenly

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[70] *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 9, 10, 11, 16, 1911; *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 17, 1911.
[71] *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 10, 12, 13, 14, 1911; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 23, 24, 1911.
[72] *Los Angeles Citizen*, November 10, 17, 1911; *California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 18, 1911.
[73] *California Social-Democrat*, Nov. 11, 1911.
[74] *Los Angeles Citizen*, Nov. 17, 1911.
[75] Irvine, 99.

changed their pleas from innocent to guilty. Overnight, the premier illustration of capitalist oppression and abuse of government power had vanished. Angry, confused mobs of workingmen gathered before the Labor Temple and demanded that the McNamaras be strung up as traitors to their class. While some working-class voters despaired, many others perceived the convenient timing of the confession as evidence of yet another capitalist conspiracy, providing even more reason to vote against the Good Government coalition. The Socialists, hoping to hold out until the election, remained vague and noncommittal on the issue, but the shock spread apprehension in their camp.[76]

When the polls closed on December 5, election day, the fusion forces scored an impressive sweeping victory. In the mayoralty race Alexander defeated Harriman 85, 739 votes to 51, 796. The results for the City Council and lesser positions showed a similar margin. The Socialists garnered almost 38% of the total vote, but they were unable to place a single candidate in office, a legacy of the municipal charter amendments which progressive activists had pushed through in 1909. In its revised form, the charter provided for city-wide elections for council seats, a system which severely limited the ability of minority groups to achieve representation in city government.[77]

Historians have typically attributed the Socialist defeat to the confession of the McNamara brothers.[78] Certainly this was the conclusion reached by the Socialist leadership. In a bitter letter to his friend Morris Hillquit, Harriman claimed that 20,000 working-class voters stayed away from the polls because of the brothers' guilty plea.[79] The *Los Angeles Times*, although placing much less emphasis on the confession, nonetheless agreed that it had led to a poor voter turnout in the Socialist districts of the east and southeast. An analysis of the election returns shows some evidence to support these assertions. In the precincts where Harriman had a majority, voter turnout was only 66%, while in Alexander's precincts it averaged 79%.[80]

Two factors tend to negate the significance of this interpretation. First, political scientists have long accepted that working-class districts show significantly lower voter participation than middle-class districts. This makes it difficult to postulate a positive correlation between the confession and voter turnout.[81] Second, even if the Socialists did lose 20,000 votes, they would have required over 30,000 to beat the Good Government coalition. Assuming that the 53,000 votes they received represented only 60% of their potential vote, they would have required a 95% turnout of their partisans to beat the progressives.

A further analysis of the election returns also supports the conclusion that the confession did not shatter the working-class coalition. As in the primaries, the city was polarized along an east/west axis. A 20% sampling of the precincts shows an extremely strong correlation between blue-collar voters, skilled and unskilled, and the Socialist

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[76] *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 2, 1911; *Los Angeles Record*, Dec. 2, 4, 5, 1911.

[77] *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 7, 1911; Fogelson, 213; Mowry, 4; Schiesl, 46.

[78] Fogelson, 214–215; Stimson, 400–407; Schiesl, "Progressive Reform," 44–45; Mowry, 52–55; Greenstein, *et al.*, 70.

[79] Job Harriman to Morris Hillquit, Dec. 19, 1911. *Morris Hillquit Papers* (Microfilm edn, Reel 2).

[80] *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 6, 1911. Voter turnout is estimated from precinct registration lists and election results published in the *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 17 and Dec. 7, 1911.

[81] See, for example, Jerry Friedheim, *Where are the Voters?* (Washington, DC: National Press, 1968), 84, 186; and Hugh A. Bone and Austin Ranney, *Politics and Voters* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 20, 45.

TABLE 2. Statistics of the General Election

| Social characteristics of sampled precincts | Mayoral candidates—General Election Harriman | Alexander |
|---|---|---|
| % Blue-Collar | 0.9189 | −0.9184 |
| | ($P = 0.000$) | ($P = 0.000$) |
| % Home-Owners | −0.2327 | 0.2305 |
| | ($P = 0.138$) | ($P = 0.142$) |
| % Foreign-Born | 0.3172 | −0.3163 |
| | ($P = 0.041$) | ($P = 0.041$) |

Numbers cited are the Pearson *R* correlations for these six variables, based on a sample of 42 of Los Angeles' 235 precincts: +1.00 represents a perfect correlation between two variables, −1.00 a perfect negative correlation, and 0.00 indicates the absence of any linear relationship.

vote for Job Harriman (see Table 2 and Fig. 2). The progressives themselves observed that "in East Side precincts, where workingmen and their wives and daughters rallied almost solidly to the Harriman standard, the Socialist ticket overtopped the Citizen's ticket by majorities as given to the other side in the western section."[82] This observation also weakens the contention, put forth by some historians, that the Socialists failed because of their inability to attract female voters. Undoubtedly, many more women voted for the Good Government coalition than for the Socialists, but this was probably more an issue of class rather than gender. Quite simply, more women were registered to vote in the middle-class precincts sympathetic to Alexander than in the working-class precincts which were more likely to support Harriman.[83] The Socialists apparently did fall short in their efforts to attract African-American voters. The three precincts analyzed which had large numbers of black residents demonstrated considerably less support for Socialist candidates than precincts with comparable class composition.[84]

The fundamental problem faced by the Socialists was the city's demography. Although the working-class represented approximately half of the city's population, a disproportionate number of this class were ineligible to vote, either because of non-citizenship or a high degree of residential mobility. Harriman himself admitted in a letter to his friend Morris Hillquit that the Socialist success in the primaries had been largely due to the division of the conservative vote between Alexander and Mushet. In the December election, however, he faced a unified and alarmed opposition from the city's middle-class, making it extremely difficult for him, or his party, to prevail.[85]

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[82] *Los Angeles Examiner*, Dec. 6, 1911.

[83] James P. Kraft, "The Fall of Job Harriman's Socialist Party: Violence, Gender and Politics in Los Angeles, 1911," *Southern California Quarterly*, 70 (1988), 43–68; Leonard Pitt, 23; Braitman, 144–145. Sherry Katz, however, argues that women voters did not desert the Socialist cause. See Katz, 302.

[84] Flamming, 208–210.

[85] Job Harriman to Morris Hillquit, Dec. 19, 1911. *Morris Hillquit Papers*. According to the 1910 census, only a little over 50% of the city's working population were blue-collar workers. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, Vol. 1, *Population* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 66–73.

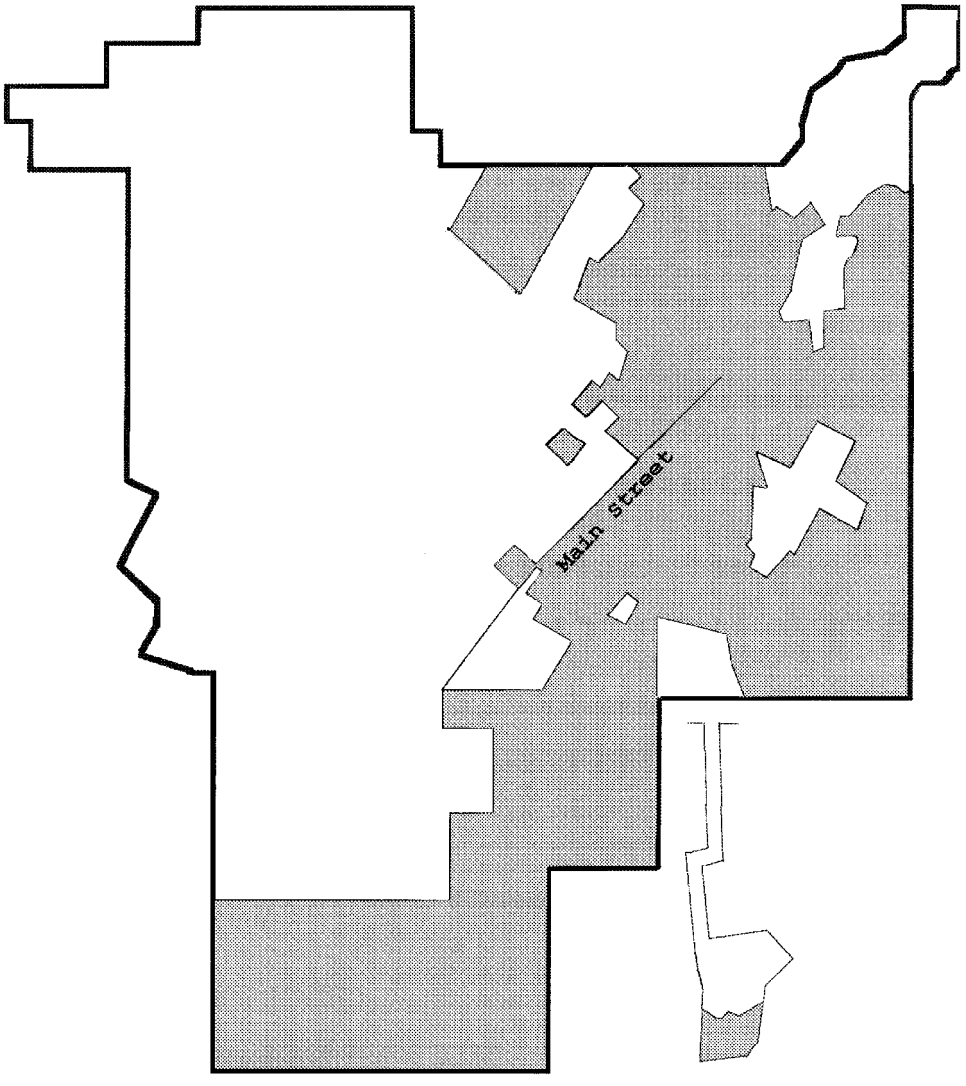


FIG. 2. Los Angeles General Election, December 5, 1911. The shaded areas indicate precincts with a Socialist majority.

The Socialists had carried out a campaign which mixed radicalism with reform, and a recognition of the working-class as the party's primary constituency, with a pragmatic desire to tap the votes of the middle-class. Their intended campaign, however, fell victim to forces beyond their control, as the polarization of the electorate along class lines reached a peak during the elections. This swell both helped and hindered their efforts. It hampered them by limiting their ability to attract middle-class voters, frightened by the militant overtones of Socialist rhetoric; but this same militancy apparently enabled them to hold the votes of an angry working class. Frank E. Wolfe,

Harriman's publicity manager and a candidate for the city council, offered the following analysis of the purpose and course of the campaign:

> The line of demarcation between the exploiters on the one hand and the exploited on the other has never been more sharply drawn. The class struggle, pure and simple, in its most intense form, is what has been [going] on in Los Angeles since the primary election…. Every local issue raised by the Socialists has challenged the right of the exploiting class to use the city government as a means for increasing its power to exploit the people.[86]

While Wolfe's summary ignores the more conservative aspects of his party's effort, he was certainly correct that their rhetoric and appeal had transcended simple "gas and water" reformism. Although pragmatic demands for social welfare reforms and a government friendly to union goals were part of the Socialist campaign, increasingly the Socialists focused on a negative campaign which emphasized the class control of the municipal government by a business elite, a campaign which attempted to mobilize organized and unorganized workers, men and women, foreign-born and native-born, black and white. Aided by the structural destruction of the old political system, which had left blue-collar citizens without representation, they aroused these disenfranchised voters by addressing their political, cultural, and economic frustrations and created, briefly, a truly working-class party.

[86] *California Social-Democrat*, Dec. 2, 1911.