
Words of History:

**From the Annual Report (1907-08) of the
Editor and Manager of *St. Louis Labor* which
was Read at Last Year's Annual General Meeting
of Local St. Louis and Adopted
[Dec. 13, 1908]
by G.A. Hoehn**

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To Local St. Louis, Socialist Party.

St. Louis, Mo., Dec. 13, 1908.

Comrades:—

At this annual meeting of Local St. Louis, it is in order to give a concise review of the work done by the party and its most important weapon in the proletarian class struggle, to wit, the Socialist press.

The Socialists of St. Louis are not without valuable experience in the great work of publishing bona fide labor papers. But, unfortunately, a great many people in all walks of life will not even learn anything by experience, and the rank and file of the working class are still far from realizing the great importance and necessity of the Socialist press.

It may interest the comrades assembled here this evening to learn that it is just about 30 years ago when the first Socialist paper started in the city of St. Louis. When, in 1878, Prince Bismarck succeeded in getting his Anti-Socialist laws passed by the German Reichstag, the Socialist Party of Germany found itself in an almost hopeless condition, owing to the fact that the government without a minute's hesitation, prepared to suppress the many publications of the Socialist Party, to dissolve the party organization, to suppress the trade unions,

confiscate the Socialist Party and labor union funds wherever Bismarck could get a hold on them, and to expel some of the most active comrades from German territory.

The thousands of Socialists who were driven from their homes, from their families, from their country, pledged their word of honor, on leaving Germany, that no matter where they would go they would remain true to the cause of the labor movement and Socialism. Many of them came to America, where one of their first efforts was to assist in starting Socialist and labor papers. It was in those days that daily Socialist papers were started in many cities in the United States, like New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Milwaukee, St. Louis, etc.

In 1877 there was the first great railroad strike in this country, and this proletarian class struggle caused considerable excitement in the great railroad centers. St. Louis was one of the storm centers of that memorable struggle, and the Socialists, most of them Germans, took a leading interest in the strike. For several days the St. Louis money aristocracy was very much afraid of a possible second edition of the Paris Commune. Ten thousand people met on Lucas Square, there in open mass meeting elected an Executive Committee to take charge of the critical situation and bring about a successful termination of the desperate struggle.

However, there was a general lack of organization, and the strike was lost. The capitalists soon regained their lost courage and used the entire machinery of government against the rebellious wage workers, and got sweet revenge.

The general feeling in the ranks of labor was most bitter, and when the Socialists of this city organized a political party the wage workers joined them by the thousands. I happened to know personally a number of the old Socialist pioneers who were mixed up in those exciting fights. One of the first things the St. Louis Socialist and Union men did was to start a daily paper in the German language, called the *Volksstimme des Westens* (The People's Voice of the West). This paper had a hard struggle during the memorable days of its short life, and died before it had a chance of celebrating its third anniversary. One of the editors was Dr. Otto Walster, whom I had the pleasure of meeting in Brussels, Belgium, at the International Socialist Congress [Aug. 16-22, 1891], while a second editor of that paper was Mr. Currin, who is today publishing a little weekly paper in Northern California.

For nearly ten years, up to 1889, St. Louis was without a bona fide Socialist and Labor paper. In 1889 another German Socialist daily was started here under the name of *St. Louis Tageblatt* (St. Louis Daily Gazette).¹ A handful of German comrades, some of whom are still with us today, undertook this tremendous work of launching a daily paper on the stormy waves of the labor movement. In this work they were bravely supported by the German labor unions of this city. This new daily paper has had a hard road to travel. It was started with but a few hundred dollars. It was born in poverty and lived and struggled in poverty; in other words, it was in a state of permanent bankruptcy, and every few weeks the question would be very seriously discussed whether the funeral take place without further delay, or whether the patient still had another chance to live and pull through once more.

In 1893 the industrial crisis set in and continued for several years. In the same year the St. Louis Brewery Combine, known as the British Brewery Syndicate, opened a war of annihilation on the United Brewery Workers' organization of this city, which was closely allied with the Socialist paper. A five years' boycott preceded by a long strike, which cost the union over \$100,000, was the result. The daily Socialist paper fought bravely for the cause of the unions. But the Brewery proprietors fought back. The *St. Louis Tageblatt* was put on the black list by the capitalists. Every brewery advertisement was taken out of the paper; every saloonkeeper selling non-union beer stopped the paper and the ads. This labor war cost the Socialist paper in the neighborhood of \$5,000. This, together with three years of industrial crisis, brought the paper into a very hopeless condition, so much so that the business management and the people at the head of the editorial department became completely discouraged. In addition came the internal troubles of the Socialist Labor Party. DeLeonism had reached the zenith of its power, and the result was a general breakup in the party movement all over the country, which had a demoralizing effect on the entire movement and on the press. St. Louis having taken a leading part in calling a halt to DeLeon's wild machinations and Utopianism under the cloak of Scientific Socialism, was especially singled out for attack by the internal forces of destruction. In the fall of 1897 our daily paper was forced out of business.

¹ The *Tageblatt* was actually launched in April 1888 and terminated in June 1897. A hardcopy run is held by the St. Louis Public Library. The paper apparently has not been filmed or digitized.

In 1893 the St. Louis comrades, under the leadership of Comrade Albert E. Sanderson, started a weekly in the English language, under the name *St. Louis Labor*.² Later this publication developed into a Socialist Newspaper Union with special editions for 34 cities, some of which were Chicago; Milwaukee; St. Paul; Buffalo, Troy, NY; Boston, Holyoke, Manchester, Adams, Mass.; San Antonio, Texas; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Pueblo [CO]; Lincoln, Neb.; and other cities. St. Louis remained the headquarters of the Socialist Newspaper Union. For three years these publications, which had a joint circulation of over 6,000 [*sic.*?], did good work. But the outside branches ran heavily into debts with our St. Louis office, and the unavoidable happened. After three years this English publication of the St. Louis comrades went out of business. Some of the outside locals like Buffalo and Troy, NY, owed the St. Louis office of the Socialist Newspaper Union as much as two and three hundred dollars each, all for subscriptions (and they never paid a cent of either).

From 1897 to 1898 St. Louis was practically without any kind of a Socialist paper. This was at the time when the old SLP was fast sailing into the harbor of Lost Hope, and when Comrade Eugene V. Debs and his friends and colleagues of Woodstock jail fame organized the Social Democracy of America, with its well remembered colony scheme. More than ever before the St. Louis Socialists who could not be “pickled” by DeLeonism realized that a Socialist paper was an absolute necessity. But there was not a cent of money and plenty of discouragement and demoralization. About 25 comrades worked for a whole year to collect a few dollars for a Socialist press fund. Each of these comrades pledge himself to pay \$5 for the purpose. A Socialist publishing society was then organized, and in August 1898 the first number of our *Arbeiter-Zeitung* [Workers’ Newspaper] made its appearance. Only members of the Social Democratic Party (later Socialist Party) could become members of the Arbeiter-Zeitung Association. So poor was our movement then that for about one year and a half we had to get the paper printed in Belleville, Ill., because we could get it out cheaper over there than in St. Louis (by getting it printed in the Belleville labor paper plant).

In January 1901 the first number of *Missouri Socialist* made its appearance. As usual the paper was started with much enthusiasm, but little money, and very little experience. Young enthusiastic com-

² According to the New York Public Library, first issue of this paper was April 29, 1893.

rades took charge of the business and editorial management of the paper, which was soon adopted as the *official organ of the Socialist Party of Missouri*. Every member of the party in the state received the paper free of charge. After about 15 months the state organization owed the Missouri Socialist office about \$1400 for subscriptions, and of this entire amount there were not \$50 paid. The rest is still due. It may never be paid. In October 1902, three weeks before an important congressional and state election, the *Missouri Socialist* ceased publication, and the only paper left to do the campaign work was the German *Arbeiter-Zeitung*.³

Local St. Louis met and discussed the situation. The *Missouri Socialist* left unpaid printing bills to the amount of \$800, according to the claims of the printers. We have never been able to see the bills or the notes which the managers of the paper were supposed to have signed. After considerable serious deliberation, Local St. Louis proposed that G.A. Hoehn, Manager and Editor of *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, should accept the management of the paper, which had not appeared for a month, and that every effort should be made to save the English paper. Hoehn took charge of the management and Ballard Dunn was elected editor. Dunn, after a week's work, listened to the advice of [Leon] Greenbaum, Roche, and [Val] Putnum, and left. This also added the editorship to Hoehn's duties. Without a cent of money the writer of this report took charge of the management in November 1902. As soon as the first edition was off the press there was a printing bill of about \$200 due, i.e., the new management started with \$200 debts.

We succeeded in keeping *St. Louis Labor* above water and gradually getting it on a solid basis. The size of the paper was increased and *St. Louis Labor* soon became one of the leading Socialist and Labor

³ While this story sounds compelling, the documentary record does not support Hoehn's recollection of a termination, a gap, and a succession. Rather *Missouri Socialist* gave way to *St. Louis Labor* without a pause of even a single week, with the "new" latter publication billed as the "city edition" of the former. An expansion of the publication from 4 pages to 8 and an increased focus on the activities of organized labor simultaneously occurred. This is not to say there was not also an unpublicized financial reason for the change along the lines of what Hoehn intimates. Since he was the sitting editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* at that moment in time, Hoehn would be in a good position to know these facts. Be aware that his recollection is not fully accurate here, however. See: "*St. Louis Labor, Our City Edition*," *Missouri Socialist*, vol. 1, no. 49 (Dec. 21, 1901), pg. 1. The transition took place approximately two weeks after this announcement ran with no break in the interval, unless the published date on the nameplate is inaccurate — as does not seem to be the case. No change in volume numbering took place.

papers of the country. When our movement and our press gained in importance and political power, new obstacles developed. The old SLP movement had gone bankrupt and there was practically nothing left of it which resembled an organization. The remnants of that movement silently sneaked into the Socialist Party, not with the object in view of helping our movement, but to continue their old work of destruction. Every attempt was made to get the movement back into the old DeLeonite track, and when these attempts failed, those elements commence their campaign of misrepresentation and revenge against our Socialist Party press. Young people, not acquainted with the history of the Socialist movement, were caught in the nets of these underground workers and when in 1904 our party polled over 400,000 votes, a new element joined our movement, composed of former capitalist reform adventurers, scheming lawyers, ex-politicians, and speculating small businessmen, who for some time considered it their mission to "reorganize the Socialist Party" and the Socialist press, in accordance with their concocted schemes and speculations. On the other hand, Democratic and Republican labor politicians combined against *St. Louis Labor* and its management, and these political tools of Capitalism were working hand in hand with a certain class of people in our own party.

We state these facts at this time, because at the bottom of all these fights against *St. Louis Labor* was, and still is today, the question of Party Policy and Party Tactics. And right here I wish to say with as much emphasis as I can, that the policy of *St. Louis Labor* of today is the same as it was 6 years ago, and after all these many years of experience, added to my experience of former years, I am more than ever convinced that the policy of *St. Louis Labor* is right. It is right, and in line with the policy outlined by every national party convention of the last 10 years. Comrades, this evening I stand before you to repeat that I have nothing to apologize for as far as the business and editorial management of *St. Louis Labor* is concerned. On the contrary; I beg leave to give you my frank opinion and advice as to some demoralizing and unsocialistic work done in the Socialist movement by people who know better, or at least, who ought to know better. They know that *St. Louis Labor* has always been in the leading ranks whenever the principles and the policy of the Socialist Party or the interests of the working class were at stake. Yet there are party members who for years acted no better toward their own Socialist press than the [James B.]

Van Cleave Citizens Alliance people or the political labor skates in whose eyes *St. Louis Labor* has always been Rough-on-Rats.

We are now entering another important campaign. Platform Policy, plans of agitation and organization, candidates and campaign committees are being agreed upon by the Socialist Party of St. Louis. Ad this policy of work will be the policy of St. Louis Labor — always has been.

Now let us understand, without ifs and buts, that after such a campaign work has been agreed upon by our party organization, we cannot tolerate the DeLeonistic and Anarchistic work which some of our ward clubs have pleased to carry on for a number of years, much to the detriment and injury of our general party movement and our local Socialist press.

Respectfully submitted,

G.A. Hoehn,

Editor and Manager of *St. Louis Labor*.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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