
Landmarks of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee

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Landmarks of labor in Milwaukee — why the city is full of them. They are almost uncountable. and I have thought it might be profitable for all on this great holiday of labor, in the year 1910, to take a look at some of them — especially our readers at a distance will be interested, no doubt, to know out of what agitations of the past the present Milwaukee success has come. For out of the struggle, the heartaches, the contentions between true and sinister politics, and the sifting of leaders, out of all this, and rising above the glory and wreck of it, has come the first notable triumph of Social Democracy in these United States. Some incidents of the past may be heard treated with charity and generous consideration for the vanquished, yet you will see running through the procession of incidents like a streak of imprisoned sunlight the clean political purpose that has at last brought such splendid results.



Step to the great towering city hall today and a labor mayor, a Social Democrat, is there to greet you. Visit the common council in session and your gaze will be greeted by a Socialist president of the

body and a Socialist majority at the desks in front of him. Go to the somber brownstone courthouse and again a Socialist, a leader in the ranks of organized labor, stands ready as chairman of the county board of supervisors to make you feel at home. Go to Milwaukee's public library and public museum, there you again feel the presence of the Socialist influence at work. Go to the school board, the Socialists are there. Go to the city's new Auditorium, the Socialists are there also partially in charge. It is the same in the Metropolitan park commission, the county park commission, the health department, the various city offices, and the departments of city life.

It is all the triumph of the two-armed labor movement which Victor Berger, that time-tried warrior and master worker for labor, tells about in his article on this page. The struggle of this principle for supremacy is the struggle that has gone before and that has left the landmarks we are to look at today, from our imaginary rubberneck coach.

It took Milwaukee's bone and sinew years to get right on this problem, but it did and the principle has proved itself. No on any longer doubts that proposition in Milwaukee.

But as the coach gets underway we may glance at a few facts that have only left their marks on the printed page and in the memories of the older inhabitants — facts that have left behind them no chrysalis-like buildings to be snap-shotted on the trip. Thus—

In 1842, when Milwaukee was 8 years old and had 4,000 inhabitants, a *Workingman's Advocate* is said to have appeared. Perhaps the name signifies nothing more than the fact that most everyone was a worker in such pioneering days.

The Fourierite movement, Utopian Socialistic, of the '30s made enough of an impression in Milwaukee to send one man, Uriel Farmin, into the Fourierite community of Ceresco, afterward Ripon, Wisconsin. C. Latham Sholes, the inventor of the typewriter, was also a contributing Fourierite, but did not enter a community. Greeley's *New York Tribune*, which had Socialistic leanings, had numerous readers in Milwaukee.

History does not record it, but it is to be presumed that Milwaukee had some share in the various early day efforts at trade organization and even had delegates in the labor congresses and grand lodges in the years preceding the rise of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor.

The Knights of St. Crispin.

Milwaukee shared in the general union labor revival of 1866, and in a notable way. For it was in Milwaukee that the famed order of the Knights of St. Crispin had its beginning. That was almost a (workingman's) lifetime ago and the records are somewhat obscured, but the founder of the order was Newell Daniels. To him belongs the credit and he lived to see the order spread all over the United States, and he also lived to see it go down to a sorry death. But it was a power while it lasted. Daniels worked at the time in the Milwaukee shoe factory of Atkins, West & Co. on West Water Street, and lived in a frame house on 4th Street, where the Alhambra Theater building now stands. The main feature of the Crispins was the limitation of apprentices in the shoe trade. The first meeting was held March 1, 1867, with the following shoemakers present: Newell Daniels, Samuel Wilson, W.C. Haynes, Albert Jenkins, Thomas Houren, F.W. Wallace, and Henry Palmer. Wallace suggested the name, that of the patron saint of the medieval shoemakers. Shortly after the German Custom Shoemakers' Union of Milwaukee came in as Lodge No. 2. Daniels wrote the ritual and drafted a circular which was sent out to every shoemaker in the country whose name they could learn. Later Daniels formed lodges in various Eastern cities and Martin Gavin, secretary of the Chicago Shoemakers' Union, removed to Milwaukee and helped in the work of extending the order. In 1868, when the first grand lodge meeting was held at Rochester, NY, Gavin was made presiding officer.

Was a Power in the Land.

"For five subsequent years after the Rochester session," we are told, "the order was a power in the land. It made and unmade politicians, it established a monthly journal, it started cooperative stores, it fought, often successfully, for better returns for labor performed. It is estimated that at one time it had 400 lodges and 5,000 members. It became the foremost trade organization in the world." When it fell to pieces it was noted that "yearly reductions in wages in all the shoe-making centers followed." In 1873, at the 6th annual session at Cleveland, Ohio, disintegration had set in. Discord and distrust were present. And when the Philadelphia session was held a year later the attendance was small and the heart had gone out of the order.

The session was called “the funeral of the St. Crispins.”

A revival came in 1875 in some 30 shoe towns, but by 1878 the order was practically defunct and the members (Daniels among the rest) had largely passed over into the Knights of Labor, which had been started in 1869 — possibly getting the idea from the St. Crispin order. In 1886, when following the 8-hour agitation, a labor ticked was successful in Milwaukee County, as a sort of political accident, Daniels was on the ticket as candidate for sheriff and was elected. Years later he removed to California and died there in 1894, being brought back to Milwaukee for burial.

I am giving generous space to the St. Crispins because the facts will be quite new to most present day readers. My quest for local facts has led me a merry chase, but partly through the information received from the Rev. Charles A. Adams, of Merrill, Wis., who joined in 1871 and from the testimony of Andrew Thomas, still a resident of Milwaukee and who was practically an original member. I have established the fact that Lodge No. 1 met in a two-story building on the northeast corner of West Water and Cedar Streets (the building disappeared years ago), and Lodge No. 2 at almost the same time in the old Riverside Building at No. 1 Grand Avenue, where the big Gimbel Brothers department store now stands, both lodges meeting there later. Toward the last, when a desperate effort to prolong the life of the order was made by forming mixed lodges, a hall on Wisconsin Street, between Broadway and Milwaukee, was used for the purpose.

Had Lofty Ideals.

The Crispins were full of lofty ideals. In the preamble to the constitution appears this: “We censure the system of a Crispin making a profit on the labor of a brother Crispin as contrary to the spirit of Crispinism.” This was the main commandment: “No member of the order shall teach or aid in teaching any part or parts of book or shoe making, unless the lodge shall give permission.... Provided... this...shall not...prevent a father from teaching his son.” Mr. Adams tells me that Daniels was opposed to strikes, except as a last resort, and wanted all employers put on an even basis — “a boon the small employer did not appreciate until the order went down.” And within five years of its institution, he writes, the order had secured an advance in piecework prices practically double what they had been before the production of apprentices had been curtailed.

The Marx International.

There still stands at the southeast corner of State and 7th Streets a quaint one-story building known as Casino Hall. Its best days are long past. It will hardly encumber the real estate there many more years, yet it is entitled to our consideration. For it was the meeting place of the Milwaukee branch of the International Workingmen's Association between the years 1874 and 1876. the branch first met at Bader's Hall, 290 4th Street, but the Casino was its home for a good share of its existence. many a union has met there even before and since, but it is now used chiefly as a saloon annex for dance purposes.

In 1880 Milwaukee was represented in a National Labor Congress at Pittsburgh. In 1881 P.J. McGuire, the Socialist carpenter, a noted figure in the early labor movement, spoke in Milwaukee. He had also spoken here in 1876.

In 1883 the Wisconsin State Bureau of Labor Statistics was established.

The Knights of Labor.

Milwaukee became a Knights of Labor stronghold in the early '80s, but unfortunately their original district assembly hall was long since torn down and I have been unable to find a picture of it. The building was of two stories, with outside stairway, and stood at the southeast corner of 3rd and Prairie Streets, where the Steinmeyer Building now is.

The Knights made tremendous headway in Milwaukee and had lodges all over the city, representing different trades. The number of these in 1886, when the national movement was at its height under T.V. Powderly, was in the neighborhood of 50. Two years later there were but 19 and in 1891 only 6.

One of the most flourishing K of L lodges was the Gambrinus Lodge, composed of brewery workmen, which met for years at the old Vorwaerts Turn Hall, 3rd Street and Reservoir Avenue. One lodge on the south side, the Reliance, was made up of about 1,500 machinists of the big Allis plant, mostly.

The Knights of Labor was started in Philadelphia in 1869, but the public did not become aware of its existence until 1877. Many Socialists belonged to it in Milwaukee, but eventually its chief repre-

sentative was a Greenbacker named Robert Schilling, who had played a part in reform and labor circles before coming to Milwaukee from Cleveland. He was brought here, he claims, by the late Edward P. Allis, founder of what is now known as the Allis-Chambers Works, in 1878, when Mr. Allis ran for Governor of Wisconsin as a Greenbacker. A year or so later he, Schilling, established a reform paper called *The Reformer* (German) and later an English paper called the *National Advance*. For a time he also published a paper called the *Volksblatt* (daily). Early in 1890, after a starving match between the two papers, Schilling turned his *Reformer* subscription list over to the *Arbeiter Zeitung* and the *Reformer* ceased publication.

Schilling won unenviable notoriety in later years for his political trading through various local reform parties, and in 1889 went into a deserved political retirement, from which he has never since been able to emerge. The Socialists could not agree with his methods and in 1894, at Milwaukee Garden Hall, they declared themselves through and, led by Victor Berger, left the meeting for all time.

What Happened to the Brewers.

The Milwaukee brewery bosses never took kindly to the K of L because of its stand on temperance. They finally prevailed on their men to withdraw, on the round that they were going against their own trade. Indirectly they influenced the cigarmakers to withdraw also. This was in 1887. Then it appeared that a shrewd move had been made against the men. For what the breweries had really feared was that their men might enforce a wage demand by a K of L boycott of their beer all over the country. Once they were out, an attempt was made to lower their wages. Capt. [Frederick] Pabst, now deceased, led the fight, saying he would sacrifice every brick in his brewery before he would give in. The secretary of the brewery unions at that time was Richard Eisner, now a Socialist judge.

The conflict extended to breweries all over the country and a general and hit or miss boycotting was resorted to. But a victory for the men was won with a 2 cent stamp. For Eisner sent a letter to the national brewers' convention, suggesting that one brewery be boycotted at a time, and that St. Louis beer be the first. This was done and the moment the St. Louis brewers gave up, the boycott was switched to Pabst, and the St. Louis agents all over the country actually helped to boycott on, and Capt. Pabst finally capitulated in comical haste. He

had filled his brewery with many non-union men and these he forced to join the union, and they did so at a notable meeting held in Casino Hall.

The Days of Brucker.

Our search for landmarks now takes us back to the Centennial year.

In 1876 Joseph Brucker, then 26 years of age and full of romantic impulses, came to Milwaukee from Austria and was active in the Freie Gemeinde society, also editor of his paper, the *Freidenker*. He became fascinated with the writings of Ferdinand Lassalle, and shortly after a bookbinder named Nusser came from Bavaria and was responsible for the conversion of Brucker to Social Democracy.

Doubtless in those days Brucker was a sincere man and perhaps he dreamed of duplicating in America the brilliant agitations of Lassalle in Germany. He started a Socialist daily paper in the German language, calling it *Der Sozialist*.

An English weekly was also printed, called the *Social-Democrat*, edited by Henry Von Ende, but the name was after a few weeks changed to *The Emancipator* upon the arrival of a new editor from Cincinnati, a courtly old gentleman named William Haller, who was much liked during the few months he spent here.

The daily started off with spirit and attracted both attention and subscribers — 2,000 of them, I am told.

It was published from 450 East Water Street, in a building that is still standing, but later was moved over to 267 3rd Street, between Cedar and State, and was joined by a Herman Sigel, from New Jersey, also a Socialist, at that time.

In the course of time, however, the paper lost ground and Brucker pulled out and eventually went over to the Republicans. He was for a time an editor of the *Illinois Staats Zeitung*, but is now in Germany. Sigel changed the name of *Der Sozialist* to *Vorwaerts* and later again, with the help of some of the brewers, changed it to a German morning paper and called it the *Freie Presse*. In the '80s it became the *Abend Post* and was finally swallowed up by the late George Brumder and merged with his German (Republican) daily.

Meantime Michael Biron, a Socialist who had formerly been associated on the *Freidenker* with Brucker, returned to the city after an absence of several years and started a workingman's paper called the

Arbeiter Zeitung in the old Opera House Building on Oneida Street. Later the name was changed to the *Milwaukee Journal*, and finally it merged with the *Freie Presse*.

Three years later Biron again started a Socialist newspaper, this time a weekly called the *Arminia*. It was published at 423 East Water Street, between Wisconsin and Mason Streets, and ran until the beginning of 1886, when Paul Grottkau, one of the leading Socialists of the country, was brought to Chicago to organize “free” unions.

Grottkau made the paper a tri-weekly and later removed it to Wells Street, where the Germania Building now stands, making it a daily and calling it the *Arbeiter Zeitung*. The editorial rooms were on the third floor and the printing was done in a job office on the ground floor. A favorite Socialist gathering place at this time and for years later was at Doerfler’s at the fork of Chestnut and Winnebago Streets. It continued so down to 1903.

Under Grottkau’s influence the free unions (as distinguished from the K of L Assemblies) increased tremendously. He organized the carpenters and they secured a membership of 1,800 men. the hod carriers, tailors, and other crafts also waxed strong and he cemented them all together in a Central Labor Union that met in the Arminia office on East Water Street.

Meantime organized labor all over the country had been planning for an 8-hour day mass strike and demonstration for May 1, 1886, and the Milwaukee workers were preparing for it. On the first Sunday in May there was a monster parade of labor, although Powderly of the K of L had at the last minute urged that the struggle be put off to some later time. There were over 6,000 men in line in Milwaukee, and later the old Milwaukee Garden, out on State Street, was secured as a labor headquarters for the general demonstration. Just at this time an ass of an Anarchist in Chicago threw the Haymarket bomb that killed and wounded several policemen, and the capitalists and the police administration in Milwaukee became fearfully excited. The police drove the men out of Milwaukee Garden with clubs, and on the first signs of turbulence the state militia was rushed in by Gov. Jerry Rusk, who “seen his duty and done it.”

Before the week was out the peaceful demonstrations of labor had been ruined, eight Polish citizens had been murdered by a company of soldiers because they did not stop marching when ordered to, and Grottkau and several others, Schilling of the Knights included, were popped into jail.

The daily papers outrageously misrepresented Grottkau and entirely overlooked the fact that prior to coming here he had brilliantly won a debate over Johann Most in Chicago on the subject of Socialism versus Anarchism. Grottkau was released on bail when the jury in his first trial disagreed.

In the fall the active men in the Knights of Labor started a Union Labor Party for the campaign. It must be confessed it represented very little except an attempt to displace old party office holders. The biggest meeting was held at Schlitz Park Hall, on Germania Street. Theodore Fritz was chairman and although Grottkau was not on the program the calls for him were so incessant that he went to the platform and fairly took the meeting by storm. The full ticket was elected, including Henry Smith for Congress. Newell Daniels, now quite an old man, was elected sheriff amongst the rest.

Money Reformers.

Another man elected was a lawyer named John W. Wegner. And at the instigation of Robert Schilling, Wegner actually called up the case against Grottkau and put him on trial a second time. Grottkau was evidently considered in the way. And when the trial was in progress some printer in Grottkau's office put in type a piece of doggerel reflecting on Judge Sloan, and the trial halted and Grottkau was sent to the house of correction for nine months for contempt of court — which he probably felt, all right.

In the spring election next following (in 1888) the Schilling faction put another labor ticket in the field, with a merchant named Herman Kroeger for mayor.

The Socialists had had their lesson, and had estimated the personal motives that made up the money reformers of the Schilling stripe. They went into the campaign with a ticket of their own, headed by Colin Campbell for mayor, and cast over 900 votes. Nine hundred were just enough votes to defeat the Schilling ticket.

In the fall of 1888 the Schilling ticket was again beaten. The so-called labor administration of county affairs had not been very creditable, and the sympathy of the voters was lost. At a meeting at the North Side Turn Hall, on Walnut Street, that had been called by Schilling, Grottkau, who had heard of the move in time to call his followers out in his paper of that afternoon, got the stage and administered a castigation to Schilling and Wegner that has probably never

been equalled, unless it was when he went for Dave Rose (who had also been taken up by Schilling), in a monster meeting at the West Side Turn Hall some years later.

Federated Trades Council.

The present labor movement in Milwaukee began with the formation in 1887 of the Federated Trades Council, which was the name chosen for the successor to Grottkau's Central labor Union. the change was rendered necessary because the American Federation of Labor had been formed the year before and a regular local chartered central body was desirable. the new council's first hall was the Federated Trades Union Hall, 171 2nd Street, just north of Grand, also known as Petrie's hall. There and at Schaefer's Hall, 244 West Water Street, its first meetings were held, with Emil Applehagen, a cigar-maker, as first president. The actual date of organization was August 20, 1887.

The new body flourished, but there was from the start a conflict between the Socialists and the political traders — to call them by no worse name. Their slogan of "no politics in the union" actually meant a free field for them to "deliver" the labor vote outside, to whichever party would pay in cash or in jobs.

During 1888, while the council was still meeting on Second Street, a Milwaukee General Trades Council, with a D.A. Souse as chairman, was organized, probably under K of L auspices, but it seems to have "cut no ice."

In 1890 John Stippik, who afterward got a job in the courthouse, was elected president of the Federated Trades Council, serving two years. In 1892 the council met in the K of L Assembly Hall, at 3rd and Prairie Streets, with William Belmdick as president. He was succeeded by John Coughlin, of the Tanners, and the council again removed, this time to the Printers' Hall, Oneida and Front Streets.

There were turbulent times there. Coughlin ruled with a high hand, with a faction of political traders that was formidable. A rule had been previously passed to allow presidents only one term, so Coughlin was succeeded by Frank J. Weber, and the latter by Louis Wieman, but the fight with the Coughlin faction got worse rather than better. While the Socialists had strength (the brewery workers alone had 12 to 15 delegates, the cigarmakers 6 to 7, etc.) still it was only by caucusing that they were able to cope with their opponents

and to keep the council from becoming a stench to the labor movement. Grottkau had left the Arbeiter Zeitung in 1888 to reside in San Francisco, and had been succeeded by Simon Hickler, later by Jacob Hunger, as general manager, and then by Michael Biron, and by this time Victor L. Berger had come into possession and changed the name to *Vorwaerts*, and the paper was alternately the organ of the council and not the organ of the council as the two factions alternately showed strength meeting after meeting. The caucuses were held at the *Vorwaerts* office, 614 State Street, and in a back room at the northeast corner of Lloyd and 29th Streets.

Finally the Socialists amended the constitution so as to do away with the office of president altogether, a chairman being elected for each meeting.

The first meeting under the new arrangement was opened by the secretary, George Moerschall, now a Socialist supervisor, and much to Coughlin's disgust the chairman chosen was able to conduct the meeting successfully. One evening the Coughlinites locked horns with their opponents and when Frank Weber as chairman ruled against them they bolted the council. Coughlin, a Democratic politician named Mike Walsh, and others then formed the Industrial Council.

They sent a protest to the American Federation of Labor, with a demand that the charter of the Federated Trades Council be taken away. The decision went flat against them, and their dual body enjoyed a short life.

In 1895 the trades council met in Miller's Hall, 3rd and State Streets, and later removed to Union Labor Hall, 6th and Chestnut Streets. There the final quietus was given the genus labor fakir in Milwaukee in 1900, when we all enjoyed the sight of 12 tricksters walking the plank on one single evening, never to return. The ventilation at this hall was poor and later Kaiser's Hall (now Catel's Hall), on 4th Street, was secured as a meeting place, to be in turn abandoned because the growth of the body demanded more elbow room. The council then moved a block farther south to the Freie Gemeinde Hall, where the council still meets, on the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

For a number of years the board of officers of the council has been composed of Social Democrats. The present officers are: Frederic Heath, recording secretary; John Reichert, corresponding secretary; Emil Brodde, financial secretary-treasurer; Michael Weisenfluh, sergeant at arms; Frank J. Weber, business agent.

The business offices of the council, as well as the headquarters of several of the unions, is at 318 State Street, where business agent Weber and Secretary Reichert can be found during the day.

And thus we may consider our trip at a close, save that we may best alight a few blocks farther west and north, where the Herald's new Labor-Socialist temple is now up to four stories. When it is completed and occupied, a new chapter of the splendidly advancing rise of organized labor in Milwaukee will begin.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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