



# Solid Men in the Granite City: Municipal Socialism in Barre, Vermont, 1916-1931

*Between 1916 and 1931 Barre, Vermont, elected two socialist mayors, Robert Gordon and Fred Sutor. Future Republican governor Deane Davis worked in both administrations and declared both men “good mayors” and pronounced them “conservative.” Did it matter that Gordon and Sutor were socialists?*

BY ROBERT E. WEIR

**B**ritish trade unionist John Elliot Burns (1858-1943) once observed, “Socialism to succeed must be practical, tolerant, cohesive, and consciously compromising with Progressive forces running, if not so far, in parallel lines towards its own goal.”<sup>1</sup> That could have been the mantra of Robert Gordon, who served as the mayor of Barre, Vermont, in 1916, or Fred Sutor, the mayor from 1929 into 1931.

Few words in the English language are as misunderstood as “socialism,” a catchall term that encompasses a broad spectrum running a left-of-center gamut from mystical religious communitarianism on the cautious end to revolutionary anarcho-syndicalism on the opposite pole. In popular parlance, socialism is used mainly as a pejorative term to denounce social programs funded by tax dollars, or as a synonym for revolutionary Marxism—though

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ROBERT E. WEIR is a former Vermont high school teacher who now teaches history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and at Smith College. He has published seven books and numerous articles on U.S. social, cultural, and labor history and is a former senior Fulbright Fellow (New Zealand).

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the latter is one of many varieties of socialism that neither Gordon nor Sutor would have supported. Like the vast majority of American socialists, they were evolutionary, not revolutionary, socialists. Although American socialism is often refracted through a Marxist lens, in practice the ballot box social democracy of Ferdinand Lassalle (1824-1864) has claimed more American adherents than to-the-barricades revolutionary ideals—much to the chagrin and criticism of doctrinaire Marxists.<sup>2</sup>

Werner Sombart and Selig Perlman famously set the tone for academic debate over American socialism, Sombart by declaring there was, relatively speaking, “no” socialism in the United States, and Perlman by insisting that American workers were more swayed by parochial job consciousness than by universalistic class consciousness of socialism.<sup>3</sup> Each overstated his case, but conventional wisdom (and a considerable body of scholarship) holds that, within the United States, socialism’s promise has been frustrated.<sup>4</sup> In 1995, Michael Kazin charged that historians had found little to counter Daniel Bell’s 1952 assertion that socialism was “an unbounded dream” unable to reconcile its romantic yearnings with American social and political reality.<sup>5</sup>

It is certainly true that revolutionary collectivist movements from the International Workingmen’s Association in the 1880s through the Industrial Workers of the World in the early twentieth-century met with swift and harsh repression. Nor did erstwhile American labor parties such as the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party of America, and the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance pose more than minor challenges to dominant Republicans and Democrats. Quasi-socialist groups such as the Greenback Labor Party, the United Labor Party, the Populists, and the Farm-Labor Party won occasional ballot box victories, but failed to undergo Western European-like transmogrification into full-fledged labor parties with broad public appeal. In the twentieth-century, only a handful of socialists attained national office, and none did so between Leo Isacson’s single term in Congress in 1948-49, and Bernard Sanders’s election to the House of Representatives in 1990.<sup>6</sup>

Overlooked in discussions of stillborn third party movements is the pragmatic world of municipal socialism. In the late nineteenth century, theory-oriented American socialists dreamed of appropriating railroads; by the early twentieth, municipal socialists like Gordon and Sutor turned to more prosaic tasks such as convincing traction companies to grade and pave crossings in cities whose streets their rails traversed. They too harbored collectivist aspirations, though they seldom had the luxury of dreaming beyond the next city budget. In this, they were typical of American socialism as praxis. Gordon and Sutor challenge the way in which pre-World War II political life is popularly understood, especially the Progressive movement. They also suggest models for future third-party aspirants.

This study verifies the famed dictum of former Democratic Speaker of the House Thomas “Tip” O’Neill: “All politics is local.” The findings of municipal socialism scholars such as Bruce Stave, Sally Miller, Gail Radford, Richard W. Judd, and James Weinstein echo O’Neill.<sup>7</sup> Their work further suggests that the narrative of ballot box socialism is best told one city at a time, though very few historians have done so since 1990.<sup>8</sup>

Municipal socialism is understudied these days, but its practice was widespread in the early twentieth century. As Weinstein documented, Sombart’s dismissal of socialism looked rather foolish the moment he issued it. Some 1,200 socialists were elected to various political offices in 340 American cities between 1912 and the 1919 Red Scare.<sup>9</sup> Barre’s Robert Gordon took office during that period of heightened socialist awareness. Perlman wrote after the Red Scare decimated left-leaning movements, yet Barre elected Fred Sutor to two terms between 1929 and 1931, a period of alleged socialist moribundity.

Neglect often stems from an inability to “see” early-twentieth-century socialism. Former Vermont governor Deane Davis (1900-90), a Republican who knew Gordon and Sutor well, remarked that they “were not only good mayors but can be numbered among the most conservative mayors Barre ever had.”<sup>10</sup> Davis exaggerated their conservatism, because the bulk of their achievements fell into the category of “sewer socialism,” a term popularized by ideologues dismissive of electoral politics, coalition building, and cooperation with the business community.

Like officials nationwide, Barre’s socialist mayors were called upon to deal with rapid social, political, and technological change; but it mattered that Gordon and Sutor were socialists, even though their minority political status forced modification of their ideals. Each showed how leftist politicians exercised power within a larger system of capitalist dominance, tactics practiced also by Vermont’s most famous socialist, Bernard Sanders. Socialism as practiced in Barre reiterates the point made by earlier scholars that nuts-and-bolts achievements of twentieth-century socialism lurk in the yellowing pages of town reports, city newspapers, and old-fashioned library vertical files. Among their revelations is that municipal socialists often delivered better government than more celebrated Progressive reformers.

#### THE ORDINARY *VERSUS* THE EXCEPTIONAL

Community studies often commence by assuring readers that the city in question is representative of larger trends—perhaps a microcosm of the nation itself. Such claims are problematic for municipal socialism. From 1949 to 1991, just six American cities elected socialist mayors, including Burlington, Vermont. Not much can be inferred from such a small sample. Similar caution applies for socialism’s apex—the 340 municipalities that elected so-

cialist officials were a small percentage of the overall urban total.<sup>11</sup> Barre, like all cities where socialists took power, was exceptional, not ordinary.

Barre<sup>12</sup> was a typical Progressive Era city in some respects. First, its social makeup was recast by immigration. By 1920, the bulk of the citizenry of numerous cities consisted of first- and second-generation immigrants.<sup>13</sup> Barre's first immigrant infusion was of Scottish stonemasons in 1880; Russian Jews, Swedes, French Canadians, French, Irish, Italians, Spaniards, Poles, Lebanese, Greeks, and Finns quickly followed. By 1910, Italians surpassed Scots as Barre's largest ethnic enclave.<sup>14</sup> Barre's 300 percent population increase (from 2,068 to 6,812) between 1880 and 1890 is the highest ten-year gain in Vermont history. Nearly half of it came from immigration.<sup>15</sup>

Barre's working-class majority was also typical. Industrialization remade Barre as it had other municipalities in the late nineteenth century. Its population jumped from just 1,700 in 1870 to over 10,000 in less than twenty-five years because it offered blue-collar opportunities for new residents. Neither immigration nor a working-class majority preconditioned Barre for socialism. The working class was the numerical majority in most early twentieth-century cities, but few saw laborers wield social or political power.

Barre's exceptional nature yielded its atypical political development. There can be only one world's largest supplier of granite, and Barre was it. Founded as an agricultural settlement in 1780, Barre would have remained a hamlet were it not for granite. Vermont's soil and climate yielded hardscrabble agricultural subsistence at best, and many among Barre's first generation of settlers simply moved on. The first granite quarry opened in 1813, but its small-scale production merely stabilized Barre's population base. Prior to railroads, granite producers faced daunting challenges in getting their unwieldy product to market. The industry's take-off period can be precisely dated. In 1875, the Central Vermont Railroad ran a spur into Barre, quarrying began in earnest, and immigrant labor appeared. When the first Scottish stonemasons arrived in 1880, Robert Gordon was among them.

Barre was also unique in that granite entrepreneurs resembled antebellum paternalists more than the industrial and finance capitalists of the robber baron era. The granite industry consisted of two major activities: quarrying and finishing work. In 1889, manufacturers and quarry owners formed the Barre Granite Association (BGA), but the BGA had a paternalist character. Barre granite was not dominated by monopolies and trusts. Dozens of small quarries and shops dotted the area, many of them owned by men who once toiled in the industry. North Barre Granite employed just twenty-five men in its carving shed; Barclay Brothers (founded in 1897) was one of the larger firms, with sixty full-time workers. Edward Glysson, who followed Robert Gordon as mayor of Barre, opened his shop in 1909 with thirty-three workers, including Gordon. The largest shop by far was the Jones Brothers Gran-

ite Plant, whose 500 employees—a peak achieved when Gordon was mayor—made it the world’s largest granite manufacturer. Most of the quarry owners also operated modest concerns; typical was Hamilton Webster, whose ninety-acre pit opened in 1883 with a handful of employees.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the entrepreneurs were self-made men, immigrants, or their offspring. William Barclay Sr. hailed from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, and was once a granite cutter’s apprentice. George Robins, co-owner of Robins Brothers, was a former quarry worker. Charles Smith, of the Smith Brothers concern, was a former cutter, and his brother A. A. previously ran a general store.<sup>17</sup> Because most manufacturers lived in or near Barre, there was considerably less social distance between employers and employees than one found in most late-nineteenth-century industrial cities. Numerous owners belonged to the same fraternal organizations as their workers—Clan Gordon and the Burns Club were favorites among Scots. Several employers also became political leaders, including Barre’s first mayor, granite shed owner Emory L. Smith (1895-96), and mayors William Barclay (1904-07) and Edward Glysson (1917-20). By 1905, Barre had approximately 2,000 granite workers, of whom 1,400 were stonecutters. Experienced cutters made about \$2.50 per day and frequently felt more camaraderie with self-made employers than with the elitist carvers and finishers who earned twice their pay. Even when strikes altered social dynamics, worker wrath generally focused on individuals, not the capitalist economic system.

Granite made Barre different in a more chilling respect. American industrial and social statistics were grim overall, but Barre’s were worse than most. Silicosis and tuberculosis thrived in industries where stone dust floated freely in unventilated sheds, and in pits where cutters worked without filters or masks. In 1900, the average American died at fifty; in Barre they passed at forty-two. Stone workers suffered mortality rates 33 percent higher than the general populace into the 1940s, and air quality did not substantially improve until the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.<sup>18</sup> As former granite worker Mose Cerasoli recalled, “The stone chips . . . gradually chew up your lungs.”<sup>19</sup> Early death was a salient theme in oral histories collected by the Federal Writers’ Project in Barre between 1936 and 1940. Italian-born Giacomo Colette guiltily recalled sending “glowing letters” to his boyhood friend, Pietro, who immigrated to Barre and took up the stonecutting trade that killed him. As Colette related to scribe Mary Tomasi, “These last two nights were an excruciating nightmare of thinking if Pietro had stayed in the old country perhaps he would not now be lying dead from . . . stone-cutter’s TB.”<sup>20</sup> Roaldus Richmond starkly summed up life in Barre: “I cut stone all my life and I drank all my life. Both will kill a man in his forties.”<sup>21</sup>

Grim social statistics and seasonal unemployment led to restive workers. Two major unions represented Barre workers, the more moderate Granite

Cutters International Association (GCIA), an American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliate; and the Quarry Workers International Union (QWIU), also ostensibly an AFL union, though one dominated by Italian anarchists who butted heads with AFL leaders.

Barre's unionization levels were stunning. At no time during the period between 1900 and 1917 did more than 7 percent of American workers belong to labor unions; in Barre nearly 90 percent of the city's workforce—including non-granite workers—was unionized.<sup>22</sup> A small granite strike in 1903 presaged more dramatic upheaval the following year, when some 3,000 workers were locked out when 200 tool sharpeners struck.<sup>23</sup> Other bitter labor confrontations rocked Barre. In March 1908, some 4,500 workers struck, followed by walkouts in 1909-10, 1915, 1922, 1933, and 1938. Wages and dust were at the heart of all but the 1922 struggle, which was precipitated by attempts to impose an anti-union "American Plan" on Barre workers.<sup>24</sup>

Barre's volatile labor relations made it a hotbed of radicalism. In 1900, six Italian anarchists were charged in the near-fatal shooting of Barre Police Chief Patrick Brown.<sup>25</sup> Barre was home or lecture venue to myriad firebrands, including famed anarchist Luigi Galleani, who published *Cronaca Sovversiva*. Emma Goldman visited the city in 1899, 1907, and 1911. Bill Haywood of the Industrial Workers of the World spoke there in 1909, as did Eugene Debs the following year. The Socialist Labor Party Hall, built in 1900, just a block off Barre's main street, featured a carved arm and hammer and the initials "SLP" ornamenting a space above its main entrance.<sup>26</sup> In 1912, it was the gathering point for dozens of children of striking Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile workers, before they were placed with local families.<sup>27</sup>

Barre's radicals created a political climate that differed markedly from the rest of Vermont and the nation. The Republican Party held a near monopoly on Vermont politics. After 1853, the party would not relinquish the governor's chair for 109 years, and the state was so thoroughly Republican that not even Franklin Roosevelt loosened the GOP grip; it and Maine were the only states not to go for Roosevelt at least once. When Harry Truman stood for election in 1948, he didn't bother to campaign in Vermont.<sup>28</sup>

Vermont's local politics were generally just as homogeneous, save for 1886, when the United Labor Party—a coalition of Knights of Labor, renegade Democrats, and small businessmen—captured control of the city of Rutland. The specter of working-class government alarmed Republican Party stalwart, former governor, and marble entrepreneur Redfield Proctor, who engineered radical gerrymandering and a Republican/big business/Democrat fusion ticket (the Citizens Party) that quashed the ULP challenge. A strike in 1904 led to a brief moment in which a former Knight of Labor became Rutland's mayor, but the GOP quickly reasserted itself.<sup>29</sup>

Once the ULP challenge was turned aside, Republicans held power in

most towns and cities. Barre, however, proved difficult. Republicans dominated its business class, but it was a union city with a large working-class majority and numerous recent immigrants. In such an environment, popular will was often expressed in strikes, public rallies, union meetings, and mob outbursts. This was especially true of Italian immigrants, most of whom had little experience in electoral politics but plenty with direct action.<sup>30</sup> Whether or not they cast ballots, socialists and anarchists outnumbered Republicans and Democrats by such a considerable margin that Barre's elites concocted elaborate structural safeguards to deter electoral expressions of discontent.

Republicans and Democrats each held mayoral and aldermanic posts in the years before Robert Gordon was elected, though political contests were more sham than substance.<sup>31</sup> The first Tuesday of March was Town Meeting Day in Vermont. In Barre, it was the occasion to vote on a city budget and elect a mayor, board of aldermen, and other city officials to one-year terms. Beginning in 1904, Barre elites plotted to make elections more predictable. In February the city held a "Citizens' Caucus" several weeks before Town Meeting Day. Like Rutland's Citizens Party, Barre's caucus exploited local ethnic and ideological divisions to forestall grassroots surprises. During the caucuses, registered voters cast ballots for candidates that would carry the Citizens' Caucus label on Town Meeting Day, the Citizen's Caucus being the only "official" party in the city. The *Barre Daily Times* proclaimed this an "amicable" way to ensure that party labels did not lead voters to select candidates with "slight qualifications," though historian Paul Demers astutely observes that its real purpose was to make certain "that the right people were nominated and then elected."<sup>32</sup> Republicans and Democrats took part in the same primary, fashioned from a pre-approved list of candidates. Although just 10-15 percent of the total electorate cast caucus votes, the Citizens' Caucus slate was duly endorsed by the local paper, and nearly always won election in March.

It was a cozy arrangement with the added advantage of allowing the left to bloody itself. Socialists began contesting elections in the first decade of the twentieth century, though they splintered between the doctrinaire Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the more cautious Socialist Party of America (SP) associated with Eugene Debs. Internecine quarrels blunted electoral strength; Barre's first SP mayoral candidate, manufacturer William Scott, got just seventy-seven votes in 1905.<sup>33</sup> Just five years later, Barre SP candidate William Earle—denied the Citizens' Caucus endorsement—missed election to the Vermont legislature by just thirty-three votes. Had the SLP not split the vote, Earle would have won.

Robert Gordon achieved election in 1916 by cleverly turning the tables on the Citizens' Caucus. He positioned the SP as Barre's moderate middle by tarring the SLP's Workingmen's Party as quixotic contrarians serving only to

elect conservative Republicans or Democrats, and contrasting his SP to anarchists, many of whom were viewed as violent. It helped that his charges rang true. Barre's Italian anarchists tended to be doctrinaire and disputatious to a fault. Although anarchists helped build the Socialist Labor Party Hall, they frequently quarreled with other left-leaning groups. In a well-remembered 1903 incident, anarchists disrupted an SLP speaker from New York, gunfire ensued, and celebrated local artist Elia Corti was killed. Corti was an innocent—a skilled carver among whose works was the local Robert Burns statue.<sup>34</sup>

Corti's death shocked Barre, but it didn't curtail the animosity between anarchists and everyone to their political right. One measure of this is an error found in Emma Goldman's autobiography, in which she sarcastically referenced an 1899 trip to Barre, when Vermont was "under the blessings of Prohibition." She also claimed that she and Luigi Galleani observed various city officials, including Mayor Gordon (misidentified in some sources as "Robert" Gordon) and the chief of police "under the influence of alcohol." According to Goldman, their embarrassing revelations led to persecutions, including the cancelation of one of her speeches and an effort to silence Galleani.<sup>35</sup>

These incidents simply couldn't have happened the way Goldman reported them. Vermont passed an alcohol prohibition law in 1852, but many municipalities, including Barre, ignored them. Few Barre residents would have been shocked to see a city official drinking and, in 1903, the city overwhelmingly approved a local option law that supplanted the 1852 law. Barre residents (allegedly) went dry with the rest of the nation in 1919, though state voters soundly defeated several prohibition amendments before the Volstead Act went into effect.<sup>36</sup> Second, Galleani was not in Barre until 1901, two years after Goldman's first visit. In 1899, Barre's mayor was *John W. Gordon* and the police chief was the very Patrick Brown gunned down by anarchists in 1900. Perhaps Goldman mistakenly conflated events, though it's just as likely she sought to besmirch *Robert Gordon*. As a SP socialist, Mayor Gordon disliked Goldman and Galleani personally and thought them politically dangerous. It would not have been out of character for Goldman to exact *ex post facto* revenge.

### THE RISE OF ROBERT GORDON

Evidence suggests we should downplay both the anarchists' distrust of the SP and Deane Davis's view that Robert Gordon was a conservative mayor. Historians poring over town reports generally do so in search of data, not drama. Barre's yearly reports open with a listing of town officials and generalized departmental summaries by various officials, including the mayor. These give way to matter-of-fact overviews of aldermanic meetings compiled chronicle style from the town clerk's notes.

Yet the city's reckoning for 1916—officially accepted in February of 1917—contains a message from Mayor Gordon, whose tone and content is unlike anything else found in the volumes. Gordon touted city progress, as he was expected to do, but abruptly abandoned the boosterish tone of his predecessors to note:

We all believe in low taxation, but there is another matter of more vital importance to our little city than low taxes, namely the health of our workmen. We hear of capitalists, who won't invest in Barre on account of a high tax rate, but the time is coming when the workman will not sell his labor here on account of unhealthy conditions. Look around the granite sheds and see how few apprentices are learning the trade to-day, not one where there were five[,] ten years ago... Something has to be done to improve the health conditions in the granite sheds, for men are learning that high wages don't mean much if you are down and out at fifty.<sup>37</sup>

Gordon understood the working class because he was, for his entire life, a member of it. He was born in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, in 1865, came to Barre in 1880, and took up stonecutting three years later. In 1893, Gordon married a Scottish immigrant living in Barre, Georgina Davidson, with whom he had four children. When Georgina died, he married her sister Barbara, who bore him a daughter. All of the Gordon children attended Barre's Spaulding Academy, and the entire family took part in the city's lively Scottish cultural scene. The civic-minded Gordon served as treasurer for Clan Gordon and was an active Freemason. He worked for the firm of McDonald and Buchan, which was purchased in 1909 by Eugene Glysson, who would become a political rival. The \$1,000 salary Gordon drew during his year as Barre's mayor was, perhaps, the highest pay he ever saw.<sup>38</sup>



*Robert Gordon*

Gordon made his first bid for mayor as the candidate for the SP in 1912, and might have won if the Central Labor Union—dominated by the AFL's more conservative Granite Cutters International Association—had not thrown its support to sitting mayor James Mutch, a GCIA member running as an Independent Labor candidate. The GCIA decision angered the SP; Mayor Mutch had proved friendlier to businessmen than to fellow unionists, and the

latter responded by ignoring him on Election Day. Robert Gordon's 311 votes were more than enough to unseat Mutch and elect Lucius Thurston, who headed the Board of Trade and was endorsed by the Citizens' Caucus.<sup>39</sup>

Labor tension produced more unity among union voters in subsequent elections. Granite was a \$1.2 million industry for Barre's thirty quarries, but low wages plagued many Barre workers. Gordon welcomed Eugene Debs, who spoke in Barre during a 1910 strike, and applauded Debs's desire to "turn on the light in the workingman's brain" and make him realize that "working people have always been regarded as the lower class." Debs exhorted Barre workers to be distrustful of salaried labor leaders and to cast their votes for those who truly represented their interests.<sup>40</sup> When Barre endured another strike in 1915, many workers concluded that Mayor Frank Langley, the editor of the *Barre Daily Times*, was too cozy with owners.

By early 1916, Langley was in more trouble than his paper let on, and his woes went beyond the previous year's strike. Although the city finances were in good shape, Italians in the city's north end complained that the mayor's no-bid deal with garbage haulers ill served their wards. A new GCIA strike loomed, as did another vote on state prohibition, a dispute over the local charter, and an ongoing battle with a local traction company. Although the *BDT* announced in mid-February that there was "scarcely an outward indication that anyone is seeking office" and the Citizens' Caucus overwhelmingly endorsed Langley's reelection, Town Meeting Day brought a big surprise.<sup>41</sup>

Despite bitter cold and a heavy snowstorm on March 7, 1,700 of the city's 2,060 registered voters went to the polls. Prohibition was soundly rejected by a vote of 1,158 to 517 and Robert Gordon defeated Langley by a margin of nearly 17 percent (842 to 601). The only other socialist elected to city office was Clyde Reynolds in Ward Four, who defeated an incumbent alderman by eight votes. Aldermen quickly approved twenty-three of Gordon's twenty-four appointees, rejecting only his choice for parks commissioner—Fred Suito, who thirteen years later would become Barre's second SP mayor. Gordon's employer, Eugene Glysson, was elected president of the Board of Aldermen.<sup>42</sup>

Gordon was a popular but shy man who preferred to pick his battles carefully, a needed temperament in Barre's increasingly fractious political environment. His \$238,363 budget included money for streetlights, sidewalks, and sewer repairs. Gordon also waded into three controversies: investing city accounts, paving Main Street, and renting the local opera house. Each of these seemingly trivial issues became a constant thorn in Gordon's side.<sup>43</sup>

As Gordon quickly learned, the everyday machinations of local government waylaid visions of remaking society along socialist lines. Gordon found that even modest proposals faced contentious roadblocks, not the least of which was a citizenry prone to viewing politics on the neighborhood level

rather than ideologically. Gordon's year in office was consumed by bitter disputes over mundane matters such as reimbursing locals for chickens killed by stray dogs, sprinkling oil on dusty streets, issuing building permits, loitering outside bars, and rumors that Mormons were recruiting Barre residents.<sup>44</sup>

Had Gordon been a typical Progressive Era mayor, he would have referred most of those items to committees. Such a course, though, was inconsistent with his commitment to fair play, civic responsibility, ending favoritism, and open government. Gordon made several structural changes that made Barre government more democratic, not the least of which was that his very election broke the monopoly of the "middle-class interests" embodied in the Citizens' Caucus. But caution was a necessary byword; until the fall election, when Barre sent James Lawson to the Vermont legislature, Gordon and Reynolds were the only elected socialists in the entire state, and they clashed as often as they allied.<sup>45</sup>

Gordon's first significant battle was with the Barre Savings Bank and Trust Company, which held the city's sinking fund—monies set aside to retire future debt. The bank had long held city assets, but Gordon felt its terms exposed the city to too much risk. Barre Savings offered to pay the city a 4.76 percent interest rate on its deposits, but it categorically refused Gordon's request that it secure the city's \$62,000 deposit with a \$30,000 bond. In an era before insurance was required of commercial banks, Gordon feared that non-bonded deposits were an invitation to gamble with city funds. When Barre Savings refused to budge, Gordon cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of Glysson's motion to divide the sinking fund among three other banks and accept lower interest rates in exchange for bonded deposits. Among those who disagreed was fellow SP member Clyde Reynolds.<sup>46</sup> Battles raged throughout the month of April, but Gordon proved his mettle by refusing to buckle under pressure applied by the bank and rival aldermen.<sup>47</sup> He also enjoyed popular support among a city electorate ill disposed to side with a large bank.

Although Vermont had no "sunshine laws" requiring open access to meetings or city planning boards, Gordon encouraged citizen input at government meetings. Citizens had their say over street-paving and sidewalk-building proposals. Reynolds opposed the mayor's plan to repave Main Street and argued that it involved taking on \$48,000 in debt. Gordon, backed by various speakers, overcame Reynolds's objection, only to falter over the question of whether to grade a streetcar crossing or build a bridge over it. Ex-mayor Harvey Hershey (1900-01) spoke out against the entire plan, and the Barre and Montpelier Traction Company (BMTC) refused to help defray the cost of paving the controversial crossing. The mayor's initial plan was defeated in a June vote.<sup>48</sup>

In July, the board authorized an \$82,500 bond for three city projects, two of which involved a pared-down version of the Main Street paving project.

Reynolds's triumph was less than meets the eye, as a face-saving "compromise" was forged when it was clear that Gordon's plan enjoyed popular support. The aldermanic board split the paving plan into two bills, a \$33,500 bond for paving, and a \$14,000 appropriation to build a bridge over the crossing—a cumulative package just \$500 less than Gordon's initial request.<sup>49</sup> Gordon then pressured the BMTC by threatening to municipalize the city's traction system. The board split three-to-three on that plan, with Gordon casting the deciding affirmative vote (and Reynolds again in opposition).

Gordon's municipalization threat was probably a shakedown ploy, as a September report stalled the project because the city was \$2,000 short on paving funds. The plan absorbed another blow when the aldermanic board abandoned bridge plans when the lowest building bid exceeded appropriations by more than \$20,000.<sup>50</sup> A more modest paving went forward, which led some aldermen to charge "favoritism" in how the work took place. Public debate was so heated—most of the ire directed at the BMTC and at aldermen—that the *Barre Daily Times* referred to it as "verbal manslaughter."<sup>51</sup>

In June, Mayor Gordon showed a bit of pique of his own by voting against a previously approved \$1,000 expenditure for sixteen Opera House concerts by the Barre Citizens' Band. One alderman charged that the ensemble represented "radical labor," but Gordon's motives were less clear. Perhaps he was flexing political muscle or perhaps, as he publicly stated, he was uncomfortable with how the contract had been drawn. But given that the bandleader was Italian and many of the musicians were anarchists, Gordon might have been exacting SP revenge. He quietly stepped away from the battle when a reconfigured contract was signed.<sup>52</sup>

Gordon attended to all manner of citizen initiatives: investigating grievances of low water pressure, authorizing a study on improving lighting in Depot Square, making appointments to city departments, finagling city insurance liability, building a Civil War monument, setting tax rates, and approving purchase of a new truck for the street department.<sup>53</sup> Such issues were seldom free of conflict. For example, Gordon inherited office at a time when new inspections changed the city's fire insurance rating and liability. He supported a plan that lowered fire insurance for most property owners. This pleased most Barre residents, but those renting the Opera House or operating theaters complained of higher costs. Eventually a compromise was struck that pegged rates to the potential size of audiences.<sup>54</sup>

Taxes and trucks proved no less argumentative. In June, the aldermanic board approved a ten-cent property tax hike, prompting immediate and numerous appeals for abatement. Nearly all were dismissed, though the city waived poll taxes for active servicemen, a nod to patriotism at a time when troops were in Mexico pursuing Pancho Villa and mobilization was on the rise in the wake of bleak reports from the Verdun campaign in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

In May, Gordon dispatched a seemingly routine matter by approving the water department's \$3,100 request to modernize by buying a motorized truck. Alderman Oliver Shurtleff objected, insisting that renting horses was cheaper.<sup>56</sup> The debate raged into August with still another three-to-three vote forcing Gordon to break the tie. In what was now standard practice, "angry words had been let loose," and Reynolds again proved to be no comrade of the mayor.<sup>57</sup> By the late fall, even routine matters led to acrimony. For example, a simple appointment to the board of health provided opportunity for Reynolds to complain about the police department.<sup>58</sup>

Mayor Gordon proved adroit at listening to Barre citizens, improving the city's utilities, supporting the cause of organized labor, and in taking on Central Power Company. His most overtly socialist action was to municipalize coal purchasing and distribution. A dispute that led to an "enervating temperature" rise took place in August, when Gordon announced plans to purchase all of the city's coal from a cooperative firm that charged \$43 less per each "50-ton jag." For once, though, Gordon and Reynolds were allies; Barre established a municipal coal yard over the howling complaints of coal dealers and two aldermen.<sup>59</sup>

Improving the city's sewer and water systems proved less controversial. At Gordon's urging, aldermen responded to complaints of low water pressure and, in July, authorized \$35,000 to extend water lines and put in larger mains. In November, the board developed plans to extend improvements to the South End, where water problems were acute. Although Gordon was out of office by the time much of the building actually took place, his actions guaranteed that improvements *would* take place. When he stepped down, the city had more than thirty-five miles of water lines and the water department had a \$17,000 surplus. Gordon's support of this classic "sewer socialism" program ultimately improved the quality of life for Barre citizens.<sup>60</sup> Not coincidentally, Gordon's water plan also eventually led to an expansion of the fire department.

Gordon was an ally of local unions, whose support he often solicited. He even welcomed AFL President Samuel Gompers to Barre, though as a Debsian socialist he had profound disagreements with the AFL. Gordon was, however, a good friend of Fred Sutor, who was president of both the local tool sharpeners union and the Vermont AFL.<sup>61</sup> Gordon personally felt that a more vigorous form of socialism was in order, and he supported the November SP campaigns of W. R. Rowland for governor, N. E. Grenslet for U.S. Senate, and James Spargo and J. P. Marsh for Congress. He also supported local socialist candidates James Lawson and John Callaghan, and the former was victorious. Gordon maintained a discreet silence on Reynolds's woeful showing in a four-way race for secretary of state.<sup>62</sup>

Historian Charles Morrissey subtitled a chapter of his book on Vermont

“Hard Living in a Hard Place.”<sup>63</sup> It is a sentiment Mayor Gordon understood and hoped to change. In January 1917, Antonio Bianchi, an immigrant granite worker, shot himself. Bianchi’s unsuccessful suicide attempt was dismissed as “temporary insanity,” but evidence suggests he was a desperately lonely young man who adjusted neither to backbreaking labor nor life within politically polarized Barre.<sup>64</sup> Just one week later, Mayor Gordon delivered his state of the city message, which included a side remark about “foolish” disputes over the streets department and the aforementioned plea to improve worker health. Gordon ended his remarks with a call for better care of the poor and more attention to workers in general. He left no doubt that he valued worker health and happiness over low taxes, though he bequeathed to his successors the challenge of reversing the city’s working-class social statistics.<sup>65</sup>

He also left an ongoing battle with Central Power Company (CPC), a firm he found contemptuous of the public. The dispute was rooted in Barre’s entry into the electric age. Central Power sought to run transmission lines through Barre, but needed to negotiate permits and fees with the city. Gordon and allied aldermen refused to grant permission until Central Power made commitments as to when the work would be finished and how much it would charge for lighting. When the CPC balked, Gordon sided with aldermen willing to grant a twenty-five-year franchise only if CPC put up a \$1,000 bond guaranteeing that service would begin no later than July 1, 1918. If it did not meet that target, the city would be free to negotiate with another company.<sup>66</sup>

The CPC rejected those terms, attempted to split the board, and found a concessions champion in Eugene Glysson. Company officials attended a January board meeting with Attorney F. B. Thomas in tow and objected to several contract clauses, including the completion date, a Gordon-sponsored clause that would make CPC pay losses incurred by power interruption, and a prohibition against charging customers to install meters. Gordon promptly reminded Attorney Thomas that CPC officials had *written* several of the very clauses they now wished to strike. The company’s stridency backfired and no deal was accomplished during Gordon’s term of office.<sup>67</sup>

Gordon was committed to striking good deals for the city. When just one estimate came in for printing city documents, he ordered bids to be re-opened. In his January budget he announced that the city had a small surplus, and he welcomed comments from ex-Mayor Melcher and others supporting his refusal to grant concessions to Central Power. But Gordon also announced that he was “done with politics” and would not run for reelection in March. Numerous potential candidates announced their willingness to serve, including Fred Sutor and aldermen Shurtleff and Glysson.<sup>68</sup>

The Citizens’ Caucus chose Glysson over Sutor by a 311 to 126 margin,

which gave Glysson a boost, though his 842-716 margin of victory over Suitoer was closer than anticipated.<sup>69</sup> Mayor Glysson granted concessions to CPC, though it and the Central Vermont Public Service Corporation, which absorbed CPC in 1929, were accused of overcharging customers.<sup>70</sup> Glysson soon had bigger concerns; the April 3 issue of the *Barre Daily Times* bore the banner headline, "State of War Between the U.S. and Germany."<sup>71</sup> Almost immediately the street department ran low on funds and a city budget based on austerity, sacrifice, and rationing remained in effect until after World War I. Glysson's accomplishments failed to match Gordon's.

Gordon's decision to step down remains open to speculation. His Socialist Party opposed the war in Europe, so perhaps he anticipated the political maelstrom unleashed by the proposed Espionage Act. He was also a quiet man who was likely surprised by the pettiness of local politics (some of which his open policies encouraged). Or, perhaps, Gordon was simply tired. He, like mayors everywhere, faced new realities that rendered old-style city governing obsolete. When Gordon took office, Barre had just 41.3 miles of graded roads—more than adequate for a horse-and-carriage city in which automobiles were a novelty. Most residents still had wells, dug latrines, and lighted with kerosene. By the time he left, the city was actively paving roads, installing water and sewer systems, purchasing motorized vehicles, installing gas pumps, and debating how best to bring electricity to residents. In the same report in which he called for addressing the needs of workers, Gordon apologized for spending nearly 60 percent more on the street department than his predecessors. He noted that "ever increasing motor traffic makes the expense of the street dept. increase each year," and that heavier motorcars exposed the "defects" of existing roads. He begged consideration of such matters "before passing judgment" on spending for, among other things, a stone crusher used in street paving.<sup>72</sup>

The demands of bringing Barre into the modern age further frustrated any plans Gordon had to advance the SP platform. He made Barre government more responsive, but the municipal coal yard and city-owned water lines were his greatest "socialist" achievements. On the undone side of the ledger were SP programs such as an eight-hour day for city employees, union printing contracts, free medical care, revamping the tax code to penalize speculators, free evening school for those wishing to continue their education, and constructing a municipally owned hospital and tuberculosis sanitarium.<sup>73</sup>

The last of these is probably why Gordon stepped down. He was fifty-two when he left office, an old man by stonecutter standards, and he suffered the aftereffects of the working conditions against which he spoke so passionately. Because Barre never built a sanitarium, Gordon relocated to a TB hospital in Lynn, Massachusetts, where he died at age fifty-six on November 1, 1921.<sup>74</sup>

### FRED SUITOR AND SIDEWALK SOCIALISM

Municipal socialists were sometimes lampooned as “sewer socialists,” but Fred Sutor, Barre’s mayor from March 1929 to March 1931, invited the label “sidewalk socialist.” Sutor, like Gordon, was a self-proclaimed socialist, though his mayoralty was cut from somewhat different cloth. First, he was elected as a Citizens’ Caucus candidate, not an SP candidate. Second, he was also a devoted AFL trade unionist.



*Fred Sutor*

Sutor was born in Leeds, Québec, in 1879, and worked part-time in a copper mine while attending grammar school. His family relocated to Barre in 1892, and Sutor eventually worked as a quarry blacksmith. In 1908, he became the business agent for the Quarry Workers International Union in nearby Graniteville, and for the rest of his life, Sutor was a union bureaucrat. He served as secretary-treasurer for the QWIU from 1910 until his death in 1934. He was variously president of Vermont’s state American Federation of Labor affiliate, treasurer of Barre’s Central Labor Union, and delegate to countless AFL conventions. He was also active in Clan Gordon, the Order of

Scottish Clans, the Red Cross, and a local Freemason lodge.<sup>75</sup> In all likelihood, Sutor first befriended Gordon through fraternal organizations.

Sutor was also politically active. In 1912, he was the SP’s quixotic gubernatorial candidate, finishing last in a field of five, attracting just 1.9 percent of the vote.<sup>76</sup> Although he was frustrated in his bid to become Mayor Gordon’s parks commissioner in 1916, he was organized labor’s preferred candidate when Gordon announced he would not seek reelection. It took a dozen years for that to become reality.

Much had changed between 1917 and 1929. World War I proved disastrous for the Socialist Party. Although some members broke ranks and supported the war effort, SP members were indiscriminately victimized during the postwar Red Scare. The 915,302 votes for president that Eugene Debs polled during his jail cell campaign for president in 1920 was a noble moment for the SP, but his party was in decline. Victor Berger was thrice refused his congressional seat because of his socialism, and an overall lack of progress led the SP’s left wing to abandon the party in 1919 and form the Communist Labor Party, a faction even more radical than the Communist Party of the

United States. The rump SP repudiated anti-ballot-box revolutionary ideals and expelled what remained of its left wing, but such ideological distinctions were lost upon Red Scare persecutors. By 1921, national SP membership was a mere 14,000, down from more than 100,000 just two years earlier. By 1928, the year before Sutor was elected, the SP had only 8,000 dues-paying members.<sup>77</sup> When Gordon was elected in 1916, he had plenty of socialist company in other American cities; by contrast, in 1920 there were just two socialist mayors.<sup>78</sup> As Julia Dietrich succinctly put it, “The chilling effect of the Red Scare lasted through the 1920s, lumping together all Leftists as Reds, all Reds as violently un-American.”<sup>79</sup>

Sutor’s socialist ideals were vague by the 1920s. He was involved in the Progressive Party, though it is unclear if he did so out of respect for Robert La Follette, or if he subscribed to party ideals that harkened back to the pre-World War I Progressive movement. Much like his frequent correspondent, Mary “Mother” Jones, Sutor was more of a trade unionist than an ideologue and he certainly rejected Marxian notions of unions as revolutionary bodies.<sup>80</sup>

Trade unionism itself took a severe hit in the 1920s. Although the AFL supported U.S. intervention into World War I, was pro-capitalist, was overwhelmingly made up conservative unions, and supported a no-strike pledge during the war, it too suffered during the Red Scare. Trade union membership plummeted from roughly 5,000,000 during the war to fewer than 3,500,000 by 1923, and did not rise for the remainder of the decade. Anti-union tactics such as open-shop associations, anti-racketeering laws, court injunctions, and scientific management work regimens took their toll on organized labor. Moreover, William Green, the AFL’s president when Samuel Gompers died in 1924, lacked the knack for rallying labor.<sup>81</sup>

Only a city with radical roots as deep as Barre’s could elect a socialist mayor in 1929, and even then it took several shocks to frighten Barre’s political establishment enough to overlook Sutor’s SP associations. In 1922, Barre endured a nasty four-month strike during which several granite firms imported scabs and imposed an open shop regimen on previously unionized workers—shocking developments that led to years of social tension within Barre. In addition, the November 1927 flood devastated large parts of Vermont, but was especially acute in Barre. Seven people died there, including Vermont’s lieutenant governor, and more than \$1,250,000 in property damage was incurred (over \$29.5 million in 2014 dollars). Mayor Norman Lewis’s 1929 budget ran a deficit, swelled by money owed to the state for flood relief. Lewis chose to defer amenities such as bus service and infrastructure expansion.<sup>82</sup>

Shifting demographics also mollified elite fears. The 1930 census revealed that Barre’s population stood at 11,188, of which roughly one-fourth was foreign-born. These immigrants, however, differed from those of Gordon’s generation. The 1924 Johnson-Reed bill greatly curtailed future immigration,

and the devastation left by World War I discouraged reverse migration. This meant that most of Barre's foreign-born citizens were like Sutor in that they had been in the city for some time and were acculturated to its rhythms. For example, nearly 10 percent of Barre's citizens had been born in Italy, but most came before World War I and far fewer shared the anarchist beliefs of the prewar generation. Of Barre's 3,156 foreign-born residents, nearly a third—including Sutor—had come from Canada and faced fewer cultural adjustment problems. City residents had reason to seek unconventional leadership, but whatever their background, most focused on improving life in the city rather than waging ideological battles.<sup>83</sup>

Several aldermen expressed interest when Lewis chose not to seek reelection, but Sutor was the “unanimous choice” of the 150 citizens who caucused in February. He ran unopposed in March, and the *Barre Daily Times* duly ran a headline proclaiming “From Mines to City Hall.” Ward One Alderman William La Point was the only elected official not endorsed by the caucus and would prove to be an outlier.<sup>84</sup> One of Sutor's first acts as mayor was to raise \$14,543 to reimburse the state for flood aid.<sup>85</sup>

As in Gordon's case, more prosaic matters occupied Sutor's time: carnival licenses, poolroom etiquette, unruly dogs, dusty streets, and complaints over telephone rates and boxing matches.<sup>86</sup> La Point often transformed routine issues into combative ones. William La Point, a Barre native who practiced law, edited a journal for Spanish-American War veterans, managed the city's opera house, and thought he should be mayor, became Sutor's political foe.<sup>87</sup> Dispute began in the first week of Sutor's term, when La Point complained that snowy streets in his ward were not properly sanded.<sup>88</sup> In this and in matters ranging from sidewalk repairs and traffic congestion to barking dogs and broken town clocks, Sutor solicited the capable advice of City Attorney Deane Davis.<sup>89</sup> That's because a surprising number of city issues proved to be potentially litigious. Among them was Sutor's choice for overseer of the poor, garbage collection plans, traffic and road disputes, utility rates, and the politics of sidewalks.

Just one of Sutor's appointments was rejected, former alderman John Milne, who sought the post of overseer of the poor. Appointing Milne would have necessitated dismissing the current overseer, Judge H. W. Scott; thus, aldermen voted down Sutor's request to appoint Milne on four occasions between March 20 and April 17, 1929. On the latter date the board reappointed Scott by a 5-1 vote, with La Point rebuffing the mayor's request to voice his reasons for opposing Scott.<sup>90</sup> In July, Sutor appointed Milne to police the municipal swimming pond, though he continued to push Milne for overseer of the poor.

The gist of the dispute centered upon Sutor's dislike of Scott's caution and rejection of the need for a new poorhouse, which Sutor championed.

Such a plan was first delayed when aldermen couldn't agree upon a location.<sup>91</sup> In November, however, the board flatly rejected building a new facility, though the mayor noted that ex-alderman Oliver Shurtleff, who had served during Gordon's mayoralty, left a bequest that could finance it.<sup>92</sup> The board's intransigence could not have been more poorly timed given the Wall Street crash just weeks earlier.

By January 1930, Overseer Scott reported that the city was spending considerably more on the poor than in the previous year. In April, Scott was abruptly dismissed and Milne was, at long last, appointed to his post, over La Point's stern objections.<sup>93</sup> Scott promptly sued the mayor, lost in superior court, and appealed to the Vermont Supreme Court, prompting an angry Suitor to withhold payment of Scott's final expenditures. This dispute lingered through March 1931, by which time Suitor had left office.<sup>94</sup>

Garbage collection must have seemed a fragrant delight compared to the stench of the Milne/Scott dispute. The issue was simple: Barre, like most Vermont municipalities, had no regular collection services. Citizens were required either to contract with private haulers or dump their own waste. City Hall fielded numerous complaints that some Barre residents were not particular about how and where they disposed of that waste. Suitor supported regular city collection and in December 1929, put forward a plan that would cost the city \$5,000 to implement.<sup>95</sup> This plan withered when sufficient numbers of citizens complained about imposed fees, even though they would have cost less than private haulage.

Solid waste disposal was just one of several infrastructure questions that first surfaced in Gordon's day, but whose full implications had only recently become clear. Recall that Gordon had to convince aldermen to buy motorized, as opposed to horse-drawn vehicles. A dozen years later, horse traffic was gone and Barre residents demanded that City Hall pave all of its streets, eliminate angle parking on Main Street, install traffic lights, relocate power poles, set speed limits, grade rail crossings, and eliminate vehicular congestion in Depot Square.<sup>96</sup> Today, Suitor's imposition of a twenty-five-mile-per-hour city speed limit is typical; to Barre residents who remembered horse carriages, it appeared reckless.<sup>97</sup> Gordon would also have sympathized with Suitor's struggle to find money for the underfunded streets department and his need to appease aldermen battling for allocations for their wards.<sup>98</sup> When Gordon served there was no bus service; Suitor found himself in the uncomfortable situation of defending the decision of the private company that purchased the Yellow Bus Line to charge all customers ten cents and eliminate the special five-cent fare for workingmen.<sup>99</sup>

Recall also that Mayor Gordon began the process of extending Barre's water and sewer lines, yet managed to generate a water department surplus. Mayor Suitor had the unenviable task of figuring out how to finish that job

and expand service for a city whose population had grown by 13 percent since 1920. In 1918, the city had 1,369 water connections; ten years later it had 1,751 and the section known as Barre Heights lacked service, necessitating the purchase of a water system to supply it. New services, including building a rest room inside City Hall, meant taking out a \$205,000 bond and changing the tax rate, neither an easy task for city government. Mayor Gordon's final budget called for a tax rate of about \$2.58; under Suitor it rose to \$3.80.<sup>100</sup>

Utility rates also proved nettlesome. Alderman La Point believed that New England Telephone & Telegraph had promised "a certain number of [free] phones in exchange for pole location rights." He simply refused to accept arguments that his reading came from a contract drawn in 1902, a time before the Vermont Public Service Board (VPSB) existed to sanction such agreements. The mayor directed City Attorney Davis to investigate the matter, probably to silence La Point, who brought up the issue at every available opportunity.<sup>101</sup>

An even more vexing issue involved an old city nemesis: the electric company. Green Mountain Power (GMP), the city's most recent provider, proved no easier to deal with than Central Power Company. Citizens complained of the inconvenience of pole relocations about which they were not forewarned, and the company rate structure baffled many, especially a call to impose on customers a twenty-cents-per-room up-front charge. GMP insisted that this lowered rates for 90 percent of its users, but Suitor and aldermen were skeptical and charged Davis with the task of bringing the matter to the VPSB. GMP did itself no favors when it called its new rate a "promotional" scheme "intended to encourage greater use of electricity."<sup>102</sup> The VPSB took its time deciding matters and negative publicity eventually led GMP to change its pricing structure.

Few things occupied as much of Mayor Suitor's time as sidewalks. As Barre transitioned from a pedestrian and streetcar city to one dominated by automobiles, each neighborhood sought to ensure that poured concrete and curbs of local granite would provide walkways for its residents. Suitor was in office just six weeks when aldermen voted to borrow \$80,000 against expected tax revenues from new assessments for the sole purpose of building sidewalks. That announcement immediately triggered petitions from residents of seven city streets. Aldermen soon filed their own requests and most aldermanic meetings heard local residents plead for sidewalks in their neighborhoods. In May, for example, F. L. White came to City Hall to argue that Walnut Street had one of the oldest requests on file and should receive first priority; in June, postal officials harangued aldermen on how new sidewalks would hasten mail delivery. In the 1929 city records, there are fifteen pages devoted to sidewalk debates just from the period from August 13 to October 7. Whatever reservations Barre citizens had about taxes did not extend to sidewalks; voters easily approved loans and levies for new pathways.<sup>103</sup>

It's hard to imagine that any politician, let alone a socialist, could have anticipated heated disputes over matters such as awnings and sidewalk widths. As new businesses eyed Main Street, Suitor innocently suggested that new buildings should follow the same rooflines as existing structures to insure walkway uniformity. That opinion was applauded by many, but deemed old fashioned by others. When some shopkeepers placed awnings over their front windows, debates ensued over whether those extending over sidewalks endangered public health. One exasperated merchant whose awning request was on hold stormed into City Hall wearing a silk shirt he claimed had faded from the result of working in the awningless front window of his sun-drenched shop.<sup>104</sup>

In the midst of an often-rancorous first term, Mayor Suitor began a project that would become his lasting legacy: a municipal recreation park. In June, Barre citizens approved a \$15,000 expenditure to build a public swimming pond off South Main Street along the Stevens Branch of the Winooski River. Although wrangling occurred over land acquisition, building a dam, and swimming in water also used as an ice pond, by midsummer the dam and bathhouses were built, along with baseball diamonds, football fields, and picnic facilities. Construction took place quickly enough to allow the city's Labor Day celebration to take place in the park.<sup>105</sup>

Mayor Suitor enthusiastically endorsed the park in his annual report. "The park has already attracted to it many people seeking relaxation and recreation. It offers abundant possibilities for future development," he noted. He outlined plans for grandstands, a running track, ice rinks, tennis facilities, and basketball and volleyball courts.<sup>106</sup> The park was such a success that, in June 1930, the mayor asked for a playground commission to oversee its supervision and maintenance. In July a five-member Recreation Bureau was created, one that withstood Alderman La Point's objection that the city could not legally create such an entity.<sup>107</sup> This site is today named Rotary Park in honor of the business organization that helps maintain it, but that name obscures the fact that the park, town pool, and entire Recreation Department owe their existence to a socialist.

The effects of the October 1929 stock market crash were not felt in Barre until mid-1930, which was fortuitous for Suitor's reelection bid. He squared off against his first-term nemesis, William La Point, who based his campaign on high-toned but vague rhetoric that referenced "ancient town meetings," past orators, and "sacred Athenian oaths." Suitor easily won the Citizens' Caucus endorsement, which prompted La Point to demand that Suitor's name be stricken from the ballot on the grounds that the Citizens' Caucus was not recognized as a legal party in Vermont. There was great irony in a member of Barre's elite challenging an entity created by that elite. Greater irony still ensued when La Point's technical point was upheld, thereby sounding the death

knell to the Citizens' Caucus. Suitor simply declared himself an independent and trounced La Point by a vote of 1,454 to 856, a substantially larger margin (26 percent) than most city mayoral contests.<sup>108</sup>

Old issues such as sidewalks and carnivals consumed Mayor Suitor's second term, plus several that were decidedly a product of changing times. Among the latter was a proposed ordinance—ultimately voted down—to ban radio broadcasts after 11 P.M. and before 7 A.M. Still another was the dedication of a regional facility unimaginable a generation earlier: the Barre-Montpelier airport.<sup>109</sup> Suitor also contemplated La Point's proposal to merge Barre City with Barre Town, a reorganization plan that failed. The mayor also pondered a merger that did take place. In March the Rock of Ages Corporation (ROA) announced a \$6 million reorganization occasioned by its purchase of ten other local manufacturers. This did not bode well for organized labor, as the firm's predecessor had been at the fore of the open-shop move that precipitated the 1922 strike in Barre.<sup>110</sup>

Suitor had more immediate concerns, including Prohibition, police corruption, and rising levels of poverty and unemployment. As noted, Barre residents disregarded Vermont's 1852 law; many paid even less heed to the current law. By 1930, Barre police viewed the 18th Amendment (and the enabling Volstead Act) as unenforceable and arrested only egregious offenders. In August, police raided five establishments and seized a still and about \$3,000 worth of alcohol (roughly \$42,000 in 2014 value). It did little to deter city thirsts, though, as the next month nearly 43 percent of all police arrests (9 of 21) were for public intoxication. Still another arrest in December netted more quantities of gin, beer, and wine.<sup>111</sup> As a union official, Suitor maintained silence on alcohol, as he knew that Prohibition was unpopular among Barre workers.

Prohibition and corruption collided in a police department scandal. In October 1930, Police Chief James Sullivan died and Suitor promoted Deputy Chief Dennis Donahue to succeed him. A month later, the mayor placed Theodore Ashley in Donahue's old post.<sup>112</sup> Suitor's speed in stabilizing the police department was prompted by allegations involving Officer Jack Somers. Somers had been appointed to the force earlier in the year, surprising many residents who knew him as a boxing promoter who cavorted with shadowy characters. Donning a uniform apparently did little to quell suspicions, and rumors circulated that Somers tried to extort a local woman during the December speakeasy raid. La Point demanded investigation of the matter in February 1931, and insisted that the city both fire Somers and abolish civil service appointments in the police department. He was among those who uttered "curt words" when Suitor advised that Somers couldn't be legally fired without a hearing. La Point was even more furious when a police report exonerated Somers.<sup>113</sup>

Suitor's greatest challenge was what to do when the Great Depression finally made its way to Barre. Local residents were used to seasonal downturns during Vermont's long winter, but unemployment remained high by the spring of 1930 and grew worse. By July, cost-cutting aldermen were "not much enthused" over plans to celebrate Barre's 150th birthday. In August, upon La Point's motion, Suitor put a bond issue before the voters to underwrite public works programs to ease unemployment. After a somber Labor Day, Barre voters approved a special \$50,000 bond to build sewers and streets, with unemployed married family men given first priority as new hires.<sup>114</sup>

A \$50,000 bond and the \$4 dollar per day minimum wage that went with it failed to solve Barre's crisis. By November, demand for work was so high that aldermen pondered whether too many non-deserving men were on the public payroll, or if the pride of destitute Barre citizens made actual need even greater. In December, aldermen petitioned the U.S. Congress for money to undertake a winter road-building project. That same month, Suitor learned of the death of his friend Mary Harris Jones (called "Mother Jones") and read of William Z. Foster's admission that he was a member of the Communist Party. Suitor may well have felt socialism's promise waning. In January 1931 Barre city officials authorized renting parts of City Hall to generate money for the city. The next month, even the Salvation Army appeared before aldermen seeking financial help to continue its relief work in Barre. Officials struggled to fund various aid programs without exhausting the Shurtleff Fund that the mayor wished to tap two years earlier.<sup>115</sup>

Like Gordon, Suitor presented the city with a final 1930 budget that contained a surplus of more than \$17,000. His upbeat annual message emphasized progress made in building sidewalks, water lines, watersheds, parks, and public works.<sup>116</sup> The mood was much darker one year later. When Suitor unveiled his \$449,099 budget for 1931, he also announced plans to leave office when his term expired in March. Although he remained popular among city residents, Suitor found juggling the mayoralty with his QWIU and AFL duties overly taxing. Moreover, his two terms were marked by personal misfortune. His mother died during May of his first term and he suffered a heart attack early into his second term.<sup>117</sup>

Suitor's 1930 budget surplus disappeared in 1931. Overseer of the Poor John Milne created some 200 new jobs, but it was not enough. In his somber 1931 report Suitor praised the efforts of city and private charities, but noted that "demands" on them were the greatest in the city's history. Although he expressed optimism that citizens would "rise above our present trouble," one also detects a sense of having been bludgeoned by misfortune: "In the last few years Barre has experienced war, epidemic, and flood. These trials are almost lost sight of during the present period of industrial hardships." When Suitor left office in early 1931, the city's debt was around \$552,000.<sup>118</sup>

La Point immediately announced his candidacy for mayor, but fellow alderman Edwin Keast soundly defeated him. Upon taking office, Keast proclaimed that “Economy should not only be talked of, but practiced,” and scrapped plans to expand public works and poor relief programs. Suitor bade the council adieu, expressed “appreciation for having had the honor of being mayor of such a fine city,” and tactfully expressed the hope that the various “projects carried through” during his terms of office would prove his legacy to the city.<sup>119</sup> Keast’s parsimony didn’t help and he served just one term as mayor. La Point finally got his wish and served as Barre’s chief executive from 1932 into 1934—the cruelest years of the Great Depression. His terms were not among the city’s most memorable.<sup>120</sup>

In his post-mayoral years, Suitor focused on union activities. In the autumn of 1932, massive layoffs and wage cuts in the granite industry—from an average of \$9 per day in the late 1920s to just \$4 by 1932—led to discontent that came to a head in a strike that began on April Fools’ Day, 1933. The strike went badly and sapped Suitor’s strength. In late April 1934, he suffered a second heart attack and, in May, a third that killed him in his fifty-fifth year.<sup>121</sup> Like Robert Gordon, he died at a relatively young age, though an advanced one by the standards of granite workers. Although no one realized it at the time, there would be no more Vermont socialist mayors until Bernard Sanders was elected mayor of Burlington in 1981, forty-seven years after Suitor’s death.

#### ANALYSIS: BEYOND THE GOO-GOOS AND PROGRESSIVES

Robert Gordon’s year in office yielded prudential bank investments, open government, battles with utility companies, a municipal coal yard, and city-owned water lines. Fred Suitor gave the city good sidewalks, parks, and a recreation department. He also helped Barre recover from the 1927 flood and further modernized city infrastructure, but was unable to deflect the blows of the Great Depression. Cheap coal, water lines, sidewalks, paved roads, playgrounds, and balanced budgets are hardly the future imagined by socialist theorists. One is reminded of the frustrations experienced by Milwaukee socialist Daniel Hoan who, in 1940, declared his twenty-four-year mayoralty a “complete fizzle” after, in Gail Radford’s words, “having socialized only a stone quarry and the city’s streetlights.”<sup>122</sup>

The challenges of being a socialist within a hegemonic capitalist society invite revisitation of John Elliot Burns’s remark that a successful socialist movement needed to compromise with progressive forces promoting parallel goals. To do so, however, raises questions of whether it even mattered that Gordon and Suitor were socialists. Were they, as Deane Davis suggested, simply “good mayors,” perhaps even “conservative” men? Should one simply label them “reformers” and lump them with a host of others, such as goo-goos, liberals, and Progressives?<sup>123</sup>

It bears notice that urban reformers of all ideological stripes faced daunting challenges. As urban historians remind us, New York City's Tweed Ring (1858-1871) was merely the most infamous urban machine, hardly an anomaly—not even in New York. The unraveling of the Tweed Ring simply shifted Tammany Hall power from one group of urban bosses to another, which is why a succession of erstwhile reformers emerged: Henry George (1886), the Council of Good Government Clubs (1894-98), and Seth Low (1902-03). Tammany Hall power would not be seriously dislodged until the mayoralty of Fiorello La Guardia (1934-1945), and even then it was not fatally wounded.<sup>124</sup> Other cities featured their own larcenous pre-1930 political machines: the Pendergasts in Kansas City, and those led by Alexander Shepherd in Washington, D.C., Christopher “Saloon Boss” Buckley in San Francisco, “Pickhandle” Tom Dennison in Omaha, and Chicagoans “Bathhouse” John Coughlin and Michael “Hinky Dink” Kenna.<sup>125</sup>

Within this desert of corruption stood a handful of bold reformers such as Hazen Pingree (Detroit, 1889-97), Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones (Toledo, 1897-1904), and James D. Phelan (San Francisco, 1897-1902). Their heroism notwithstanding, dishonest city government remained the norm rather than the exception—a fact often glossed in celebratory Progressive Era accounts. Textbooks are quick to note that muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens spurred urban reform with his 1902 exposé *The Shame of the Cities*; they seldom mention that Steffens followed four years later with *The Struggle for Self-Government*, or that a supplemented edition of *The Shame of the Cities* made the best seller list in 1940. That is to say, the Progressive Era's exposure of urban corruption far outstripped actual reform efforts.

An assessment of Gordon and Suitor must begin with the fact that each reformed Barre government and made it more responsive to the electorate at a time when many cities remained mired in corruption. They contributed to the neutering and ultimate destruction of the Citizens' Caucus which, if not as iniquitous as the Tweed Ring, was nonetheless an oligarchic political tool.

Second, both Gordon and Suitor brought Barre into the modern age with relative efficiency. In the decades following the Civil War, American cities faced the challenge of transforming themselves from merchant hubs into industrial, commercial, and retail centers. Rapid urban growth quickly revealed the utter inadequacy of antiquated city infrastructure, often with disastrous results (epidemics, floods, poverty, class conflict). Every upgrade that cities needed—from tenements and streetcars to sewers and sidewalks—entailed enormous expense, hence opportunities for graft. The same was true of the incidentals associated with technological change, including the paving of roads to accommodate automobiles, the building of airports, the issuance of radio licenses, and the location of electrical and telephone poles. That Gordon and his protégé Fred Suitor helped Barre make these transitions without

a whiff of scandal and with the interests of the citizenry in mind should not be remarkable, but it was.

This shifts our gaze to one of the ways socialist ideology mattered: Gordon and Sutor held a collectivist worldview that placed community well-being above self-interest or self-enrichment. That collectivism is part of what separated most municipal socialists from Republican and Democratic Party goo-gos and Progressives. Bryan Palmer notes the existence of a “significant Left” from the Gilded Age on, made up of Knights of Labor, Greenbackers, “Populists, anarcho-communists, Christian socialists, early feminists, bohemian intellectuals, trade unionists, immigrant Marxists from failed European revolutions, Wobblies, co-operators,” and others.<sup>126</sup> These groups often quarreled with each other, but they shared several important ideals.

The first was an inherent distrust of the individualist ethos undergirding the capitalist system. In Jeffrey Coker’s words, the American left shared “the concept of inevitable class conflict.”<sup>127</sup> Goo-gos and Progressives tinkered with capitalism, but even when Gordon and Sutor opted for a short-term agenda of immediate improvement of conditions, neither man accepted the inevitability of capitalism or considered it a just economic system. Such beliefs explain why Gordon was twice denied the Citizens’ Caucus nomination. They explain also why AFL colleagues often viewed Sutor with suspicion. Sutor’s mentor within the granite cutters’ union was James Duncan (1857-1928), who was denied the AFL presidency in 1924 because of his socialist beliefs. (The AFL accepted the permanence of capitalism.)

Gordon and Sutor, like most goo-gos and Progressives, believed in efficiency, industrial progress, and the material improvement of society, but they sought to expand democracy, not contract it. Barre’s socialist mayors were not revolutionaries, but neither were they seduced by the blind belief in experts, a hallmark of Progressive thinking. As Bruce Stave observed, “socialists generally opposed . . . attempts to institute city manager or commission forms of government,” staples of top-down Progressive urban reform.<sup>128</sup> Gordon and Sutor encountered and resisted calls for commission-style government.

As their battles with public service boards, power authorities, banks, and traction companies reveal, Barre’s socialist mayors were suspicious of the “experts” that Progressives thought should manage cities. The socialist perspective was the difference between trusting the masses to make bottom-up changes, and the Progressives’ paternalistic belief that meaningful reform should be imposed from the top, often by unelected policymakers.<sup>129</sup>

Socialists in Barre and elsewhere also championed pluralism. Although a handful of forward-thinking individuals such as Randolph Bourne embraced that ideal, Progressivism was, overall, a white, middle-class movement more comfortable with uniformity than diversity. Barre experienced significant factionalism, but not even disputatious Italian anarchists inspired local calls for

immigration restriction, a constant cry among Progressives. Nor did many Barre residents participate in anti-immigration leagues, trade in popular racist caricatures, or add their voices to the eugenicists that thrived in Vermont and among Progressives across the nation.<sup>130</sup> Barre was hardly an untroubled multi-ethnic haven, but one finds no hints of ethnic, racist, or religious slurs from Gordon or Sutor, a statement that cannot be made about Progressives such as E. L. Godkin, David Starr Jordan, Henry Cabot Lodge, Margaret Sanger, Lester Ward, or AFL President Samuel Gompers.<sup>131</sup>

Gordon and Sutor were light years ahead of many mainstream reformers in their overt support for organized labor. Even when urban reformers paid lip service to industrial progress and its workforce, the period between 1900 and 1933 was not particularly “progressive” insofar as organized labor was concerned. The Progressive Era saw the rise of self-selected welfare capitalists and legislative efforts to regulate factory safety, curtail child labor, exempt unions from antitrust laws, and protect some workers (women, seamen, railroad employees), but the overall record of courts, Congress, and the business community differed little in substance or spirit from the anti-union sentiments and actions of the Gilded Age robber baron era.<sup>132</sup> Radical groups such as the Industrial Workers of the World were repressed (legally and extralegally) and even officials allied with the moderate American Federation of Labor faced harsh sanction. Aside from an artificial uptick spearheaded by War Labor Board protections during World War I, organized labor seldom represented as much as 10 percent of the American workforce. Unions, however, found significant support among municipal socialists. As Judd observed, most elected socialists pursued “a dual strategy of trade-union agitation and political activity,” the path followed by Fred Sutor.<sup>133</sup> Gordon and Sutor each viewed the working class as their base of support, which meant they had to do more than support unions in the abstract.

There were other stylistic differences between Progressives and municipal socialists. The first group longed for consensus politics and sought order; the latter averred that political change was inherently chaotic. Progressive reformers sought centralized programs; socialists demanded grassroots local control. Socialists favored public enterprises often deemed unrealistic by Progressive reformers who believed (romantically) in the benevolence, efficiency, and civic pride of the private sector.

Historian Shelton Stromquist made the following trenchant observation:

Much of the historiography of labor and socialist political development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has effectively bypassed the city as a political space, emphasizing the emergence of nationally competitive . . . labor and socialist parties and consigning the realm of municipal politics to the margins.<sup>134</sup>

Stromquist is correct; a serious reexamination of pre-New Deal politics demands taking a closer look at the local level. There one finds that the American political spectrum has been much broader than generally supposed.

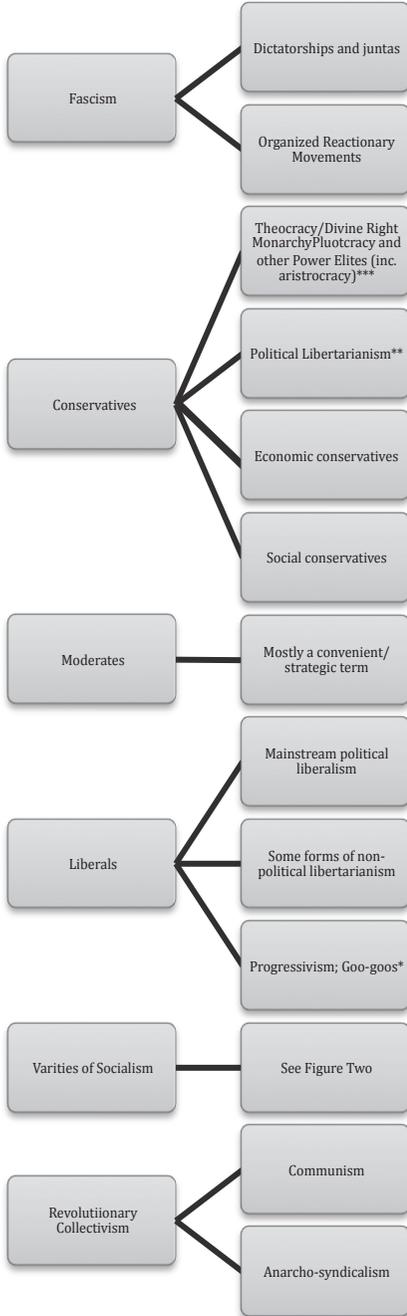
History survey texts frequently homogenize reform movements.<sup>135</sup> This is understandable given the battle over the very definition of socialism—one often dominated by leftist ideologues. Doctrinaire socialists often insisted that all ideological compromises delayed the coming class war, and were quick to label “sewer socialists ... inappropriate for a revolutionary working-class party.”<sup>136</sup> There is little to be gained in reopening discursive debates over which of the political left’s many varieties were “true” socialism, but there is merit in defusing the fervor with which leftist critics dismissed municipal socialists as “right-wingers.”<sup>137</sup> Within the context of U.S. politics between the years 1880 and 1930, it behooves us to ask, “To the right of what?”

The traditional political spectrum, which locates political thought and practice on a horizontal left-to-right axis, persists despite the best efforts of scholars to expose its various inadequacies. It is important to note that, even within this flawed tool, “right-wing” municipal socialism is to the left of liberal movements such as late nineteenth century goo-gos and early-twentieth-century Progressives (see Figure 1). Most socialists at least dreamed of a post-capitalist collectivist future; most liberals longed for redeemed capitalism. Such distinctions placed even dreamy Christian socialism to the left of liberalism (see Figure 2). Within the context of the overall political culture of the 1880-1930 period, most municipal socialists were considerably left of center, a distinction not lost on the elites and hardcore conservatives who feared them.

Appreciation of political pluralism, especially on the local level, adds nuance to our understanding of American political culture. It also transcends underexamined assumptions about the futility of third-party movements. As Cecelia Bucki observed, when faced with the reality that neither revolution nor social evolution was imminent, American socialists had one of three options: remain ideologically pure, sacrifice ideals for pragmatic gain, or strike a “balance” between meeting the immediate “needs of working-class constituents” and providing a future “cooperative commonwealth.”<sup>138</sup> Place Gordon and Sutor in the last camp. Each recognized that his party was not strong enough to hold power outright; hence, coalition building was necessary, even when distasteful.

To avoid Daniel Hoan’s deep disappointment, successful municipal socialists articulated both a short-term and a long-term agenda. They understood, in Bucki’s words, that it “was one thing to win an election; it was quite another to win power.”<sup>139</sup> Sutor even came to believe that most Ameri-

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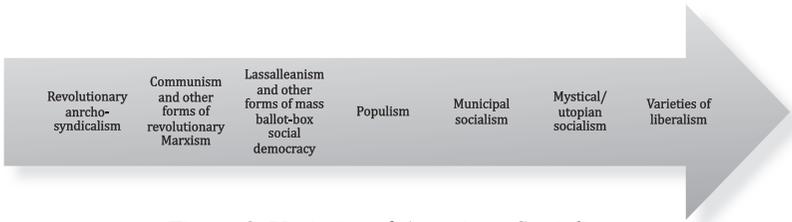


*Figure 1: U.S. Political Spectrum: Post-1870 (Top to bottom: from extreme right to extreme left)*

\* Progressivism and the Good Government movement (“goo-goos”) are listed on the left wing of liberalism for several reasons. First, many adherents sought reform independent of formal party structures. Second, many reformers sought a form of liberalism that involved regulation, spending levels, and levels of government intervention that were on the fringe of pre-Keynesian economic thinking.

\*\*Political libertarianism is notoriously difficult to categorize, as it tends to be personal and idiosyncratic. Some Libertarians’ ideals drift considerably left of the American center, but because contemporary political Libertarians tend to side with conservatives on social and economic issues (often including support for a strong military), Libertarian politicians are generally viewed as on the right.

\*\*\*This category includes all those who claim to rule because of some sort of special status and can be expanded to include plutocrats, aristocrats, technocrats, and power elites claiming any sort of chosen status because of alleged superior breeding, training, or belief system. In practice, many theocracies are little more than religious forms of fascism. Though often authoritarian, divine right monarchies tend not to devolve to that level because of built-in principles of noblesse oblige



*Figure 2: Varieties of American Socialism*  
 (From left to right— Note: all versions are left of liberalism)

can workers accepted the permanence of capitalism, though he was not so pessimistic as to think that minds couldn't be changed. But if even a city as radical as early-twentieth-century Barre lacked the critical mass necessary to recast society, socialism needed to evolve drop by drop, not emerge from a mighty flood. It is striking that men such as Gordon and Suitor embraced consensus politics more comfortably than some of their Progressive Era counterparts. This is, perhaps, why Davis viewed them as "conservative."

As we saw, neither Gordon nor Suitor could even muster a socialist quorum on the board of aldermen. (Nor could they count on support from their few erstwhile comrades.) Socialists faced scrutiny from the press and courts, and butted heads with what Gail Radford calls "quasi-public goods- and service-producing enterprises" such as commissions, boards, and agencies whose semi-autonomous status operated as "fiefdoms in a political gray area."<sup>140</sup> It would have been hard enough to municipalize traction and electric companies; add the regulatory power of the VPSB, and the task was more daunting still.

Yet they did try. Gordon and Suitor followed the same path as municipal socialists such as Emil Seidel and Daniel Hoan in Milwaukee; George Lunn in Schenectady, New York; J. Henry Stump in Reading, Pennsylvania; and Jasper McLevy in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Sally Miller notes that most adopted some form of the "Wisconsin Idea" of enticing other social groups—including the middle class—to cast SP ballots, or at least to provide strategic support when necessary. This often meant practicing "local party autonomy" that freed them from strict Socialist Party lines. It meant galvanizing reliable allies, such as reform-minded liberals, organized labor, and ethnic associations.<sup>141</sup> Maintenance of such a coalition was achieved through methods not automatically associated with socialism: low taxes, cultivating friendly relations with local churches and business owners, modernizing city services, and downplaying public ownership schemes. As Judd put it, the Socialist Party "at its best . . . blended utopian visions and practical reform and avoided the pitfalls of both extremes."<sup>142</sup>

### POSTSCRIPT: THE FUTURE OF THIRD PARTY MOVEMENTS?

In 2012, President Barack Obama was reelected when he defeated Republican challenger Mitt Romney. Or so history records. Technically, Obama defeated Romney and 174 other candidates for president. Collectively, 1.73 percent of voters ignored both Democrats and Republicans. Since World War II, only two third-party presidential candidates have broken the 10 percent barrier: Ross Perot in 1992 (18.9 percent) and George Wallace in 1968 (13.5 percent), with only Wallace winning electoral votes. The 913,664 votes captured by Eugene Debs in 1920 are the most ever collected by a SP candidate for president.<sup>143</sup>

The winner-take-all nature of American elections has helped Republicans and Democrats maintain a shared monopoly on national power since 1858. As noted earlier, the obstacles facing third-party challengers are formidable, but they have not proved insurmountable at the state and local level. Let us return to Vermont. Fifty years after Fred Sutor left office, voters in Burlington elected another socialist mayor, Bernard Sanders.

On the surface, Burlington seems too different from early-twentieth-century Barre to invite comparison. As Vermont's largest city, it has a per capita income that surpasses that of the rest of the state and, for several decades, its largest employers have been the Fletcher Allen Hospital and the University of Vermont (UVM). Very few of its residents are recent immigrants and, though there is a blue-collar presence, the city contains a large number of white-collar professionals. It is best known for UVM, its vibrant downtown retail trade, and tourism. That is to say, it's an *exceptional* place.

That uniqueness was the key to launching Sanders's electoral success. His 1981 ten-vote margin over five-term Democrat Gordon Paquette shocked prognosticators and might have been a fluke. Luck would not, however, explain why he was reelected mayor three times, served sixteen years in the U.S. House of Representatives, and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2006 and reelected in 2012.

As W. J. Conroy observes, Sanders was the consummate "social democrat" as mayor of Burlington.<sup>144</sup> His mayoral achievements were the sort that Deane Davis might have called conservative: centralizing the city budget, creating a Community and Economic Development Office, advancing a city home rule petition, canceling a boondoggle roads project, promoting youth and arts programs, supporting a downtown pedestrian retail mall, bringing a minor league baseball franchise to the city, and seeking alternatives to property taxes. His most overtly "socialist" acts were denying exclusive private development along a vast swatch of prime Lake Champlain real estate, building a public lakeside boathouse, and directly negotiating with unions. Like Robert Gordon, he fretted over the city's vulnerable citizens, in Sanders's case, youth, the elderly, women, the disabled, and gays.<sup>145</sup>

Sanders, like Gordon and Sutor, sought to bring good government to Burlington. Alas, a quick roll call of recently jailed mayors indicates that such a modest goal remains elusive for much of the nation.<sup>146</sup> Good and responsive government has been the historic goal of municipal socialists, and it might be a key for independents of various stripes. In an article for *The Atlantic*, James Fallows noted that on the local level government can be “practical-minded, nonideological, future-minded, and capable of compromise.” As examples he offered Greenville, North Carolina, where a business-minded Republican has been mayor since 1995, and left-leaning Burlington, Vermont.<sup>147</sup>

Vermont’s municipal socialists have proved practical. Under Sanders, Burlington addressed issues such as potholes, crumbling sidewalks, snow removal, and antiquated sewers—things Gordon and Sutor had done in Barre. Because he got city finances under control by negotiating with unions, putting services out to competitive bid, empowering non-profit organizations, holding fund raisers, and above all, by making the city more business friendly, the city was able to fund more ambitious programs: a bike path, cleaning lakeshore beaches, rehabbing homes in the run-down North End, establishing a land trust, creating micro-lending programs for small ventures, and funding public arts and entertainment events. Peter Clavelle, the socialist who succeeded Sanders as mayor in 1989, noted that Sanders “would have been in office no more than two years if he just stuck to ideology. But he did a good job of managing the city. That’s why we’re still here.”<sup>148</sup>

Sanders built strong coalitions fashioned from different constituencies than those courted by Gordon or Sutor—neighborhood associations, community activists, municipal unions, business groups, ethnic associations, and UVM students—but these shared a reform ethos analogous to that displayed in Barre. Sanders’s socialism bothers some Vermonters, but his attentiveness to Vermonters helps explain why he wins. Sanders, for example, upholds gun rights—a position in line with majority views in Vermont, but decidedly out of synch with most left-leaning progressives. Vermonters vote in higher percentages than the national average when Sanders is on the ballot, and he defeats Republican and Democratic challengers by wide margins, even though he spends little on campaigns and avoids the big-money campaign tactics of contemporary politics.<sup>149</sup>

The careers of the three socialist mayors studied here suggest that getting elected may not be as daunting as imagined—if third parties move beyond the romance of symbolic large-scale campaigns, embrace Tip O’Neil’s adage that all politics is local, and concentrate on *exceptional* places. In 2008, nineteen Green Party members won offices across the United States, most of them from places as different from surrounding areas as early-twentieth-century Barre was to the rest of Vermont: Palm Beach, Florida; and Berkeley,

San Francisco, and Monterey, California. In Charleston, South Carolina, Eugene Platt won a spot on the Public Service commission; in Corvallis, Oregon—home of Oregon State University—Michael Belstein was reelected to the City Council.<sup>150</sup> In the past, blue-collar towns were seedbeds for socialism; in the post-industrial future, perhaps college towns, minority-heavy electorates, and bohemian enclaves will provide fertile soil for outlier candidates.

Purely ideological movements can raise ire and/or hope—witness the contemporary Tea Party—but historically they have struggled to retain traction unless they build coalitions. Perhaps outliers need to dream small. One could do far worse than to learn lessons from the mayoralties of Robert Gordon and Fred Sutor. Both are reminders that much good can still be done when big dreams give way to attainable goals.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Burns quote found at: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/johnburns262248.html>, accessed February 20, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx's 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program* is generally acknowledged as Marx's response to Lassalle.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Sombart, *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* (1906; reprint, White Plains, N.Y.: International Aptitudes & Science Press, 1976); Selig Perlman, *History of Trade Unionism* (1922; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1950). Sombart (1863-1941), a German economist, argued that American exceptionalism, especially as expressed in political liberty and economic prosperity, blunted the potential for revolutionary upheaval. In an oft-quoted purple passage he asserted that class consciousness was shipwrecked upon "shoals of roast beef and apple pie." Perlman (1888-1959), an economist and labor historian, placed the blame on "trade consciousness," the tendency of American trade unions to emphasize craft over class solidarity.

<sup>4</sup> For representative discussions of the shortcomings of American socialism see: James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage, 1969); Michael Kazin, "The Agony and the Romance of the American Left," *American Historical Review* 100 (December 1995), 1488-1512; Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marx, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Kazin, "The Agony and the Romance of the American Left," 1488.

<sup>6</sup> New York City labor leader Leo Isacson (1910-1996) served in the House of Representatives from February 17, 1948, to January 3, 1949. He was the last avowed socialist to do so until Sanders. The Democratic Socialists of America, an organization aligned with the Socialist International, claimed that in 2010, 70 members of Congress were socialists, but nearly all were liberal Democrats who would be surprised to find their names on the DSA list. Voices of the Nation, a conservative advocacy group, listed 83 "socialists" in Congress. Neither list is remotely accurate. As of 2014, Sanders is the only member of Congress to claim a socialist mantle.

<sup>7</sup> Sally Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Gail Radford, "From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities: Institutional Factors in the Shaping of Public Enterprise" *Journal of American History* 90 (December 2003): 863-880; Richard Judd, *Socialist Cities: Municipal Politics and the Grass Roots of American Socialism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989); Bruce Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1975); Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, esp. 261-294.

<sup>8</sup> Among the works in which municipal socialism is discussed are: Bryan Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Leon Fink, ed., *Workers Across the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Leo Ribuffo, *Right, Center, Left: Essays in American History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1992); Cecelia Bucki, *Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal, 1915-36* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Radford, "From Municipal Socialism to

Public Authorities.” It should be noted that several of these works are critical of the socialist “right,” which is where many locate municipal socialism.

<sup>9</sup> Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, esp. vii-xi. Weinstein saw socialism in severe decline by 1919 and a spent force by 1925.

<sup>10</sup> Deane C. Davis (with Nancy Graff), *Deane C. Davis: An Autobiography* (Shelburne, Vt.: New England Press, 1991), 68.

<sup>11</sup> An urban area is defined as one in which more than 2,500 persons live in close proximity. The 1920 census revealed that, for the first time, more than half of all Americans lived in urban areas.

<sup>12</sup> Note: In this article I refer to Barre generically as a “city,” though New England incorporation laws are peculiar. The area covered in this essay is, indeed, the City of Barre. There is also the Town of Barre, which is incorporated separately from the City of Barre, though it surrounds the City. What one might refer to as “Greater Barre” consists of the City, the Town, and the unincorporated villages of East Barre, South Barre, Graniteville, and Websterville.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 645. Foner gives data on first- and second-generation population for ten cities; among them: New York (76 percent), Cleveland and Boston (72 percent), Chicago (71 percent), Detroit (65 percent), and San Francisco (64 percent).

<sup>14</sup> “Barre, Vermont: An Ethnic Bouillabaisse,” Barre Ethnic Heritage Studies Project, Vermont Department of Education, 1978, (pamphlet). According to the 1910 census, Barre’s population of 10,734 included 1,478 Italians and 1,282 Scots. These groups were much larger than the next biggest groups of 420 English-speaking Canadians and 208 French-Canadians.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Arthur W. Brayley, *History of the Granite Industry of New England, vol. 2* (Boston: National Association of Granite Industries, 1913); Donald G. Allen, *Barre’s Granite Heritage* (Barre, Vt.: Friends of the Aldrich Library, 1997). In 1930, ten small firms consolidated as Rock of Ages, Barre’s first large-scale quarry.

<sup>17</sup> Brayley, *History of the Granite Industry*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* See also David Rosner and Gerald Markowitz, *Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics of Occupational Disease in Twentieth-century America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Sanders, ed., “Notes and Documents: Vermont Labor Agitator,” *Labor History* 15 (March 1974): 262.

<sup>20</sup> <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/wpa/38050626.html>, accessed December 17, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?wpa:15:./temp/~ammem\\_5XCs](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?wpa:15:./temp/~ammem_5XCs), accessed December 17, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Demers, “Labor and Social Relations of the Granite Industry in Barre,” B.A. thesis, Goddard College, Plainfield, Vt., 1974.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, 12 April 1904.

<sup>24</sup> David Seager, “Barre, Vermont Granite Workers and the Struggle Against Silicosis, 1890-1960,” *Labor History* 42 (2001): 61-79.

<sup>25</sup> “Shoot a Chief of Police,” *New York Times*, 28 December 1900.

<sup>26</sup> Karen Lane, “Old Labor Hall, Barre, Vermont,” *Labor’s Heritage* 10 (Spring/Summer 1999): 48-61.

<sup>27</sup> “Town Takes 35 Children,” *New York Times*, 18 February 1912.

<sup>28</sup> William Doyle, *The Vermont Political Tradition: And Those Who Helped Make It* (Montpelier, Vt.: Leahy Press, 2000); Charles Morrissey, *Vermont* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981).

<sup>29</sup> Leon Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 66-111.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Topp, *Those without a Country: Italian American Syndicalists* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Soversivi in the United States, 1890-1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Elisabetta Vezzosi, *Indifferent Socialism: Italian Immigrants and the Socialist Party in the United States during the Early Twentieth Century* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1991). During a time when most of Barre’s Italian immigrants arrived, only about 2 percent of their comrades in Italy enjoyed voting rights.

<sup>31</sup> The City of Barre and the Aldrich Library hold a list of former Barre mayors but party affiliations are not given. I was able to determine that the following men served as Democratic mayors before 1916: John W. Gordon (1896-1900), Charles W. Melcher (1902-03), and J. Henry Jackson (1903-04). John W. Gordon was not directly related to Robert Gordon. The following mayors were Republicans: Nelson D. Phelps (1901-02), John Robins (1907-10), James Mutch (1901-12), and Frank Langley (1915-16, 1920-22). I was unable to determine the party affiliation of Harvey Hershey (1900-01). William Barclay, Sr. served as Barre mayor from 1904-07 and considered himself an independent. Mayors Lucius Thurston (1912-13) and William H. Ward (1913-15) simply called themselves members of the Citizens’ ticket, as did most Barre mayors from 1904 to 1930. The muddying of party affiliations was a

major focus of the Citizens' Caucus. Those who received its endorsement could claim to represent no interest other than that of Barre, a convenient label within the city's fractious political climate.

<sup>32</sup> *Barre Daily Times*, 4 February 1904; Demers, "Labor and Social Relations," 29. Hereafter abbreviated *BDT*.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Collins, "Barre's Labor-Socialist Tradition Has Deep Roots," *The Sunday Rutland Herald and The Sunday Times Argus*, 4 September 1977.

<sup>34</sup> Karen Lane, "Old Labor Hall Barre, Vermont." Corti was an anarchist, but not a fire-eater. His accidental death shocked the city to such a degree that even foes cooperated in raising money for Corti's memorial, which now graces Hope Cemetery. See also "Call Murder Charge an Anarchist Plot," *New York Times*, 1 November 1903.

<sup>35</sup> Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2 vols. (1931; reprint, New York: Dover, 1970), 1:238-239.

<sup>36</sup> "Drys Beaten in Vermont," *New York Times*, 8 March 1916.

<sup>37</sup> *Barre, Vermont, Annual City Report*, 1916.

<sup>38</sup> \$1,000 is roughly the equivalent of \$23,715 in 2014 dollars. When Gordon worked in the granite sheds the average pay was \$2.70 per day for apprentices. Workers did not report on Sunday, so even if there were no layoffs, strikes, or other interruptions in a work year, most stone workers drew less than a \$1,000 per annum. Gordon would have made at least \$2 per hour by the end of his career, but—as Mose Cerasoli recalled—the industry norm was for prolonged layoffs in late summer, late fall, and most of the winter. Gordon never accumulated middle-class wages, and money would have been very tight in a household that included five children. For Cerasoli's testimony see, Sanders, ed., "Vermont Labor Agitator," 261–270.

<sup>39</sup> Collins, "Barre's Labor-Socialist Tradition."

<sup>40</sup> "Debs Predicts a Panic Coming," *BDT*, 9 September 1910.

<sup>41</sup> "Garbage Plan Called Farce," *BDT*, 8 February 1916; "Apathy in Barre Politics," 16 February 1916; "Citizens' Caucus Results," 18 February 1916; *BDT*; "Barre City Council Rejects Traction Company Plan," 23–24 February 1916.

<sup>42</sup> *BDT*; "New Mayor Takes Office," "Prohibition Rejected by Heavy Vote," 8 March 1916.

<sup>43</sup> *BDT*; "\$238,363.33 City Budget," 22 March 1916.

<sup>44</sup> City Records of Barre, Vermont, volume 9: 1913–17.

<sup>45</sup> Demers, "Labor and Social Relations," 32.

<sup>46</sup> *BDT*; "Three Banks Given the Sinking Fund at 4.20 Interest," 28 April 1916. In April Reynolds tried to get Gordon to reverse himself, but the mayor quashed that effort. See *BDT*, 22 April 1916.

<sup>47</sup> For example, see *BDT*, 22, 26, 28 April 1916. See also, Barre City Records. Note: The city of Barre published the Barre Annual Report, which was a digest of city business within a given year prefaced by reports from various city officers. It also holds bound copies of the Barre City Records, which contain the City Clerk's more detailed notes of city meetings during the calendar year, plus information such as permits and assessments required by Vermont law.

<sup>48</sup> *BDT*, 10, 25 May 1916; *BDT*; "Road Bonding Plan Failed," 8 June 1916.

<sup>49</sup> *BDT*; "\$82,500 Bonds Voted By City Decisively," 8 July 1916.

<sup>50</sup> \$20,000 is the equivalent of more than \$429,000 in 2014 dollars.

<sup>51</sup> *BDT*; "Propose to Buy Street Car Lines," 31 August 1916; *BDT*; "Street Money is Gone," 6 September 1916; *BDT*; "Bridge Bids All Rejected," 12 September 1916; *BDT*; "Favoritism in Street Work," 20 September 1916.

<sup>52</sup> See *BDT*, 25 June 1916 for details of the band dispute. The *BDT* of 8 July 1916 reported that the contract would be signed.

<sup>53</sup> *BDT*, 26 April; 10, 24 May; 19 July; 11 October 1916. See also Barre City Reports, 1916.

<sup>54</sup> *BDT*; "Radical Changes Proposed," 28 June 1916. See also *BDT*, 29 November 1916.

<sup>55</sup> See *BDT*, 14 June and 2 August 1916.

<sup>56</sup> At the time, horse-drawn conveyance still dominated most of Vermont. The debate boiled down to clashing views of the future.

<sup>57</sup> *BDT*, 10 May 1916. See also *BDT*; "City Council Votes for a New Truck For the Water Dept.," 3 August 1916; *BDT*; "In Statu Quo," 4 August 1916.

<sup>58</sup> *BDT*; "New Member of the Board of Health," 15 November 1916. Reynolds was already in a foul mood, having just been soundly defeated in a bid to become Vermont's secretary of state. See note 62 below.

<sup>59</sup> *BDT*; "Discussed Coal Prices to the City," 8 August 1916.

<sup>60</sup> *BDT*; "\$82,000 Bonds Voted By City Decisively," 8 July 1916; *BDT*; "10-Inch Main for South End," 22 November 1916; *BDT*; "More Firemen Are Proposed," 20 December 1916; *BDT*; "\$17,000 Surplus in Water Dept.," 31 January 1917.

<sup>61</sup> *BDT*; "Gompers is Coming," 28 July 1916; *BDT*; "Gompers Gets Ovation From Union Men," 9 August 1916; *BDT*; "F. W. Suitor Again Head," 10 August 1916.

<sup>62</sup> *BDT*; "Vermont Socialists Name W. R. Rowland For Governor," 13 September 1916; *BDT*; "Hughes' Plurality in Vermont Was 19,452—Official," 21 November 1916; *BDT*; "Socialists Cele-

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brated," 24 November 1916. Reynolds received just 911 votes in his bid for secretary of state, only 111 more than the Prohibition candidate.

<sup>63</sup> Morrissey, *Vermont*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> *BDT*, "Asked No Tears Be Shed Over His Grave," 11 January 1917.

<sup>65</sup> *BDT*, "Better Conditions For Workingmen Recommended," 24 January 1917.

<sup>66</sup> *BDT*, "Restrict Franchise," 29 November 1916; *BDT*, "Fix Hearing on Power Co.," 5 December 1916; *BDT*, "Power Charter is Not Opposed," 13 December 1916.

<sup>67</sup> *BDT*, "Central Power Corporation Disdainful of City Council," 10 January 1917.

<sup>68</sup> *BDT*, "City Paid Out \$281,405.17," and "Mayor Gordon Not a Candidate Again," 17 January 1917. See also *BDT*, 10, 22, 26, 29 January, and 4 February 1917.

<sup>69</sup> *BDT*, 16 February and 6-7 March 1917.

<sup>70</sup> In startling candor, the CVPSC's own history mentions customer complaints of overcharging. See <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/Central-Vermont-Public-Service-Corporation-Company-History.html>, accessed March 30, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> *BDT*, 3 April 1917.

<sup>72</sup> *Barre Annual Report*, 1916.

<sup>73</sup> Collins, "Barre's Labor-Socialist Tradition."

<sup>74</sup> *BDT*, "Ex-Mayor R. Gordon Died in Lynn, Mass.," 2 November 1921.

<sup>75</sup> *BDT*, "Barre's New Mayor," 5 March 1929; *BDT*, "Fred Suitor, Labor Leader, Died Suddenly," 10 May 1934.

<sup>76</sup> *New York Times*, 1, 2, 5 September 1912.

<sup>77</sup> David Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America: A History*, (New York: Macmillan, 1955); Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA: From 1870 to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 1987), 182-203; Lipset and Marx, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 237-260; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, 324-339.

<sup>78</sup> Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism in America*, 118.

<sup>79</sup> Julia Dietrich, *The Old Left: In History and Literature*, (New York: Twayne, 1996), 82.

<sup>80</sup> The Progressive Party of 1924 was a ragù of old-line Republican reformers, labor movement supporters, agrarian radicals, and socialists troubled by the revolutionary rhetoric of communists. See Nancy Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette: The Righteous Reformer*, (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2007). See also Paul Heller, *Granite City Tales: Writings on the History of Barre, Vermont* (Self-published, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles and Melvyn Dubofsky, *Labor in America: A History* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2010), 235-240. William Green became AFL head upon the death of Samuel Gompers in 1924.

<sup>82</sup> *BDT*, "Budget Calls for \$424,038," 29 January 1929.

<sup>83</sup> *BDT*, "Barre Gained 11.7 Per Cent in Population," 21 April 1930. Peter Liveright, "Unionism and Labor Relations in the Granite Industry, Barre, Vermont," BA thesis, Goddard College, Plainfield, Vt., 1943.

<sup>84</sup> For election news see *BDT*, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20 February 1929. For election results see *BDT*, 5-6 March 1929.

<sup>85</sup> Deborah P. and Nicholas R. Clifford, *The Troubled Roar of the Waters: Vermont in Flood and Recovery, 1929-1931* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007); *Barre Annual Report*, 1929.

<sup>86</sup> See *Barre City Records*, 1929-31, and *Barre Annual Report*, 1929, 1930, 1931.

<sup>87</sup> William H. Jeffrey, ed., *The Granite City: Barre, Vermont* (Concord, N.H.: Rumford Press, 1903).

<sup>88</sup> *BDT*, "Appointments Partly Made," 13 March 1929.

<sup>89</sup> See *BDT*, 20, 27 March and 22 May 1929. Davis would later serve as Republican governor of Vermont from 1969 to 1973.

<sup>90</sup> *BDT*, "One Appointee Not Confirmed," 20 March 1929; *BDT*, "Again Reject By Same Vote," 27 March 1929; *BDT*, "A. G. Fay Named as Grand Juror," 10 April 1929; *BDT*, "Scott Voted in as Overseer," 17 April 1929.

<sup>91</sup> *BDT*, "Construction Work Held Up," 24 April 1929. See also *BDT*, 22 May and 6 August 1929.

<sup>92</sup> For Milne's appointment see *BDT*, 31 July 1929. *BDT*, "Poorhouse Proposition is Rejected," 21 November 1929.

<sup>93</sup> *BDT*, "Oust Scott, Put J. R. Milne as Overseer," 8 April 1930.

<sup>94</sup> *BDT*, "Suitor Wins Tilt on City Overseer," 25 July 1930; *BDT*, "J. R. Milne New Overseer of Poor Dept.," 18 March 1931.

<sup>95</sup> For typical complaints see *BDT*, 27 March and 16 April 1929. See *BDT*, "City Garbage Collection is Suggested," 3 December 1929.

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<sup>96</sup> For various debates over vehicular-related issues see *BDT*, 27 March, 1 May, 6 May, 15 May, 12 June, 31 July, 28 August, 2 October, 8 October, and 5 November 1929; *BDT*, 26 February, 30 April, 14 May, 3 June, 11 June, and 18 June 1930.

<sup>97</sup> *BDT*, "25 Mile Per Hr. Speed Limit is Proposed," 14 May 1930.

<sup>98</sup> *BDT*, "Spending on Streets Causes Debate," 2 October 1929; *BDT*, "Street Paving Assessment is Protested," 26 February 1930.

<sup>99</sup> *BDT*, "Let Workmen Parley with Bus Officials," 6 August 1929; *BDT*, "Workmen's Special Fare Eliminated," 29 August 1929.

<sup>100</sup> For discussions of water service and city taxes see *BDT*, 22 May; 18, 22 June; 19, 31 July; 8 October 1929; see also *BDT*, 29 January, 21 May, 13 October, 17 December 1930. See especially *BDT*, "Ask New Vote on Water Route," 22 May 1929; *BDT*, "Mayor Tells of Growth of Water System," 19 July 1929; *BDT*, "Tax Reports on Street Work and City Water," 29 January 1930; and *BDT*, "Rate for 1930 Fixed at \$3.80," 21 May 1930. The rate is per thousand dollars of a property's assessed value. \$1,000 in 1930 is the equivalent of roughly \$13,000 in 2010.

<sup>101</sup> The phone debate raged throughout 1929, but the gist of the matter is reported in *BDT*, 31 July, 21 August, and 20 November 1929.

<sup>102</sup> For pole disputes see *BDT*, 24 April and 1 May 1929. For rates and pricing debates see *BDT*, "Explanation of Electric Rates Asked," 5 November 1929; *BDT*, "Object to Room Charge in New Electric Rate," 13 November 1929; *BDT*, "Electricity Rate Hearing on December 4," 20 November 1929; *BDT*, "Room Charge is Promotional Says Power Co.," 4 December 1929; *BDT*, "Electric Rate Decision up to Commission," 7 December 1929.

<sup>103</sup> For a sampling of sidewalk petitioning see *BDT*, 16, 17, 21 April; 1 May; 10, 19 June; 28 August 1929. For details of the funding scheme see *BDT*, "Extra Tax For Sidewalks," 18 April 1929 and "Vote Taxes For Sidewalks and to Meet Bonds," 26 April 1930. See also *Barre City Records*, 1929.

<sup>104</sup> *BDT*, "Building Line on No. Main St. up to Owners," 6 September 1929; *BDT*, "Aldermen Talk About Awning Over Sidewalk," 11 December 1929; *BDT*, "City to Look Up Title to Land on Main Street," 18 December 1929; *BDT*, "Faded Shirt," 24 December 1929.

<sup>105</sup> *BDT*, "Citizens Vote \$15,000 to Get Bathing Pool," 13 June 1929; *BDT*, "Swimming Pool Project Moves Along," 26 June 1929; *BDT*, "Labor's Day Is Fittingly Observed," 3 September 1929. *Barre Annual Report*, 1929.

<sup>106</sup> *BDT*, "Mayor Praises Developments at Playground," 20 January 1930.

<sup>107</sup> *BDT*, "Playground Commission Is Asked For," 25 June 1930; *BDT*, "Recreation Bureau Named After Debate," 30 July 1930; *BDT*, "Playground Bureau Not Legally Named," 5 August 1930.

<sup>108</sup> *BDT*, "Two seeking Election as Barre Mayor," 23 January 1930; *BDT*, "La Point Asks Order to Bar Suitor's Name," 14 February 1930; *BDT*, "Suitor Must Prove Right," 15 February 1930; *BDT*, "Caucus Claim Ruled Out But Suitor Files," 17 February 1930; *BDT*, "Mayor Names Davis and Dix to Old Offices," 4 March 1930.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Turner, *From Barre-Montpelier to E.F. Knapp: The Story of a Small Airport in Berlin, Vermont* (Berlin, Vt.: Berlin Historical Society, 2011). Berlin is located between Barre and Vermont's capital, Montpelier. The airport was a cooperative regional effort. Longtime alderman William Reynolds and former mayor Frank Langley (1915-16, 1920-22) represented Barre on the committee.

<sup>110</sup> *BDT*, "Ban on Radios 11 pm to 7 am Is Suggested," 12 March 1930; *BDT*, "No Radio Ban After Certain Hour of Night," 26 March 1930; *BDT*, "B.-M. Airport Dedicated in Fine Manner," 7 June 1930; *BDT*, "United Barre Considered By Council," 28 April 1930; *BDT*, "City Council Still Oppose Carnivals," 2 July 1930; *BDT*, "Railroad Street to Get Cement Sidewalk," 22 July 1930; "Rock of Ages Corporation is Organized," 18 March 1930. Rock of Ages began life in 1905 as Boutwell, Milne, and Varnum. It changed its name to Rock of Ages in 1925 and then reorganized in 1930. Co-founder George Milne should not be confused with the ex-alderman whom Suitor championed for the post of overseer of the poor. In 1932, the granite industry began laying off workers and slashing their pay. As an official with the GCLIA, Fred Suitor tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a settlement with employers. A six-week strike in the spring of 1933 ended with mixed results. Governor Stanley Wilson activated the National Guard even though the GCLIA had agreed to binding arbitration. Workers got some of the wage cuts rescinded, but were unsuccessful in ending open shop practices or ridding Barre of imported scabs. See Frayed Page Collective, *Vermont's Untold History* (Burlington, Vt.: Public Occurrence, 1976).

<sup>111</sup> *BDT*, "Big Mopping Up of Liquor Done in Barre," 16 August 1930; *BDT*, "Barre Police Tap Wet Spot on No. Main Street," 11 December 1930. See also *BDT*, 3 September 1930.

<sup>112</sup> *BDT*, "City Council Praised Chief Sullivan," 4 November 1930; *BDT*, "Donahue is Barre's New Police Head," 11 November 1930; *BDT*, "Ashley Named Deputy Chief of Police Dept.," 24 December 1930.

<sup>113</sup> To follow the Somers scandal see *BDT*, 24 and 31 December 1930; 6, 11 February 1931.

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<sup>114</sup> *BDT*, “205 In Barre Able to Work, Out of a Job,” 17 June 1930; *BDT*, “Shall Barre Observe Its 150th Year?” 23 July 1930; *BDT*, “Public Works To Relieve Unemployment,” 13 August 1930; *BDT*, “Aldermen Put Bond Issue Up To the Voters,” 27 August 1930; *BDT*, “Labor Day Program Carried Out in Part,” 2 September 1930; *BDT*, “Barre Voted \$50,000 For Public Works,” 9 September 1930.

<sup>115</sup> *BDT*, “Discuss Plans For Spending City’s \$50,000,” 17 September 1930; *BDT*, “Some Charity Cases Called Not Deserving,” 19 November 1930; *BDT*, “Ask for Road Construction Work in Winter,” 2 December 1930; *BDT*, “Mother Jones, Champion of Labor, Dead,” 1 December 1930; *BDT*, “‘Red’ Foster Refused to Reveal Names of Radical Committee,” 5 December 1930; *BDT*, “Turn City Hall To Commercial Uses Is Plan,” 14 January 1931; *BDT*, “The Salvation Army Asks \$500 From the City,” 18 February 1931; *BDT*, “Likely to Keep Shurtleff Fund Without Drain,” 25 February 1931.

<sup>116</sup> *Barre Annual Report*, 1930.

<sup>117</sup> *BDT*, “\$449,099 to Run Barre For Coming Year,” and “Mayor Suitor’s Annual Message,” 21 January 1931. News of Suitor’s mother’s death is in *BDT*, 15 May 1929. His obituary mentions his 1930 heart attack, something the local paper referred to merely as an “illness.”

<sup>118</sup> *Barre Annual Report*, 1931.

<sup>119</sup> *BDT*, “New Projects Not On Keast’s Plan for Barre,” 4 March 1931; *BDT*, “Mayor Suitor Said Farewell To City Council,” 5 May 1931. For election coverage see *BDT*, 9, 13, 14, 17 February and 2, 4 March 1931.

<sup>120</sup> La Point was succeeded by John A. Gordon, the grandson of John W. Gordon, *not* socialist Robert Gordon.

<sup>121</sup> *BDT*, “Fred Suitor, Labor Leader, Died Suddenly,” 10 May 1934.

<sup>122</sup> Radford, “From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities,” 863.

<sup>123</sup> The term “goo-goo” is the nickname given to members of Good Government Clubs that emerged in New York City in the 1890s to battle what they saw as Tammany Hall corruption. The term then went into wider circulation and implied that reformers elevated good government over party labels or loyalties.

<sup>124</sup> Not even LaGuardia’s eleven-year reign permanently obliterated Tammany Hall corruption. In the 1950s, Carmine DeSapio revived the Tammany machine and forged a working relationship with mobster Frank Costello. DeSapio earned the wrath of Eleanor Roosevelt when he sandbagged the political career of Franklin Roosevelt Jr. DeSapio lived until 2004, but Mrs. Roosevelt had her revenge and DeSapio lost power after 1961.

<sup>125</sup> One could easily see Richard J. Daley as the heir to the Coughlin and Kenna machines in Chicago.

<sup>126</sup> Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left*, 1.

<sup>127</sup> Jeffrey W. Coker, *Confronting American Labor: The New Left Dilemma* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 6.

<sup>128</sup> Stave, *Socialism and the Cities*, 7. See also Bradley Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901-1920* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

<sup>129</sup> Since 1982, Barre mayors have been elected to two-year terms. They also often play second fiddle to an unelected city manager, a change made in 1955. These are changes in accordance with Progressive Era thinking that socialists saw as inherently undemocratic.

<sup>130</sup> Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State*, (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999).

<sup>131</sup> Ted DeCorte, “Menace of Undesirables: Eugenics in the Progressive Era,” <http://www.slide-share.net/teddecorte/menace-of-undesirables>, accessed March 30, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Approximately 3 percent of the workforce belonged to unions in 1900, a percentage that would double by 1910 and again during World War I. Once protections from the War Labor Board ended, millions of workers lost union representation. The percentage of American workers in unions did not surpass 10 percent again until 1933. The 1900 to 1930 period also saw numerous dramatic setbacks for organized labor, including hostile Supreme Court decisions—especially the 1908 Danbury Hatters’ case (*Loewe v. Lawlor*)—the rise of the virulently anti-union National Association of Manufacturers, the often violent repression of the Industrial Workers of the World, the Red Scare, the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, the Ludlow massacre, and the promotion of open-shop movements.

<sup>133</sup> Judd, *Socialist Cities*, 11.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Fink, *Workers across the Americas*, 304.

<sup>135</sup> A particularly problematic example is Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003), a book often assigned to undergraduate students. It has much to commend it, but McGerr’s view of Progressivism cherry picks a fifty-year period and labels nearly every reform movement “Progressive.” By essentially eliminating the Gilded Age, McGerr obliterates the substantive differences between grass-roots reform efforts led by movements such as the Knights of Labor and Populists and top-down

Progressive reformers. A different analytical uncertainty emerges in Robert Wiebe's classic, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1967), a book still in print and still assigned. By lumping reform efforts as the eponymous search for order, differences elide and dissolve.

<sup>136</sup> Judd, *Socialist Cities*, 15.

<sup>137</sup> Charges of "right-wing" socialism and slurs such as "sewer socialist" intensified with the emergence of the American Communist Party after 1919, though such thinking was already present in the American left. The Knights of Labor, for example, was riven over disputed views of socialism. Its ranks contained doctrinaire Marxists who wanted to make the Knights a working-class revolutionary vanguard, and Lassalleian socialists who espoused ballot box politics. Black International anarchists opposed both as too conservative. In the twentieth century, the Industrial Workers of the World also split over revolutionary versus evolutionary tactics.

<sup>138</sup> Bucki, *Bridgeport's Socialist New Deal*, 177.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>140</sup> Radford, "From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities," 887-888.

<sup>141</sup> Sally Miller, "Milwaukee: Of Ethnicity and Labor," in Stave, ed., *Socialism and the Cities*, 41-71. Quotes are from p. 45. Note: The Wisconsin Idea is sometimes called the "Milwaukee formula."

<sup>142</sup> Judd, *Socialist Cities*, 32.

<sup>143</sup> Socialists sometimes claim credit for Robert La Follette's 4.8 million votes in 1924, but the SP merely endorsed La Follette, who ran on the Progressive Party ticket after squabbling with leftist ideologues.

<sup>144</sup> W. J. Conroy, *Challenging the Boundaries of Reform: Socialism in Burlington* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>145</sup> For more on Sanders as mayor see Steven Soifer, *The Socialist Mayor: Bernard Sanders in Burlington, Vermont*, (New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1991).

<sup>146</sup> Among the mayors jailed since Bernard Sanders was elected in 1981 are: Lee Alexander (Syracuse, N.Y.), Marty Barnes (Paterson, N.J.), Marion Barry (Washington, D.C.), Bill Campbell (Atlanta, Ga.), Buddy Cianci (Providence, R.I.), Bill Cooper (Appalachia, Va.), Joe Ganim (Bridgeport, Conn.), Phil Giordano (Waterbury, Conn.), John Gosek (Oswego, N.Y.), James Brent Haymond (Springville, Utah), Sharpe James (Newark, N.J.), and Kwame Kilpatrick (Detroit, Mich.). And one can only feel badly for Camden, New Jersey, citizens; when Milton Milan went to jail in 2000 he became the third city mayor in a row to be imprisoned.

<sup>147</sup> James Fallows, "Why Cities Work Even When Washington Doesn't: The Case for Strong Mayors," *The Atlantic*, April 2014, 66-72; Fallows quote on 66.

<sup>148</sup> Jay Walljasper, "Burlington, Northern Light," *The Nation*, 19 May 1997.

<sup>149</sup> John Nichols, "How Does Bernie Sanders Do It?" *The Nation*, 19 November 2012. In 2012, Milo Weinberger, a Democrat, became mayor of Burlington. Both Sanders and Clavelle endorsed him. Weinberger's City Council is made up of seven Democrats, four members of the Sanders-Clavelle "Progressive Coalition," two independents, and one Republican. This makes Burlington one of the most representative cities in the nation.

<sup>150</sup> 2008 Green Party election results can be viewed at <http://greenpages.wordpress.com/2008/11/08/november-2008-green-party-election-results/>, accessed March 30, 2014.