



Socialist Party of Missouri Collection (S0090)

Collection Number: S0090

Collection Title: Socialist Party of Missouri Collection

Dates: 1909-1966

Creator: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Abstract: The Socialist Party of Missouri Collection contains correspondence and official proceedings of the Socialist Party, records of activities and interactions with other organizations, and literature related to socialism. The collection documents internal party history, local and national politics, and the labor movement. The collection also includes a sound recording of an interview with presidential candidate Norman Thomas.

Collection Size: 4.6 cubic feet
(103 folders, 10 rolls of microfilm, 1 audio disc, 1 oversize photograph)

Language: Collection materials are predominantly in English. Materials in German and Dutch are indicated at the folder level.

Repository: The State Historical Society of Missouri

Restrictions on Access: Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at stlouis@shsmo.org. Collections may be viewed at any research center.

Restrictions on Use: Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Rights & Reproductions](#) on the Society's website for more information about reproductions and permission to publish.

Preferred Citation: [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Socialist Party of Missouri Collection* (S0090); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

Donor Information: The records were donated to the University of Missouri by Maurice R. Wheeler and Doris B. Wheeler on September 7, 1972 (Accession No. A0161). An addition was made by Edward Petrikovitsch in September 1972 (Accession No. A0182). An addition was made by an unidentified donor on May 17, 1974 (Accession No. A0427). An addition was made by Mrs. Louis Zuefle on August 30, 1977 (Accession No. A1136).

Existence and Location of Originals: Folder 101 contains photocopies of *Proceedings: Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party of America at St. Louis, 1917*. The original is located in University of Missouri-St. Louis, Thomas Jefferson Library special collections, HX 89 S75 1917.

Separated Material: The microfilm rolls are located in the microfilm cabinet in the reading room at the St. Louis Research Center.

Related Materials: Additional materials related to the Socialist Party of Missouri can be found in the following collections:

Frei Gemeinde Von St. Louis (1850-1972), Records (S0037)
Saunders, Robert S., Papers (S0087)
Camp Solidarity Inc., Records (S0184)
Preisler, Paul (1902-1971), Papers (S0235)
Von Romer, Harry (1906-), Collection (S0471)
Wheeler, Maurice (1907-1993) and Doris (1907-1985), Papers (S0599)

Processing Information: A contract (a revision to an earlier one), which was signed by Maurice R. Wheeler and Doris B. Wheeler and dated September 27, 1972, covers the original accession (A0161) from September 7, 1972. See the letter from Mrs. Irene Cortinovis to Mr. and Mrs. Maurice R. Wheeler, dated September 14, 1972, located in the administrative files in the St. Louis Research Center office.

Staff members separated audio materials and associated transcripts at an unknown time and stored them within a devised collection, *Oral History Collection (S0829)*. Interviewees are David Thayer Burbank (T-217), Edward Petrikovitsch with Doris and Maurice Wheeler (T-225), Edward Petrikovitsch (T-226), Harry Von Romer (T-268 and T-273), Norman Thomas (T-356), and David Cohen (T-436).

The material in folders 98-100 once comprised the “Edward Petrikovitsch Collection” and was incorporated into the Socialist Party of Missouri Collection at an unknown time.

Textual materials were microfilmed in 1984 according to a previous arrangement of folders.

Processed by: Western Historical Manuscripts Collection staff in 1972. Revised by Emery Cox, September 17, 2018.

Historical Note: Under the leadership of Eugene V. Debs and Victor L. Berger, the former Social Democratic Party of America combined with a faction of the Socialist Labor Party in 1901 to form the Socialist Party of America (also called Socialist Party of the United States of America or Socialist Party U. S. A.). The first party platform explicitly denounced the capitalist system and called for its overthrow.

Debs and Allan L. Benson were the Socialist Party’s presidential candidates from the founding through 1920, during which period the party reached its greatest membership and electoral numbers. Dues-paying members resided in all 48 states, plus the District of Columbia and Alaska Territory. Participation declined after World War I and the “Red Scare” (a movement against communism, anarchism, and socialism) but then experienced a revival during the Great

Depression (1929-1939). Norman Thomas was the party's nominee for President of the United States in each election from 1928 to 1948.

During the McCarthy era, the Socialist Party received fewer presidential votes in 1952 and fewer yet in 1956—the last year that they ran a presidential candidate. Historian David A. Shannon wrote a chapter on “Last Rites and Post Mortem” in his 1955 book, *The Socialist Party of America*. The party officially disbanded at its 1972 convention, but immediately reformed under the name Social Democrats, USA. Two factions thereof formed new organizations the next year: Socialist Party of the United States and Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (later Democratic Socialists of America). Those three successors are each still active in 2018.

Like many political parties in the United States, the Socialist Party operated through state affiliates. Those contained the basic organizational unit: county- or municipal-level Locals. The Locals could be further subdivided into Branches, which represented a more specific geographical area, such as a ward of a city.

Missouri's state affiliate, the Socialist Party of Missouri, mirrored the national party's trend of popularity in the 1910s and 1930s. There were about 100 Locals in the state in 1934, the secondary peak in membership. However, activity waned through the rest of the Roosevelt Administration and the rest of the 1940s. By 1954, the party was no longer listed in *State of Missouri Official Manual* (the “Blue Book”).

The Socialist Party of St. Louis (sometimes formally called Local St. Louis) was the chapter in Missouri's then-largest city. At the initial convention in 1901, delegates voted to establish the national party headquarters in St. Louis, although the office moved to Omaha in 1903. Records in this collection often focus on the St. Louis area regardless, because the donors, Maurice and Doris (Bausch) (Preisler) Wheeler, were St. Louis residents. Enough members lived in St. Louis that Branches existed for some wards and groups of wards. Doris Preisler and her first husband, Paul W. Preisler, for example, were members of the South Central Branch.

Arrangement:

The collection has been arranged into the following 5 series:

- Administrative Files
- Activities
- Publications
- Addenda
- Oversize Audio-Visual

Scope and Content Note:

Administrative Files

This series contains materials related to proceedings of the Socialist Party on national, state, and local levels. It includes party constitutions; minutes of party bodies, such as branches, committees, and conventions; financial records; and membership information. Correspondence (bulk 1933–1938) to and from secretaries of various bodies, individual members, outside

speakers, and others documents the party's events, conflicts, and plans. Subjects in the correspondence include labor unions, strikes, and elections. The series is arranged first by topic (foundational documents, minutes, correspondence, finances, and membership) and then chronologically.

Activities

This series consists of materials pertaining to more specific operations of the Socialist Party and to interactions with other organizations. The series includes correspondence with other parties and political organizations; Socialist Party educational, electoral, outreach, and entertainment activities; and documents about various labor unions and labor history. Education and entertainment sometimes overlapped with each other, such as with Martin Lechner's play *Sane or Insane: The Sanity Trial of Capitalism*. A lengthy report from the St. Louis Labor Education Project contains biographies of labor leaders and brief histories of specific unions, and transitory newspapers called "strike bulletins" detail disputes of the Gas House Workers and Warehouse Workers in St. Louis. The series is arranged mostly alphabetically by topic (communism, education, elections, labor, etc.).

Publications

This series contains literature and ephemera published by the Socialist Party and other political groups. It includes meeting and event flyers, pamphlets, political cartoons, and clippings and whole issues of periodicals. Promotional pamphlets such as "Toward Independent Labor Politics in Britain" or "Russia—Promise and Performance" connect the collection to international socialist movements. Official party serials present include *The Missouri Socialist*, *Socialist Review*, *Hammer and Tongs*, *The Bulletin* (for St. Louis), and the handwritten *The Missouri Rebel*. The series is mostly arranged first with general collections of literature, followed by folders each containing issues of specific titles.

Addenda

This series consists of materials that were acquired after the initial collection had been created, especially papers that Edward Petrikovitsch donated. There are several autographed letters from Julius Deutsch (f. 98-99) and Norman Thomas (f. 99), and folder 100 contains issues of *Solidarity Slants*, the newsletter of Camp Solidarity (see collection S0184).

Oversize Audio-Visual

This series comprises 1 phonograph record (Norman Thomas interviewed by Upton Close on issues of 1936 campaign) and 1 oversized photograph (Socialist National Emergency Convention in St. Louis, April 4-18, 1917).

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- f. 7-8 Reports and Minutes, 1935-1937
- f. 9 Proceedings of the National Convention of the Socialist Party, 1940
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- f. 62 Labor-Social Work Committee, Minutes and Memos, 1945
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- f. 65 Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, 1935

- Box 006 f. 66 Gas House Workers Union, 1935
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- f. 99 Edward Petrikovitsch Correspondence to and from Norman Thomas and others, 1928-1966 (some materials in German)
- f. 100 *Solidarity Slants*, 1950-1961
- f. 101 *Proceedings: Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party of America at St. Louis, 1917*
 Original in University of Missouri-St. Louis Library special collections, HX 89 S75 1917
- f. 102 Negative of Socialist National Emergency Convention in St. Louis, April 4-18, 1917
- f. 103 Conventions, circa 1934
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