



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

Pool, checkers, and dominoes were among the games available to visitors to the quiet game room at the 4th Street Social Center.

POLITICS IN PLAY

SOCIALISM, FREE SPEECH, AND SOCIAL CENTERS IN MILWAUKEE

By Elizabeth Jozwiak

Emil Seidel, the workingman and Socialist elected mayor of Milwaukee in April 1910, was generally known as a modest individual, largely due to his soft-spoken voice and small physical stature. Although his demeanor did not diminish the power of Seidel's intelligence or earnestness when running the city, his style of public speaking was not prone to the incendiary, like many of his fellow Socialist politicians, notably Victor Berger. It was with some surprise then that members of the Milwaukee Ministerial Association found themselves on the receiving end of a fiery address by Seidel the same year he was elected. The topic was the children of the city and the future that they faced. Seidel believed that the problems facing the city's youth were so serious that he confronted the group and challenged them to put aside their differences and recognize the level of the threat. "While you are fighting for some theological dogma, our boys and girls are going to hell!"¹

These were strong words for a group of clerics to hear, especially from the usually unassuming Seidel. But the mayor had cause for concern. From 1889 to 1904 Milwaukee had invested over \$2 million in public schooling in response to the population increases that came with late nineteenth-century immigration. Milwaukee's leaders placed significant resources in the building of new schools and additions to existing schools, yet in 1904 half of the city's children did not attend any kind of school. By 1910 a special study of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics indicated that despite the city's financial investment, 27 percent of children ages seven to fourteen still did not attend school. The schools were there but many of these children were working in the vast number of industries that called Milwaukee home during the late nineteenth century.²

Seidel understood the plight of working children, having had to leave school to go to work at age thirteen to help support his family. The mayor's passion for the well-being of his city's youth went beyond personal interest, though, as the public schools were to play an important political role in the plans of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Socialist party of Milwaukee. As the first Socialist mayor elected to lead the city of Milwaukee, Seidel was able to develop the recreation plank of the Socialist platform. SDP members, who had been dubbed "sewer socialists" for advocating municipal ownership of utilities and other large-scale civic reforms, had other goals as well, including city-supported recreational facilities throughout Milwaukee neighborhoods. Recreation had been part of the SDP platform since 1904, and party members, including mayors Seidel and (after him) Daniel Hoan, as well as those serving on the Common Council and the School Board, worked to promote city parks, playgrounds, and social centers. They did this at a time when a national movement of social reform championed a return to the traditional values of community. Such values naturally accommodated the idea of city-supported social centers and the ideal loca-

A boy sits alone on the sidewalk in seeming despair. The social centers sought to alleviate boredom and societal malaise.



Gee!

*I wish I had
a playground.*



WHI(X3)28630

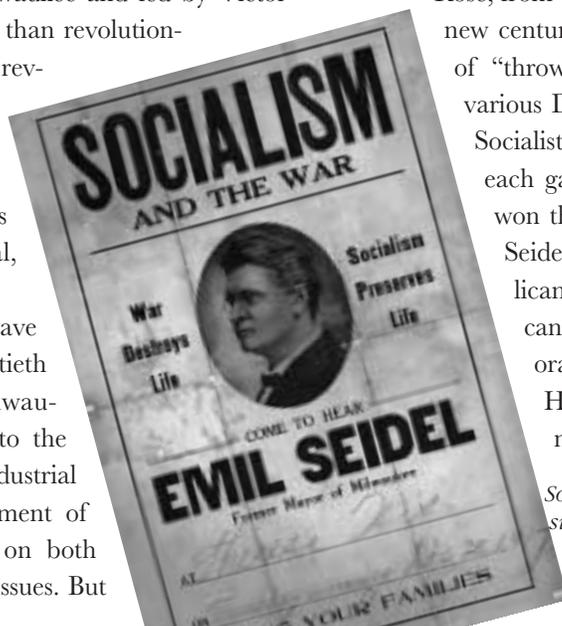
Students of Milwaukee's International Socialist Sunday School in a production of Cinderella.

tions for many of the centers were the neighborhood schools.³

Unlike most other cities in the nation, however, Milwaukee was home to a large political kinship of Socialists who were a potent political force. Formed in 1898, the SDP, a national political movement centered in Milwaukee and led by Victor Berger, took an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary approach to socialism. While the revolutionary branch of socialism adhered to the overthrow of the capitalist system by organized workers, "evolutionaries" like Milwaukee's SDP members supported practical, incremental gains for workers now.

Their timing could now not have been better. By the turn of the twentieth century, many working-class Milwaukeeans found themselves attracted to the SDP because of its respect for industrial workers, its demands for fair treatment of working people, and its emphasis on both bread-and-butter and quality-of-life issues. But

many of the city's middle- and upper-class inhabitants were also seeking a break from the machine politics and graft that had plagued Milwaukee throughout the 1890s and into the twentieth century, especially during the administration of mayor David Rose, from 1898 through 1906. By the first years of the new century, Milwaukeeans had adopted an attitude of "throw the bums out," and they began to replace various Democrats and Republicans with reputable Socialists. The Common Council and School Board each gained a Socialist contingent, and the SDP won the mayor's office with the election of Emil Seidel in 1910. In 1912, Democrats and Republicans defeated the Socialist mayor with a fusion candidate. But the Socialists retrieved the mayoralty in 1916 with the election of Daniel Hoan, who held the office until 1940. The mayor's office was undoubtedly a milestone



Socialist mayor Emil Seidel was largely responsible for the inception of Milwaukee's municipal social centers in 1912.

WHI(X3)49594

for the party, but the Socialists in the Common Council and on the School Board were perhaps even more important to the story of the city's social centers because their positions focused on the schools and the recreation programs directly.

The social centers owed their existence, in part, to the great social reform movements that were spreading quickly across the country. Reformers like Jane Addams in nearby Chicago and throughout the country promoted the civic aspects of community social centers as modern versions of the New England town meeting or as adult education centers. They believed that such discussion could occur without advocating particular political philosophies. Like these other urban reformers of the period, the Milwaukee Socialists considered social centers to be places for play, entertainment, and civic activity. The SDP, however, considered unfettered political discussion—including the discussion of socialism—an essential civic activity. This connection between the social centers and political free speech would prove to be the battleground where SDP members would have to decide if they valued recreation more as a means to a political end to extending the reach of the party, or as an end in itself, bettering the lives of all Milwaukeeans.⁴

As was the case with many of their political ideas, Milwaukee Socialists applied their recreation strategy in two important ways. First, Socialists in different areas of government believed that in addition to participation in civic activity, all residents deserved access to wholesome cultural and recreational facilities. Although these politicians did not wish to exclude political discussion from the scope of the recreational activity that took place in the centers, they did not want to derail the centers from taking hold by emphasizing politics too soon. Second, despite being primarily concerned with ensuring recreational opportunities for the working class, party leaders were wise enough not to promote social centers as the exclusive realm of the workingman or woman. The SDP won an increasing number of offices in the early 1900s, but the party would need to continue to gain political allies to accomplish its goals. Those allies would be easier to make if the SDP minimized its rhetoric of class conflict. Also, if the centers were perceived as being for only working-class individuals, the activities the centers offered might smack of

charity, rather than recreation. This perception could alienate all classes from participation.⁵

No matter their practical short-term goals, party members remained committed to their mission to educate the public about Socialism, and the centers were at the heart of that education. The primary goal was to establish the social centers as a strong, familiar presence throughout the city, where people would learn about Socialist beliefs and activities at a basic level, in their own neighborhood, whatever their address. SDP leaders believed that people needed only to become informed about Socialist goals and philosophy to become supporters. The consequent election of a majority of Socialist candidates throughout city government would then make possible the first concrete changes for everyone's benefit. To the Socialists, the social centers would be both ends and means in that endeavor. In time, however, this question of "political education" was the issue on which the socialists and their allies parted ways, but this potential rift was not apparent at the beginning.⁶

A school in a needy area, the lower North Side's Sixth District School, was chosen for Milwaukee's first social center experiment in 1908. Among the residents of this largely poor section were many immigrants, including Russian Jews and Greeks. The center was a success, bringing together the various ethnic groups and achieving significant participation of both parents and children. With that success the SDP was ready to fulfill its plan for a city-wide program. They recognized that middle-class residents might be more likely to approve of taxes that provided them with services, rather than those that served only the less fortunate.⁷

Their efforts paid off in 1912 when the School Board instituted a Division of Municipal and Adult Recreation. The board hired as the new division's head, Harold Berg, an energetic elementary school principal who had supported a social center at his elementary school. He threw himself into this job, often working sixteen-hour days. Socialists did not worry much that Berg was not a member of the party. For them, having a committed director was more important than political affiliation. Harold Berg was a tireless promoter of the centers, speaking to local community groups and sharing Milwaukee's growing suc-



WHI(X3)22047

Milwaukee's second Socialist mayor, Daniel Hoan, was also friendly to the recreation programs.

cess story in articles. Berg chose one of his most innovative teachers, Dorothy Enderis, as his assistant for girls' recreation. While a fourth grade teacher, Enderis had promoted the importance of play, not just exercise, for children. Viewing the district rule of required classroom calisthenics as silly, Enderis allowed the children to play games on the playground during their exercise period if they quickly completed the calisthenics. Far from disapproving of this modification, Berg supported her efforts. Center workers praised Enderis for "bringing good cheer and kindly advice" when she visited them. She would eventually succeed Berg in 1920 and lead the division, and the social centers in particular, to greater heights during her tenure, which lasted through 1948. In later years, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee would honor her contributions to education by naming its education building after her.⁸

When determining the plan for Milwaukee's social centers, Berg and Enderis examined various cities' full-scale recreation systems. They deemed Chicago's fieldhouses—large facilities that had room for all manner of recreation and civic activity—



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

Former principal Harold Berg teamed up with his most favored teacher, Dorothy Enderis, to lead Milwaukee's recreation programs.

too expensive to be practical in Milwaukee. Despite being at first the "bluest folks" when they compared their little schoolhouse efforts to the grander Chicago programs, Berg and Enderis soon decided that the Milwaukee's existing school center approach was more neighborhood-friendly. A neighborhood system certainly fit the Socialists' vision for the centers, which they borrowed from Rochester, New York's former social center director, Socialist Edward J. Ward. Ward became an advisor to the Mil-

waukee program in 1910 at the instigation of the SDP.⁹

By the mid-1910s eleven social centers distributed throughout the city provided a variety of wholesome recreational opportunities for young people and adults, without politics casting a shadow over their benefits. Some classrooms became "quiet game rooms" where children could play checkers and other board games or work on puzzles. Neighborhood directors sometimes arranged tournaments to maintain interest in such quiet games.¹⁰

The centers also provided pool tables for teenage boys. These were quite controversial at first, but Harold Berg and other

The Wisconsin Historical Society

Director: Robert B. Thomasgard, Jr.

Officers

President: Patricia A. Boge

President Elect: Mark L. Gajewski

Treasurer: Anne M. West

Secretary: Robert B. Thomasgard

Board of Curators

Ruth Barker, *Ephraim*

Thomas H. Barland, *Eau Claire*

Murray D. "Chip" Beckford, *Cascade*

Patricia A. Boge, *La Crosse*

Mary F. Buestrin, *Mequon*

Thomas E. Caestecker, *Green Lake*

John M. Cooper, Jr., *Madison*

William J. Cronon, *Madison*

Craig Culver, *Prairie du Sac*

Laurie Davidson, *Marinette*

Ness Flores, *Waukesha*

Stephen J. Freese, *Dodgeville*

Mark L. Gajewski, *Madison*

Charles E. Haas, *La Crosse*

Beverly A. Harrington, *Oshkosh*

Fannie E. Hicklin, *Madison*

Gregory Huber, *Wausau*

Margaret Humleker, *Fond du Lac*

John Kerrigan, *Dubuque, IA*

Ellen D. Langill, *Waukesha*

Genevieve G. McBride, *Milwaukee*

Judy Nagel, *DePere*

Janice M. Rice, *Stoughton*

Fred A. Risser, *Madison*

John M. Russell, *Menomonie*

Dale Schultz, *Richland Center*

John Schroeder, *Milwaukee*

Gerald D. Viste, *Wausau*

Anne M. West, *Milwaukee*

Carlyle H. "Hank" Whipple, *Madison*

Ex-officio Board of Curators

Delores C. Ducklow, *President, FRIENDS of the Society*

John Grek, *President, Wisconsin Council for Local History*

Roy C. LaBudde, *President, Wisconsin Historical Foundation*

David W. Olien, *Senior Vice President, University of Wisconsin System*

The Wisconsin Historical Foundation

President: Roy C. LaBudde, *Milwaukee*

Vice-President: Bruce T. Block, *Milwaukee*

Vice-President: Margaret B. Humleker, *Fond du Lac*

Vice-President: Sheldon B. Lubar, *Milwaukee*

Vice-President: Edwin P. Wiley, *Milwaukee*

Treasurer: Rhona E. Vogel, *Brookfield*

Secretary: John D. Singer, *Madison*

Asst. Treasurer & Asst. Secretary: W. Pharis Horton, *Madison*

Hartley B. Barker, *Scottsdale, AZ.*

Thomas H. Barland, *Eau Claire (emeritus)*

Patricia A. Boge, *La Crosse*

Robert M. Bolz, *Madison*

Daniel W. Erdman, *Madison*

James D. Ericson, *Milwaukee*

Rockne G. Flowers, *Madison*

John J. Frautschi, *Madison*

Mark L. Gajewski, *Madison*

Gary P. Grunau, *Milwaukee*

Richard H. Holscher, *Lake Tomahawk*

Ralph C. Inbusch, Jr., *Fox Point*

W. Robert Koch, *Madison*

Paul Meissner, *Milwaukee*

George H. Miller, *Ripon (emeritus)*

Jodi Peck, *Fox Point*

Peggy A. Rosenzweig, *Wauwatosa*

Walter S. Rugland, *Appleton*

Richard L. Schmidt, *West Bend*

Robert B. Thomasgard, *Madison*

Carol T. Toussaint, *Madison (emerita)*

Robert S. Zigman, *Milwaukee*



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

One woman is held afloat by a rope while more advanced swimmers go it alone in the Forest Home School swimming pool.

social center supporters managed to persuade skeptics that social center poolrooms were indeed wholesome. There was nothing inherently wrong with playing pool; it was the smoking and drinking in the saloons that housed the majority of poolrooms that were the problems, he argued. Many boys would continue to favor the saloon, but for those who patronized the centers, the pool tables could be the “connecting link between the neighborhood gangs and the center.” Center staff drew them with pool tables and kept them with other activities.¹¹

Basketball was the most popular sport in the centers with teams and sportsmanlike intercenter rivalries encouraged. Outside groups, such as the East Side Young People’s Socialist League (YPSL) basketball team, made use of the center facilities as well. Social clubs, amateur entertainment, movies, and “industrial classes,” such as craft classes, rounded out the social center activities.¹²

Even though many of the activities—such as the industrial classes—resembled those offered at settlement houses, the supporters of the social centers continued to present them to the

Common Council and general public as providing something for everyone. To avoid the perception of charity work that would require private, not civic, support, Milwaukee’s social center administrators emphasized that their centers were run “by the people, for the people,” not by the wealthy for the poor. Some Milwaukeeans began with a “sentimental attitude” about the centers, and, according to Dorothy Enderis, they thought they were for immigrants and “bad boys.” After seeing them in action, however, residents of wealthy districts wanted them for themselves as much as poorer residents did. Without looking very hard, anyone could find “something doing” at the neighborhood social center.

Harold Berg told his staff to gear their offerings to the interests of neighborhood patrons. Administrators found, for example, that teenage boys who had left school to work had little interest in the formal gymnastics some recreation directors had assumed they would enjoy. But young men—and girls, too—could hardly get enough basketball and filled multiple teams. In the largely Italian immigrant neighborhood



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

Above: The social centers promoted cleanliness too. A group of boys peek from behind their shower curtains at the 14th Street Center. **Right:** In 1912 girls basketball teams at the Dover Street Center included the Crescents, Lions, and Owls.



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

Dover Street Center. Whether seventeen or seventy-seven, “they were all of one age when in the classroom,” remembered one teacher.¹⁴

of the Detroit Street social center, directors found that the poor attendance at evening dances could be blamed on cultural prohibitions against girls going out at night. The directors in those neighborhoods adapted, and they reported reaching the “girl element,” after they instituted socials that were much more family affairs than were the evening dances. Depending on the center, neighborhood socials might regularly draw as many as two hundred people.¹³

Women in the industrial classes, too, set their own agendas. They might learn *Amerikanisch schnittmuster* (American sewing patterns) or “get new ideas in fancy work” from each other. The women also periodically exhibited their work at center craft shows, which one patron called “better than the state fair” because they could better examine the work displayed. Women of all ages built camaraderie over their sewing at the

At every level, women played a role in the support of the centers, from the women in the various classes, to the “girl element” at dances, to Dorothy Enderis’s direction. Perhaps where gender had its most distinct role, however, was on the School Board. Promotion of the social center idea and responsi-

bility for carrying it out resided largely with the board. Once Milwaukee began electing its School Board members in 1907, the SDP was eager to win seats on it, in part to help lead the way on the social center idea. Having won the right to vote in school elections in 1885, women expressed concerns that were critical in these elections. Given their responsibilities for raising children, women were deemed well suited for deciding school issues. Female candidates made good sense as well to the SDP. Though not always feminist in practice, in theory these women stood for women's rights. One of the first Socialists on the board was Annie Whitnall, school activist and daughter of local lumber magnate George Gordon. She was also well known in Socialist circles as the wife of prominent Socialist landscape architect Charles Whitnall, who would become city treasurer in the Seidel administration of 1910–1912. Originally part of the local Fabian “Ethical Society,” the Whitnalls were involved in the founding of the SDP in 1898. They were among the few early non-German Milwaukee Socialists. Although Annie Whitnall did not officially join the party until 1909, and was elected without party fanfare in 1907, she backed the party program. She was a popular, hardworking, and well-respected member of the board.¹⁵

The leader of the Socialist contingent on the board, however, was undoubtedly Meta Berger, who was elected in 1909. Another woman initially known primarily as the wife of a local Socialist leader—in this case, Victor Berger—Meta Berger became a Socialist force in her own right. Victor Berger was the editor of the local Socialist newspapers, the weekly *Social Democratic Herald* and then the daily *Milwaukee Leader*. He also served as a city alderman and in 1910 became the first Socialist elected to the United States Congress. Meta Berger was not politically inclined as a young woman, but the Socialist cause was her husband's life, and gradually she came to understand and agree with Victor's political beliefs. Meta Berger's col-



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services
An advertising pamphlet reaches out to German, Polish, Hebrew, and Italian speakers.

leagues respected her enough to elect her president of the School Board in 1915, and she remained a member for thirty years.¹⁶

Prominent nonsocialist clubwomen and School Board members such as Fanny Norris, Belle Cantrovitz, and Lizzie Black Kander, well known for founding and running a local Jewish settlement house, frequently joined the Socialists in a pro-social center alliance. As “distasteful” as Kander found Socialist rhetoric, she and Meta Berger, for instance, often saw eye to eye on children's issues. Milwaukeeans of all backgrounds knew of Kander from the *Settlement Cookbook*, which for years supplied many Milwaukee kitchens with tasty recipes. Although various newspaper publishers attempted to dismiss their importance by caricaturing them in ridiculously elaborate hats (the daily *Milwaukee Free Press* dubbed them the “Easter Bonnet Club”) this thinly veiled caricature of their gender could not dismiss the power they had

when they stood together, which was often.¹⁷

As a result of the efforts of all the advocates of the centers, Milwaukee voters embraced the social center idea, approving a 1912 referendum endorsement of \$20,000 in taxes for social center work. Some critics who had initially been “worked up about taxes,” recalled Dorothy Enderis, had become converts to the social center cause, and few Milwaukeeans still referred to them as a “blankety-blank notion of those socialists in City Hall.” When Gerhard Bading, the fusion candidate elected to the mayoral office in between Socialist mayors Seidel and Hoan, floated the idea of cutting social center spending, he faced an outcry from around the city; the centers had become something everyone wanted.¹⁸

Although sports, games, and entertainment events drew good attendance and the Socialists wholeheartedly supported these, these events were not the primary reason Socialist support for the centers had been so intense. For the SDP, the discussion and promotion of Socialism was as critical an element

to the existence of the centers, and the party would fight to develop the centers into the political tools they wanted them to be. Not every center had a civic club or civic meetings, but those that did might draw attendance of anywhere from 17 to 350. Many issues might be discussed, but for Socialists, “civic” discussion generally meant “political” discussion. Because the School Board and its recreation director set policy for the use of the school buildings after hours, Socialists needed support from the educational community for a policy that supported free discussion. Most nonsocialist School Board members worried about the disruptive influence of full-fledged political debate at the centers, and the board banned “partisan” activities in the schools. While they may have been concerned about mainstream political debate turning ugly, what really worried most members was that these centers might serve as forums for “isms”—namely Socialism.¹⁹ The two mutually exclusive attitudes were on a collision course, but would the centers be the casualty?

The School Board approved of a “civic” program category, and SDP aldermen held public meetings at the social centers to discuss city and ward issues. During the Socialist administration of 1910–1912, SDP officials also used the centers to discuss politics. Sometimes Socialist members seemed to dominate civic clubs that were not officially Socialist, inviting Socialist officials to give speeches and even musical performances. This practice led antisocialists to believe that certain civic clubs were really fronts for the SDP. One letter to the editor of the *Daily News* said the “so-called neighborhood clubs, organized ostensibly for the purpose of explaining city budgets, higher taxes, etc.” were in fact “paving the way for further explanations of why the taxpayers’ money should be squandered.” To prevent these civic meetings from serving as campaign forums, the School Board suspended them close to election time.²⁰

The SDP disagreed with what it considered an artificial distinction between civic and political concerns. Victor Berger once declared that the idea of public social centers without free discussion “was like telling children they could go swimming as long as they stayed away from the water.” On the School Board,



Milwaukee Free Press, March 21, 1907

An editorial cartoon reacts to the political power wielded by a contingent of women on the Milwaukee School Board.

Meta Berger often led the fight for open discussion in the centers. When the Milwaukee County Woman’s Suffrage Association petitioned the School Board in 1913 for permission to hold its meetings in the schools, Berger supported the request on the grounds that the group was not political. One nonsocialist School Board member, Emmet Richardson, on the other hand, argued that suffrage was a “burning political question,” and he and other Board members contended that permission in this case would open the door to other political meetings. A few nonsocialist social center supporters, such as women’s club activists Belle Cantrovitz and Lizzie Black Kander, voted with Meta Berger, but they were outvoted. Berger also lost her campaign to remove altogether the ban on “partisan” meetings by civic groups. That effort failed by an even larger margin than had the suffrage meeting question.²¹

Meta Berger tried again in 1914. For her, it was only right that the school buildings “that cost the people so much money



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

During the Depression, social centers eased the suffering of the unemployed. Here, a group of men repair their own shoes at the Municipal Unemployment Social Center.

ought to be open to them to discuss any subject they please.” The local newspapers took strong positions on the question. The *Milwaukee Sentinel*, for example, editorialized in favor of the School Board’s refusal to permit “the schoolhouses to be used as conventicles for political gabfests and soapbox oratory.” Eliminating the restriction against partisan meetings would open the door to “socialist ‘rag chewing’ contests” and “political agitators.” Victor Berger and his Socialist paper, the *Milwaukee Leader*, not surprisingly did not waste any time replying to these charges. He maintained that discussion of Socialism did not preclude representation of other points of view. The “political agitators” that the *Sentinel* spoke of, declared the *Leader*, were people who did not “endorse things as they are.” A “political gabfest,” he defined as a “meeting of voters whose minds are not directed by wires from the Mer-

chants and Manufacturers Association.”²²

The School Board occasionally approved political debates, but usually only during a municipal campaign, as it did in 1916. Board members did not want a steady diet of political controversy in the centers. The board and recreation director Berg remained chary of discussions “thrown open to the audience.” Berg, despite approving of free discussion in principle, argued that “it is wiser to be careful and avoid occurrences which may not only put a stop to such use of the schools but interfere with the social center work.” “Personal disagreements and disorder” in a private hall might be expected, he maintained, but such heated exchanges in the public schools might bring about demands to close the buildings for such use. The School Board’s G. W. Augustyn, a social center supporter, agreed: “General discussions free for all comers are likely to degenerate into person-



Milwaukee Public Schools Department of Recreation and Community Services

A man identified as Mr. Cacateau teaches a group of young men how to turn a cigar box into a guitar in 1941 at the 4th Street Social Center.

alities and disputes.” These would be bad for the civic clubs and the social centers, he said. Berg decided, consequently, to allow only invited guests to discuss publicly the questions that were raised at such meetings. This restriction would presumably prevent incidents like one in 1911 at the West Side Neighborhood Club.²³

In June 1911 the West Side Neighborhood Club sponsored a debate on the Socialist administration record between antisocialist alderman August Braun and SDP speaker Carl Thompson. Perhaps because it was a meeting of a regular club, this politically charged meeting went forward without School Board oversight. But after the debate, Braun and fellow alderman Joseph Carney charged the Socialists with unfairly dominating the meeting. The *Social Democratic Herald* countered that a “little bunch of clickers at the back,” not the Socialists, were the real problem because they were the ones interrupting the speakers. Someone who had attended the debate wrote the *Herald* to say that alderman Carney had not been invited to speak, but rather than listening to the others, repeatedly demanded the floor, “stalking out” when the chair refused to give it to him. Braun, Carney, and the vice-president of the club evidently felt waylaid by Socialist club members at this meeting. Though the School Board did not find any violation of rules, several nonsocialist members apparently worried that this meeting signaled a potentially volatile trend and began monitoring “civic” use requests more closely.²⁴

The Socialists did their best for free speech in the social centers, but had to be satisfied with highly regulated forums. This defeat, however, most likely saved the centers for broader recreational uses. The perception that the centers had become politicized would have sounded their death knell. This kind of political controversy had effectively killed the civic uses for social centers in Rochester, New York. Antisocialists had closed ranks after an outspoken Socialist associated with their social centers had made some controversial statements, and the subsequent budget cuts gradually shut down the centers altogether. For the Milwaukee Socialists, as disappointing as the loss on the political question was, saving the recreation aspects of the centers was

no small achievement. And unlike most cities that tried the social center experiment, Milwaukee’s did not die out after World War I.²⁵

Once the United States entered the war in 1917, social center growth, like that of other recreation programs, tapered off. Milwaukeeans still used their social centers, but activities were often geared to the war effort. The women’s industrial classes did Red Cross work or combated the higher cost of living by sharing ideas about how to remake hats or sew new outfits to save money. For some women, the center was an important psychological boost, a time to have some fun and companionship and divert one’s mind from the husband or son at the front.²⁶

After the First World War, under the leadership of Dorothy Enderis, who took over the recreation program in 1920, the centers thrived by taking on the problems of the community, and adapting to its changing needs. In those years, the centers helped break down animosities among ethnic groups brought with the immigrants from Europe. One old man told Enderis of his amazement at the change in attitude. “In Europe we hate one another. Here, after three months you have us playing together.” During the depression of the 1930s, she enlarged the social center mission to embrace the unemployed. In 1932 a new center was established near City Hall, where unemployed men could listen to lectures, music, or play sheepshead or other card games. There were also practical provisions such as a “tai-

loring corner” and a “cobbling corner,” where the men could repair their worn clothes and shoes. At the time of Enderis’s retirement in 1948, the city was operating thirty-five social centers, almost all of them in schools. Eventually the Park and Recreation Department absorbed many of the functions of the social centers. The forms may have changed, but the ideal of broad-based recreational opportunities that the socialists and others championed, remained. And could Emil Seidel see today’s cities’ after-school or midnight basketball programs for young people, he would surely smile with satisfaction.²⁷ ❧



In the Paint at One Two Today, Milwaukee’s midnight basketball teams like the Pistons and the Lakers continue the legacy of the city’s social centers.

¹ Emil Seidel, “Unpublished Autobiography.” Emil Seidel Papers, Milwaukee Area Research Center, 116-117.

² John D. Bunker, *History of Wisconsin, Volume 4: The Progressive Era, 1893–1914* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin), 156, 269.

³ William J. Reese, “Progressivism and the Grass Roots: Social Change and Urban Schooling, 1840–1920.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974) 169–170.

⁴ Dwight F. Davis, “The Neighborhood Center — A Moral and Educational Factor,” *Charities and the Commons*, 19 (1908), 1504, 1506; Raymond V. Phelan, *Community Centers*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota General Extension Division (Bulletin of the University of Minnesota, General Series no. 25), 1915, 5, frontispiece; “Larger Use of the Public Schools,” *Westminster Civic League* (Milwaukee), May 15, 1908.

⁵ *Social Democratic Herald*, August 3, 1907.

⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 7, 1910; *Milwaukee Journal*, November 7, 1910; Duane Mowry, “The Use of School Buildings for Other than School Purposes,” *Education*, 29 (October 1908), 92, 96.

⁷ Milwaukee Board of School Directors (MBSD), *Proceedings*, 1907; Duane Mowry, “The Use of School Buildings for other than School Purposes,” *Education*, 29 (October 1908), 96; MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1908, 1909; MBSD, “Superintendent’s Report,” *Proceedings*, 1909; *Milwaukee Journal* November 7, 1910, in *Social Democratic Scrapbook*; *Social Democratic Herald*, July 2, 1910; *Milwaukee Journal*, May 2, 1910.

⁸ Meredith Ann Velie, “Hierarchy and Web: A Study of Urban School Reform, Gender and Cognitive Style in Milwaukee, 1890–1920” (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1992), 241, 211, 224–226; C. G. Pearse, “Next Steps in Milwaukee,” 68–70; MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1913 and 1915; Harold Berg, “Staying after School,” *Survey*, December 16, 1916, *First Dover Annual*, 1917, 6.

⁹ MBSD, *Proceedings*, February 2, 1909; Velie, 255; Daily News, February 22, 1911; Rowland Haynes, “Recreation Survey, Milwaukee, Wisconsin,” *Playground*, 6, 2 (May 1912), 58. *Milwaukee Journal*, June 23, 1910; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 26–27, 1910; Photocopies of sections of University of Wisconsin Board of Regents Records, re: Edward J. Ward, Kendrick Shedd Papers, Box 2, f6 (Rush Rhees Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York): “Recreation Centers,” *Playground* (April 1912), 11–28.

¹⁰ Harold Berg, “Staying after School,” *Survey*, 37 (December 16, 1916): 300; Dorothy Enderis, “Human Problems Faced in Recreation Centers,” *Recreation* (December 1949), 419–420; Harold Berg, “Practical Aids in Conducting a Neighborhood Recreation Center,” part 2, *Playground* (12), 443.

¹¹ *Milwaukee Leader*, September 13 and 17, 1913; *Milwaukee Free Press*, September 27, 1913; Harold Berg, “Staying after School,” *Survey*, 37 (December 16, 1916), 300.

¹² *Milwaukee Leader*, November 23, 1913; *Bay View Advance*, February 25, 1916, March 23, 1917, October 20, 1916; “Milwaukee’s Recreation Movement,” *Survey*, 25 (18 February, 1911), 833; *Advance*, January 12, 1917; *Milwaukee Leader*, April 27, 1914; *Advance*, December 3, 1915.

¹³ Duane Mowry, “Social and Recreational Activity in Milwaukee,” *American City*, 6, 4 (1912), 748–750; Harold Berg, “Staying After School,” *Survey*, 37 (16 December 1916), 298–299; Dorothy Enderis, “Human Problems Faced in Recreation Centers,” *Recreation* (December 1949),

419; *Milwaukee Leader*, November 3, 1913; “Attendance Reports of the Milwaukee Social Centers, 1913–1917, *First Dover Annual*, 1917, 28–29.

¹⁴ *First Dover Annual*, 1917, 13, 14.

¹⁵ Velie, 9–10; MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1908, 1909; *Social Democratic Herald*, March 23, 1907, July 10, 1909, September 4, 1909; *Daily News*, February 27, 1911.

¹⁶ Velie, 7–10, 17, 66; Lizzie Black Kander Papers (Box 1, F 7) Wisconsin Historical Society; *Milwaukee Herold und Seebote*, May 10, 1909, in: “Clippings—Social Centers,” Milwaukee County Historical Society.

¹⁷ Velie, 7–10, 17, 66, 136; *Milwaukee Journal*, clipping dated 1937; *Social Democratic Herald*, July 2, 1910; Meta Berger, original draft of autobiography, 48, 2 Meta Berger Papers, (WHS); *Milwaukee Free Press*, March 21, 1907.

¹⁸ *Milwaukee Leader*, November 3, 1913; *Amusements & Recreation in Milwaukee*, (Bulletin of the City Club, Milwaukee, 1914), 24; MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1915; Dorothy Enderis, “Human Problems Faced in Recreation Centers,” *Recreation* (December 1949), 419; Lela B. Stephens, *Lady of the Lighted Schoolhouses* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1955), 11; *Social Democratic Herald*, July 2, 1910; *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 27, 1910; *Milwaukee Journal*, June 23, 1910;

Photocopies of sections of University of Wisconsin Board of Regents Records, re: Edward J. Ward, Kendrick Shedd Papers, Box 2, F6 (Rush Rhees Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York); Newspaper clipping (unnamed) February 12, 1911, in Kendrick Shedd Papers; Letter from E.J. Ward to Kendrick Shedd, February 27, 1911, Kendrick Shedd Papers, Box 2, f 6; City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, *Budget* (Bureau of Municipal Research for Controller) 1914, 11, 6; Velie, 255.

¹⁹ Attendance Reports of Social Centers, MBSD *Proceedings*, 1913–1917; *Milwaukee Leader*, December 6, 1913; C.G. Pearse, “Next Steps in Milwaukee,” *Playground*, 6, no. 2 (1912), 68–70.

[In 1912, the Board’s Division of Municipal Recreation and Adult Education was officially formed.]

²⁰ “To the Voters of the 10th Ward,” pamphlet, Frederic Heath Scrapbook, Milwaukee County Historical Society; MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1904 and 1905; *Milwaukee Free Press*, September 27, 1904, *Milwaukee Journal*, September 7, 1904; *Daily News*, February 16, 1910, July 22, 1911, July 31, 1911; Emil Seidel, speech at the First National Conference on Social Center Development, Papers of the University of Wisconsin–Extension, University of Wisconsin–Madison; *Social Democratic Herald*, January 7, 1911, January 21, 1911

²¹ MBSD, *Proceedings*, 1913; *Milwaukee Leader*, December 2, 1913, February 6, 1913, October 18, 1913, January 15, 1916.

²² *Milwaukee Leader*, June 3, 1914; Reese, 420–421; Velie, 96–97; *Milwaukee Leader*, June 8, 1914.

²³ *Milwaukee Leader*, January 21, 1916, February 2, 1916, February 24, 1916.

²⁴ *Social Democratic Herald*, June 2, 1921, June 10, 1911; *Daily News*, July 1, 1911.

²⁵ Blake McKelvey, *Rochester, the Quest for Quality, 1890–1925*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), 102–103, 106; Edward J. Ward, *Rochester Social Centers and Civic Clubs: Story of the First Two Years*, (Rochester, New York: League of Civic Clubs, 1909), 52–53, 72–74; John Dutko, “Socialism in Rochester, 1900–1917” (master’s thesis, University of Rochester, 1953), 149–151.

²⁶ MBSD, *Proceedings*, December 4, 1917, January 2, 1918; *First Dover Annual*, 1917, 14; *Advance*, October 4, 1918.

²⁷ Edward S. Kerstein, *Milwaukee’s All American Mayor: Portrait of Daniel Webster Hoan* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966). Daniel W. Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1936), 322.

The Author



A native of Wisconsin, **Elizabeth Jozwiak** is an Assistant Professor of History at University of Wisconsin–Rock County in Janesville, where she has taught for several years. She received her bachelor’s degree from UW–Milwaukee and her doctorate at UW–Madison.