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## PENSACOLA LABOR PROBLEMS AND POLITICAL RADICALISM, 1908

by WAYNE FLYNT

**H**ISTORIANS HAVE generally ignored labor organization in the South. Even the few pioneer studies dealing with southern labor have been confined to the more spectacular strikes in a handful of states. Florida's unions, radicalism, and labor politics have been damned to the historical limbo surrounding so much of her twentieth-century history. The records reveal that Florida's labor organizations, beginning with the Knights of Labor in the 1880's, experienced the same cycles of growth, power, decline, and frustration as in the more highly industrialized northeast. Before examining a specific phase in the long and often sanguinary struggle to organize Florida's workingmen, the subject must be viewed in a national context.

The period from 1890 to 1914 brought only slight increases in real wages. Laborers were spared from serious retrogressions during this period of prosperity by steady employment rather than by large salary increases. Only in the years 1894-1897, 1908, and 1914 did widespread unemployment drive wage earners to near desperation. During periods of peak employment, fewer than one-half of the industrial workers or miners earned enough to support their families in adequate fashion. Consequently, the children of the poor died at three times the rate of children from middle income families. Only one-third of the children enrolled finished elementary school and less than ten per cent completed high school, thus perpetuating a potential surplus of unskilled labor.<sup>1</sup>

In areas of chronic unemployment or where there were particularly harsh working conditions, unionism developed a distinct left wing. The extreme example of labor radicalism emerged from Daniel De Leon's Socialist and Trade Alliance of the 1890's, and its spiritual progeny, the Industrial Workers of the World

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1. Arthur S. Link, *American Epoch* (New York, 1958), 55-67.

(IWW). A more moderate wing of leftist labor stemmed from the Socialist Party of America led by Eugene V. Debs and Victor Berger. Debs' socialism was generally respectable; it deplored violence, pressed for economic democracy, and was dominated by a somewhat visionary band of moderates. The party had a membership of 58,000 in 1908, but its influence was apparently much greater.<sup>2</sup>

The American Federation of Labor, organized in the 1880's, entered the twentieth century as the expanding giant of labor. The federation made spectacular gains from 1890 to 1904; but then, between 1904 and 1910, after management organized a powerful counter-offensive, union strength did not measurably increase. Businessmen supported the National Association of Manufacturers and its open shop philosophy or "American Plan," as it was labeled. Industry sponsored active propaganda campaigns, attempting to identify labor with foreign and radical elements, and workingmen sometimes compromised their own cause by sporadic violence.

Before 1905, Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, kept unionism officially neutral and disassociated from such political groups as the Socialists and Populists. Then, in 1906, the federation made its historic entrance into politics, and subsequently conducted a program to foster political interest among the rank and file of its members. Political activity, first started in an effort to neutralize federal court injunctions in labor disputes, reached into the presidential campaign of 1908, when the Democrats acceded to some of labor's historic demands, and Gompers openly campaigned for William Jennings Bryan.

The year 1908 brought the most serious labor-management conflict of the early twentieth century. The stock market decline and general economic readjustment brought business failure, industrial stagnation, and an unemployment rate that rose to twelve per cent, three times the average of the preceding five years.<sup>3</sup> The business decline affected the whole country, including Florida, even though the state was not heavily industrialized.

2. *Ibid.*; and Foster Rhea Dulles, *Labor in America* (New York, 1949), 208-223. See especially Chapter XII in latter, "Thunder on the Left."

3. Don D. Lescohier and Elizabeth Brandeis, *Working Conditions and Labor Legislation* (New York, 1935), 128.

Florida depended, for the most part, on agriculture for its income. Nonetheless, Tampa, Jacksonville, and Pensacola were especially hard hit by the economic upheaval that plagued the nation. Pensacola, long a leading export center for the lumber industry and a commercial hub for surrounding farm areas, had begun developing an infant manufacturing establishment by 1908. Unemployment and an abnormally large number of businesses going bankrupt plagued the community during the spring of that year.

Pensacola's history of labor organization reached back to the 1880's when the Knights of Labor organized. By 1908, there were twenty-two identifiable labor unions, a remarkable total for a southern community with a population of less than 20,000. The Stevedore's Benevolent Association described itself as the oldest and strongest labor organization in the South. The United Association of Plumbers, the Stevedore's Lumber Association, International Stage Employees, the Federal Labor Union, and the unions representing the steam and gas fitters, carpenters and joiners, cotton screwmen, printing pressmen, bartenders, bakers, retail clerks, post office clerks and carriers, and barbers varied in strength, but the records indicate that they were all rather well organized. The machinists' union, organized by Louisville and Nashville Railroad workers, had its own labor hall. The Pensacola Typographical Union had organized newspaper workers, and the painters, paper-hangers, and decorators were also organized. The Knights of Labor still operated as a general union led by Grandmaster W. P. H. Tharp. The Amalgamated Association of Street Railway Employees and the electrical workers were the youngest unions in 1908, organized when the first electric railroads arrived in Pensacola. Other unions represented a variety of occupations and skills.<sup>4</sup> When Pensacola businessmen in 1908, badly affected by the economic chaos, tried to dismiss their employees, organized labor's response was rapid and angry.

The first labor dispute of 1908 began when members of

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4. Several additional unions are identifiable by initial only. To determine unions in Pensacola, it is necessary to examine the *Pensacola Journal* for 1907-1908, plus other scattered sources, particularly the Napoleon B. Broward Papers in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville. Cited hereafter as Broward Papers. Known membership of these unions varied from 46 to 127, with the average apparently between 50 and 75, or a total union membership of 1,100 to 1,600.

Division 234, Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees, failed to reach a contract agreement with the Pensacola Electric Company. The union was demanding two cents an hour increase (to twenty cents an hour), joint consultation and arbitration in labor disputes, and a closed shop. Although the company pleaded an inability to pay increased salaries because of the depression, the employees voted to give their negotiating committee authority to call a strike. The unions were desperately trying to avoid a crippling walkout and asked the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce to use its power to help reach a settlement. The Chamber committee met with union and company representatives but reported no progress.

An ominous prelude of future events appeared in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on January 17, 1908. The Alabama paper reported that a train from Atlanta had brought in fifty strikebreakers and several private detectives who, allegedly, were to be used in the Pensacola car strike. The professional strikebreakers, for the most part notherners, were supposedly waiting in Montgomery until they received the order to proceed to Pensacola.<sup>5</sup> This kind of pressure, in addition to general public disapproval, brought union capitulation on January 19. Local newspapers, admitting that the men were underpaid, praised their public spirit for calling off the strike. Public opinion, the papers claimed, would not support a strike on the particular issues involved.<sup>6</sup>

An interested letter writer viewed the Pensacola struggle in broad economic terms. The world, he argued, was peopled by thousands of parasites who lived luxuriously by exploiting the labor of others. When the competitive system reached a certain stage of development, business slacked, industry ceased, and laborers lost their jobs.<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz of Pensacola supported this analysis, adding, "if the present [economic] system is wrong, and in my mind there is no doubt that the condition of an honest man out of work . . . proves it, the minister should not hesitate to say so, and should be ready to give his support and influence. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

The Reverend Mr. Thomas Callaway drew a large congre-

5. *Montgomery Advertiser*, quoted in *Pensacola Journal*, January 18, 1908.

6. *Pensacola Journal*, January 19, 1908.

7. E. C. Wentworth to editor, *ibid.*, February 18, 1908.

8. Rabbi Jacob D. Schwarz to editor, *ibid.*, February 20, 1908.

gation to his First Baptist Church with his sermon title, "The Problem of the Unemployed," chosen because of the great local interest in the subject. The contradictory but provocative sermon praised Christian socialism which, the Pensacola minister claimed, was earnestly seeking the right solution to the problem of the unemployed and oppressed.<sup>9</sup>

Union leaders listened patiently while rabbi and preacher dealt with hunger in the ethereal terms of theology, then chose a more pragmatic alternative, which culminated in the largest Pensacola strike in twenty years. Electric street-car workers were still bristling over their January failure to secure higher wages when the Pensacola Electric Company issued an order requiring all idled employees to report three times each day in case they were needed. Union leaders prevailed on the mayor to try and get the rule rescinded, but the company flatly refused, and between seventy and eighty employees walked off their jobs April 5. Both sides tentatively agreed to arbitration, but the company manager, John W. Leadley, under pressure from the owners, broke off negotiations and fired the strikers. The Pensacola Chamber of Commerce maintained an official neutrality, but there was sympathy for the strikers among the membership, and a resolution was adopted protesting importation of strike breakers and supporting union demands for arbitration.

Mayor C. C. Goodman inflamed the situation by demanding that the company continue car operations according to its franchise. The company pledged to resume operation with new workers, but when a car ventured out on April 6, strikers boarded it and forced it back into the barns. When Manager Leadley offered to hire new operators, only one local man applied for the job. When the company announced that it would seek employees elsewhere, the strikers began meeting every tram arriving from the North. Meanwhile, Ben Commons, vice-president of the International Electric Railway Workers Union, arrived from New Orleans to direct the strike.<sup>10</sup>

G. C. McCain, union president, advised against violence but insisted that he and his men were determined to keep the cars from running. Both sides were planning strategy on April 8;

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9. *Ibid.*, February 25, 1908.

10. *Ibid.*, April 7 and 8, 1908.

Commons conferred with union leaders, and C. F. Wallace of Boston's Stone and Webster Syndicate, the mother company, discussed procedure with Leadley. When Commons offered a compromise settlement based on reinstatement of the strikers, company officials, determined to break the union once and for all, rejected the proposal and began preparations to lodge and feed fifty to a hundred men who would be imported shortly, presumably from the North.

The union had learned a valuable though costly lesson about public opinion during the January fiasco, and they assiduously cultivated good will in April. Pensacola newspapers remained outwardly neutral but they actually supported union demands for arbitration. The strikers, meanwhile, had chartered a boat to help carry workers who were being inconvenienced to their jobs at the Pensacola navy yard.

Company officials began clearing rails on April 9, amid rumors that strike breakers would arrive shortly. The following afternoon brought the hated "scabs" on the train from New York. As these men walked toward the car barns, they were followed by a large taunting crowd. When a boy was pushed into their ranks, a riot started which lasted for over an hour. The strikers hurled bricks and the frightened would-be strike breakers reportedly fired guns in the air. A second mob of over a hundred men blocked the retreat of the new arrivals as they tried to reach the safety of the barns. More serious violence was averted with the timely appearance of Ben Commons who was able to quiet the strikers. Twelve strikebreakers were injured, and when police led the others to the safety of the jail, a mob of over two hundred followed. Union president McCain did little to cool passions in his impromptu address to the crowd: "I am proud of the city of Pensacola. . . . I say with pride that a little handful of men kept 85 from reaching the barns, and I am sure that we will prevail in the end. . . . Pensacola is too good a union city to let the bread be taken from our mouths by scabs in the pay of professional strike-breakers. We do not want violence . . . but we must live, and demand all that is due us."<sup>11</sup> Commons strongly advised against mob violence and finally persuaded the crowd to disperse.

11. *Ibid.*, April 11, 1908.

The local police had been powerless amid the surging emotions of April 10, and the jittery mayor wired Tallahassee requesting state aid in maintaining law and order. Governor Napoleon B. Broward sent in a detachment of state militia on April 11 and declared martial law and a ten o'clock curfew.<sup>12</sup> Even with this, an angry mob of nearly two hundred followed Manager Leadley to work the following morning. Meanwhile, eleven city labor unions held a mass meeting and scheduled a giant sympathy rally in Seville Square for April 12. Mayor Goodman issued a permit for the rally, but then, under pressure from Governor Broward, revoked it. The Chamber of Commerce, after spirited debate and much pro labor argument, advised against the rally, but the mayor compromised and finally allowed the laborers the use of the opera house.

The rally clearly demonstrated wide public support for the strikers. Circulars were distributed, and three strikers paraded through the streets carrying a large American flag and advertising the meeting. Within fifteen minutes the hall was packed with over two thousand people, including about a hundred Negroes. The chairman was Michael J. O'Leary, the only living charter member of the first Pensacola labor union. The first speaker, Ben Commons, warned that the Stone and Webster Company was trying to destroy the union in the thirty-three cities where it operated. He urged strong political action by the unions. W. C. Monroe, who stated that he was speaking for the public rather than for either the unions or company, insisted: "It is time to act when a bull-headed corporation . . . which is enjoying so many privileges . . . [declines] to arbitrate, when the mayor, chamber of commerce and citizens of Pensacola have demanded arbitration."<sup>13</sup> County Solicitor Scott M. Loftin recommended a peaceful strike if the company refused to arbitrate and predicted that the laborers would have the sympathy of the public. The assembled throng enthusiastically approved a resolution thanking the public for its support.

Many Pensacola citizens continued to show their support for

12. The proclamation, as issued by Colonel William LeFils, commanding the Florida state troops on duty in Pensacola, stipulated that ". . . All citizens of Pensacola . . . are requested to remain indoors, avoiding all unnecessary gatherings upon the streets and other places." See *Pensacola Journal*, April 14, 1908.

13. *Ibid.*



the strikers. One newspaper correspondent reported that people were wearing "We Walk" badges, and a local grocer advertised free meats and vegetables to striking union men.<sup>14</sup> P. K. Yonge, alderman and head of the Chamber of Commerce, won city council support for Mayor Goodman's request for troops, but when additional troops arrived on April 13, along with forty-three more strikebreakers, one councilman and several chamber members bitterly protested the presence of state militia.

The local Electrical Workers' Union, consisting of Pensacola Electric Company employees, walked out in sympathy on April 14. A group of Pensacola merchants gave a donation of \$500 to the striking motormen and conductors, and a number of firms indicated their willingness to extend credit to the families of the strikers. Another example of the attitude of local citizens was indicated when the company filed petitions to try damage suits in another state, since, they claimed, "it will be impossible to secure a jury not in sympathy with the strikers and prejudiced against the company."<sup>15</sup>

When the street cars ventured out again on April 14, over five hundred state troops were patrolling the streets of Pensacola. Not since the Reconstruction period more than a quarter of a century earlier had so many state troops been placed on active service. Despite the presence of armed soldiers, crowds numbering in the hundreds gathered on the streets and shouted insults at the "scabs." When a policeman arrested one of the strikebreakers because he failed to sound his gong when crossing the street, as required by city ordinance, a crowd gathered and the militia intervened to prevent a possible riot.

State Adjutant General Clifford Foster tried to mediate the dispute, although when the union agreed to an open shop the company rejected the overall proposal. Foster charged the company with rejecting his attempts to end the strike and announced the withdrawal of his troops.<sup>16</sup> Strikers and sympathizers threw

14. Mrs. Charles Drennon to editor, *ibid.*, April 11, 1908; *ibid.*, April 14, 1908.

15. *Ibid.*, April 16, 1908.

16. These troops had put in overtime duty while they were in Pensacola. William W. Flournoy, commander of a DeFuniak Springs militia company, wrote Governor Broward that he got practically no sleep during the entire time that he was in Pensacola. William W. Flournoy to Broward, November 10, 1908, Broward Papers.

“railroad torpedoes” (firecrackers) on the tracks which exploded with a loud noise and scared the passengers but did no physical damage. Gangs hurled bricks through car windows at night, but the company remained adamant and continued to advertise in the New York papers for non-union motormen who were willing to come to Florida to help break the Pensacola strike.<sup>17</sup>

Local citizens were deputized to help preserve law and order so that Governor Broward could begin withdrawing state troops on April 17. Only one company of reserve troops remained in the city by April 20. Things seemed to be somewhat quieter, and a committee, consisting of seven merchants and three laborers, was set up to start negotiations. Then suddenly more strikebreakers arrived in Pensacola, this time from West Virginia.

Trouble broke out again on the afternoon of April 20, when a crowd of twenty-five men stepped from behind trees at a secluded spot and signaled the startled motorman to stop. When he speeded up, shots were fired and the conductor was hit three times. Later, several state militia men reportedly were poisoned. That night a court injunction was issued forbidding the unions from interfering with the movement of the cars and the company announced that it was breaking off all negotiations. A union rally denounced the violence and called for a city wide boycott of the company. A reward was posted for the capture of the April 21 assailants, but this failed to deter further violence. When the company applied for police protection, twenty-five of the city’s thirty-three policemen resigned rather than protect the strikebreakers.<sup>18</sup> The city was now fast reaching a state of anarchy.

Public opinion began to swing away from the unions after April 21, especially after two strikers were charged with the shooting of the conductor that day. Then, things quieted again, and the last of the state troops were withdrawn on April 28. There was a new flare-up on May 3, when the Big Bayou Company trestle was set afire. Three days later, the men arrested for shooting the streetcar conductor were released when witnesses failed to appear. The dismissal, according to the local paper, was met with “open-voiced approval and applause from one hundred union men and sympathizers who crowded the . . . courtroom.”<sup>19</sup>

17. *Pensacola Journal*, April 16 and 17, 1908.

18. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 25, 1908.

19. *Pensacola Journal*, May 7, 1908.

On May 11, a dynamite charge splintered the floor of a car, and two days later a major accident was averted when two one-pound sticks of dynamite jarred loose from the tracks and failed to explode. The same day a cache of fifty-seven sticks of dynamite was found hidden in shrubbery near the company's Big Bayou half-burned trestle.

Faced with growing public opposition, and the adamant position of the company, the thirty-eight day strike collapsed on May 13. Boats which had been carrying men to work at the navy yard were halted, forcing workers to utilize the streetcars. Then, sixteen of the strikers broke ranks and returned to their jobs. At first, the union severely criticized its deserting members, then finally advised the other strikers to go back to work. But Manager Leadley, now in no mood to be merciful, refused to rehire any but the first sixteen who had helped to break the strike.

The electric car strike was the worst but not the only labor-management confrontation in Pensacola during the spring of 1908. The national machinists union had struck the Louisville and Nashville railroad in May the year before. The Pensacola machinists union was formed when the company introduced a number of rule changes in 1907. A union committee offered to confer with company officials after several machinists were dismissed, allegedly for "discussing" rule changes, but the grievance committee was itself promptly dismissed. This seemed to bear out the belief held by many of the employees that the company was trying to break the union. Only a portion of the 127 union members in Pensacola left their jobs, but the eight month strike, which lasted until September 1908, reportedly cost the company over two million dollars in increased expenses. During the strike, pickets maintained positions at the thirty local Pensacola shops.<sup>20</sup>

Defeated in the streets, their unions almost destroyed, and their families hungry, Pensacola laborers turned to politics. As early as March 1908, union leaders were talking of positive political action. Louis P. Head, author of a weekly labor column and leader of the local typographical union, announced: "Let the word go forth that no man of any party shall be elected to public office, from magistrate to president, who does not pledge himself to A SQUARE DEAL-giving capital and labor equal rights

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20. *Ibid.*, September 23, 1908.

. . . .”<sup>21</sup> S. D. Bennett, Jr., another local labor spokesman, encouraged union members to educate themselves by reading at least one newspaper and one economic journal every day: “The noon hour, which is now generally wasted in recitation of ribald yarns, or in descanting upon the charms of a play wherein the lower limbs of females predominate, could be turned to profitable account by reading or discussing matters of vital interest to workers. . . .”<sup>22</sup>

The plumber’s union adopted a plan which it hoped would result in the election of union men to the state legislature and to the county commission. Recognizing that economic conditions demanded political action, the union officials advocated a state labor commission and an eight-hour day. They also criticized the local police who allegedly often arrested and harassed men who came into the Pensacola area looking for work.<sup>23</sup>

The Louisville and Nashville machinists union in Pensacola, hard hit by company wage cuts, supported the plumbers’ program. A local laborer encouraged workingmen to run for office and scored their political apathy, arguing that they were not “forced to five on year after year ensnared by the siren voice of viscuscuticled politicians and self-seeking time-servers only to be dashed upon the rocks of a ‘financial crisis’ at the whim of the destiny manipulators of Wall Street. . . .”<sup>24</sup> In a letter to the Pensacola paper, one citizen proposed worker unity behind a third party since both Democratic and Republican parties apparently were unable to solve America’s economic problems. Workers should not abandon hope, he said, conditions could be ameliorated.<sup>25</sup>

This advice by Pensacola’s labor leaders and union officials obviously stirred the working population. During the last week of registration for state elections, lines formed every day. Since many laborers could not register during the day, the registrar made special arrangements to keep his office open until nine o’clock in the evening. When the registration period ended, 6,287 men had qualified to vote. It was believed that over a thousand of them had been encouraged to sign up during the union drive.<sup>26</sup>

21. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1908.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, March 12, 1908.

24. *Ibid.*, March 29, 1908.

25. Alex Mitchell to editor, *ibid.*, March 4, 1908.

26. *Ibid.*, April 12 and 19, 1908.

Representatives from sixteen unions had met on May 8, 1908, during the electric car strike, to discuss organization of a Central Trade Council. These unions, all affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, designated three delegates from each union to coalesce labor strength. Organization took place in mid-August under the direction of Louis Head.

All the Pensacola unions participated actively in the state and local elections held in May 1908. The Escambia County Workmen's Protective Association, a political organization composed of union men, endorsed nine men for the county Democratic executive committee and John Burns and John P. Stokes for the state legislature. The latter two ran on platforms which favored the establishment of a state labor commission, automatic arbitration clauses in all public utility franchises, an end to child labor in Florida, and improved public schools.<sup>27</sup> Burns and Stokes were defeated, but seven of the nine labor candidates for the county executive committee were elected. Of the eleven city precincts, labor candidates won in five and by large majorities.<sup>28</sup>

Labor pressures also influenced state races, particularly the hard fought campaign between Duncan U. Fletcher, Governor N. B. Broward, William B. Lamar, and John Beard for a seat in the United States Senate in 1908. Fletcher was in Pensacola during the height of the streetcar strike, but he ignored the labor dispute. Lamar and Broward followed the same policy. Only John S. Beard, a native of Pensacola, met the issue squarely. He described himself to a cheering Pensacola audience as a friend of labor and insisted that unions had to organize to meet industrial combination. Organized capital, he claimed, was aggressive while organized labor was defensive. He blasted government by injunction, a stand which appealed to union men who felt that their activities were too often thwarted by the courts.<sup>29</sup>

From labor's point of view, the questionable candidate in the senatorial race was Governor Broward, leader of Florida progres-

27. Charles H. Hill to editor, *ibid.*, May 5, 1908.

28. Precinct 12 gave Burns 123 votes, Stokes 155, and 99 for the third next candidate. In precinct 13, Burns received 133 votes, Stokes 132, and the next highest total was 113. Approximately 940 of Burn's 1,184 votes came from the eleven city precincts, with 700 in the five heavily labor precincts. Stokes got 980 of his 1,556 votes in eleven precincts, 630 in five precincts. For election returns, see *Pensacola Journal*, May 24, 1908.

29. Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, May 19, 1908.

sivism. He had strong labor support in his successful 1904 campaign, and the workers supported his liberal program. The unions were therefore very surprised when Broward sent troops into Pensacola in 1908 to protect the strikebreakers. The governor explained that he had very little choice in view of the mayor's request, but this failed to placate unionists. Much of the conservative press of Florida praised Broward's intervention.<sup>30</sup> The *Miami Metropolis* and other pro-Broward papers defended his actions, but not with enthusiasm. The *Jasper News*, official Farmer's Union paper in Florida, endorsed Broward in the senate race, but blasted the militia intervention: "Things have come to a pretty pass when the business men of the State, who are members of the Florida State Troops, are taken from their homes and kept indefinitely to aid a foreign monopoly, like the Pensacola Electric Company, in fighting our own laboring men."<sup>31</sup>

Broward lost labor support in Pensacola. When he addressed a large crowd in Seville Square on May 8, several hundred members of the Escambia County Protective Association were present. A group representing the association asked a number of questions dealing with the right of boycott, but Broward claimed that the questions were so highly technical it would require research before he could intelligently answer them. He did champion compulsory arbitration and a shorter work day, but this failed to win him much labor support.<sup>32</sup>

The growing cohesion of the state labor movement was demonstrated by reaction to Broward's policies from many parts of Florida. A Mr. R. W. Ohlinger of Haines City, who had learned that Broward had banned mass meetings and that Pinkerton detectives were aiding the Pensacola Electric Company, wrote to ask the governor if he disapproved "of mass meetings for the working class," if he approved "of Scabs, especially when brought from other states to take the place of your own citizens in time of a strike," and if he had "not sufficient malitia [*sic*] and soldiery [*sic*] enough in this state, so as to make it unnecessary [*sic*] for the presence of Pinkerton?" He added a footnote: "I voted for

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30. see *Panama City Pilot*, April 16, 1908; Jacksonville *Florida Times-Union*, April 16, 1908.

31. *Jasper News*, April 24, 1908.

32. For the speech, see *Pensacola Journal*, May 9, 1908.

you for Governor, and *may* vote for you for senator.”<sup>33</sup> A Broward organizer in Jacksonville wrote that he was finding it “hard to accomplish anything among the Union men, as they claim you are opposed to organized labor. . . .”<sup>34</sup> Fletcher took advantage of this growing opposition and frequently blasted Broward for sending troops into Pensacola.<sup>35</sup>

Labor leaders still loyal to Broward launched a concerted effort to hold defections to a minimum. The *Jasper News*, which had long championed joint action between farmer’s locals and urban unions, sought to swing its 5,000 subscribers into the governor’s camp.<sup>36</sup> Tom Watson of Georgia, an acknowledged leader of Florida’s agrarian radicals, intervened on behalf of Broward with members of the Farmer’s Union.<sup>37</sup> Claude L’Engle, editor of the pro-labor *Tallahassee Sun*, handled union relations for Broward. He sent personal letters supporting Broward’s candidacy to nearly 4,000 union members, 2,000 of them in the Tampa area alone.<sup>38</sup> Individual union members supported Broward, but not in the same proportions as in 1904.<sup>39</sup> Many who analyzed the election results claimed that Broward lost many union members and that most of these voted for John S. Beard. In Tampa, the unions reportedly opposed Broward because he had sent troops into Pensacola. A leading newspaper reported that a number of Pensacola voters had not supported Broward for the same reason.<sup>40</sup>

Voter analysis in the primary supports these claims of union defections. The largest Beard majorities in Escambia County came in the four precincts where local labor candidates received their strongest support.<sup>41</sup> Beard endorsed Fletcher in the runoff

33. R. W. Ohlinger to N. B. Broward, April 14, 1908, Broward Papers.

34. C. D. Jenkins to N. B. Broward, May 15, 1908, *ibid.*

35. Tom Ledwith to N. B. Broward, May 13, 1908, *ibid.*

36. *Jasper News*, April 24, 1908.

37. N. B. Broward to James Lanier, April 8, 1908, and N. B. Broward to Tom Watson, April 24, 1908, Broward Papers.

38. Claude L’Engle to N. B. Broward, April 20, 1908, *ibid.* L’Engle had been editor of the Jacksonville *Florida Sun and Labor Journal* and later the *Tallahassee Morning Star*. At this time, he was a close friend of Governor Broward. L’Engle served as congressman from Florida from 1913 to 1915.

39. See, for instance, Ralph Fernandez to N. B. Broward, June 20, 1908, Broward Papers.

40. *Jacksonville Metropolis*, quoted in *Pensacola Journal*, May 1, 1908; and *Gainesville Daily Sun*, April 25, 1908.

41. Precincts 12, 13, 14, and 26.

against Broward, and nine of eleven city (labor influenced) precincts in Pensacola gave Fletcher a margin of 434 votes. Fletcher carried each of the four heaviest labor precincts and won the county by a vote of 1,659 to Broward's 1,298.<sup>42</sup> Broward swept both Pensacola and Escambia County in 1904, thanks to strong labor support, but was not able to duplicate the victory four years later. Broward also lost Duval County which had the second largest concentration of union members in the state by a vote of 2,659 to 1,844. Hillsborough County, with the largest number of unionists in the state, also supported Fletcher in 1908, by a vote of 2,991 to 2,234. Though attributing Broward's defeat to union defections would be a gross simplification, one may safely conclude that Broward lost key labor support in many vital counties because of labor's disaffection with him.<sup>43</sup>

National politics also felt the backlash of labor frustration in Escambia County, Florida. Four minor "radical" parties won some support, due, in part, to the general dissatisfaction of Pensacola unionists. With a platform which endorsed government ownership of private utilities, the graduated income tax, and free textbooks, the Florida Prohibitionist party received support. Tom Watson also plugged for his Populist party, whose platform endorsed the right to organize, the eight-hour day, employer's liability, and government sponsored public works during periods of unemployment. It opposed the use of convict labor in competition with free labor. Tom Watson praised labor unions and advised farmer's organizations to broaden their base to include urban workers.<sup>44</sup>

The Independence party, led by John Temple Graves and William Randolph Hearst, also won some labor voters. This party's Chicago convention wrote a platform calling for the prohibition of employee blacklisting, employer's liability legislation, creation of a department of labor with cabinet status, government ownership of public utilities, and the cessation of arbitrary in-

42. See returns in *Pensacola Journal*, June 18, 1908.

43. This could have been the major factor if labor broke sharply away from Broward. There was an absolute minimum of 10,000 union members in the state, 5,000 members of the Farmer's Union, in addition to labor sympathizers. The margin separating Fletcher and Broward in the runoff was only 3,588 votes.

44. See the text of People's Party platform in the *The Jeffersonian*, April 23, 1908, copy in the Flowers' Collection, Duke University Library. Cited hereafter a Flowers collection.



junctions against labor unions.<sup>45</sup> Pensacola's Louis P. Head was the party's national committeeman from Florida, and he began organizing the state. He set up state headquarters in Pensacola, and, in late September, met with labor leaders from eastern and southern Florida who supported the ticket. An editorial in the *Pensacola Journal* admitted that this platform and party held attractions for labor but predicted that the party would not win the election.<sup>46</sup>

The Socialist party received the largest number of Florida's labor votes. Socialism in Florida symbolized protest rather than party loyalty. Unemployed union members and farmers working marginal lands protested their low economic status by voting the Socialist ticket in 1908, although later they rejoined the major parties as the latter adopted remedial farm-labor programs. Florida polled the highest percentage of left-wing votes of any southern state in 1908, and labor difficulties contributed substantially to this strength.<sup>47</sup>

Henry L. Drake, secretary of the Florida Socialist party, informed the state convention, held in Tampa in July 1908, that the paying membership had reached an all time high in Florida.<sup>48</sup> The party in Jacksonville had tripled its membership in one year. Socialism in Pensacola was blessed with respected union leadership and remarkable intellectual support. S. D. Bennett, Jr., a union leader in the streetcar affray, enunciated the Socialist position in a number of enlightening, if somewhat naive letters, replying to critics:

If he [a critic] entertains the common conception of a Socialist, as depicting a bewhiskered beer guzzler with an unpronounceable cogmen, having a predilection for the flag of red - an Anarchist - he should refer to a standard lexicon. Socialist is a polity, not politics and is the antithesis of anarchism; it is the practical Christianity of Christ; it aims at the universal observance of the Golden Rule. Socialism contemplates the establishment of an industrial democracy wherein every man and woman shall have opportunity to work . . . it

45. For the platform see *Pensacola Journal*, July 29, 1908.

46. *Ibid.*

47. For an excellent discussion of this subject see George Norris Green, "Florida Politics and Socialism at the Crossroads of the Progressive Era, 1912" (unpublished master's thesis, Florida State University, 1962).

48. *Pensacola Journal*, July 2, 1908.

is that state of society wherein every man will receive full value of that which he produces and except he DOES produce, he will not receive. . . . The opposite condition obtains today. A few owning the wealth . . . while millions slave has conduced to the production of petted, perfumed, be-jeweled pink tea satellites and the cringing, cowering, genuflecting automatons comprising the classes; it has made possible the endowed college and hall of erudition for the scions of wealth and the bitter, biting, school of poverty for the brats of the proletariat; it has placed a premium upon honesty and a stigma [on] union labor. . . . Nothing short of a complete revolution of our social system along economic lines will accord to every one his just heritage. . . .

It is a disgraceful commentary upon our boasted civilization and . . . illimitable ability to produce the means of subsistence, that destitution, nakedness and illiteracy thrive in our midst. . . .<sup>49</sup>

Eugene V. Debs could hardly have done better.

Frightened Florida Democrats vainly sought to halt union defections in 1908. Claude L'Engle used the *Tallahassee Sun* to advocate a solid union vote for William Jennings Bryan and the Democratic party.<sup>50</sup> The moderately liberal *Pensacola Journal* raised the specter of Negro domination if white laborers split their vote between several parties. The American Federation of Labor's endorsement of Bryan did help strengthen union loyalty in Florida.

Despite all such pleas for unity, many Florida union members chose to express their dissatisfaction in 1908, by voting for one of the four "radical" parties. In 1904, fourteen counties cast a radical vote (Populist and Socialist) larger than Escambia's, and twelve gave more votes to the Socialists alone. The Socialist party vote in Pensacola increased from 66 in 1904, to 351 in 1908, a total surpassed only in Hillsborough County. Escambia County, although not one of Florida's most populous counties in 1908, cast the largest radical vote (Socialist-Independence-Populist-Prohibitionist) in the state. The Democrats won the county with 1,887 votes. Solid Negro support gave the Republicans 718

49. S. D. Bennett, Jr., to editor, *ibid.*, October 11, 1908. For similar, if less lucid options, see W. A. Smith to editor, *ibid.*, October 23, 1908; Minnie Wolfe Rutherford to editor, *ibid.*, July 14, 1908; and S. D. Bennett, Jr., to editor, *ibid.*, October 18, 1908.

50. *Tallahassee Sun*, quoted in *The Jeffersonian*, May 14, 1908, Flowers' Collection.

votes, but a total of 958 voters, nearly one out of every four, bolted the established parties. Without the impetus of labor unrest, Escambia gave the Socialists only 158 votes in the 1912 election when the Socialist ticket polled its largest statewide vote in Florida history. Labor defections were held in check in 1912, and the Socialist-Prohibitionist-Progressive parties polled a total of only 529 votes in Escambia. Ten Florida counties voted more heavily for the Socialist ticket in 1912, than Escambia.<sup>51</sup>

Certain conclusions emerge from these facts: Florida labor unions were extremely well organized in the urban areas of Florida, particularly Pensacola, Tampa, Jacksonville, at the beginning of the twentieth century; they approximated in microcosm national objectives and difficulties; they sometimes enjoyed marked success in mobilizing public sympathy; and when faced with defeat and frustration, many union members protested by voting Socialist or for other "radical" parties. In 1908, Florida labor unions served notice that they could not be ignored or taken for granted.

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51. *Report of the Secretary of State, 1903-1904* (Tallahassee, 1904), 22; *ibid.*, 1907-1908 (Tallahassee, 1909), 18; *ibid.*, 1912 (Tallahassee, 1913), 16, insert.