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“Comrade Mrs. Johnson”: A Biography of Socialist Politician Olive M. Johnson

An Honors Thesis Presented by
Sydney Marenburg

To the Department of History
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Honors

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Acronym Key

American Federation of Labor (AFL)

Bureau of Investigation (BI)

Communist Party (CP)

Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA)

Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labor Party (NEC)

National Recovery Administration (NRA)

Socialist Party (SP)

Socialist Labor Party (SLP)

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics/Soviet Union (USSR)

Workers International Industrial Union (WIIU)

Introduction

In a box in the United States National Archives stands a thick folder crammed with crumbling newspaper clippings, SLP pamphlets, letters on tissue-thin typewriter paper, and memorandums. Even the paperclips on the packets of paper had been left untouched and not switched out for proper archival fasteners. For a woman who had never taken any violent action against the United States and spent her days as a newspaper editor, government officials in the State Department were discussing her as if she was a ticking time bomb. Even as an individual who warranted discussion by the Secretary of State himself, Olive M. Johnson has faded away from wider memory; her story left untold. With the rising interest in labor movements as well as a number of nationalized, left-of-center political organizations, now is the perfect time to rediscover this early twentieth-century socialist.



Image 1: Olive M. Johnson passport photo

Prior to the McCarthyism and Red Scare of the post-World War Two United States, the American political scene had several options for the idealistic voter wanting to get interested in more progressive, leftist politics. Whether the introduction to a new political party was through a workplace labor union or from other community involvement, political action could be taken by voting, attending rallies or lectures, and reading party-produced newspapers. By the turn of the twentieth century, the American political left was broken down into varying degrees of active and radical contingents. For what some considered the most radical, there were the anarchists with the International Working People's Association, although by 1910, due to several nationwide incidents, the general attitude in the US was turned against them, and the anarchist party was dissolved.¹ In addition to the anarchists, various other Marxist-aligned parties were formed and shifted quite rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century as new labor movements began to emerge and a rise in immigration brought in radical movements from around the world.

For the group that considered themselves the heirs to pure Marxist theory, the Socialist Labor Party had a tumultuous relationship with the rest of the American left. Beginning as the Working Men's Party, which was founded in 1876, what eventually became the Socialist Labor Party was active in political discourse by submitting candidates for public office, hosting conferences, and publishing a newspaper that was read around the country.² Following the principles of Marxism, which said that politics and economics were intertwined and economic improvement would not be made until the political structure was changed, Daniel DeLeon transformed the Working Men's Party into the Socialist Labor Party in 1890.³

¹ Woodcock, George. "Various Traditions: Anarchism in Latin America, Northern Europe, Britain, and the United States." In *Anarchism*. University of Toronto Press, 2004. 398.

² Turner, Victor W.. 2003. *The Roots of American Communism*. Somerset: Taylor & Francis Group. Accessed October 4, 2023. 12.

³ Ibid, 123.

When it comes to politics, there is a strong temptation to shuttle individuals and their ideologies into boxes. Even Johnson's contemporaries wanted to confine her to a label, whether suffragette, feminist, prohibitionist, or socialist. While she could not avoid pigeonholing, she still was able to express her economic reform ideas while also expressing the call for what we might identify as early feminist thought. My goal in writing this thesis is to stop confining women's actions to feminist history. Why is a woman who was involved in radical politics first and foremost not included in the history of the American left? Johnson advocated for labor and economic reform more so than she ever advocated for voting rights, yet traditionally, because she spoke on women's places in the Socialist Labor Party, she would be confined to women's studies in traditional history. When her career is mentioned, her most cited work is her "Women and Socialism" pamphlet, listed under feminist compilations of leftist literature, while her other contributions to economic philosophy are sent to the wayside.

The difficult part of writing this thesis is that Johnson is an obscure figure, and for good reason. Ultimately, she failed in every possible political goal she had. There was no socialist revolution, the SLP collapsed, and economic gaps between classes have only widened. So why Johnson? I firmly believe that by using Johnson, we can examine the failure of nineteenth-century American leftist politics. Through her biography, contemporary audiences can see the historical presence of gender politics, a lack of racial unity, and the constant infighting of various leftist groups, which hinder unity from making systemic changes. Although she failed, she left behind a plethora of literature, from her pamphlets, editorials, speeches, and newspaper articles. In the 1960s, there was a brief resurgence in interest among the SLP with interest in Johnson's writing. Clearly, her writing inspired or influenced others' political thoughts, which were then shifted and formed into new ideologies.

One of the political elements that differentiated the SLP from other leftist political movements such as the United States Communist Party (USCP) or the Socialist Party (SP) is the SLP's focus on electoralism. Across the United States, the SLP would post candidates for elected office, from governors and senators to local school boards. The majority of their efforts were poured into elections, continually posting and renominating members for election campaigns, only for them to very rarely be successful, and never above a local city government. The focus on electoralism by the SLP meant that more practical assistance from strike support to food assistance were very rarely, if ever, employed. The lack of a boots-on-the-ground approach meant further alienation of laborers in more vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and domestic labor, two fields which primarily employed non-white and female individuals.

When setting out to discuss my interest in the early twentieth century American Left, my previous discovery of Johnson was brought up. It was hard to incorporate her into the larger story when at the time we had incredibly limited information. I was encouraged to read other biographies such as *Florence Kelly and the Nation's Work* by Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* by Barbara Ransby and *Citizen and Socialist* by Nick Salvatore. Using these examples, it became clear that a biography would be the prime vehicle through which I could examine the varying facets of political participation in the United States around the early twentieth century.

Olive M. Johnson was important enough to get a wikipedia article but was never valued enough to be mentioned alongside the influential figures of the early-to-mid twentieth century of Frances Perkins, or Eleanor Roosevelt. For a woman who ran for elected office five times, in 1904, 1918, 1929, 1932, and 1934, attended college in her thirties and graduate school in her forties at a time when women were not granted suffrage nationwide, she should deserve to have

some minor recognition for her achievements. Even when examining several different websites for sources, there is not a singular site which contains a full scope of her work. Rather the same few pieces of information are repeated and most of her work is tied to the male leaders of the Socialist Labor Party. In existing literature about the SLP, Johnson is a footnote, listed as editor of *The Weekly People* for two decades, longer than any other editor. She therefore had creative control over the content of the paper, leading her to be in a position to guide the party platform in the United States.

This thesis is a study of Olive Malmberg Johnson, an unknown leader of the socialist movement at the height of its popularity in the United States. Through her exceptional story, we learn that it was possible for a woman to be involved in politics at a time when it is commonly assumed that women's citizenship was mediated through gendered spheres. For a woman who ran for political office before women were legally allowed to vote across the nation, she participated in a relatively fringe political party because she saw a need to look out for the interests of the working class in the United States. Remaining fast to her beliefs, Johnson's political ideology also led to her making more antagonists than allies. The antagonistic attitude Johnson takes towards other leftist organizations prohibited allyship for a larger movement, as did her gender.

Throughout her life, she was an outsider to predominantly male organizations, ultimately stalling any potential progress which she could have made. However, as a doctrinaire SLP member, she was also blind to the needs of non-white and rural, non-industrial workers. Even times where she lived in Harlem, meaning that she would have had Black neighbors and had access to newspapers discussing incidents such as the "Red Summer" of 1919, there is no evidence of her sharing personal views about the need for liberation and collaboration with Black

leftists.⁴ She continually defined the “working class” in narrow terms, undoubtedly hampering the SLP’s potential for success. These problems plague the left today. By examining her story, I want to provide insight on the state of the American Left today.

In chapter one, I will discuss Johnson’s early involvement with socialist ideology, her immigration to the United States from Sweden, and her early speaking efforts with the Socialist Labor Party. In this chapter, I compare her approach to American Leftist politics with the political activity of Eugene V. Debs, arguably the most famous Socialist in the history of the United States.

In chapter two, I will examine Johnson’s rising star status within the SLP, eventually leading to her election attempt as Governor of New York, and her becoming the editor of the *Weekly People*, the official party newspaper. The 1910s were a moment where Johnson’s gender was brought to the forefront of almost all of her actions, tying her to the suffrage movement. Although she, and the SLP were politicizing her gender, the party platform was excluding the concept of race from their fight for liberation from capitalism.

In chapter three, I write about the impact of the First Red Scare on Johnson and the SLP, Johnson’s growing distrust with the United States government, and how she confronted a complicated political scene, as the Communist Party rose in the United States.

In chapter four, I discuss the failure of the SLP to embrace unity on the left, abandoning agricultural workers, and in effect, defining who counts as a to-be-liberated worker. Additionally, I speak about SLP views on New Deal programs in relation to the Great Depression.

In the conclusion I share the final years of Johnson’s life, the present state of the SLP, and I reflect upon what Olive Johnson’s biography tells us about the Left today,

⁴ Whose who

Chapter 1 Olivia Malmberg, 1872-1909

Introduction

Born in a town where parents grew up a mere walk from their childhood home where their grandparents still live only a short trip from their childhood homes, it is hard to know whether Olive Johnson would have known her life journey would take her across oceans, across continents, to speak in front of crowds, fearlessly leaving her family behind to forge her own path. She was not going to allow herself to be content doing only what was expected of her. And whether she knew it or not from the time she was young, Olive was going to set out to change the world.

This chapter will consider the question of why did Olive Johnson choose to align with the Socialist Labor Party, even though there were other, potentially more effective groups available to her. I will be considering her own writing and the platform of the SLP in addition to comparing her to her contemporary, Eugene Victor Debs, to demonstrate what her early life can reveal about the experience of being a woman and a leftist at the turn of the twentieth century. Johnson's personal story of growing up in Sweden and then immigrating to the US ultimately affects her politics more than she would even come to realize. As an American, her early adulthood would have been shaped by the pull of competing political ideologies and parties, from a growing women's movement to trade unionism to left-wing electoralism. And, while she would ultimately choose the Socialist Labor Party, the conflict over her status as a woman in politics would become a defining feature of her life.

Confronting Womanhood

Born in Lund, Sweden on March 14th, 1872 as Oliva Karolina Malmberg to her two parents, Nils Malmberg and Ingrid Nelson Malmberg, Johnson would have grown up surrounded by an understanding of some form of socialism and the emerging vision of cooperative welfare laying the vision for the twentieth century welfare state.. As early as the late 1850s, government officials were working toward plans for economic revitalization through a nationally controlled economy and resource management.⁵ Additionally, a culture that spread from the Swedish rural poor to the rest of the country focused on the collective efforts of labor and ownership.⁶ Furthermore, a cultural shift in Sweden was happening right around when Johnson was born. No more were women legally limited in their rights to property, education, and careers. Growing up, Johnson would have attended mandatory primary education funded by the government and witnessed the construction of rail lines to connect the country, also funded and managed through nationalization efforts.⁷ With this context for her childhood, it is easy to see why arriving to the United States would have been a call to action to work towards a different economic structure.

⁵Norberg, Johan. *The mirage of Swedish Socialism: The Economic History of a Welfare State*, The Fraser Institute. July 20, 2023., 3

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ Ibid, 8.

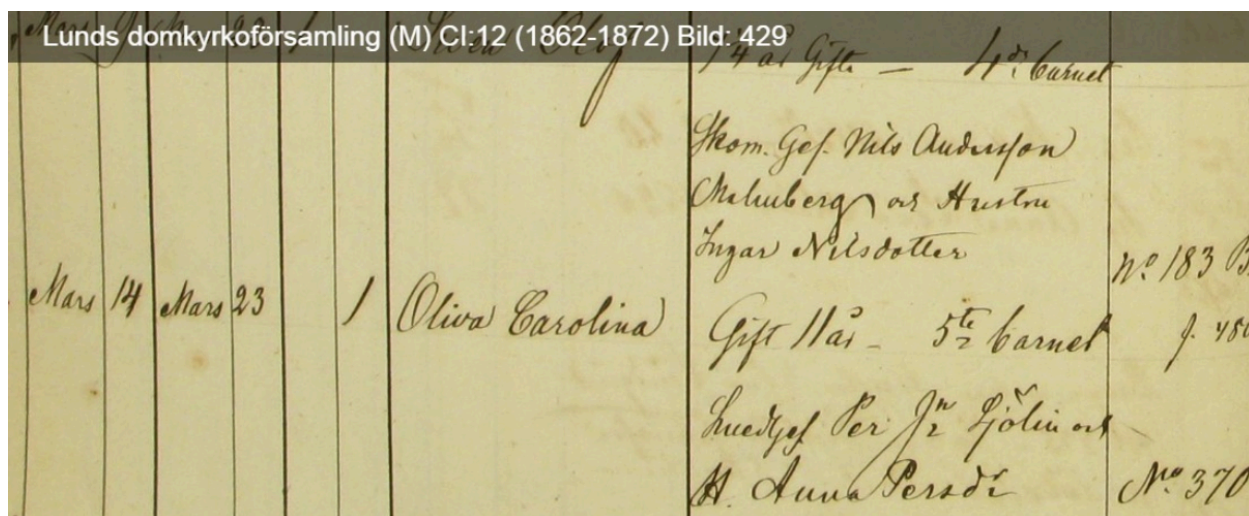


Image 2: Parish Baptism record from Lund, Sweden for Oliva Carolina Malmberg, retrieved from Ancestry.com

When Johnson was fourteen, her mother, Ingrid, died, having given birth to six children but only three survived, leaving Johnson to be the youngest.⁸ At fifteen, it seems that she was on her own in Sweden, as there are no other records of her two older siblings or her father, Nils, associated directly with her. The records found for Johnson show her working independently as a maid or hired hand in an urban environment, but interestingly enough not associate her directly living in the household of her employer as is common at that time in the United States.⁹ If she were not living in her employer's household, that would give her more mobility and freedom to pursue her own interests outside of her employment, which could have been a platform for her to first dip her toes into progressive politics and socialism in Sweden. Her experience in Sweden would have provided her with an intellectual and practical background before she arrived in the United States, seemingly instantly becoming involved with the Socialist Labor Party.

⁸ Genline AB; Johanneshov, Sweden; Swedish Church Records Archive; Reference: 100012.138.13400

⁹Deutsch, Sarah. *Women and the city: Gender, space, and power in Boston, 1870-1940*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. 64.

Considering that Johnson would have watched her mother grow weaker with every pregnancy, I estimate there were a total of thirteen pregnancies based on a parish record from when the family was in Sweden. Ingrid, working to take care of the home, would have had Olive to help, except for when she would have been at school. It is my opinion that Johnson's later writing, especially in *Women and the Socialist Movement* and *The American School*, were directly influenced by the suffering which she would have seen her mother and similar women around her undergo.¹⁰ Both of these later texts discuss collaborative home building, where a community is responsible for taking on the burden of child raising, and valuing domestic labor as 'real' work, a concept that is still controversial in contemporary politics. Of course, Johnson's experience with maternal mortality would not be unusual, but still shocking to anyone having to live with that. One must imagine how Johnson would have told herself that she was going to avoid the silent, ignored fate of the thirteen pregnancies of her mother, with only six births, and three children living to adulthood. She may have also been conscious of her ambitious personality, not wanting to be "handcuffed to the sink," as she later put it.¹¹

Immigrant to Activist

The fact that Johnson's formative political years took place in the Midwest is not without consequence. With an influx of immigrants from Scandinavian countries who had been raised in some form of socialist tradition, even if imperfect, ideologies were bound to cross the Atlantic with the immigrants. One must wonder what her reaction to the Homestead Strike would have been, having arrived in the United States only a few months before. The altercation took place regarding a Pennsylvania Carnegie steel mill wanting to bring in non-union workers. A violent

¹⁰ Johnson, Olive M. *Women and the Socialist Movement*. New York: Labor News Co., 1908.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

conflict where the Pinkertons, a privately hired guard force and the strikers exchanged gunfire, wounding two dozen and killing nine from both sides.¹² With tangible evidence that the government would raise arms in support of private industry and not condemn the use of a private militia to attack strikers, it must have been extra tense when determining to get involved with any political or union activity that was outside of the status-quo.

Other leftists in the political realm of the United States came from the Midwest, Eugene Victor Debs, one of the most successful socialists in American history, and Daniel DeLeon are two other such examples. I would argue that due to the richness of diversity on the East Coast and the influx of immigrants to fill an industrial machine, cities in the Northeast tend to have more focus placed on them for their labor movements and political activity. More people will have heard of the filth and grime of the Lower East Side slums of New York City than will know of the sewer and garbage removal efforts of Milwaukee with their “sewer socialism.” In no way is it a competition, and there is ultimately more history than we have time to study, but examining broader political activity across the United States when not confined to the traditional cities means that there are more ideologies which could contribute ideas to later political formations. Interestingly, the default to urban laborers is a fault that organizations such as the Socialist Labor Party themselves fell into.

¹² KRAUSE, PAUL. “6 July 1892: ‘A Carnival of Revenge.’” In *The Battle For Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel*, 19-27 University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt6wrbj5.7>.

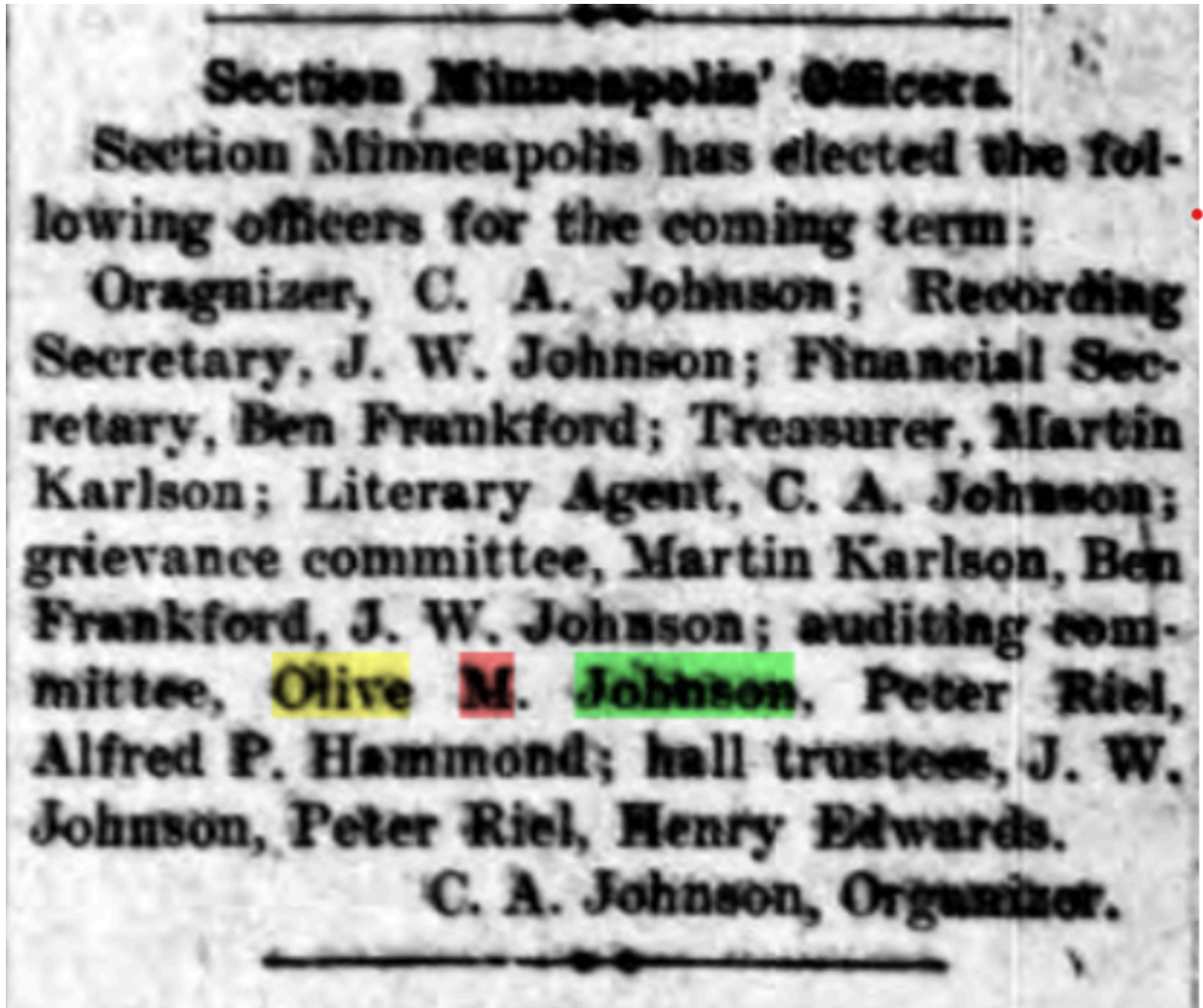


Image 3: Article from *The Weekly People*, Saturday, June 20th, 1903 including newly elected officers for the Minneapolis SLP. Note Charles is included in the top line.

Industrial unionism was the name of the game for years. It was the principle that organizing politics around the labor of so-called unskilled workers would lead to more progress because it is meeting potentially interested parties where they were at.¹³ In fact, the Homestead strike was pointed to as a failure of industrial unionism.¹⁴ But, it ultimately remained the most successful organizing tactic, especially because it seemed to help the workforce get tangible benefits and results, unlike other later political movements that wanted complete system

¹³Perry, Ben. "Olive Malmberg Johnson." In *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. 352.

¹⁴ Ibid.

overhauls rather than focusing on day-to-day successes.¹⁵ Industrial Unionism was also a more successful organizing structure because it would bring in those of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds under a singular goal. For immigrants to the United States, industrial unionism would have provided a basic jumping-off point for further political involvement.

Nils Ture, almost six years older than Johnson, would have most likely moved to the United States a year earlier to settle initially in Boston.¹⁶ Census records show that he listed his arrival to the United States in September of 1891, almost six months before Johnson would have left Sweden to then join him in Boston, and then his oldest daughter, Anna Marie, is born the following year still in Boston of November 1892. The years between Johnson's arrival in the United States and her eventual marriage in 1898 leave a gap in records and information. According to a biography provided by Johnson in 1925, she completed high school in Minneapolis, and marriage records list her and her husband as getting married nearby in Wisconsin, only two years later to be recorded as living in Minneapolis again in the 1900 census.¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹

¹⁵ Rachleff, Peter. "Industrial Unionism." In *Encyclopedia of the American Left*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. 353.

¹⁶ Year: 1930; Census Place: Tenafly, Bergen, New Jersey; Page: 6A; Enumeration District: 0238; FHL microfilm: 2341051

¹⁷ DeLeon, 125.

¹⁸ Wisconsin Historical Society; Madison, WI, USA; Wisconsin Marriage Records Pre-1907

¹⁹ Year: 1900; Census Place: Minneapolis Ward 6, Hennepin, Minnesota; Roll: 768; Page: 13; Enumeration District: 0066

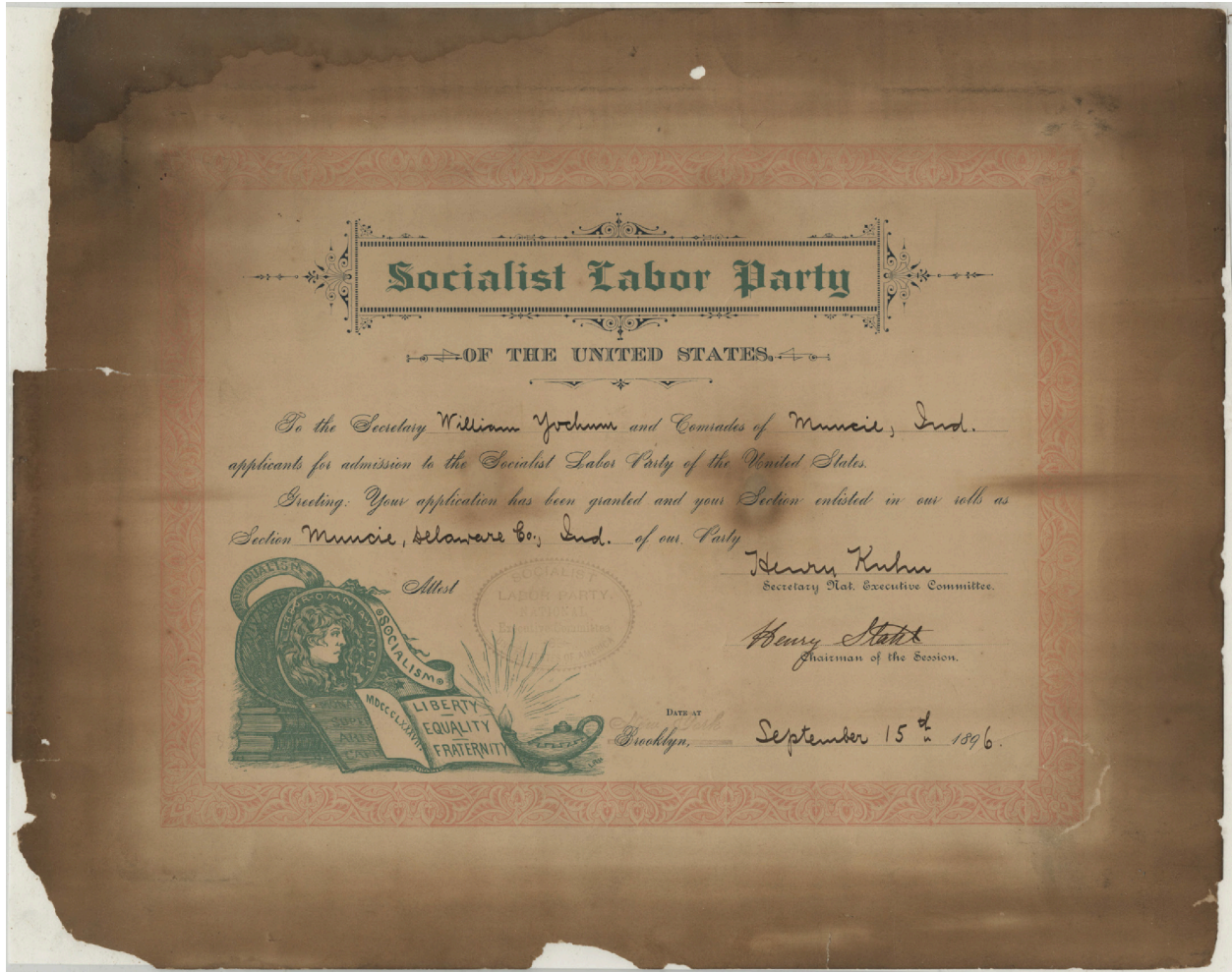


Image 4: Muncie Socialist Labor Party Certificate for William Yochum, signed by Henry Kuhn and Henry Stahl, September 15, 1896. Olive and Charles would have most likely both received a certificate of membership such as this one.

The Socialist Labor Party

Formed in 1876, the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) was founded as a collection of leftists who closely identified themselves with Marxist ideology. Originally conducted primarily in German, the SLP soon spread from the Midwest, concentrated in Cincinnati and Chicago to the East Coast, where it found an audience of Eastern European immigrants to begin filling out its ranks.²⁰ One of the most well-known members of the SLP and arguably a famous socialist in his

²⁰ Cronin, Sean. "The Rise and Fall of the Socialist Labor Party of North America." *Saothar* 3 (1977): 23. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23195205>.

own right, Daniel DeLeon, took the helm of the party in 1890. Trained in academia, DeLeon had a law degree from Columbia with experience teaching there. He was considered one of the leading intellectuals regarding the law and also an effective communicator and orator.²¹ He could have had a bright future, pursuing systematic change from the inside. But that was not the path he was destined to take. Fired from Columbia for his pro-socialist attitude in a proto-red scare, DeLeon put more of his attention into the SLP intending to expand it from its relatively limited German and Jewish, New York base.

Touring the Midwest and eventually settling there, DeLeon made his goal clear: to bring in as many different types of leftists under one system to work with electoral politics, to ensure that politicians which a Marxist could trust were in office, rather than looking in from the outside.²² Considering themselves the direct intellectual descendants of Karl Marx and his ideology, members of the SLP were to work towards socialism as a unified force.²³

Unfortunately, the SLP never moved beyond a methodology of electoral politics, alienating themselves from more practical actions such as worker or strike support except on very select occasions. Additionally, their internal definition of who were considered workers, whether they realized it or not, was urban living people, employed in industrial settings. Very little thought is given to rural or agricultural workers, or those employed in domestic service.

²¹ Ibid, 24.

²² *Reform or Revolution An address delivered by Daniel De Leon under the auspices of the People's Union., at Wells' Memorial Hall, Boston, January 26, 1896., 3*

²³ Seretan, L. Glen. *Daniel DeLeon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979. 89

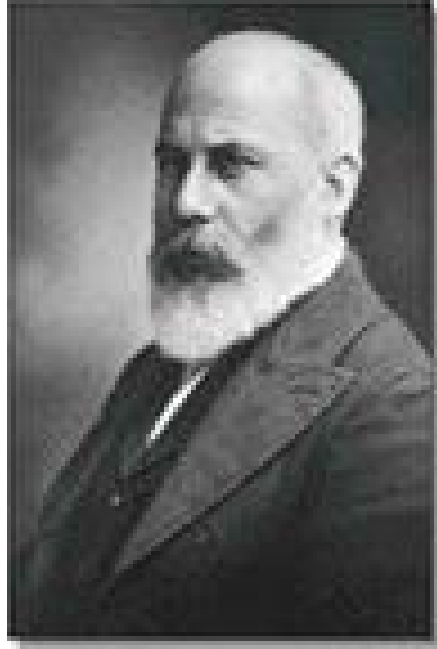


Image 5: Daniel DeLeon, courtesy of the SLP archives

Interestingly, for as much as the SLP later critiques parties such as the Socialist Party and the Communists for being too focused on a single figurehead, the SLP remains attached to DeLeon even after his passing.²⁴ writing commemorative articles and lauding his intelligence and platform far more than that of anyone else, even Marx himself! Entire pages devoted to DeLeon, including editorials written by prominent members of the party like the future National Secretary, Arnold Peterson, DeLeon's successor, and Olive Johnson, one of his great admirers.²⁵ DeLeon himself was not in favor of the elevation of individuals to a god-like status. Believing that "officers have not dropped down into their positions from the sky."²⁶ It is important to consider the presentation that the party had, stating that they were for the abolition of class hierarchies and the political involvement of all, yet they created an artificial leader for their party to be beholden to. When taking this approach to politics, it creates a need for all leaders to be not only the

²⁴ Weekly People, July 13, 1907.

²⁵ Fifty years of American Marxism, 1891-1941 : commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Weekly people. Socialist Labor Party, Socialist Labor Party of America. 1941.

²⁶ De Leon, Daniel. Fifteen questions about socialism. United States: New York Labor News Company, 1921.

ideological, but also moral leaders of the party. As a result, any disagreement or misstep causes ostracization and internal fighting. Infighting led to weeks of work attempting to expel offending members from the party and denouncing the issues of other ideologies rather than looking to make progress and campaign and gather more support among those whom might have been potential allies.

Johnson would be well equipped to put up with the infighting and snippy letters posted in the party paper, the *Weekly People*, writing her own fair share of rebuttals over her years of involvement and participating in debates over membership. She was ruthless with her pen and unafraid to speak her mind about comrades both in and out of the party. For as much as the SLP considered themselves the party of the people, when looking at the leadership of the SLP, most were approaching socialism from an intellectual standpoint. DeLeon was highly educated as a law professor, Petersen went to college to major in history, and a later writer, Aaron M Orange was an economist.²⁷ Johnson eventually went to college and even participated in graduate programs and elite universities, but for the majority of her life, she was firmly rooted in a laboring class experience.

The SLP was not there on the frontlines of strikes, they conducted most of their work through distributing newspapers and pamphlets.²⁸ Meetings were held at local halls and lectures were given. But after those events were over, members of the SLP went back to their lives working in a capitalist system. It can easily be assumed that many would be members of their industrial union and would have most likely brought the SLP's principles to those events, but in terms of providing an effective organizational strategy for the average worker, they were seriously lacking. Not to say that the SLP abandoned or neglected its membership. It ultimately

²⁷ "Arnold Petersen, Socialist Laborite", *The New York Times*, February 7, 1976., "Socialist Laborites Name State Ticket", May 7, 1938 *New York Times*

²⁸ *Weekly People*, August 31, 1918.

was a party that supported electoralism and to a degree, respectability politics. In the next few decades of the SLP, they would avoid harsh surveillance by the Bureau of Investigation (BI) because of their strong stance on nonviolence.²⁹ Petersen is quoted at one point saying that “the anarchists were ‘worse than nothing and did more damage to the working people’s cause than the the conservative can do.’”³⁰

Once Johnson becomes a figure in the SLP, she seems to distance herself from the laboring class. While still living in poverty, she seems to devote much of her time to the SLP. Occasionally taking on sporadic work as a boarding housekeeper or a maid, she does not have the same connections as she once would have to the working class labor and social movements.³¹ I argue that a part of the reason she would have fallen in with the intellectual class of the socialist movement was because it simply was an easier life, and for someone who would have grown up experiencing the hardships of labor, being able to not work oneself to death as so many others did would have been very tempting. In no way is this suggesting that Johnson was not dedicated to the liberation of the working class population, but perhaps her methodology lacked a practical and hands on approach that it would have benefitted from.

An additional possible explanation for Johnson’s connection with the SLP would be her childhood and young adult years in Sweden. She would have watched socialistic measures be passed and implemented on a government wide scale through legislation without the complete overhaul that future leftist revolutions would produce. What she had not considered was that the reason behind the implementation of the socialistic structure was because there was almost no economic stimulation or true economic disparity between classes in Sweden in the early

²⁹ Letter from George F. Lamb to J. Edgar Hoover for the Department of Justice Bureau of Investigation, March 13, 1920.

³⁰ Report by A.H. Loula. On the Socialist Labor Party, March 12, 1920. In Regards to Radical Agitators.

³¹ Olive M Johnson, 1940 United States Census.

nineteenth century.³² For a country with little industrialization, the revamping of the economy to include an educated labor force, high speed transportation in the form of a railway, and the construction of production infrastructure were an attempt to be competitive in a global labor market and not necessarily out of the goodness of the ruling class' hearts.³³ Unfortunately in the United States, the extreme wealth disparity between the leisure and laboring classes would have no reason to change from a top down method because the governing body is content with the status quo and needs to be pushed to change. Here, the SLP served an important role, because while they may have seemed extreme when compared with advocates in favor of child labor, against other slightly more moderate parties calling for the implementation of things like a five day work week made the optically more moderate measures seem reasonable in comparison.

A Short Lived Love

It is to be assumed that Olive and Charles met through activity with the SLP. We know that Charles was active with the party, having also immigrated to the United States from Sweden, but he came much earlier, when he was only four years old. Johnson states that her first involvement with the SLP was in 1895, which would give three years before their marriage for the pair to get to know each other. An important aspect of their relationship is that Olive gained US citizenship through Charles. We can not know for sure how long their relationship lasted from courtship to separation, nor can we know the reasons for their separation. Still, I would argue that there seems to be an element of Olive wanting to move onto further adventures, making the SLP an important and main focus of her life. At the same time, Charles preferred to remain where he had been living for the majority of his life. They would have been officially

³² Norberg, 2.

³³ Ibid, 4.

married for at least two years, from the 1898 marriage certificate to the 1900 census. There is also a possibility that Charles remained active in the SLP even following their separation, with a Charles Johnson of Minneapolis running for elected office in 1913. Unfortunately, at this time, Johnson's personal correspondence does not seem to exist outside of limited SLP archives, so the true nature of their relationship and separation will not be known.

Registration of Marriage	
No. 199	34
1. Full name of husband.....	Charles Johnson Wi
2. Name of the father of husband.....	John Johnson Jo
3. Name of the mother of husband before marriage	Mary Stone Ha
4. Occupation of husband.....	Barrel Nailer <i>in Flour Mill</i> El
5. Residence of husband	Minneapolis, Minn. Mi
6. Birthplace of husband.....	Sweden Al
7. Full name of wife previous to marriage.....	Olivia Malmberg Ma
8. Name of the father of wife.....	Nils Malmberg Jo
9. Name of the mother of wife before marriage	Ingred Nelson Ma
10. Birthplace of wife.....	Sweden Pi
11. Time when the marriage was contracted.....	April 30, 1898 Ap
12. The place, town or township, and county, where the marriage was contracted.....	Hudson, Wis. Hud
13. The color of the parties.....	White Whi
14. By what ceremony contracted.....	Civil Pre
15. Names of subscribing witnesses	W. J. Egbert M. I
	Harry Paasche Joh
16. Name of person pronouncing marriage.....	Trueworthy Jewell Cha
17. Residence of person last named	Hudson, St. Croix Co. Hud
18. Date of certificate or affidavit of marriage.....	April 30, 1898 Apr
19. Date of registration	May 4, 1898 May
20. Any additional circumstances.....	Parties both sworn Par

Image 6: Marriage registration between Charles and Olive Johnson in 1898, retrieved from Ancestry.com

It does not appear that Charles ever remarried. Truthfully, there is little known about him, but due to his and Johnson's older age at the time of separation, I would assume that perhaps the desire for children in their relationship was not a focal point, especially considering that Charles does not remarry unlike his contemporaries, even Nils Malmberg. We can not know whether the topic of children would have come up in their relationship, but Johnson, who would have been over twenty five at the time of her marriage, would have had to contend with desires to continue her political activism, which by 1898, she had already been active in the SLP for three years. Getting married and having children meant that she would have had to put her life on hold until her children were old enough to be on their own independently, so up until her youngest child was about sixteen years old.³⁴

Johnson's decision, whether to get married or not, and to remain married or not, was not unique to her. Other politically minded women during the nineteenth, twentieth, and even current-day politics, have to contend with the struggle between maternal and social activist expectations. Men, without the societal expectations of being responsible for the home or children, had the freedom to be gone for months at a time on lecture circuits or for campaigning, without so much as a questioning glance. It was shown, whether intentionally or not, that to be an effective activist as a woman at the turn of the twentieth century, one could not participate in traditionally feminine roles such as marriage. For some, it could have been liberating, providing a relatively socially acceptable alternative to being hidden away in the role of wife, but it also meant that those who had gotten married would have not had the freedom to participate actively in the causes they believed in, especially if children were involved. Women like Emma Goldman,

³⁴Sklar, Kathryn Kish. *Florence Kelley and the nation's work: The rise of women's political culture, 1830-1900*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 268.

Jane Addams, Mary McLeod Bethune, even Ida B. Wells had to balance their womanhood and relationships with their activism.³⁵

Unfortunately, at this time there is no personal correspondence of Johnson's from this time of her life. We can not know for sure why she may have chosen to separate from Charles. An important distinction to note is that she did remain Mrs. Olive M Johnson for the rest of her life as was the custom. She did not get formally divorced, an important choice, because just as she got her United States citizenship by marrying Charles, it could have just as easily been revoked, making her position more vulnerable than it already was as a single woman.³⁶ I would like to assume that they simply grew apart, or perhaps did not have much affection for each other in the first place. For some women who were in abusive relationships, widowhood or leaving in the dead of night would have been their only ways of escape. But, as Johnson is so vocal and strong-willed, I would like to assume that were there some sort of violence against her, she would have left Charles, and potentially Minneapolis long before she felt the need to.

Remaining in Minneapolis until at least 1903, Johnson had begun to become a fixture of her regional political scene. A newspaper article in the *St. Paul Globe* lists her as the final speech for a commemoration of the signing of the Paris Commune, a short-lived governmental seizure in France by working class radicals.^{37,38} She also is known as one of the weekly speakers giving lectures at the SLP's social hall on topics ranging from discussions of economics to human history.³⁹ Her skill for writing and contribution to "clear Socialist thought" were beginning to

³⁵ "Biographies." National Women's History Museum. Accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.womenshistory.org/students-and-educators/biographies>.

³⁶ Nils Ture Naturalization Certificate, United States Department of Immigration.

³⁷ *St Paul Globe*, Monday March 9 1903, pg 3

³⁸ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Commune of Paris." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 7, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Commune-of-Paris-1871>.

³⁹ *The Minneapolis Journal*. (Minneapolis, Minn.), 24 Oct. 1903.

spread outside of Minneapolis, where she was even approached for written contributions to a splinter newspaper by a member of the supposed still SLP. The public response from Johnson to the Temporary National Executive Committee is a great insight into her choice to support the SLP.

Being so loyal to her party, Johnson responds in an open letter to a request for her to write a weekly column for a new newspaper the “Socialist Standard.” There is no further information published about the Temporary National Executive Committee which was looking to publish the new work, nor is there any evidence that the newspaper ever managed actually to be published. Throughout her life and professional career, Johnson would have had plenty of opportunities to join other political movements, perhaps some which were more successful and leave a larger lasting mark than the SLP would, but she remained loyal, citing almost eight years of membership in the SLP by 1903. She believed that merely reforming the system at play “was positively futile” and that a “political organization, on the basis of the class struggle” was the only way to affect real change in the broader world.⁴⁰ She approved of the “discipline, clear vision, straight tactics and undaunted perseverance” of the party, and placed her loyalty to the party as a way to better the lives of all around her rather than “look to the movement as the thing to better [her] economic and social circumstances.”⁴¹ To Johnson’s credit, that sentiment seems to hold fast throughout the rest of her life, with her willing to live on poverty level wages to lecture and write for the party.

⁴⁰ Weekly People, Saturday May 02, 1903

⁴¹ Ibid.

The Broader Left

To say that the left was factionalized would be an understatement. In 1901, the Socialist Party was formed, having broken off from the SLP due to ideological differences. The SP was focused on reform rather than electoralism like the SLP was. Progressive social figures such as Florence Kelley joined the SP following the charismatic Eugene V Debs.⁴² One argument for the break between the SLP and the SP was the expulsion of members from the SLP for not tightly adhering to the party policies. This was perceived by the SP as “expelling everyone who can speak English from Socialist Labor Party...the party is very largely a bunch of greenhorns.”⁴³ There was still an expectation of assimilation for immigrants to the United States, and their politics were supposed to follow. Nationality became important for politics on the left in a way it had not previously. When a political ideology was formed around reforms or electoralism, the result was generally expected to benefit anyone who subscribed to that particular party, and as a result, the rest of the nation.⁴⁴ Under the split of the SP from the SLP, rather than fighting for the introduction of socialism into the United States, it was now to introduce American Socialism to Americans, and Americans only.

Once again, for an unknown reason, Johnson moves to East St. Louis, Illinois and becomes active in their SLP scene. She even runs for a position in the management of the college board there, while lecturing and participating in the National Executive Committee for the midwestern branch of the SLP.⁴⁵ While Johnson had written and spoken in Minneapolis, she did not seem to take an official role within Minneapolis’ SLP branch. But, once arriving in St. Louis,

⁴² Sklar, 275.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Weekly People, May 13, 1916.

⁴⁵ Weekly People, July 13, 1907.

Johnson seems to thrive politically, quickly cementing herself as both a resource for action and also national involvement.

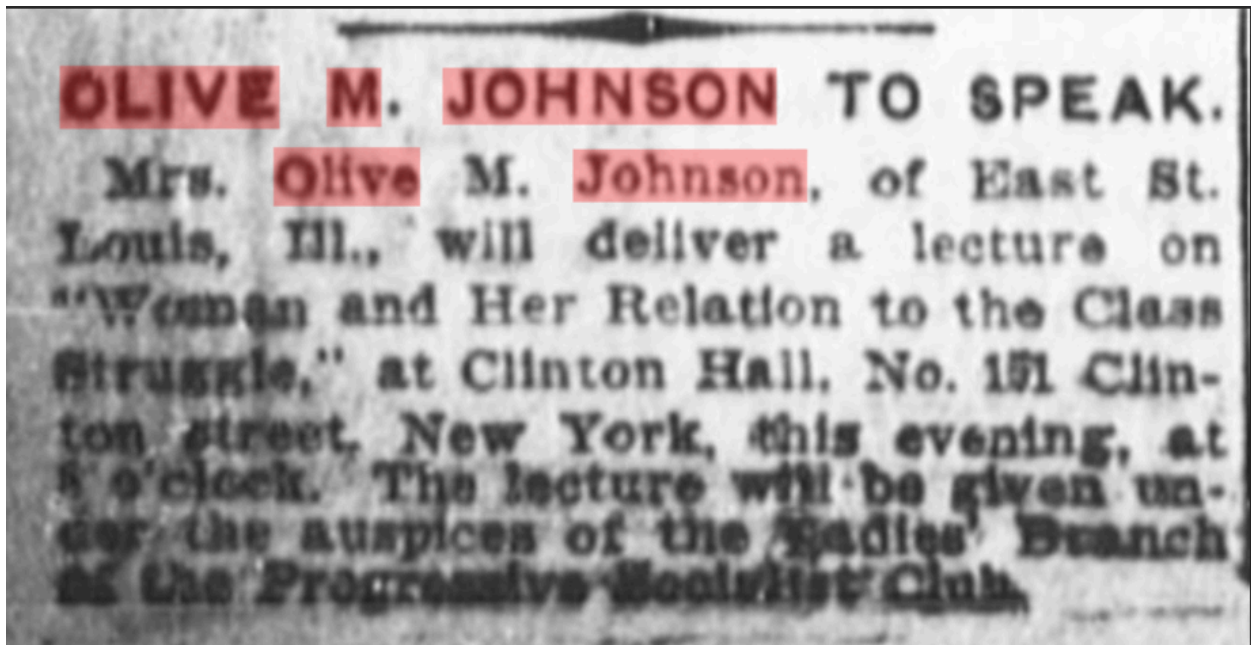


Image 7: The evening world. (New York, N.Y.), 29 June 1904.

After St. Louis, Johnson moved again to Oakland, California, before moving to New York. There is a record of her beginning in 1907, regarding her reporting of the Haywood Trial of CH Duncan, listing her as being a representative of The Socialist Papers, The Daily People of New York, and the Industrial Workers of Chicago hailing from Oakland CA. Again in 1910, an advertisement for a lecture she is giving records her as arriving to Spokane, Washington, a place she seems to have spent a great deal of time, from Oakland. Although there is no evidence of Charles moving to St. Louis with Olive, in California, the pair traveled the West Coast, lecturing together and even co-authoring opinion pieces together.⁴⁶

Johnson is bold about representing the respectability politics and electoralism of the SLP, stating that when she was reporting for the Haywood trial, the SLP and the IWW's policies were "certainly opposed to any such mad acts as he has been playing here," further going on to say

⁴⁶ Weekly People, May 1, 1909.

that he should be thrown from the union, and the actions of those involved with the attempted bombing did not represent any aspect of the SLP or the IWW.⁴⁷ Reporting opportunities and invitations for more travel and lectureships began to appear for Johnson. She was becoming a steady fixture in the world of American socialist politics, and quickly being featured without any mention of Charles.

SOCIALIST WRITER SAYS DUNCAN WILL BE FIRED FROM UNION

Mrs. Olive M. Johnson of Oakland, Cal., who is here writing the Haywood trial proceedings for the Socialist papers, the Daily People of New York and the Industrial Workers' Bulletin of Chicago, came to the office of The Statesman last evening and asked that a statement from her regarding C. H. Duncan, the man taken into custody by the police Tuesday afternoon, be printed. Mrs. Johnson denounces Duncan. Her statement follows:

"We are certainly opposed to any such mad acts as he has been playing here.

"I have sent word to both the Industrial Workers and the Socialist labor party and Duncan will be thrown out of the Spokane union as

soon as word reaches its officers. We cannot stand for any such actions as this man has shown and we will have nothing to do with him.

"If Duncan is the man I think he is, and I have no doubt that he is, we have been suspicious of him for some time. He was a delegate from Washington last September to the I. W. W. convention in Chicago and while there his actions were such as to cause many other delegates to remark about him and express their disapproval of his conduct. He was always grumbling and finding fault.

"I came here to tell of the trial as the proceedings show and I regret that such a man as Duncan should come here and act as he has. It hurts us."

Image 8: "Socialist Writer Says Duncan Will be Fired" Idaho Statesman (published as The Idaho Daily Statesman) - May 30, 1907

Eugene V Debs

What would a discussion about the political left in the United States be without mentioning Eugene Victor Debs? Debs was the charismatic, outspoken Midwestern politician who brought Socialism to the doorsteps of many Americans when he ran for president and

⁴⁷ The Idaho Daily Statesman, May 30, 1907

garnered a following of those who were ready for change. He also was one of the most despised individuals by the collective membership of the SLP who had ever had the displeasure of residing on the earth at the same time as Daniel DeLeon and Olive M Johnson. Perceived as a traitor in the eyes of the SLP for splitting off to form the Socialist Party, there was nothing that Debs could do that would be worth supporting.



Image 9: Eugene Debs, 1912, retrieved from Wikipedia

Debs, born in the Midwest roughly two decades before Johnson would be born in Sweden, he grew up in the picture of American life. His father owned property, he was able to go on to be educated through high school with a concentration of education as a “means of social mobility.”⁴⁸ Even when he left school to work on the new railroad which passed through his

⁴⁸ Salvatore, 10.

hometown, he continued to demonstrate a classic American story, working until he could purchase his own tools, making him independent.⁴⁹ A few years later, Debs took up white collar work as a store clerk, ironically enough giving him the time and social mobility to become active in labor organizing.⁵⁰

The radicalizing moment for Debs was his participation in a strike supported by the locomotive firemen's brotherhood lodge, known as the Great Railroad Strike of 1877.⁵¹ He began to view political office as his platform, running his campaigns with strong support from his fellow lodge members, an early form of a union system.⁵² Seeing participation in public office as an important part of societal participation, even as the government began to appear more and more anti-labor.⁵³ Debs' growing hostility towards the traditional government and capitalist enterprise is similar to other leftists at the time because state violence towards labor was being used with increasing frequency and force.⁵⁴ The Homestead Strike placed Debs in a leadership role, where he was arrested for his participation, leading to an attempt by Samuel Gompers of the AFL to push him from the union movement.⁵⁵ Another two years later when Debs was once again arrested during another strike, he supposedly was then fully introduced to Socialism.⁵⁶

Fully divesting from the Democratic Party, the AFL, and SLP, Debs began to align with the populist movement. Debs and other socialists who had previously been remotely associated with the SLP began to push back against DeLeon's control of the party. Somewhat ironically, DeLeon is the one who suggested that the party split in order to neutralize his opposition within

⁴⁹ Salvatore, 18

⁵⁰ Ibid, 21.

⁵¹ Ibid, 37.

⁵² Ibid, 40.

⁵³ O'Shea, T. (2022). Eugene Debs and the Socialist Republic. *Political Theory*, 868.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00905917221095084>

⁵⁴ Ibid, 876.

⁵⁵ Ross, Jack. *The Socialist Party of America : A Complete History*. Lincoln: Potomac Books, Incorporated, 2015. ProQuest Ebook Central.37.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 40.

the SLP.⁵⁷ Within the form the SP would take by 1901, Debs would become a major force for politics, campaigning for socialist ideology and the SP rather than the SLP. The SLP got a perfect enemy out of Debs, connecting his name to any policy the SLP did not agree with, stating that Debs was in the pockets of mainstream politics.⁵⁸

Debs ran for president in the 1912 elections, and while getting a small percentage of the vote at six-percent, he still garnered more support than might have been previously thought, even if other leftists did not agree with his platform.⁵⁹ Complaints from the SLP contain statements describing Debs as “the kids who play pranks on old man ‘Capital’...We don’t want these [people] we want socialism.”⁶⁰ In the perspective of the SLP, Debs chose to continually rather waffle on subjects of Industrial unionism and specifics regarding his plan for socialism.⁶¹ The SLP’s complaints regarding Debs and the future of the SP’s socialist ideology is the lack of firm stances on economic and social platforms from economic structure to what form political action should take.⁶²

Conclusion

Eric Foner famously asked the question, “Why is there is socialism in the United States?”⁶³ Eugene Debs would answer that the American socialist tradition not only existed but was thriving in the early 20th century. Johnson was a part of that tradition but stood on its edges, choosing not to align with the mass mobilization of Debs’ Socialist Party. Johnson was effective

⁵⁷ Ross, 53.

⁵⁸ Weekly People, August 31, 1912

⁵⁹ Huberman, Leo. The Debs Way. Monthly Review.(2019) 35.

⁶⁰ Weekly People, October 28, 1912.

⁶¹ Weekly People, August 31, 1912.

⁶² Weekly People, June 24, 1950.

⁶³ Foner, Eric. “Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?” *History Workshop*, no. 17 (1984). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288545>.

because of her outspoken nature and willingness to work on behalf of the party rather than her own self interests. Nonetheless, she built few bridges to the wider left. Debs, by contrast, built a mass movement. Additionally, Debs rejected the cult of personality that DeLeon got wrapped up in, so he was following an ideology, rather than a singular figure. For all of Johnson's efforts to claw a space out for herself in turn-of-the-century politics, she would have had an easier time of it were she a man, as she would not have had to conform to society's expectations of what a woman's role should be.

Chapter 2 Comrade Mrs. Johnson, 1910-1919

The room was large, and the audience small. The seats in the front few rows were a sea of hats. Plumes the length of someone's arm, brims wide enough to shelter two beneath its cover. And in front of the room of only a few dozen newly minted voters, the host of the evening would introduce the Women's Suffrage Party members from the eleventh and seventeen districts to the speakers for the evening. That night was the latest in their symposium series, introducing the numerous political parties that would populate the New York State Ballot for the 1918 election. The topic of socialism was on the mind, with speakers from both the Socialist Labor Party and the Socialist Party in attendance. After New York State legalized women's right to vote in November of 1917, organizations pivoted from just coveting the ability to vote to determine what could be done with it.

Mrs. Johnson, as she was announced, though introducing herself as Comrade Johnson, was called up to speak from her chair. One can imagine the independent figure of Johnson standing, smoothing out her skirt and approaching the podium. Even before she speaks, a commanding figure with her eyes bright as she peered over the present audience would have silenced any lingering murmurs. In a clear and booming voice, Johnson begins her prepared speech with her usual "clear-sighted and logical way" as she presented how capitalism and the subjugation of women throughout history were inherently intertwined. Her call was for the women present that night to become active in politics and bring the energy of revolution back to their luncheons and visiting hours with friends. After her twenty minutes of speaking time were up and she took a step back from the podium, the small audience erupted in applause, demonstrating thanks for the presentation they had just received.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Times Union (Brooklyn, New York), 8 May 1918, Wed, 14.

One woman in the audience spoke up above the crowd to ask whether any of the Socialist parties operating in New York would be nominating a woman on the election ticket for that November. Mrs. Johnson, without any hesitation, announced that in fact, one had already been selected. With that, she was named to be the gubernatorial candidate for the state.

In this chapter, I will be looking at Olive M. Johnson during the height of her political career in NYC while she navigates what it means to be a woman and a leader in the Socialist Labor Party. I argue that Johnson was caught between two models of political organizing as she entered into electoral politics: the SLP's focus on class-based struggle and the women's suffrage movement's vision of political solidarity based on gender. This chapter will attempt to analyze Johnson's writing based on her audience changing from a published theorist to an occasional writer for the *Weekly People*, to the paper's editor, and then to a public-facing figure as a candidate for governor. She is not the only person facing this complication. Ultimately, this chapter will compare Johnson's political career during the second decade of the 20th century to two other activists working in New York at the same time and in the decades thereafter—W.E.B. Du Bois and Claudia Jones— who both faced the challenge of reconciling their race or gender identity with their vision for socialism. Race and gender presented an almost insurmountable challenge that hampered the potential for left-wing politics. No matter how successful a woman might have been, she would not have been able to be a public leader of her own platform, and even then, as Johnson was, she would have been used as a token to prove a point or work towards some other cause. For Johnson, her identity within the SLP was that of being a woman first and a socialist second and those around her in the party reinforced this time and time again, refusing to separate her gender from her politics.

A Woman as Rising Star of the Party

The decade began with Johnson's status within the party rising. By 1910, Johnson cemented herself as a figure in the SLP following her reporting of the Haywood trial proceedings. She participated in the International Socialist Congress in Sweden as the official American representative from the SLP and after the event concluded, conducted a speaking tour of the country on the American Labor Movement until some time in 1911.⁶⁵ At this time, there is no evidence of her in the United States Census for 1910, and her time overseas could be a possible explanation for her absence. The earliest she could have been out of the country would have been in late June of 1910 and have arrived back in the United States by August of 1911. At this point, she is still living in California, but even there, she continued the momentum of her prominence in the party. Newspapers from Ohio to California have advertisements in their back pages advertising the "Woman Socialist to Lecture."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ DeLeon, Solon, Irma C. Hayssen, and Grace Poole, eds. *The American Labor Who's Who*. New York: Hanford Press, 1925. 125.

⁶⁶ The times dispatch. (Richmond, Va.), 27 Aug. 1911.

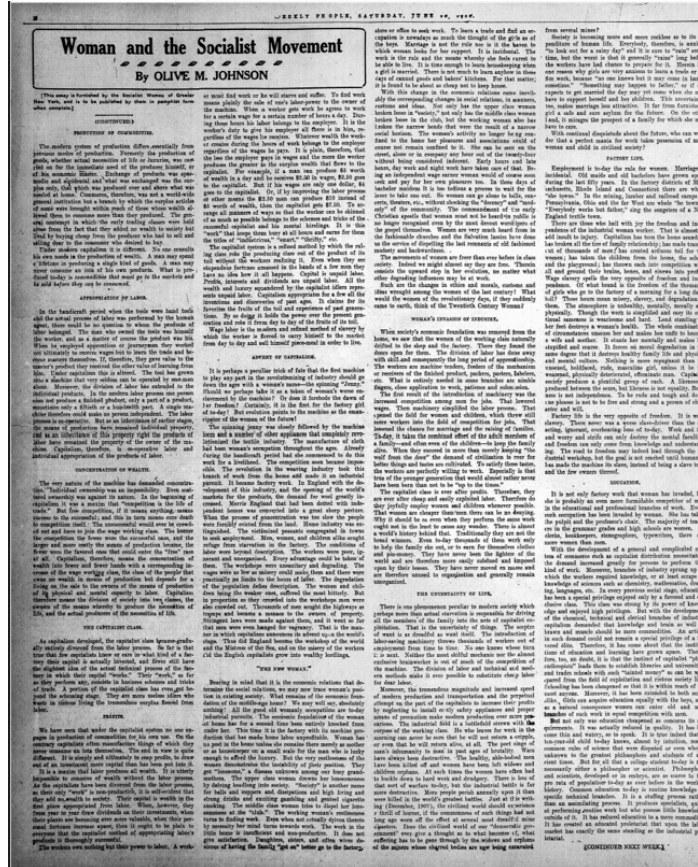


Image 10: Page of *The Weekly People* with a section of Johnson's "Women and the Socialist Movement" printed, copied from microfilm, NYPL

To bring Johnson back to the East Coast, Johnson got the opportunity to work closely with Daniel DeLeon himself. The SLP assisted with the court case of a man who had been arrested and charged with disorderly conduct during a strike in a textile factory in New Jersey. The charges were supposedly fabricated, and it was retaliation for the man as the leader of the strike and organizing force of the union. Johnson and DeLeon were asked to participate as a lobbying force to intervene between the company that had him arrested and the legal process.⁶⁷ It is easy to imagine the connection and relationship that would have developed between two such strong minded individuals. From this moment, Johnson seems to have made a significant impression on the party founder and, shortly after moved to New York to begin assisting the SLP

⁶⁷ *Echo : Wochenblatt der Vereinigten Deutschen Socialisten Clevelands.* (Cleveland, Ohio), 27 July 1912. *Chronicle America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress.

at party headquarters. Two years later in 1914, Daniel DeLeon passed, leaving a rupture in the party and a revolving door of newspaper editors and party leaders began.

Faith in the SLP was also waning, with membership dropping steadily between 1914 and 1916. Without a strong leader, many in the party felt that progress could not be made and would instead default to regional factions as national issues were not being addressed. The infighting in the party combined with the rise of prominence of the SP with Eugene Deb's moderately successful presidential campaign, made the SLP seem like a sinking ship. Nonetheless, Johnson seemed to stay loyal. Her unwavering support for DeLeon motivated her as she began to write analyses of his work and a number of articles describing the shame he would feel towards the party were he still alive. To reinforce her involvement with the SLP once DeLeon passed, Johnson began to take a stronger role in representing the party, and particularly the interests of women. Drawing on speeches and writing DeLeon had produced during his life, Johnson initially wrote a text that was published first in 1908 and then reissued in 1919.

Her *Women and the Socialist Movement* begins by justifying a difference between the male and female sexes based on evolutionary and prehistoric behaviors, seeing men as protectors and thinkers to a "higher degree."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, women, "a necessity to the life of the infant," have a need to be confined to domestic behaviors, even saying that women as a whole have "less energy and endurance" than men.⁶⁹ Even while holding to gender essentialist theory, she still supports a theory of matriarchal control with women controlling finances and property.⁷⁰ She continued her history of the subjugation of women from the Greeks and the Romans through the Medieval Society and up to her present. She claims that women faced the "stigma that past slavery and serfdom throw upon them" and that the only way to crawl out from the systemic

⁶⁸ Johnson, Olive M. *Woman and the Socialist Movement*. New York city, New York labor news company, 1908.3.

⁶⁹ Johnson, 2.

⁷⁰ Johnson, 4.

oppression women face is to dismantle the world in which they live.⁷¹ In November of 1917, New York State legalized women's right to vote, leading to opportunities for Johnson to run for governor and then later mayor of the state. In 1919, the republishing of *Women and the Socialist Movement* would have been a further political commentary with the nineteenth amendment up for ratification having been approved by Congress.

According to Johnson, to further push the narrative around early ideas of women's liberation, was reexamining the concept and practice of marriage. One of her goals for the future, specifically regarding marriage, was for there to be a "new morality, a union based on mutual love and faith."⁷² She shames men for not devoting the appropriate time and energy to their families, trapping women in loveless and abusive marriages because they are unable to access property or safety otherwise without a male protector and representative.

Johnson had to straddle a thin line between her gender politics and her party politics. Her party members, when formerly addressed, were given the honorific "comrade," or none was used at all. More often than not, Johnson is known as "Mrs." When a women's club was to be organized, she was marketed as the main attraction to speak on women's issues in the world. She does write on other subjects, but when she takes her tours in 1905 and 1910 representing the United State's SLP at the international conference and then intercontinental speaking engagements in 1918, she seems to have been a strong yet potentially nonthreatening presence as a representative of the party. She was incredibly well-versed in party politics and the platform, but perhaps due to her gender and middle age, she could have been a more inviting face of socialism than the ranting Debs of the Socialist Party.

⁷¹ Johnson, 7.

⁷² Johnson, 12.

Internally with the SLP, Johnson had to perform her own allegiance to the socialist cause. I propose that having left California, Johnson herself went to New York, and Charles returned to Minnesota. A Charles Johnson, a socialist, ran for the position of city Alderman for the tenth Ward of Minneapolis in 1912.⁷³ I would posit that a reason for the split of the couple was due to Charles aligning with the SP rather than the SLP. The summer of 1912, he gets arrested for blocking the street and flow of traffic due to a “street meeting” of some socialist nature.⁷⁴ Three years later at the end of 1915, Charles due to internal conflict, gets pushed out of the party. In the article (included below) it lists his participation in groups in both Minneapolis and St. Louis, two locations he most likely lived with Olive previously. Additionally, it lists his occupation as a machinist, of which corresponds to his 1900 census listing him as a laborer.⁷⁵ The intra-party conflict, with Charles even going so far as to say he was leaving socialism behind.⁷⁶ Johnson, as a participant in the SLP, featured in articles, having represented the SLP internationally, and a prominent speaker for the SLP, could not have had a husband who was not only not apart of the party, but denouncing the idea of socialism all together. Following 1916, there are no search results for a Charles Johnson and socialism from either the Fulton archive or Newspapers.com where I have previously been accessing my sources.

⁷³ Star Tribune Tue, Nov 05, 1912, 5.

⁷⁴ Star Tribune, Tue, Dec 16, 1913, 10.

⁷⁵ US Census 1900 “Charles Johnson”

⁷⁶ The Minneapolis Journal Minneapolis, Minnesota • Fri, Oct 27, 1916, Page 1

EXPELLED FROM SOCIALIST PARTY, ALDERMAN EXPLAINS WORKINGS OF "COMMITTEE"

REGISTRATION FACTS IN BRIEF

WHEN—You must register Saturday between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.

WHERE—At your precinct registration booth. (Ask The Journal if you don't know its location.)

WHO—The only persons who need not register are those who registered for the June primaries, and who have not moved out of that precinct since.

WOMEN must register, in the same manner as men, to vote for school directors and members of the library board.

CALL The Journal Registration desk between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. for any information about registration.

Minneapolis Man Tells How He Had to Submit Resignation, to Be Enforced at Will—Says Socialist Can't Be Nonpartisan.

Otto S. Langum, nonpartisan candidate for mayor, pointed to the career of Alderman Charles I. Johnson of the tenth ward, who was elected four years ago as a socialist, but is now out of the party, as illustrative of the workings of the invisible committee.

"I am not averse to making a full explanation of the workings of the so-called invisible committee," said Alderman Johnson, "but as a former socialist I prefer the term local committee. The socialist party in Minneapolis has a local committee for each ward, and in addition each nationality has a local committee. This makes about 25 local committees in the city. Each local committee has delegate representation in the socialists' central committee.

Holds Club Over Van Lear.

"It is the central committee," continued Alderman Johnson, "that holds the resignation of Thomas Van Lear, socialist candidate for mayor. That committee has power to enforce his resignation or expel him from the party.

"Before a man can run for office of any kind, and remain a socialist, the party takes a referendum vote. High man is nominated, but even before he is nominated by the party referendum vote, he must sign a blank containing his resignation from the party nomination; the primary nomination; from accepting the office; and from the office, after election by the people.

"I signed one of those perforated blanks four years ago. I was working as a machinist in the Minneapolis & St. Louis shops, but resigned so as to devote all my time to my position as alderman. That was satisfactory to the socialist party, and especially to the tenth ward local of which I was a member. There was a tacit understanding that if I were elected alderman I would devote all my time to the office, but after three years on the aldermanic salary I decided I would have to find other work.

"To avoid trouble with the local, I resigned from the local, which of course was a resignation from the party. That was late in December of 1915. On Jan. 4 of this year I took a job as machinist.

TWIN CITY-DULUTH HIGHWAY WILL OPEN IN 1917, PREDICTED

State Commission Called Into Session to Prepare Plans for Pushing Work.

Road to Form Arterial Base From Iowa Line to Pigeon River, Says G. W. Cooley.

The Minneapolis-Duluth highway, for the construction of which Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth are each to raise \$10,000, will be ready for travel in the tourist season of 1917. George W. Cooley, state engineer and secretary of the state highway commission, said today.

Its completion, he predicted, will be the most outstanding single result in

Image 11: "The Minneapolis Journal" Minneapolis, Minnesota, Oct 27, 1916, Page 1 A front page article about the removal of Charles from the party

While Johnson was editor of the *Weekly People*, a nationwide ideological change regarding women was taking place. The "New Woman" was a young woman who would not have to be confined to housework or other labor under the direction of a direct male supervisor. Rather, there were new opportunities for women in the job market and even expanded learning. Johnson, in fact, takes advantage of more of these opportunities for women when she attends

college at Hunter, graduating in 1916. Although Hunter was founded in 1870, by the time that Johnson attends it had expanded from solely being a teaching preparatory institution. It followed other curricula that new women's colleges being opened were also offering. Other schools which formed to support the new interest in women's higher education were Sweet Briar College, University of Mary Washington, James Madison University, and Connecticut College. Even though Johnson would have been close to two decades older than her peers at forty-four when she graduated, she was willing to support her female comrades to push for them to not be "perpetual nursemaids and dishwashers."⁷⁷

Considering Johnson left her husband, her statements and views regarding marriage may give a clue as to what her relationship was like. By 1919, she had found her own independent career to support herself, that of being the newspaper editor, but she also claimed that she had jobs working in a factory shop, a store, a restaurant, an office, a housekeeper, and a teacher. She continued to work the rest of her life to maintain her independence, perhaps seeing a life of work and scraping by as preferable to having to be reliant on a partner. After almost ten years away from home, Charles might have wanted to return back to Minnesota, where he had lived for the majority of his life. Especially after following Johnson to California, where her presence seemed to be more significant within the party than his, considering her active involvement with reporting for press outlets and speaking engagements, Charles might have been wanting to reclaim some of his masculinity, rejecting his wife's newfound political involvement and prominence.

For all of Johnson's radical views of womanhood and even marriage for the time, one needs to wonder why she chose to remain with her support for the Socialist Labor Party rather than join the National Woman's Party or even participate in the Heterodoxy Movement, which

⁷⁷ *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), 24 Sep 1929, 17.

would have been local to her in New York. It is reasonable to assume that the National Woman's Party would have supported her attempts to run for elected office, with a newspaper columnist stating that "No woman who insists on voting for some other woman...will have to write a name in...Her chances are small, but that is a small consideration with the suffragettes."⁷⁸ This snippet in particular, refers to her run for Governor of the state of New York in 1918. Johnson is also recorded as speaking to the Woman Suffrage Party in Bedford, New York, about the advantages of voting for the SLP ticket. Some of Johnson's statements regarding the party seem exaggerated, such as her claim that the party "represented 70 percent of the total population of the country."⁷⁹ Considering that Johnson got only twelve thousand signatures for her electoral petition, whereas the other parties held votes, gathering a total of over one million registered voters. To put that in a cleaner number, Johnson got .00012% of the votes across the state of New York in September of 1918.⁸⁰

Other historians such as Kate Weigand and Nancy Cott argue that the further splintering of political movements around single-issue platforms meant that women had to pick what the issue they cared about the most was. Whether that was domestic reform policies like child and healthcare, living conditions, or prohibition, that movement within groups such as the National Women's Party disparaged socialism and other leftist politics for being too radical and instead preferring to reform existing systems, putting most of their weight behind women's rights. On the other side, the leftist parties, in particular the most popular US Communist Party, rather would target a systemic overhaul of everyday life and class, but refused to acknowledge the need

⁷⁸ The Brooklyn Daily Eagle (Brooklyn, New York) September 13, 1918, 6.

⁷⁹ Times Union (Brooklyn, New York) May 8, 1918, 14.

⁸⁰ "Women Socialist runs for Governor" *New York Tribune*, September 12, 1918.

for explicit rights for women, going so far as to be against women's suffrage because what would the use of voting be if it were to still be voting for an unjust system?⁸¹

In the discussion of Johnson's views on the concept of monogamy, it is difficult to ascertain her personal beliefs versus those of which she held to remain socially acceptable. Comparing her ideology from *Women in the Socialist Movement* to her opinions on the Mebel lawsuit, there is a shift. In her earlier work, Johnson seems to view non-monogamy as a plausible option for a relationship, saying that the reason it fell out of favor was because it was difficult for a single male breadwinner to support a larger number of dependents such as multiple wives and their children. She critiques monogamous marriage for a loss of community and resources for large family structures to support each other. What is unable to be determined is her opinion on intergenerational families living together because it would also provide the same form of community that I believe she is referring to. In the public eye such as when Johnson was running for Mayor of New York, she returns back to explicitly defending the United State's practice of institutional marriage, stating that "the Socialist-Laborites envision a change in marriage...toward more monogamy instead of less."⁸² There are even other respectability political tactics being taken, reinforcing her American alliance and shunning the foreign influences of the "Russian regulations" and attitudes towards marriage.⁸³

Home to Roost in New York

A possible reason for Johnson's more permanent arrival to the east coast could have not only been to participate in party headquarters, but also to push for more educational opportunities. Johnson had the opportunity to obtain a four year undergraduate degree at Hunter

⁸¹ Weigand, Kate. *Red feminism American communism and the making of Women's Liberation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.

⁸² *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York), 24 Sep 1929, 17.

⁸³ Ibid.

College in 1916 and also participated in graduate studies at Columbia and then a few years later at New York University. At no point is there a record of Johnson getting an official graduate degree, whether that is a masters or a doctorate. This is not unusual for the time, as while women may have been taking classes, they would not have been welcomed into a full-fledged graduate study program. From 1890 to 1920, only twelve women were awarded full doctorates for a school such as UC Berkeley. Information regarding both Columbia and NYU was unavailable at the time of research, but based on other information, it can be assumed that Johnson would have not even been in consideration for a full program.

The 1910s were a decade where Johnson moved from merely supporting the party to being a featured and important member of the SLP. She moves to New York to be closer to the party's headquarters and travels overseas back to Sweden to be a representative at the International Socialist Conference. Furthermore, she undertakes a wider tour of Sweden to discuss US Socialist policy and also report back tactics that could be utilized in the United States, taking inspiration from the more progressive Scandinavian countries as well as Germany's pre-World War 1 social policy. Not only taking inspiration from international politics, fellow American progressive theorists would have influenced Johnson's philosophy. When she got placed on recommended reading lists for subjects ranging from women and politics to the impact of governments on their political parties, her contemporaries, from whom she borrowed and elaborated on ideas, were listed next to her.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ *Woman and Economics*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman; *Woman and Social Progress*, Scott Nearing; *Woman and Labor*; Olive Schreiner.

THE WOMAN QUESTION

Some Important Books
on the Subject Which
Serious Thinkers
Should Read

WOMAN UNDER SOCIAL-
ISM—Bebel; translated by
Daniel De Leon; cloth \$1.00

WOMAN, HER POSITION
AND INFLUENCE IN
ANCIENT GREECE AND
ROME—James Donaldson;
cloth 1.60

WOMAN AND ECONOM-
ICS—Charlotte P. Gilman;
cloth 1.50

WOMAN AND SOCIAL
PROGRESS—Scott Near-
ing; cloth 1.50

WOMAN IN MODERN SO-
CIETY—Earl Barnes; cloth 1.25

WOMAN AND LABOR—
Olive Schreiner; cloth..... 1.25

WOMEN, SUBJECTION OF
—John Stuart Mill, cloth .60

WOMAN SUFFRAGE—Dan-
iel De Leon; paper10

WOMAN AND THE SO-
CIALIST MOVEMENT—
Olive M. Johnson; paper .05

Postage extra—20% west, and
10% east of Chicago, except
Bebel's "Woman under Socialism"
and pamphlets.

N. Y. LABOR NEWS CO.
45 Rose St. New York

Image 12: Pamphlet Advertisement from the *Weekly People*, May 13, 1916.

Arriving in New York City around 1912, Johnson would have found a thriving scene for progressive politics. From socialists to anarchists, labor organizers, and civil rights activists, there was a political ideology for everyone. In a way, Johnson was not a unique figure in the New York scene in the early 20th century. Women across the city were taking up political and social action. There were women leading the fight for better working conditions such as Clara Lemlich and Rose Schneider. There were women working for reform of healthcare and living

conditions such as Lillian D Wald, and other causes such as women's suffrage. There were also women in Harlem who were fighting for racial equality such as Ella Baker. Even in the SLP, there were a number of other women active in organizing who Johnson worked closely with.

What did set her apart from other women in the party was her attention to a national platform. Johnson in this period of her life began to write prolifically in newspaper columns for the *Weekly People* as well as travel around the country speaking to audiences on subjects from women's political action, socialism as a political ideology, and international events. An interesting pattern that emerges regarding Johnson's work is that while she certainly does take on issues in her writing regarding the intricacies of what a socialist revolution would look like, she often defaults back to subjects which are traditionally gendered like education, women's labor, and domestic issues. It is clear that Johnson is engaging in intellectual dialogue with other authors in her lifetime. Through her writing, we are able to analyze the progression of her ideology and also view her values which she keeps returning back to.

Johnson on Tour

The past eight years of Johnson's life had been leading to 1918. She was given the opportunity to go on a national tour once again, this time advocating for the action of women in the SLP and to encourage membership building even in the face of a global war and growing concerns about socialism and the further left communism, including direct government action against groups such as the IWW. Working closely with the National Secretary of the party, Arnold Peterson, a schedule was developed for Johnson, traveling from coast to coast, stopping often in Chicago, and even going back to her home of Minneapolis. For each speaking engagement she was booked for, the rate was five dollars, and it was requested that two to three engagements be arranged. Some chapters, such as the one from Buffalo, New York, had to send

their regrets that even though they would have been excited to have Johnson to speak, their chapter coffers would be unable even to support one lecture. And, in a rare moment of Johnson's age beginning to be apparent, at almost fifty years old, a number of communications between Johnson and Peterson contain requests and arguments for more break days between traveling and lectures, finally Peterson conceded to give her one day a week of no travel and no bookings, but at times, it was still not enough for her.

Even while going on her national tour for the party, in March of 1918, Johnson is selected to run for governor of New York as the first woman candidate. It would not be until a hundred years later in 2021 that a woman would finally be elected for the position. March 30th, when the New York State convention was convened, would have been at the same time that she would have been presenting in Detroit, Michigan.⁸⁵ To get the nomination, it seems that two letters were sent to her just days before the committee would have been met, informing her of the intention to nominate her. She sent her willingness to accept the nomination if granted to her in both a telegram and then elaborated on her response in a letter to Petersen. She said, "I feel rather favorably inclined towards the idea, particularly if trouble is ahead, as it might well be."⁸⁶ The trouble she was discussing was the dissatisfaction in the party and the splitting of a previously influential woman from the party in favor of the SP. An interesting insight into her motivation to work for the SLP is revealed, though. She laments that her life would be easier and more comfortable if she had gone into a more steady and traditional line of work, but finding a great deal of encouragement from her other party members, in particular women, she felt that it was important to keep up the cause to give her fellow women a candidate they could believe in.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Weekly People*, March 23, 1918.

⁸⁶ Letter, Johnson to Peterson March 28, 1918.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The financial concerns for Johnson were going to be in a perilous state, as if she ran for governor of New York, it might jeopardize other options for her such as applying for teaching or tutoring positions. In fact, one of the upsides for Johnson were she to run and win the election would be the government salary she would receive. While Johnson would work hard remotely campaigning and having others campaign for her, she would ultimately lose. But, the ability of Johnson to have been nominated gives a wonderful view of what women's politics were in the early twentieth century.



Image 13: "Woman Wants to be Govenor" Albuquerque morning journal. (Albuquerque, N.M.), 30 Sept. 1918.

A WOMAN SOCIALIST

When Johnson first ran for governor in New York in 1918, the cries of amazement from around the country were not at her politics. The astonishing aspect of her campaign is that she was a woman! The heading of an article with some variation of "Woman Runs for N.Y. Governor" was featured in papers from Georgia, Arizona, Texas, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, and

New York. The announcement of her running was the only one of its kind in the non-New York papers. Nowhere else was the rest of the SLP's ticket published. For the United States in 1918, the most shocking thing a politician could be was a woman, not even a socialist. Especially at that moment in time coming up on the first red-scare, there seemed to be a blase nature about her associated political party. Furthermore, the tone of the short articles tend to be very patronizing. In Georgia and Texas, of the three sentences dedicated to her campaign, one of them reads "While she won't be elected, she believes she will convince many that women can make a good campaign." At this time, it is unable to be determined where the papers got this supposed quote from her, but it is reasonable to assume that there were editorial choices made by the almost exclusively male editor teams.

Editor of the Party

The role that Johnson took on to have the most influence on the party was when she became the editor of the *Weekly People* newspaper. The *Weekly People* was the main English language publication produced by the SLP and had a wide reach with distribution on both coasts, and a few thousand copies being printed each week. The previous editor, Edmund Seidel, had been in his position for two years, gathering discontent from fellow party members. What changed was in March 1918, letters from Seidel were shared which contained sentiments of wanting to abolish and remove the non-English speaking chapters and members of the SLP from under the organizational structure. There were also discussions of mail fraud organized by him and general disinterest in the party, and a refusal to cooperate with party management and policy conductors.

By mid-April of 1918, Seidel was removed from his position and a temporary editor, Olive M Johnson, was appointed to be in charge of the paper until a permanent individual could

be selected. Johnson was also given Peterson's assistance while she was still on her tour. Critiques from other SLP members said that she was unqualified for the position of editor and that she was only being placed so that Peterson could extend another form of control to take over the party himself due to their close relationship. On April 25th, a vote with the National Executive Committee was conducted to agree to pay Johnson a salary of twenty-five dollars a week, a sum that she supposedly requested but was still poverty wages.



Image 14: Men reading socialist newspapers near the Arlington Hotel, Delphi, Indiana, circa 1908. Note the *Weekly People* edition the man on the left is holding.

Almost instantly, Johnson began making changes to the paper. She instituted an editor's column, giving her a platform for the expression of her opinions on a consistent basis. Her writing in this column ranged from a typical single column or a few paragraphs to an entire page.

Additionally, she started writing other articles in the paper, unfortunately, many are unattributed to anyone in particular, but writing patterns and characteristics are evident and she develops a position on voter access for American soldiers overseas and continues to push for equitable education opportunities. The comment period for the position of editor ended in early October, and there were almost fifty nominations for Johnson to remain as the editor in a permanent position. The votes were nearly unanimous and Johnson would then keep the position for the next two decades, one of the longest serving members of the National Executive Committee in the SLP.

Name	Age	Sex	Race	Marital Status	Occupation	Birthplace
Olive Johnson	35	F	White	Single	Editor	England

Image 15: Section of 1920 Census including Johnson with her occupation as editor of a newspaper, retrieved from Ancestry.com

Olive Johnson in Context

As a woman working in progressive circles in the early 20th century, Olive Johnson had a lot working against her. At the time, most leftist movements around the world had a policy of not acknowledging the intricacies of identities among their comrades. It was considered antithetical to socialist ideology because under socialism, everyone was to be equal and it would not matter what race, ethnicity, or gender you were. The only identity that should be valued would be class because once class equality was achieved, then all else would fall into place. For African Americans and women in leftist movements, class was but one of the many oppressions bearing down on their lives.

WEB DuBois and Double Consciousness

Just as today, activists in the early twentieth century had to choose between the extent of their values and political action and the associated parties. While the SLP did not focus on the “woman question” from its conception to the extent Johnson perhaps wanted them to, it explicitly chose to ignore race-based struggles. In the 1890s, Daniel DeLeon explicitly stated that “there was no such thing as a race or ‘Negro question’... there was only a social, a labor question...so far as the socialist and labor movements were concerned.”⁸⁸ The ignoring of racial struggles, which obviously disproportionately targeted working-class African Americans, alienated a potential group for allyship within the SLP’s cause. Many Black radicals in the United States chose to join the Communist Party or the Socialist Party. Interestingly, the Communists could be considered to be just left of the SLP and the Socialists to be just ever so slightly right. The Socialist Party of America advocated for a racially integrated movement, although they saw racism as a result of capitalism and believed that if capitalism was destroyed, racism would go with it.⁸⁹



Image 16: WEB Du Bois from the W.E.B Du Bois Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, UMass Amherst Libraries

⁸⁸Kelley, Robin D. G. 2022. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press. 41.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

For Black Americans, such as W.E.B. DuBois, they did not have the luxury of waiting for capitalism to fail in the hope that racism would also disappear. In Du Bois' February 1929 speech for the Rand School, "The Socialist Party and the Negro," he rails against the hypocritical nature of the socialist movements for simultaneously shaming African Americans for taking the only jobs that are open to them, while also wondering why more Black people would not join the party. Du Bois saw the future of the party as one that would have to fight for "economic justice" because the refusal to allow Black Americans into the party while also acknowledging their racial differences would continue to give bosses ammunition to use non-white workers as scabs and to continue to drive down wages and foil negotiation plans.⁹⁰

A weakness of contemporary leftist movements to Du Bois and the relationship between socialist politics and the fight for civil rights was their attempt to appease potential allies in the form of white conservative southerners.⁹¹ Admittedly, Du Bois' observations of the Socialists being "afraid to make a direct appeal to the negro vote" did have a basis for it, as during a 1931 mine strike in Kentucky when the integrated Communist party sent representatives down to help provide mutual aid and other assistance to the striking community, and as a result, other organizations such as the American Red Cross would not assist those miners who were prior supporters of the Communists.⁹² So for Southerners who already had a tumultuous relationship with racial politics, it was a worry to align oneself with socialism during the period of the United States' first red scare.

But, Du Bois critiques the hesitancy to alienate the white southern vote as one of copping out on their goals. He is scathing towards the party, saying that "Everybody is in favor of justice

⁹⁰ Du Bois, WEB. "The Socialist Party and the Negro." Speech, February 1929. Robert S. Cox Special Collections and University Archives Research Center. UMass Amherst. W.E.B. Du Bois Papers. 1

⁹¹ Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

⁹² Members of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, *Harlan Miners Speak: Report on Terrorism in the Kentucky Coal Fields*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008.

so long as it costs them no effort.”⁹³ Interestingly, this is Johnson’s critique of the Socialist party as well, believing that those not in the SLP were not willing to push the political envelope and were too willing to cave to centrist pressures.⁹⁴ While the Socialist party may have wanted to have a nationally applicable platform, Du Bois brings to light that due to cultural differences across regions, the party must be willing to amend and target different interests than what they may have been interested in the first place.⁹⁵ Other scholars, such as Micheal Dawson, have noted that there was a concern among white leftist leadership of their parties being identified as being “too black.”⁹⁶ Du Bois would have had to watch the political party he had aligned himself with time and time again deny concerns about the very real racial violence and inequality that was inflicted on African Americans.

Decades before Du Bois wrote his speech, presidential candidate Eugene Debs stated that “There is no ‘Negro problem,’ apart from the general labor problem. The Negro is no one whit worse off than thousands of white slaves.” and ‘The class struggle is colorless.’ The capitalists, white, black, and all other colors, on the other side.”^{97,98} It is difficult to imagine how Du Bois must have experienced his dual interaction with the Socialist Party, where he would have been told that unity through a political party that wants to tear down the existing systems in place would have been liberating to hear, but then to experience hostility due to racial inequality within the same group that was supposedly calling for equality and removal of class barriers. Dawson saw the struggle that would have existed for Black leftists in conversation with white leftists as being unbalanced, for the working class who would have benefited from a socialist revolution, one side was fighting for economic equality and rights in the workplace. Meanwhile, the other

⁹³ Dubois, 2.

⁹⁴ *Weekly People*, October 11, 1903.

⁹⁵ Dubois, 3.

⁹⁶ Dawson, Micheal. *Black Visions: the Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies*, 2001. 3.

⁹⁷ Eugene V. Debs, June 20, 1903.

⁹⁸ Eugene V. Debs, Nov. 1903.

was fighting against lynching and a constant threat of violence and an expectation of racial inferiority.⁹⁹

Because Du Bois had to straddle two ideological worlds, from his political activism with the fight for social change in an economic sense to his then work with the NAACP, he found himself pushed out of the projects he had devoted his life's work to from both fights. From the NAACP, he was asked to step down from the organization due to his association with leftist politics in a time of growing fear for communism, especially in the aftermath of the Second World War. Meanwhile, from the Socialist Party, he grew disenfranchised with the party as they refused to meaningfully recognize racial discrimination and an attempt to defeat racism as a way to also combat capitalism.¹⁰⁰

Du Bois was considered too radical for the radical movements he was a part of because he wanted to view economic politics holistically. He had to contend with a struggle of white leftists who wanted to preserve the white hierarchy, because not doing so in the face of capitalism would ultimately have destroyed whatever privilege they did have. Were white progressives to have made an active effort towards racial justice, there would have been more efforts to solidify anti-lynching legislation and to police their own communities, especially further south.¹⁰¹ Even when working with the party, Du Bois was stuck between wanting complete integration of non-white members into committees and local chapters, but then many found their voices overlooked and issues ignored as they were a small group when compared to the white majority. But, when Black socialists founded their own committees, it was used against

⁹⁹ Dawson, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Oakley C. Johnson, ca. March 1961.

¹⁰¹ Dawson, 27.

them in an argument for the white groups to say that the Black socialists would not be willing to work towards greater economic liberation.¹⁰²

Du Bois, even while working towards Black liberation on the left, did not see women as being able to be active participants in the fight. Even when given the opportunity to work with Ida B. Wells, the incredible muckraker who brought advocacy for anti-lynching efforts to the forefront, he said that “nothing more than membership was expected of her in the NAACP.”¹⁰³ If there would not have been support for Black women’s suffrage opportunities on the part of white women, men, and in particular Black men did not seem to be stepping up to help tackle these issues themselves.

While Johnson had approached her political efforts from 1910 to 1919 with the goal to make the lives of those like her better, her aims regarding intersectionality fell short. She was successful at spreading news about the SLP through her organizing efforts on tour around the nation, and her numerous advocacy efforts with newly minted voters. Additionally, she was able to turn the *Weekly People* into a more streamlined and efficient publication. No longer did women in politics, especially among the left, seem like an impossible feat.

Conclusion

While Johnson had approached her political efforts from 1910 to 1919 with the goal to make the lives of those like her better, her aims regarding intersectionality fell short. But, in comparing her efforts to those of WEB Du Bois, when confronting widespread change, Johnson only affected a small section of middle class white women. She was successful at spreading news about the SLP through her organizing efforts on tour around the nation. Additionally, she was

¹⁰² Perry, Jeffrey B. *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011 169-172.

¹⁰³ Dawson, 137.

able to turn the *Weekly People* into a more streamlined and efficient publication. No longer did being a woman in politics, especially among the left, seem like an impossible feat.

Du Bois would ultimately be pushed out of both the SP and the NAACP because he refused to pick between his leftist ideology and support for fellow Black Americans. Johnson was able to always channel her political activities through the SLP platform, even when speaking on topics involving women. Here, we can see an example of how Johnson's whiteness favored her because she was not at risk of ostracization due to her discussion of potentially controversial issues. There is very little evidence on Johnson's own thoughts about race in the United States, even though she must have been confronted with news regarding the racial hostility in the country. Because she had ideological blinders on to only examine problems which she believed capitalism was at fault for, she would not have had a reason to fight for the liberation of Black Americans under socialism as it seemed to be a moot point.

Chapter 3 “Prisoner of Her Own Nation” 1920-1929

In only a few weeks time, members from the National Executive Committee would be traveling to Russia to observe the Third International conference of 1921. It would be a gathering of leftists from around the world who would come to marvel at the Communist nation and to discuss how a revolution could be effectively employed in the rest of the world. Amidst the planning of a new edition of the *Weekly People*, phone calls with organizers on committees states away, and the much celebrated May Day parade; a man appeared in the doorway of 45 Rose Street. He announced himself as Mr. Cox, a special agent from the Department of State, there to inquire about the actions and political ideology of one Mrs. Olive M. Johnson.

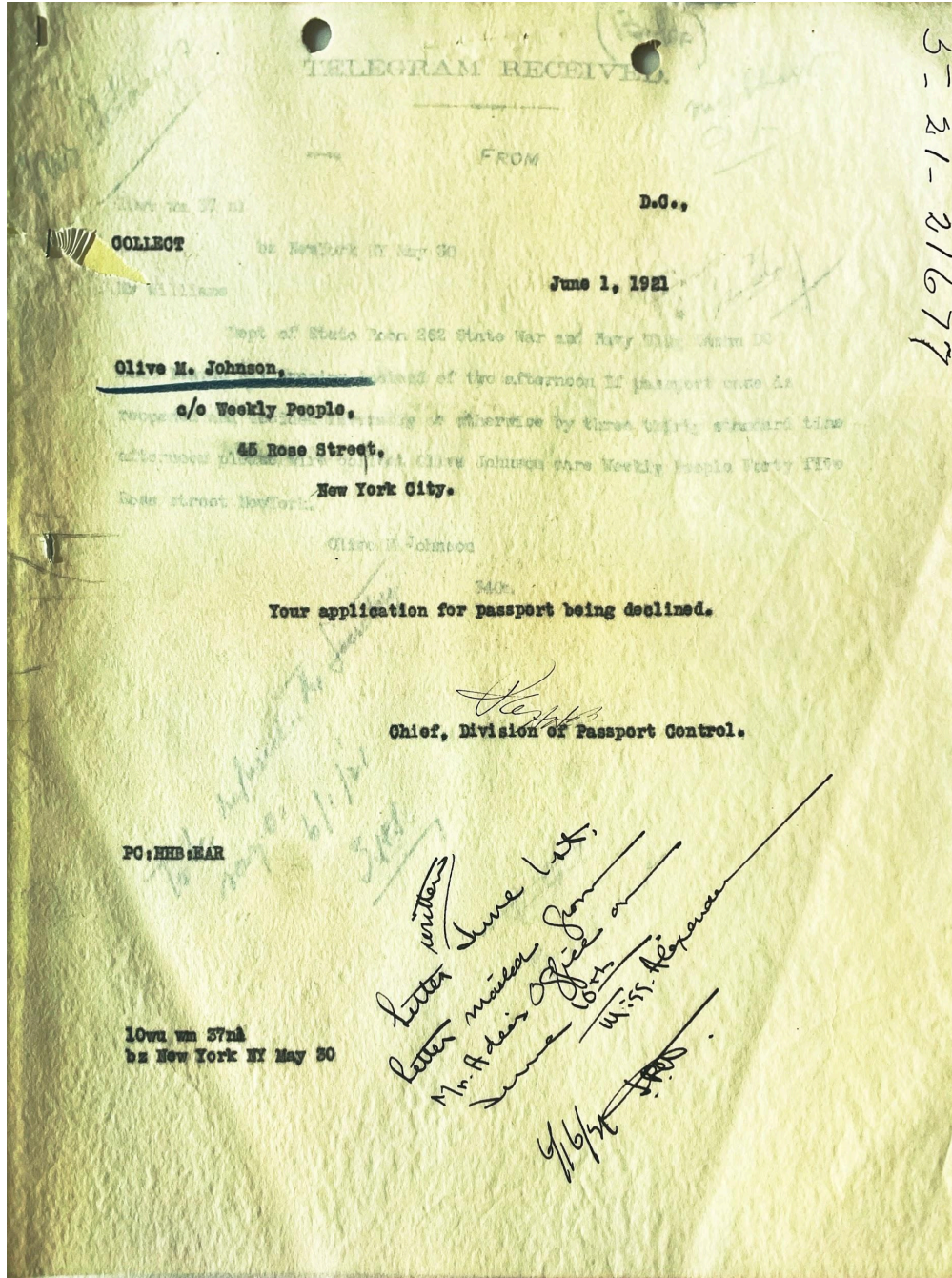


Image 17: Letter of Passport Denial from the United States State Department, June 1, 1921.

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the impact of the often forgotten first red-scare on progressive politics in the United States by looking at how Johnson's politics were constrained by censorship. With the passing of the nineteenth amendment in 1921, a nationwide political

change was taking place. Now no longer confined to a select handful of states, women got the ability to vote, and a rush to appeal to their ballots appeared, politics shifting focus towards international attention even amidst a governmental isolationist policy. Worldwide, leftist politics took root in Soviet Russia, a laboratory of Communism in action, to be studied, admired, or repelled from.

The SLP would have avoided some of the more intense government surveillance up until the 1920s. Previously, Woodrow Wilson's government was focused on those who were engaged in anti-war ideologies, with newspapers written in non-English languages being placed under extreme scrutiny, leading to Congressional acts being passed such as the Espionage and Sedition Acts by 1918, which the SLP would later feel the consequences of.¹⁰⁴ In 1917, the United States Attorney "authorized and arranged¹⁰⁵" for a special report of socialist organization in the US consisting of the SLP, the SP, the IWW, and WIIU. This was conducted under the supervision of the Bureau of Investigation with the Department of Justice (BI), the precursor to the modern day Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In the eyes of the Bureau, the SLP was one of the more threatening organizations operating in the United States, stating that the "most intelligent element of the working class radicals are to be found in this organization"¹⁰⁶ In comparison to the analysis of the SP, the SLP was organized, and operated on a political footing which would be respected across class lines due to their seemingly more refined actions and air of respectability. The author of the report, Arthur E. Reimer, supposedly a former member of the SLP for a dozen years including membership in the NEC and candidate for political office, considered "the SLP from the view point of socialist theory the most consistent and logical of all radical groups and

¹⁰⁴ Shepley, Nick. 2011. *Palmer Raids and the Red Scare : 1918-1920 : Justice and Liberty for All*. Luton: Andrews UK Ltd.. Accessed February 22, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central. 8.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from A. Bruce Bielchki regarding Socialist Labor Party Activities, US, FBI Case Files, 1908-1922, October 30, 1917..

¹⁰⁶ Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation 1908-1922, Socialist Labor Party Activities, May 20, 1919.

although numerically the smallest are potentially the strongest.”¹⁰⁷ What made Reimer collaborate with the Bureau of Investigation is unknown, especially considering he remained an active participant in the American Left through the twenties, but the BI used his analysis for two years, until in 1919, the SLP once again became a concern for the Bureau.¹⁰⁸

Palmer Raids¹⁰⁹

Attorney General Alexander Mitchell Palmer, faced with a growing discontentment regarding the economy following the end of the first world war in 1918, struck a blow against radical politics in the United States, instigating the First Red Scare in 1919. What would become known as the Palmer raids were night time attacks in November, purposefully coaligned with the second anniversary of the Russian Revolution.¹¹⁰ Between the November and January raids, close to 10,000 individuals, most of them immigrants, were arrested, and many held without charge.¹¹¹

Although most of those who were arrested in the Palmer raids were connected to the Communist parties, two members of the SLP were also targeted. In the course of the January 20th raid on the office which supported the Bulgarian chapter of the SLP in Ohio, all literature was seized into police custody, not to have been returned.¹¹² Concern for the party members was high, especially as very few in the office were fluent in English so as to communicate with the officials. Members of the SLP identified the attack on the office and the arrest of two of their

¹⁰⁷ Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation 1908-1922, Publication number M1085, US, FBI Case Files, 1908 Page 180 Old German Files, 1909-1921

<https://www.fold3.com/image/5523399/socialist-labor-party-activities-380564-page-180-us-fbi-case-files-1908-1922>

¹⁰⁸ Solon DeLeon with Irma C. Hayssen and Grace Poole, *The American Labor Who's Who*. New York: Hanford Press, 1925; pg. 194.

¹⁰⁹ Finan, Chris. *From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act : A History of the Fight for Free Speech in America*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2007. Accessed March 10, 2024. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Kaross, Sonia, Bud Schultz, Ruth Schultz, and VICTOR NAVASKY. “The Palmer Raids: The Deportation Mania Begins.” In *It Did Happen Here: Recollections of Political Repression in America*, 164. University of California Press, 1989. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnjbq.20>.

¹¹² Weekly People, January 31, 1920.

comrades as a case of xenophobia, targeting the immigrant population of Ohio for their political participation.¹¹³ Petersen, the National Secretary, issued a direct callout to the Justice Department on behalf of the Bulgarian chapter saying that: “it is difficult for us to understand why sub-divisions of our organization are being annoyed and harassed by agents of your department. Is it because these members of ours are foreign- born and therefore less capable of defending themselves than American-born citizens?”¹¹⁴ The officers involved with the raids were very aware that what they were doing would ultimately be unconstitutional.¹¹⁵ Most individuals arrested were released within a few days with no charge having been placed against them, allowed to leave with shattered confidence in American freedom of speech, injuries obtained during beatings during or immediately after the arrests and interrogations, and a concern for their families and comrades.¹¹⁶

The public reaction to the raids was overwhelmingly positive. The arrest of thousands of supposed “foreign enemies” restored many Americans faith in their government. With the motivation for the raids to supposedly be an investigation into the unrest many felt following the end of the First World War, the goal would be to gather evidence to deport as many individuals as possible to free up employment and housing opportunities in a floundering economic market.¹¹⁷ While the raids conducted by Palmer and his Department of Justice, may have seemed to have no lasting impact, as leftist activity was still strong in the United States, the direct influence of Palmer on immigration policy, excluding immigrants from politically “risky” countries, which fueled xenophobia, has reverberations until today. Roughly half of the individuals arrested in the raids were to be sentenced to deportation by the Department of Justice,

¹¹³ Weekly People, January 31, 1920.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Arnold Petersen to US Attorney General, Mitchell Palmer, January 24th, 1920.

¹¹⁵ Finan, 2

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 3.

but the Department of Labor and the State Department collaborated to find that over three-quarters of the proposed deportations had no legal basis.¹¹⁸ From the ten thousand arrests made under Palmer's orders, only eight hundred would be deported, or only eight percent.¹¹⁹

Deportation of radicals would have been fresh in the minds of many in the United States, when in October of 1919, only one month prior to the Palmer raids, Emma Goldman, one of the most famous radical figures in American History, was arrested for her supposed rhetoric advocating the overthrow of the government. Goldman had been targeted for decades regarding her anti-war sentiments, anarchist ideology, and suspected involvement in violent actions from the McKinley assassination to a series of bombings of government official's yards.¹²⁰ The deportation of Goldman in 1919 was successful due to a series of censorship measures taken across all levels of the federal government. Some of the only voices opposing the increased censorship, or removal of free speech protections, were two supreme court justices, who saw the sliding slope of anyone and their speech being labeled radical for daring to dissent against the primary narrative.¹²¹

Back to the Women Question

As the definition of what a radical would be, American leftists had to contend with balancing their own belief while not appearing overtly threatening to the American social order. *Women and Socialism*, having been republished in 1919, would be a timely, and important restatement of the values regarding domestic relationships under socialism, but within the framing of having to exist in the United States. When comparing the original edition published in

¹¹⁸ Finan, 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 4.

¹²¹ Ibid, 6.

1908 to the one in 1919, it does not appear that any language has been modified.¹²² In the American eye, one of the dangers of Bolshevism happening in Russia was the deconstruction of traditional family values, a common cry by conservatives even today.¹²³ American socialists from Johnson to August Bebel argued in favor of monogamous marriage and the stability of a relationship rooted in marriage. In the USSR, the definition of marriage from 1918 to 1926 would ultimately change, from only recognizing civil unions as marriages, to almost a decade later allowing no-fault divorce, the removal of recognized children's parentage based on marriage and even having taken steps to ensure access to reproductive healthcare such as abortion.¹²⁴ It did not matter that the majority of Russians were ultimately unaffected by the changing policy, in American eyes, it was as if the very concept of family was being destroyed.¹²⁵

Historian Erica J. Ryan suggests that it was women like Florence Kelly, mentioned for her work in chapter one, and by extension, Johnson, who contributed through their own independence to the rise of the flapper in American culture.¹²⁶ By the 1920s, the population of solidly middle-aged reformers and activists who had made great strides in the earlier decades were evidence that a life separated from the presence of a husband and occupied with work were not sentences of moral destruction. A form of female respectability politics was played, with interviews with Johnson focusing on her self-sufficiency, the refined living conditions she resided at, and even her "widow" status.¹²⁷ At this time, it is unknown exactly when Charles

¹²² Johnson, Olive M. "Woman and the socialist movement," Published N.Y., National Executive Committee, Socialist Labor Party, 1919. *Weekly People*, Saturday July 4, 1908

¹²³ Ryan, Erica J. "'The Age of Woman in Revolt': Talking about Bolshevism by Talking about Women in Red Scare America, 1919–1923." In *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare*. Temple University Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvrd33j.6>. 49.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 50.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, NY, Monday, June 10, 1929

passed. The 1930 census will list Johnson as being widowed, but the earliest mention of Johnson as a widow is 1929. Due to the commonality of the name Charles Johnson, there is very little evidence of his location following 1900 excepting a co-written article with Olive before 1910.

The decade of the 1920s was when Johnson found herself with an important role in the SLP, participating nationally in leftist politics, in addition to internationally. She writes about her own political philosophy, acknowledging concrete steps which could be taken to reform the current political and economic system. The observations and theory Johnson proposes in *The American School* and *Americanism* are different in nature than that of earlier reformers. In accordance with SLP philosophy, Johnson's proposed changes could not happen were the entire philosophical and economic systems to not change to Socialism.

The Passport Saga

Travel in the early 1920s was in a time of change. The first World War had changed policy regarding passport usage and ease of leaving the country. Immigration laws were being passed to limit the number of "undesirable" people from entering the country.¹²⁸ A rise in political enemies of the United States such as those who were considered anarchists and communists were becoming more and more of a perceived threat, along with those who were going to be a threat to whiteness, such as the Chinese or restrictions on Southern Europeans.¹²⁹ It was not unique to the United States, the question of international travel, but for those of a political identity such as socialism under the scrutiny of the government, it was an issue that had to be planned around.

¹²⁸ Craig Robertson, *The Passport in America: The History of a Document* (Oxford University Press, 2012). 163.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 164.

Somewhat protected by her Swedish background, and then her status as a United States citizen thanks to her marriage to Charles, Johnson was in a better position than most other immigrants to fight the denial of her passport. When she applied for her passport, Johnson had been living in the United States for twenty nine years, enough time for her to adapt to the culture, she spoke English fluently, was employed in a respectable occupation as a journalist, and mostly associated with those who might not immediately seem foreign, and therefore, not immediately dangerous. Were she Russian, combined with her leftist politics, there is a very strong chance she would have been arrested in the Palmer Raids.

The saga of Johnson's passport denial was published with great uproar in *The Weekly People*. Correspondence from the State department to the SLP and the responses sent were included along with columns of incendiary language, labeling Johnson a "prisoner of her own nation."¹³⁰ Following the arrival of the agent from the State Department to investigate the personal affairs of Johnson and the SLP, no further response was given to the SLP regarding the submission of a passport to Johnson. It appears that the State Department, rather than outright not issuing the passport, rather intended to let the date pass, as to not create a major issue, a convenient scheduling accident. Johnson and the SLP attorney actually traveled from New York to Washington D. C. to confront the missing passport in person. Over the course of two days, they were denied access to any office before being given the news that the secretary of state himself, Charles Evans Hughes, who would later go on to be a Supreme Court Justice and opponent of the New Deal in the 1930s, had reviewed the situation and refused to admit a passport to Johnson.¹³¹

¹³⁰ *Weekly People*, June 18, 1921

¹³¹ Simon, James F. (2012). *FDR and Chief Justice Hughes: The President, the Supreme Court, and the Epic Battle Over the New Deal*, 193-195.

In a memorandum from the Division of Russian Affairs, an agent for the State Department describes Johnson as an “agitator” warning that she “will continue to agitate. The refusal of a passport will no doubt embitter her still further. On the other hand, if she went to Soviet Russia she might have her eyes opened somewhat to the practical results of Bolshevism, though her fanaticism may preclude this.”¹³² To deem Johnson a radical and dangerous figure as they have here which is the basis for passport denial, it clearly exhibits a familiarity with her writing and the SLP relations with communism. One such way they could have developed the knowledge presented here would be the copy of *After Thirty Years*, published by Johnson in a pamphlet to distribute for the anniversary of the first edition of *The Weekly People*, detailing both personal and party perspectives on the state of Leftist politics in early 1921.

¹³² Memorandum from D.C. Poole, Division of Russian Affairs, May 27, 1921.

DESCRIPTION OF APPLICANT.

Age: 45 years. Mouth: medium
 Stature: 5 feet, 3 inches, Eng. Chin: round
 Forehead: medium Hair: light
 Eyes: blue Complexion: fair
 Nose: medium Face: round
 Distinguishing marks _____

IDENTIFICATION.

I, May Phalar, solemnly swear that I am a (native) citizen of the United States; that I reside at 1411 Grand Street, Brooklyn, N.Y.; that I have known the above-named Olive Johnson personally for 21 years and know (her) to be wife of the person referred to in the within-described certificate of naturalization; and that the facts stated in (her) affidavit are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

May Phalar
Journalist
1411 Grand St. Brooklyn, N.Y.
(Address of witness)

Sworn to before me this _____ day
1921 of MAY 11 1921 19
Philip W. Adams
Clerk of the Department of State Court of _____

Applicant desires passport to be sent to the following address:
Mrs. Olive Johnson
45 Rose Street
Manhattan Borough
New York, N.Y.

A duplicate of the photograph to be attached hereto must be sent to the Department with the application, to be affixed to the passport with an impression of the Department's seal.




Image 18: Page 2, Olive Malmberg Johnson Passport Application, NARA

Refusing to grant a hearing regarding the matter or any audience with Hughes to discuss the decision, Johnson was officially denied any passport for Russia, and then when a new passport application was filed for travel to Northern Europe, that too was denied.¹³³ Johnson would not leave the country again for the remainder of her life. But what was it about Johnson that made her a threat were she to leave to travel to Soviet Russia? Thirteen Americans attended the Third International conference, and Johnson would have made fourteen. The hypocritical

¹³³ *Weekly people*, June 18, 1921.

view regarding Johnson's exclusion was unveiled, because if it was travel to Russia for the occasion that was dangerous, those other individuals would not have been permitted to attend.¹³⁴

I would argue that Johnson was targeted not because of her agreement with the Third International platform, as she made it very clear she was only going to observe since she was a staunch anti-communist, but because of her albeit limited fame within the American world of Socialism.

In her first election campaign only a few years earlier, her womanhood was brought to the forefront as the matter of spectacle, not necessarily her politics. The fact she was a woman made her less threatening to the general public. Therefore, Johnson was immediately dangerous and threatening, unlike a ranting Eugene Debs, it would be a non-violent woman sharing a leftist ideology. Johnson had also been established as a focus of the suffrage movement, even if she did not identify as a suffrage activist. With the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920, there would be more women voters who might be more inclined to listen to a female politician. So combining Johnson's subversive actions as an independent, politically active, woman identifying with leftist ideology, that could very quickly be a dangerous formula for the State Department to consider the ramifications of.

Inquisitions into Johnson's personal life were mentioned a number of times whether from accounts of the story by Petersen, or by government officials tasked with reviewing the application.¹³⁵ While it was never explicitly stated what "personal affairs" might be referring to, I would suggest that questions of Johnson's marital status were being investigated. As most passports at the time would be issued in the husband's name, for Johnson to file a passport for herself, mentioning Charles because he is her connection to citizenship, but not to include his

¹³⁴ Riddell, John, ed. (2015). *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921*. London: BRILL.

¹³⁵ Letter from Arnold Petersen to Charles E Hughes, June 15th, 1921, page 2

own permission or other information in his own hand as to correlate with the issuance of a passport for his wife, might have raised additional questions because Johnson could then be not only socially dangerous, but also ideologically.

Johnson, A Radical?

While the United States Government might have seen her as a threat, other leftist organizations continued to poke fun at Johnson and Petersen for their efforts, or perceived lack thereof. The *Daily Worker*, the publication of the USCPA, mocked the pair for failing to fill the charismatic DeLeon's shoes, and accusing the party of not being a true proletariat organization, due to the weak monetary donations received from members, yet still being able to employ a staff for the paper and publish weekly.¹³⁶ "They must have money, real money" cried the *Daily Worker*, lambasting the SLP for their "bloodless revolution," identifying the weak spot in the SLP's platform, as they had taken no true steps towards social change as they did not advocate for violence, unlike the successful Russian and Communist revolution which had succeeded through bloodshed.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ The *Daily Worker*, July 1, 1924.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*



Image 19: The Washington times. (Washington [D.C.]), 12 June 1929.

The infighting of various leftist organizations was obviously prevalent, even in the face of greater threats against leftists and the rise of more conservative governments across the globe, whether that is the Red Scare in the US or the fascist government takeover in Italy which had the

assassination of socialist political leaders. But, Johnson seemed to remain optimistic. Believing that “a new era is approaching...that era is labor’s.”¹³⁸ There was a desire to infuse every aspect of ones life with the labor cause. From where news was obtained from, to the entertainment consumed. But it had to be the “right” message. Soviet productions were considered “shoddy imitations of past glories,” cubism and Italian futurism were “indulging in stunts.”¹³⁹ The mentality displayed here by Johnson aligns with the somewhat aging membership base of the SLP. Of the party leadership, Johnson was fifty five and Petersen was forty two. The SLP in its current formation had been in existence for thirty two years. When compared with the new, flashy, Communist parties, I would imagine that the SLP was feeling threatened and would use this worry to double down on their obstinate nature rather than collaborate with other leftists.

It begs the question, what would have happened if there had been a willingness to cooperate with other leftists? Would there have been more systems in place at regional levels to support those who were struggling with housing, work and food? Would there have been a concentrated effort to combat racism across the country? Could American policies have been influenced even if at a smaller scale initially to reverberate beyond localized government initiatives? These questions and conundrums which Johnson most likely have grappled with as she and the SLP would be thinking beyond their immediate present continued into the thirties, especially with the occurrence of the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression.

¹³⁸ Olive M. Johnson “Flashlights on the Modern Drama” Landkaenning, Annual Christmas Magazine of the Scandinavian Socialist Labor Federation. December 31, 1927.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

Having examined the impact of the first red-scare on progressive politics in the United States using Johnson's experiences, we can see how the attempted rise in censorship on leftist ideology led to a long-term weakening of the Left. Even with the introduction of women to the electorate across the nation, the anticipated shift towards radical politics in government never came. The Soviet Union was used as a boogeyman while the United States appeared to be experiencing a period of economic well being, drumming up support for anti-leftist propaganda and arrests. The threat of government intervention against leftist organizations was once again very real as arrests were being made by the BI during the Palmer Raids. The government was perceived as the enemy of the left, fueling leftist desires to dismantle it, and to spur the socialist revolution. Unfortunately, what seemed to continually stand between the Left and their goals was a lack of unity and cooperation, a story which would be repeated over and over again in the next decade.

Chapter 4 “I Do Not Expect To Win” 1930-1939

“Charity-under any name-could not, it was self-evident, permanently bolster up capitalism” Johnson stated in a 1935 edition of *The Weekly People*.¹⁴⁰ “Recovery...could only mean a new period of frenzied production with the accompanying exploitation of labor.”¹⁴¹ What brought about these strong feelings this time for Johnson was the dismantling of the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and the fleeting moment where it seemed like there could be regulated labor in the United States as had been dreamed about for decades by leftists.¹⁴² Rather than focus on the dismantling of government influence by private corporations, Johnson instead targets her rage at the AFL and other “labor fakers.”¹⁴³ Fair wage standardization and price stabilization had been cast aside for pointing fingers and placing blame on fellow workers. A moment of hope shed for further descents to poverty. Collective bargaining protections fell away for chaos, with each group fighting for control over the national labor market. The crisis which had seemed to be an eye opening moment with calls for change, dissolved into factions and arguments, not to be regathered again.

The 1930s were an eventful decade for Johnson. Beginning with the impact of the Great Depression and ending with a sharp decline in her health, Johnson placed herself on the front lines of the debate between socialism and capitalism. The thirties were also evidence that there would not be any form of societal change that the SLP would have been content with. The communists were wild anarchists, the implementation of Roosevelt’s New Deal was a “pledge to the capitalist class” and even the introduction of more women into politics was not enough to

¹⁴⁰ Weekly People, Saturday, November 30, 1935.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² “National Industrial Recovery Act (1933).” National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/national-industrial-recovery-act>.

¹⁴³ Weekly People, Saturday, November 30, 1935

even scoff at.¹⁴⁴ For the discontent experienced by the American left in this decade, it is puzzling to see historians who look to the 1930s as a triumphant period for Leftist politics, while simultaneously witnessing the decline of groups like the SLP, the fracturing of the SP, and even the shifting of the CPUSA. Americans seemed to be looking for change, but were still not ready to break from the status quo.

In this chapter I will examine how Johnson clung to the SLP's ideology even as other leftists were moving further away from the marxist ideology towards communism, and mainstream inclusion of socialist platforms appeared dangerous to leftists parties. The lack of intersectionality between classes, unskilled labor, and races meant that other groups, such as the USA communist party were gaining considerably more traction, even with the continual attempts to remove the party from popularity. Her politics became wrapped up by others in terms such as suffragette and prohibitionist, just a few examples of her internally complex ideologies being shoehorned into more conventional politics.¹⁴⁵ All while, her own thinking switches from something of full confidence, boasting about successes, to participating in political activity as if only going through the motions, perhaps due to a growing resistance to partnering with the government and their platforms more so than before.

Great Depression

A reason the Stock Market crash of 1929 hit the United States economy so hard was the already ongoing environmental crisis of the dust bowl. While most Americans may have experienced the Great Depression only beginning with the crash in 1929, anyone whose livelihood was based in agriculture had already been experiencing economic hardship for close

¹⁴⁴ Weekly People, Saturday November 14, 1936

¹⁴⁵ Weekly People, Saturday February 15, 1930

to a decade previously.¹⁴⁶ The Great Plains region of the United States ecologically relied on grasses and small shrubbery to act as ground cover, an important task because of the limited rainfall and extreme weather, from high winds, scorching heat, and tornadoes the region would get.¹⁴⁷ Without those specific grasses, there was nothing to anchor the fertile topsoil, causing it to dry out and be swept up by wind gusts, hence the term “dust bowl” which became synonymous with the environmental disaster in the region.¹⁴⁸

While farmers and others within the realm of agriculture, from cattle farmers to sharecroppers further south, had already begun to organize and attempt to protect their communities against home foreclosures and starvation, many traditional leftist organizations seemed to be hesitant to participate in organizing efforts.¹⁴⁹ As discussed in chapter two, one reason why the socialist affiliated groups, such as the SLP, would have been resistant to organizing among agricultural laborers could have been because of the high proportion of Black farmers and while in their own communities, recognized how racism had played a special role in their mistreatment and class abuse, the midwestern based, white, European immigrant populations would have still refused to discuss race as something that needed to be defeated.

The term “dust bowl” does not appear in editions of *The Weekly People* until 1937¹⁵⁰, and a keyword search for “agriculture” in the digitized archives of paper turn up few and far between prior to the 1940s, and when they do, most hits are discussing efforts and activities in the Soviet Union or presenting problems with government oversight, there is almost nothing referring to the

¹⁴⁶ Hurt, R. Douglas. *The dust bowl: An agricultural and social history*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1984. 21.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 50.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁹ Kelley, Robin D. G. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*. Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition. University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9781469625492_kelley.

¹⁵⁰ *Weekly People*, October 23, 1937

plight of the farmers themselves.¹⁵¹ In the SLP's worker revolution, there does not seem to be room for farmers and ranchers. The SLP was intent on liberating their workers, workers who were employed in factories, performing semi-skilled labor in the form of machine operation. Even if they did proclaim that they were for the liberation of all, in effect, they were excluding people of color, women, and white rural americans. Even mine workers were in a tenuous relationship with the SLP, as their work occupied a mixed space between manual and organized labor.¹⁵² For working class Americans who would not have felt accepted by the SLP, other groups such as the CPUSA would have seemed a much better alternative, even with their own issues. Figures such as Claudia Jones, who will be discussed later in this chapter, will be evidence of a new and growing desire among underrepresented individuals by traditional leftist groups to get involved to fix their own conditions.

“They call it Fascism...we call it a New Deal”

It was almost the universal opinion of those under the political socialist umbrella that the New Deal projects did not do enough to bring about a socialist economy.¹⁵³ Meanwhile, politically conservative groups saw the New Deal as a socialistic measure, perhaps on par with the Bolshevik revolution two decades before.¹⁵⁴ No state system was dismantled, money was infused into the economy over five years following the initial market crash, but for many, it was still too little too late. In the eyes of the SLP, security measures for the economic state should have been in place to have prevented the crash in the first place. In the May 1925 Address to the Workers of American by the Socialist Labor Party, the looming economic bubble is discussed at

¹⁵¹ Weekly People, July 23, 1921, Feb 4, 1922, May 5, 1928.

¹⁵² Weekly People, February 18 1928.

¹⁵³ Post, Charles. “The New Deal and the Popular Front: Models for Contemporary Socialists?” *International Socialist Review*, no. 108 (March 1, 2018). <https://isreview.org/issue/108/new-deal-and-popular-front/index.html>.

¹⁵⁴ *Does the National Platform of the Socialist Party for 1932 Answer; Who Wants the New Deal?* 1932. The League for Constitutional Government.

length. The Address states that “[when] eventually, the saturation point will be reached in Europe, the point when Europe can no longer absorb American capital and credits...the real battle of working class emancipation will have to be fought.¹⁵⁵” The SLP saw a continuous cycle where those who owned the capital, that is the producing industries, continually treating their workers as disposable, cutting wages to the point the working class would be unable to afford what they were producing, as well as a growth of industry overseas following the First World War, meant that at some point, the seemingly ever expanding capitalistic market, had to fall.¹⁵⁶

I would argue that the trend of dissatisfaction with Democratic politicians can be found rooted in the attitudes of the left regarding the New Deal. The implementation of policy regarding items like child labor laws or health and safety measures, with advocates pushing back against corporations who ultimately benefited from the lack of regulation at the turn of the twentieth century is one of the last periods of unity in American politically progressive spheres.¹⁵⁷ The specific moment I would like to put forth that the leftist movement in the United States fell apart, never to be repaired, was the earlier election in 1912, when Eugene Debs and the Socialist Party entered mainstream politics. The SLP tended to be the most contrarian political faction of the left, but none of the active leftist organizations in the United States seemed to be willing to get along with each other.

There will always be infighting to a degree, with the minutiae of issues being debated and argued over. But where the left in the United States fails is their unity, or lack thereof. For as much as they proclaim “united we bargain, divided we beg,” there does not seem to be any effort at unity, with pride and stubbornness dictating cross-party relations. By the 1930s, it had been

¹⁵⁵ “A Review and an outlook”, *What is Ahead of the American Working Class?* Address to the Workers of America by the Socialist Labor Party. May 1925. 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ *Weekly People*. Saturday. August 15. 1904

fifty years of organized Marxist philosophy in the United States. In those fifty years, the movement had splintered into a half dozen roving bands intent on only supporting their own agendas, rather than looking at what could be done for the majority of the population.

The need for radical change seemed to fall on deaf ears. For as much talk as was had, the SLP does not take much political action beyond holding lectures and submitting candidates to run for office, taking a very isolationist approach, even while hypocritically instructing members “to reach out and to draw to themselves the elements of the working class able and willing to work with them in the ranks.”¹⁵⁸ The SP had been proposing practical legislation and while still following some of the tenets of electoralism, they had taken on much more of a reform, rather than strictly revolutionary ideology. The AFL was still advocating for the exclusion of African American workers from its ranks. The IWW had been working towards an integrated workforce, but still believed in industrial unionism. The CPUSA tried to build interracial solidarity with working class individuals across non-factory jobs, but was unfortunately overwhelmed by anti-communist governmental and corporate policy. These groups all wanted protections for workers, financial stability, living needs provided for, and generally systemic support.

Some of the skepticism of the New Deal and the increased government intervention between labor and their employers would have come from historic trends of violence employed against labor by the government. Its possible, in Johnson’s mind, only a few months after she had arrived in the United States, the Homestead strike and massacre happened, with the government turning a blind eye to the murder of striking workers, and even deploying troops to put down the rest of the strike. By the thirties, forty years later, she was seeing the Democratic Party passing legislation protecting unions and their right to strike, when even a decade before, there were still efforts to minimize the rights of labor. An early example of this is in 1917, when over a thousand

¹⁵⁸ A Review and an Outlook, 10.

striking Arizona mine workers suspected of being members of the IWW were forcibly rounded up by the military and abandoned in the desert with no supplies, at gunpoint.¹⁵⁹ The mistrust of more seasoned leftists would have been well deserved, and the pessimism that came out of the SLP was not without valid complaints.

Exclusion of Key Groups

Issues arising from the New Deal such as a lack of financial support for Black workers due to pressures from Southern politicians and a corruption of agricultural policy such as explained by Kevin Scannell's work, meant that the New Deal would fail many Americans who needed the help the most.¹⁶⁰ The lack of policy enforcement by government oversight committees ultimately benefited white, already financially fortunate Americans far more than those of the working class, and especially not those of the racial minority working class. The ineffective nature of the New Deal for the average American shows that the New Deal was not really about wealth distribution in the Socialistic sense.¹⁶¹ It was about stabilizing a politically volatile society, and reaffirming the inequality present within the system. Johnson in an editorial of the *Weekly People* listed the New Deal as in the same vein of the Fascism in Italy and Nazis in Germany.¹⁶² Many on the left watched with dismay as union protections for workers were peeled back under New Deal policy, even though Roosevelt was supposedly an ally to labor.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Helgeson, Jeffrey. "American Labor and Working-Class History, 1900–1945." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/the-bisbee-deportation/>

¹⁶⁰ Scannell, Kevin, "Bonded by Class, Divided by Race: Labor Radicalism and the Origins of the Freedom Struggle in St. Louis from 1877-1945" (2023). *History Honors Papers*. 91.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 100.

¹⁶² "In Italy they call it Fascism; in Germany they call it Nazi; in the United States we call it a New Deal" *The Weekly People*, Saturday, August 19, 1933.

¹⁶³ Scannell, 95.

Claudia Jones

As Johnson only examined her gender identity in her politics and Du Bois, as mentioned in chapter two, considered his race, individuals such as Claudia Jones were forced to reckon with both. Jones, an immigrant to the United States, would have overlapped both Johnson and DuBois in their careers even though she was several decades younger than the other two institutional figures on the left. Her introduction to progressive organizing politics was her work with the Scottsboro Defense committee to free nine young Black men who were accused of the sexual assault of a white woman. According to Angela Davis' biography, this moment brought her in contact with members of the Communist party, who welcomed her into their cause with open arms.¹⁶⁴ Like Johnson, Jones quickly became the authority and leader of women in the movement, assuming the position of leader of the Women's Commission and undertaking efforts to represent the diverse experiences of women in the United States for the Communist party.¹⁶⁵ Jones also saw the power of written theory to disseminate through party means, and once again like Johnson, her first successful publication was a theory on how women's participation in leftist movements should be acknowledged and appreciated.

¹⁶⁴ Davis, Angela Y. *Women, race & class*. New York: Vintage Books, 2020. 98.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

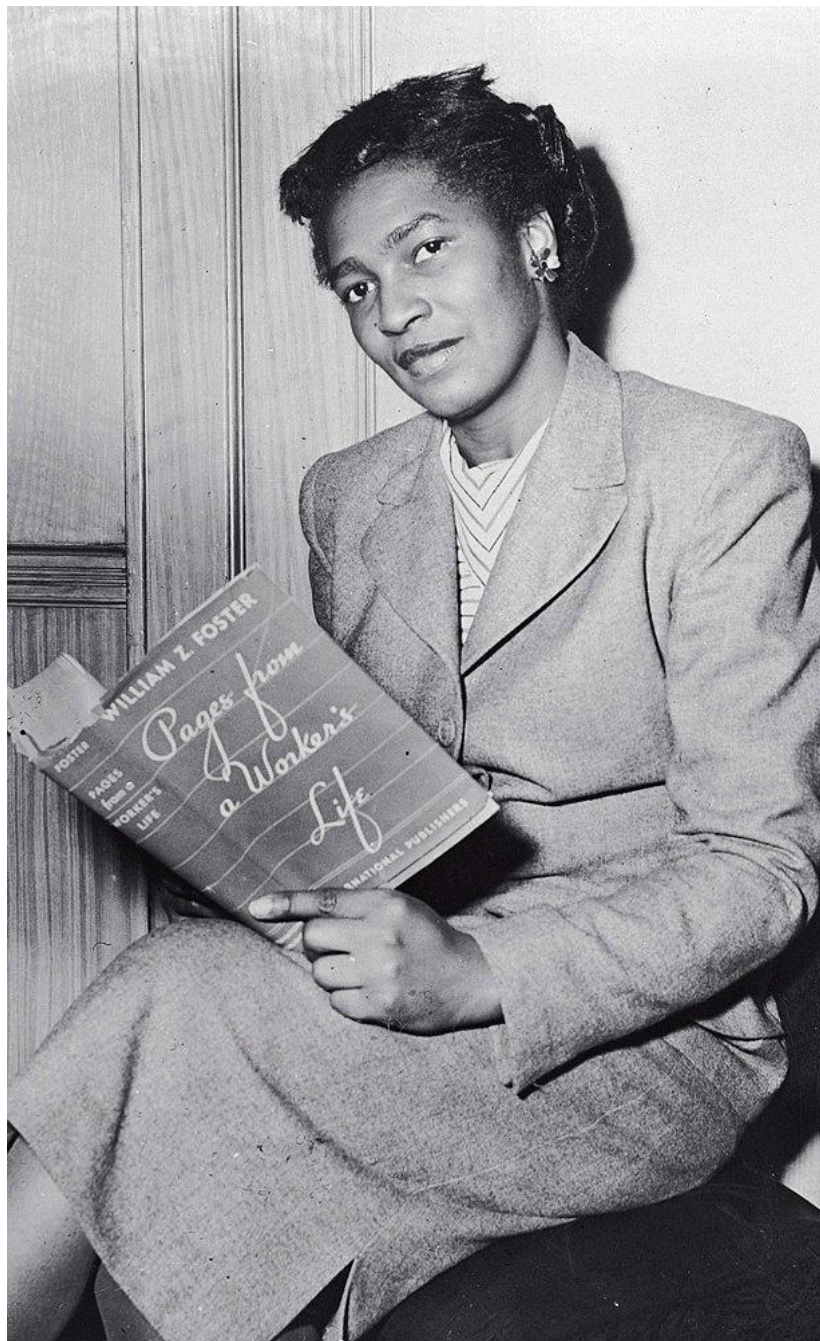


Image 20: Claudia Jones from Hulton Archive

“An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women” was a continuation of theory that had been published in leftist circles from the previous nearly half century. Drawing on inspiration from figures such as Emma Goldman, Clara Zetkin, Milly Witkop-Rocker, the text *Women Under Socialism* by August Bebel, and other texts such as those by Olive Johnson and

Charlotte Perkins Gilman which would have been in the public consciousness, Jones would have been familiar with her contemporary feminist discourse, but also how it left Black women out of the picture. Within the first page, Jones accuses the left of leaving Black Americans, and in particular Black women out of their vision for a revolutionary future. “This Neglect (referring to Black women) has too long permeated the ranks of the labor movement generally, of Left-progressives, and also of the Communist Party.”¹⁶⁶ If Johnson and the SLP wanted to highlight women’s participation in the progressive movement, but would not look at other identities than class and gender, and Du Bois and his comrades in the Socialist Party would focus on class and race but refuse to acknowledge gender and even actively work to keep women out of the party, how was a woman like Claudia Jones to find a place in the movement?

To Jones, the other exclusion meant that she needed to do her own work and build her own community who would value her skills and knowledge. Historians like Carole Boyce Davies argue that Claudia Jones and other female leftists were more radical than even the founders of modern leftist movements like Karl Marx or Daniel DeLeon because they had to create their own forms of leftist philosophy to be included. Eurocentrism and male focus were at the root of western leftist philosophies between the consistent non-acknowledgement of the impact of colonial patterns and colonial liberation outside of the United States or Mainland Europe, and not considering domestic activities a form of labor.¹⁶⁷ Racial and gender-based oppression went hand in hand, and to have an effective revolution, according to Jones, meant that those classifiers had to be destroyed before class.¹⁶⁸ Jones, just as DuBois, would have experienced from her predominately white comrades views of the concerns of Black or other minority Americans as

¹⁶⁶Jones, Claudia. *An End to the Neglect of the Problems of Negro Women*. Political Affairs, 1949. 3.

¹⁶⁷ Jones, 5.

¹⁶⁸ Davis, 98.

issues which were only distractions of the larger issue, and would not be addressed until a leftist victory or implementation of some other practical solution program where the real answer would have to be a near complete attitudinal shift.¹⁶⁹

While there was not a leftist revolution in the United States, whether socialist or communist, Jones made the most significant contribution to feminist politics introducing the idea of a “triple oppression” paradigm regarding the experiences of women of color in the United States.¹⁷⁰ Jones’ theory had been influenced by other feminist thinkers just as Johnson had been influenced by her contemporaries, and was able to make it apply to fellow leftists rather than saying the experiences would not be applicable to those supposedly more liberated movements. Jones believed that without Black women’s liberation, liberation for any women would be impossible because there would always be a demographic that those in the ruling class could weaponize their actions against.¹⁷¹ Women were at the forefront of social issues, from feeling the impact of low wages and rising prices of housing and necessary goods, to being on the front lines of strikes whether in terms of support for picketlines or participating themselves in labor reforms, but more often than not, Black women and their efforts were overlooked and ignored. Jones dared to challenge the exploitation of Black women in domestic roles.

For many in the communist party, having domestic assistance in the form of maids or cooks was seen as a symbol of the Bourgeoisie class, but would not consider it the same exploitation if the domestic employee was a Black woman.¹⁷² Jones made sure to reinforce to white women that the “economic relationship of Negro women to white women” would remain in name only and not for an equal partnership until white women were able to see people

¹⁶⁹ Dawson, 26.

¹⁷⁰ Lynn, Denise. “Socialist Feminism and Triple Oppression: Claudia Jones and African American Women in American Communism.” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 8, no. 2 (2014): 2.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷² Davis, 99.

employed in domestic service as providing just as valid a service and occupation as train conductors and industrial laborers.¹⁷³ In a situation of gender analysis, women working outside of the home, like an expectation for many women in the leftist movements as they are to be considered contributing to society, would be unable to maintain the standard of housekeeping as traditionally imposed on women, and so must decide whether to use outside help or forgo outside expectations of how domestic duties must be unkempt.¹⁷⁴ For many, it would be an easier solution to turn to external assistance and underpay someone else, often a Black woman, who would have been seen as having no other job options due to the racism prevalent in other industries, rather than fall behind on their own work or remain at home full time.¹⁷⁵ The class distinction of women taking care of their own homes as a point of privilege versus the expectation of Black women to be working for others as well as their own families was consistently overlooked by white feminists and leftists, only to be consistently discussed among Black female circles.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

Just as Claudia Jones was beginning her career in leftist politics, Johnson was ending hers. In 1936, Johnson fell ill with Tuberculosis, yet continued to work as editor for another two years until she submitted her resignation to Petersen in 1938.¹⁷⁷ In a way, it was time for Johnson to retire, to begin to open the political field up to individuals like Jones, who were embracing a much more intersectional view of American politics. Jones, and others within the Communist Party, were prominently including the needs of Black Americans and women in their

¹⁷³ Davis, 99.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 127.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 128.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 132.

¹⁷⁷ Weekly People, Saturday, February 26, 1938.

movements. In every decade of her political participation, what seemed to be holding Johnson back was a lack of cooperation and engagement with those different from herself. Admittedly, this singular way of thinking is what made her successful in the SLP, as it had always been very ideologically streamlined. Even when faced with the crises of the Great Depression, she and other members of the SLP remained obstinate, and refused to cede any grounds of cooperation, even to other leftists. The future success of progressive movements would rely on a willingness to set aside differences and to embrace intersectionality.

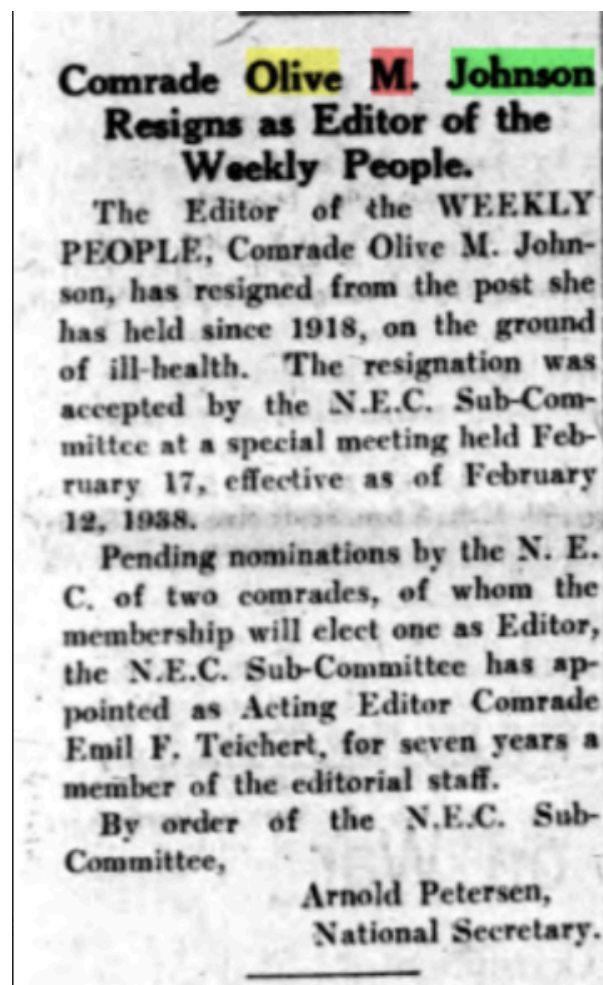


Image 21: Weekly People, Saturday, February 26, 1938

Conclusion

Following the Second World War and the Second Red Scare, the membership numbers for the SLP began to fall dramatically. There was a brief resurgence of popularity but it was still never up to the membership of the 1910s and early twenties. Between the Second World War and 1970, there was an almost seventy-five percent decrease in membership.¹⁷⁸ Using the last yearly report from the NEC in 2007, there were seventy-seven members of the party.¹⁷⁹ *The Weekly People* turned into *The People* and as of March 2024, does not seem to be publishing anymore.

Olive M. Johnson passed away from Congestive Heart Failure, an outcome of her battle with Tuberculosis in 1936. She was in her home in California, having moved there sometime in the 1940s to stay with her older brother, Nils. Johnson passed away as the last of her living siblings, most likely alone, on June 16th, 1954. Of the people in the SLP, who she had worked with for decades, the only remaining figure to remember her would have been Petersen. Unlike half a century earlier when she and Nils wrote the obituary for their younger brother, Carl, I have not found evidence of any obituary in any paper for herself, whether a California, New York, or Socialist publication. From the beginning of her political career, she had to write herself and her ideology into that of the Left. There is no grave to visit to leave flowers on, as she was cremated. No next of kin is listed on the death certificate, and her occupation reads “Housewife.”

In 1968, there was a brief resurgence of interest in Johnson’s work, with the SLP republishing many of her previous articles and advertising a reprint of her pamphlets in the *Weekly People*. Any additional scope Johnson could have gotten through this reprint would have been short

¹⁷⁸“Socialist Labor Party of America.” The Socialist Labor Party of America (1876-1946) membership series. Accessed April 28, 2024. <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/slpmembership.html>.

¹⁷⁹“Forty-Seventh National Convention Socialist Labor Party ,” 2007. 22.

lived, as it seems by the seventies, the party had in effect collapsed, especially with Petersen stepping down as National Secretary in 1969.

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH						REGISTRATION DISTRICT NO. 1974	REGISTRAR'S NUMBER 7656
1a. NAME OF DECEASED—FIRST NAME MIDDLE NAME		1b. LAST NAME		2a. DATE OF DEATH—MONTH, DAY, YEAR		2b. HOUR	
OLIVE		M JOHNSON		June 16, 1954		12:45 a.m.	
3. SEX Female		4. COLOR OR RACE Caucasian		5. MARRIAGE STATUS Widowed		6. DATE OF BIRTH March 14, 1872	
7. AGE—LAST BIRTHDAY 82		8. USUAL OCCUPATION Housewife		9. BIRTHPLACE Sweden		10. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY U.S.A.	
11. NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER Nils Mallberg - Sweden		12. MAIDEN NAME AND BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER Ingrid Nelson - Sweden		13. NAME OF PRESENT SPOUSE (IF MARRIED) Herman Barefield			
14. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? No		15. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER None		16. INFORMANT Herman Barefield			
17a. COUNTY Los Angeles		17b. CITY OR TOWN Malibu		17c. LENGTH OF STAY IN THIS CITY OR TOWN 27 months		17d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION (none)	
17e. ADDRESS 24157 Malibu Rd.		18a. STATE California		18b. COUNTY Los Angeles		18c. CITY OR TOWN Malibu	
18d. STREET OR RURAL ADDRESS 24157 Malibu Rd.		19a. CORONER DAVID R. FOSDICK, M.D.		19b. PHYSICIAN June 16, 1954		19c. ADDRESS 909 Via de la Paz Pacific Palisades, California	
19d. SIGNATURE		19e. DATE SIGNED June 17, 1954		20a. CEMETERY OR CREMATORY Chapel of the Pines		20b. DATE 6-19-54	
20c. CREATION OR APPROVAL CREMATION		21. SIGNATURE OF EMPLOYER KAMIS CHURCH 7049		22. FUNERAL DIRECTOR PIERCE BROS - TODD & LESLIE		23. DATE RECEIVED BY LOCAL REGISTRAR JUN 18 1954	
24. SIGNATURE OF LOCAL REGISTRAR D. E. ...		25. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH Congestive Heart Failure		26. CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE DEATH BUT NOT RELATED TO THE DISEASE OR CONDITION CAUSING DEATH		27a. DATE OF OPERATION	
27b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION		27c. LOCATION CITY OR TOWN COUNTY STATE		28. AUTOPSY <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO		29a. PLACE OF INJURY	
29b. TIME OF INJURY		29c. INJURY OCCURRED WHILE AT WORK		29d. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?		29e. LOCATION	

Image 22: Olive M. Johnson’s death certificate, retrieved from FamilySearch.com

With Johnson’s fade into obscurity, it is important to revisit not only her contributions to the political field, but also why she might have been forgotten. As a woman on the left, Johnson had to be aware of multiple facets of her political world. She had to be included in the early feminist movement, speaking to groups about women’s suffrage and women’s political participation as a means to justify her own place. She also was well versed in SLP political ideology, speaking on the party platforms but also running for office, where her candidacy was

constantly called into question because of her gender, not necessarily her ideology. Johnson was doubted even within the leftist political sphere because of her more intellectual approach to socialism rather than a hands-on approach to significant societal change.

Having used studies of individuals like Eugene Debs, WEB Du Bois, and Claudia Jones, we can see where Johnson could have expanded her political views to encourage allyship rather than antagonism among the American Left. She kept a narrow focus on promoting the ideology of the SLP, but was unable to make wider reaching social change due to an adherence to the party platform. As the SLP had an electoral philosophy rather than an effectual, smaller scale plan, it was unable to build up a larger movement with support across industries and races. Meanwhile, it was proven that the efforts of the SP and then later, the CPUSA, were not as hostile to Black Americans and were more willing to work with non-factory workers. Johnson was able to keep the SLP going in the decades following the death of Daniel DeLeon, and promoted women's political participation. Her accomplishments on a small scale are still worth appreciating, so we may also see where she fell short.

To approach Johnson's political activity now, a historian has to resist the temptation to confine her to any one category. When I first started writing, I was viewing Johnson through a more traditional feminist lens, only to find her rejecting that label. Throughout her life, Johnson continually resisted the tendency of her contemporaries to reduce her to a singular cause. Her multifaceted life's work offered an early model of how to be both a woman and a politician, an activist and an editor, a socialist and a professional. Olive Johnson professionalized politics, a path that other women would take up in the years to come. While even contemporary election discussions still engage in a gendered focus, it is considerably easier for politics to be the main focus of a candidate's platform rather than their gender.

Were I to have more time, I would be very interested in exploring further influences Johnson had on later movements, whether feminist or leftist, even if indirectly. As demonstrated in chapter four, even by the 1930s, when she was running for election for the last time, she was no longer the only woman on the ballot. Political participation of women on the left was more visible and if not widely accepted, at least tolerated. However, Johnson lacked an intersectional awareness in her politics. Her blindness to the needs and positionality of women of color made the SLP a hostile place for them. As I have said many times to anyone who would listen to me speak about Johnson, while I have greatly enjoyed studying her and learning more about the leftist political scene of early twentieth century America through her as a lens, I do not believe that I would have actually wanted to meet her in real life. I feel that her stubbornness would have been infuriating.

Reflecting upon Johnson's career, so much of her time was spent decrying other leftists whom she did not personally agree with. Not only does it sound exhausting to constantly be infuriated with what others are doing, it is fundamentally unproductive. One of the major aspects which drew me to study Johnson was learning how her work a century ago could relate to the contemporary world. As we are on the verge of another election at the time of writing, with the political left and right more divided than ever, and a whole slew of looming political issues both domestic and international, it seems daunting to imagine that anything could ever be resolved.

The Left of today can learn from Johnson's life experience. During Johnson's life, she lived through the Great Depression, a moment of economic struggle and wealth disparity across the United States. As demonstrated in chapter four, many left-of-center individuals decried the New Deal, and refused to support it for not being radical enough. Meanwhile, conservatives also disliked it because they deemed it too "socialist." In my research, I found a flyer published by a

very conservative organization, and when initially scanning over the document, it was difficult to tell what their position was. Many of the items listed, such as making child labor and lynchings illegal, seemed like objectively good legislation. Was the New Deal perfect? Absolutely not. It had sexism and racism written into it. But did it do more for Americans than any other legislation at the time as well as set up future systems such as banking protections and social security? Yes.

Does the National Platform of the Socialist Party for 1932

Answer: *Who Wants the New Deal?*

It is common knowledge that the Democratic Platform promises have been only recognized in the breach. If, as here pointed out, the explanation is that the Democratic Platform was—after it had decoyed the necessary votes—jettisoned in favor of the Socialistic Platform, does not at least the inference logically follow that the Socialist left element merely used the Democratic Party and its candidates as a sort of Trojan Horse in which to ride to control under cover?


<p>National Platform</p>		<p>Socialist Party, '32</p>	<p>The New Deal Answers</p>
<p>It proposes to transfer the principal industries of the country from private ownership and autocratic, cruelly inefficient management to social ownership and democratic control. Only by these means will it be possible to organize our industrial life on a basis of planned and steady operation without periodic breakdowns and disastrous crises.</p> <p>Unemployment and Labor Legislation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for immediate relief for those in need, to supplement state and local appropriations. 2. A federal appropriation of \$5,000,000,000 for public works and roads, reforestation, slum clearance and decent homes for the workers, by federal government, states and cities. 3. Legislation providing for the acquisition of land, buildings and equipment necessary to put the unemployed to work producing food, fuel and clothing and for the erection of houses for their own use. 4. The six-hour day and the five-day week without a reduction of wages. 5. A comprehensive and efficient system of free public employment agencies. 6. A compulsory system of unemployment compensation with adequate benefits, based on contributions by the government and by employers. 7. Old-age pensions for men and women sixty years of age and over. 8. Health and maternity insurance. 9. Improved systems of workmen's compensation and accident insurance. 10. The abolition of child labor. 	<p>"Redistribution of Wealth"—"Planned Economy"—Result: Increase of Government bureaucracy and destruction of the individual property right guaranteed under the American form of Government.</p> <p>Unemployment and Labor Legislation</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The FERA Act of 1933 approved May 12, 1933, stated as its purpose, "to provide for cooperation by the Federal Government with the several states in relieving the hardship and suffering by unemployment." \$950,000,000 for this act appropriated in 1934 and \$3,300,000,000 for National Industrial Recovery appropriated in 1934. 2. The President received a blank check for \$4,880,000,000 in 1935 for this purpose. 3. Covered by the FSHC, Federal Subsistence Homesteads Corporation, and ECW, Emergency Conservation Works (which directs the Civilian Conservation Corps). 4. Covered in NRA codes, and the Socialistic Wagner Labor Bill which has the support of the "Brain Trust." 5. Covered by the Social Security Bill. 6. Covered by the Social Security Bill. 7. Covered by the Social Security Bill. 8. Covered by the Social Security Bill. 9. Covered by the Social Security Bill. 10. Covered by NRA codes, and "Brain Trust" desires to have the Child Labor Amendment to the Constitution ratified which will regiment the youth of America under Federal control. 		

Image 23: *Does the National Platform of the Socialist Party for 1932 Answer, Who Wants the New Deal?* The League for Constitutional Government, 1932.

When a reader can not quickly distinguish between a far left and a very conservative publication on a particular topic, then perhaps the leftists have their priorities backwards. So many leftists now fall into the trap the SLP did, screaming for the reading of theory and thinking about “after the revolution” but few steps are being taken to reimagine what a *now* could look like. Historically and at the present, many leftist platforms agree on the same basic principles, everyone should be entitled to community and a basic standard of living. But how do they expect to reach that reality? Imagine what could be accomplished if interpersonal issues were set aside to back a few select pieces of legislation or one particular movement. There have been movements demonstrating the success of a singular focus, both among politically progressives and conservatives. As of late, the political right in the United States has seemed to master their single-issue-voter base which can be seen in the push for filling local governments and school boards with people running almost exclusively on the idea of book bans, preventing “controversial” topics from being accessed by children.

The left seems to have a need to be perfect, to have the right answer to every question and every problem. It is impossible to map out a future perfectly from our current vantage point. But, I would rather have comrades in safe jobs, with stable housing and access to food before we sit down and debate the finer points of economic policy and reform. For Johnson, she did have contemporaries who were doing the work of eliminating child labor, pushing for worker protections and figuring out agricultural policy, but who were not engaging strongly in leftist theory. Because Johnson and the SLP did not have strong roots in mass mobilization like the SP and the CPUSA would go on to do, they ultimately failed in their goals. Not every historical actor needs to be successful, and those who fail are important because they can teach us what went wrong so we may try and learn from them. But, learning from failure means that we can not

make the same mistakes that they did. We need unity and a willingness to put aside our differences to target a singular cause at a time to combat the rising trends of far-right politics.

I hope including figures like WEB DuBois and Claudia Jones serve as other examples of political philosophies. Johnson contended with her gender but seemed to refuse to think beyond her identity as a woman to examine what it meant to be a white woman. DuBois fought within the SP for the acknowledgment of the specific struggles that Black Americans dealt with but still viewed his experiences through a male lens. Meanwhile, Claudia Jones, a Black Woman had to be continually conscious of her intersectional identities in a world not built for her; she learned to channel and express her views of liberation through the CPUSA. In the case of Jones, her albeit limited success led to participation in the larger civil rights movement, and to exist in the peripheral of the feminist movement in a more prominent place than Johnson had been awarded. It is impossible to copy an activist's playbook step by step, but when reviewing multiple cases side-by-side, trends of success or failure points are revealed.

Timeline

1872	1872
Johnson born on March 14th to Nils and Ingrid Malmberg	Susan B. Anthony casts a ballot illegally in the Presidential election.
1886	1886
Johnson's Mother, Ingrid, passes away	The Chicago Haymarket riot and bombing occurs as the result of a three-day general strike, AFL founded
1892	1892
Johnson Immigrates to the United States, landing in Boston on March 27th to join her older brother, Nils	Ellis Island, the New York Immigration center is opened, the Homestead Strike and Massacre Occurs
1895	1893
Johnson first is introduced to the SLP, becomes active within the party	An early New York Stock Exchange Collapse, starting a financial panic and four-year economic depression
1898	1896
Johnson marries Charles, becoming Olive M. Johnson in Wisconsin	Plessy v. Ferguson decision rules that racial segregation is legal in the United States
1899	
Johnson's father, Nils Malmberg, passes away in Sweden	
1902	
Karl (Carl), Johnson's youngest brother passes away	
1903	
Moves to East St. Louis	
1904	1904
Runs for Trustee of the University of Illinois	Theodore Roosevelt wins the presidential election
	1906
	The Pure Food and Drug Act as well as the Meat Inspection Acts are passed

1907	Moves to California as a representative for the SLP and reports on the Haywood trials	1907	The Financial Panic and Depression of 1907 takes place
1908	Publishes “Women and the Socialist Movement” first in <i>The Weekly People</i> before it is published as a pamphlet	1909	The National Conference of the Negro is held, the predecessor of the NAACP
1910	Spends time in Europe as the SLP delegate for the International Socialist Congress in Copenhagen	1911	Standard oil is declared a monopoly and dissolved under the Sherman Antitrust Act
1911	Moves to New York City, around this time separates from Charles	1912	Eugene V. Debs runs for president and gets six percent of the national vote
1912	Enrolls in Hunter College	1914	Daniel DeLeon Dies
1916	Graduated from Hunter College and takes graduate classes at Columbia	1918	The first World War Ends
1918	Johnson embarks on her national speaking tour, is nominated for New York State Governor and is appointed editor of <i>The Weekly People</i>	1919	First Palmer Raids take place, Emma Goldman is deported from the United States
1919	Johnson participates in graduate studies at New York University	1920	The nineteenth amendment is ratified and women are granted the right to vote nationwide
1920	Publishes “Americanism”	1921	Widespread immigration legislation is passed, placing a limit based on the nationality of immigrants to the United States
1922	Johnson has her passport revoked and publishes “Serfdom on the Horizon”		

1923	Publishes "Revolution" and "Daniel DeLeon: American Socialist Pathfinder"
1924	Publishes "Karl Marx-49 Years After" and "The Cooperative Movement"
1924	The Scopes Monkey Trial takes place
1926	Publishes "Daniel DeLeon, The Man and His Work"
1927	Publishes "Russia in Revolution"
1927	The first movie with sound premiers
1928	Publishes "Ultramontanism: Roman Catholic Political Machine in Action"
1928	Amelia Earhart makes history as the First Woman to fly over the Atlantic Ocean
1929	The stock market crashes, sending the US into the Great Depression
1930	Publishes "Industrial Government"
1931	Publishes "The Socialist Labor Party During Four Decades"
1932	Johnson runs for Mayor and publishes "The Virus of Anarchy: Bakuninism Vs. Marxism"
1932	Unemployment as a cause of the Great Depression reaches twelve million workers, Franklin Delano Roosevelt is elected President of the United States
1933	New Deal funding and social programs are passed by Congress, authorizing the Civilian Conservation Corps
1934	Johnson runs for Senator
1935	Publishes "Industrial Unionism" and "Socialist Economics in Dialogue"
1935	The Social Security act is signed into law by FDR, excluding domestic and agricultural laborers

1936	Publishes "May Day Vs. Labor Day" and Johnson falls ill with Tuberculosis
1938	Johnson submits her resignation for editor of the paper
1938	Federal legislation, the Fair Labor Standards Act, is signed, creating a national minimum wage
1939	Germany invades Poland, beginning the Second World War
~1940	Johnson moves back to California to live with Nils in his aging years
1941	Japan bombs Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, pushing the United States into WW2.
1945	WW2 is over in both the European and Pacific spheres
1947	Nils dies, most likely leaving Johnson his home
1954	Johnson dies in her home in California at the age of eighty two
1954	Joseph McCarthy begins his congressional hearings on Communist influence in the United States, Racial segregation in public schools is ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court

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