



HON. VICTOR L. BERGER
THE FIRST SOCIALIST MEMBER OF CONGRESS

HON. VICTOR L. BERGER

A Character Sketch from The American Magazine

ARTHUR BRISBANE, the editor of Hearst's *New York Evening Journal*, once called Berger a modern Martin Luther. When Berger heard this he said, "No, no! I am only a scene shifter. All my life has been spent in preparing the stage for a great drama." Berger is one of the best loved and best hated men in Wisconsin. For twenty years he has fought what seemed a hopeless battle. He has been shifting scenes and arranging the stage in preparation for the entrance of the hero. His hero is the working class organized politically for the purpose of becoming master of its own destiny. He has labored long and unselfishly to that end.

At first he was hated and much maligned by the workers themselves, but he never lost hope. He suffered their insults without discouragement. And his only answer was to plead the harder—and shift the scenes—until to-day the hero understands Berger and acts. He is still hated by two classes: those who profit from vice and those who profit from privilege. The slum fights Berger because corrupt politics is its bread. The boulevard hates Berger because contracts, public franchises, unearned rents, profits and dividends are its bread.

The workers of the shop, the mill and the factory now believe in Berger. They earn their own livelihood. They do not beg nor steal. They ask only to work and to enjoy the legitimate produce of their work. Berger knew that democracy must be founded on the producers, the men who toil—and he drew them together to fight the petty thieves below and the big thieves above.

And of course the thieves cannot make out Berger. He is poor. He has never made a dollar out of politics although he is said to be a powerful "boss." His whole income is thirty dollars a week, paid him by the workers for his service to them as labor editor. Nor can the thieves understand Berger's power. When they advertise a meeting Berger calls on the Socialists to supply the audience. When election time comes he asks for 1,200 men to come at four o'clock in the morning to distribute literature to every house in Milwaukee. Rain or shine, 1,200 men are there to act as errand boys for the cause of the party. When he asks an outsider to speak in Milwaukee, and wants to please him, he asks the Socialists to come, and fifteen or twenty thousand come.

Berger rarely runs for office. He wants his hero in power, not himself. When he runs, therefore, he usually selects a hopeless district to break down prejudice and to enter the wedge for someone else. His greatest sacrifice has been to give up the life of a student. Nevertheless, he has one of the best libraries in Wisconsin, and he loves books and music. He knows history, philosophy, economics and politics. He is one

of the founders of the National Socialist party, a member of its Executive Committee and one of its two representatives in the international body which meets periodically in Brussels. On a recent visit to Europe he was welcomed everywhere by immense audiences who saw in Berger the most distinguished political Socialist America has produced.

Berger is no intellectual dreamer, but a big, able, unselfish man who works effectively and whole-heartedly for each new good thing, however small; who is not confused or discouraged by the vision of a happy unified world, which he carries usually concealed, somewhere in the recesses of his generous spirit.

S U B J E C T S

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*Why Milwaukee Became  
Socialistic*



*The Socialist View of the  
Trust Question*



*The French Revolution from  
a Socialist Point of View*

# The First Socialist Congressman

*Excerpt from an Article in The Survey, by John Spargo*

THERE will be a third party in Congress, a tiny minority of one, with one vote in a total of 392. It will not be an insignificant minority, however, but one to be reckoned with. Those disposed to sneer at this minority party of one may be reminded of the old fable: "Only one," sneered the mouse at the lioness fondly licking her cub. "Yes, only one, but that one a lion," answered the mother. The Socialists will have only one representative in Congress—but that one will be Victor Berger, a lion.

For Victor L. Berger is a big man from every point of view. He is big physically; he is big intellectually, and he is big spiritually. In any assembly of men of acknowledged greatness he would command attention and respect.

Berger is fifty. His hair is gray and thinner than it was, but that is the only sign of departed youth about him. His healthy, pink cheeks, his eyes radiant with gladness, and the quick, eager movement of his body bear witness to the youthfulness of his spirit. The boy still lives in the man.

Yet for more than half his life Berger has borne heavy burdens which would have crushed most men. For almost thirty years he has been fighting against terrible odds, often alone and unaided. For the sake of his ideals he has endured a life of martyrdom. Berger's personality is said to dominate the Socialist movement in Wisconsin, but that is only true because he sinks his personality in the movement—was it not written of old that "he who loses his life shall find it"?

Berger has lived in Milwaukee for thirty-two years, ever since he came to this country with his parents. Born in a German province of Austria, and educated in the best schools of his native land, he became a teacher of German in the Milwaukee public schools, an occupation

which he followed for years, until his radical ideas led him to the difficult and thorny paths of Socialist journalism.

When you meet Berger for the first time you soon discover that he worships his wife. Those of us who know him intimately know how idyllic is the life he lives in his modest home with his wife and children, and we marvel that through all the years his passion for the Socialist movement and his passion

for his wife have not interfered with each other. Perhaps it is because Mrs. Berger, who was his pupil, then became herself a teacher, and is now a member of the Milwaukee School Board has long been quite as good a Socialist as her husband. Despite the fact that during many years Berger has been bitterly assailed and vilified, no word of reproach has been brought against his personal life.

Always a close student, especially of history and economics, Berger is not only one of the best scholars in the American Socialist movement, but it is safe to say that in the next Congress there will be few, if any, better educated men than he.

He is no doctrinaire, however. He has thoroughly learned the terminology of Socialist literature—and wisely discarded it. He cares for theories only in so far as they relate to life and help in the solution of its problems. His style is direct, simple and powerful, like Bunyan's.

In Congress Victor Berger's influence will be felt. As in Milwaukee, it will

always be cast on the side of decency and progress. He knows that the social millennium will never be brought about by one supreme stroke, even if the Socialist Party should so far progress as to send three hundred other representatives to join him. He will voice the great social challenge of the age with wisdom and courage—for he is a consummate politician.

## AT HOME

Excerpt from an Editorial appearing on the morning following the election of Mayor Seidel, in *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, which paper opposes the Socialists bitterly:

"Social democracy in Milwaukee is what it is, whether good or ill, chiefly because of Mr. Berger. He is its pioneer, its propagandist, its sponsor. Its history is mainly his biography as a citizen of Milwaukee. He rocked it in its cradle, reared it and now exults to see his bantling in control of this great city.

Mr. Berger's exultation must be tempered by an anxious sense of responsibility. Whatever may be the serious mistakes of social democracy during the next two years, or wherever the immediate responsibility, public censure will point the finger at Victor L. Berger and say: 'Thou art the man.'"

## Collier's Weekly Says, Editorially:

"What Socialism is to be in the United States is as yet undetermined. Its great success in Milwaukee was made possible by the fact that Victor Berger has been always more interested in the next step for the general welfare than in manufacturing in advance an ultimate ideal. He accepts, in the main, the Marxian creed, but wears it lightly, and deals with the world in which he lives."

# The First Socialist Congressman

## *The Outlook Says:*

**J**UST one member of the Sixty-second Congress will be a Socialist, and he will be the first man who was ever elected to Congress on a Socialist platform. Victor L. Berger, of Milwaukee, remarked after his election that he did not "expect to revolutionize the country single-handed." Mr. Berger is a man of great force as a leader, and his personality is a remarkable one. Six months ago he was described in *The Outlook* by Mr. Frederic C. Howe, in an article relating to the Socialist victory in Milwaukee, as the soul of the Socialist movement for a quarter of a century. Mr. Howe added this lively and interesting description of Berger's life and character: "He is a bundle of physical and nervous force. He seems to know no weariness, no discouragements, no failure. His only thoughts are grouped about the working class movement. Yet he has been as roughly bruised by his fellow-workers as by the capitalist press. He has even been 'fired' from the party that he created, the party to which he gave all his worldly savings to promote. He has seen Socialism

rise and sink to nothingness on a number of occasions. Time and again he gathered the fragments together for a new start. For twenty-five years this has been his only interest. And he is still poor. He has never made a dollar out of politics. Berger is a student."

A friend of *The Outlook*, writing from Boston, throws light on Berger's methods and character by telling the following incident: "A conference on Socialism was held in Boston about two years ago, and Victor Berger was one of many speakers. Said an open-minded hearer: 'He is the one man of the lot who makes Socialism taste good in the mouth.' It was not only his German *Gemüthlichkeit*, the good-natured level headedness that stamped his personality, which produced this impression; it was his sagaciously tolerant attitude towards the rest of the world. In the course of the conference there was vehement denunciation of men and institutions, but he cared more for the principles he was devoted to than for the instruments designed for achieving them. While he believed in a Socialist party as the most effective means for agitation for the ends in view, his main concern was for the ends themselves."



A picture taken after the Socialist victory, showing Mayor Seidel, Frederic C. Howe and Victor L. Berger

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