

gan to decline and disappear. Historically, in such situations, African American workers have always been hit the hardest.

Eric Arnesen has admirably recreated the bittersweet history of black railroaders. The book is extremely well written, nuanced, and insightful. Anyone interested in civil rights and the labor movement will find it invaluable. Furthermore, one would hope that the book would inspire other studies of regional or individual railroads and the issue of race.

A Milwaukee Woman's Life on the Left: The Autobiography of Meta Berger, edited by Kimberly Swanson. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2001. xxvi, 189 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$15.95 paper.

Reviewer Sally M. Miller is professor emerita of history at the University of the Pacific. She is the author of *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism* (1973), "The Milwaukee Movement to 1920" in *Socialism in the Heartland* (1986), and many other books and essays on socialism and on women reformers.

This sketchy autobiography is a welcome addition to political history and woman's history. Meta Schlichting Berger (1873–1944), a daughter of German immigrants, grew to young womanhood as a middle-class housewife and mother in the Midwest. Born in Milwaukee and educated as a teacher, her marriage to an ambitious minor party politician transformed her life and her sense of identity. Although nonpolitical and unconfident, she began attending her husband's socialist and trade unionist conventions as a supportive wife. To her own surprise, she became caught up in the socialist movement, and then embarked on public activities of her own.

In 1897 Meta Schlichting married Victor Berger, who quickly built the local socialist party into a major presence in Wisconsin politics. Thirteen years older than his wife, he initially dominated her, shaped her beliefs and cultural tastes, and patronized her self-actualization efforts. In 1909 Meta Berger, freed by a devoted housekeeper from childcare of their two daughters and from homemaking tasks that bored her—a perk of the middle class—was elected to the Milwaukee School Board, where she served for 30 years. Simultaneously, she immersed herself in her husband's campaigns for municipal and congressional offices and in handling the financial exigencies of his daily newspaper, the *Milwaukee Leader*. Living in Washington at times during his congressional terms as a lone socialist representative (1911–13, 1923–29), Meta Berger tried to find causes to pursue, spurning the social circles of Washington wives. During World War I, Victor Berger was prosecuted by the federal government for his antiwar views. He

nearly lost his newspaper to wartime politically inspired postal restrictions and became the first congressman to be unconstitutionally excluded from his seat because of his conspiracy conviction—later overturned by the Supreme Court.

Berger was a difficult man and husband, prone to temper tantrums and infidelity, but Meta Berger stood by him and threw her considerable energies into salvaging his career. She also somehow managed to continue her own activities. On the school board, she promoted pensions and equity in pay and promotions for women teachers, and she proposed the establishment of nursery schools, medical care for pupils, and other measures adopted from socialist platforms. Her reputation led to her appointments to the State Board of Education and the State University Board of Regents. She also campaigned for female suffrage and was a leader in the wartime international women's peace movement. Lastly, as an active socialist, she held offices in both the local and national party.

After Meta Berger was widowed in 1931, she became even more prominent in the Socialist Party, but later split with that fading movement to become a fellow traveler on the fringes of the Communist movement, even visiting the Soviet Union in 1935 as a member of a delegation of American unionists. By then, she had developed her own political persona as a "velvet-fisted radical."

Meta Berger's brief and somewhat repetitious autobiography sheds light on her intellectual evolution and provides insights into Victor Berger's personality and career. The editor, Kimberly Swanson, has supplied substantive footnotes, but she failed to consult recent secondary sources on Milwaukee political history, including an article by John Buenker dealing with Meta Berger's suffragist activity (in Sally M. Miller, ed., *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism* [1981]). Nor did Swanson correct her subject's factual errors, such as confusing socialist committee meetings with conventions, and her several references to the Hoover administration prior to its assuming office. Nevertheless, it is helpful to have this midwestern political and suffrage leader of the second rank brought out of the wings to center stage. Superficially, one might label Meta Berger's life as an exception to the norm. But she was representative of her generation when thousands of women first plunged into civic life, involving themselves in politics and social services.

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