

Lend Lease Episode 5 - Municipal Socialist Politicians of the United States

- The first: John C. Chase Socialist Mayor of Haverhill MA elected 1898
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2019/06/14/guess-which-massachusetts-town-elected-nation-first-socialist-mayor/ya1NwDdc1HYI9W7IR4EFIK/story.html> &
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_C._Chase
 - *Socialism has long evoked pushback in America. Socialism, warned a much earlier coalition of Republican and Democratic party leaders, is unAmerican, embraces doctrines “imported from foreign countries,” and threatens traditional marriage, organized religion, and other basic American values. Those comments weren’t made on Fox News last week, but in 1898 in my hometown of Haverhill, after it made former shoe worker and union activist John C. Chase the nation’s first elected Socialist mayor. Haverhill also elected Socialist city councilors and aldermen and sent two Socialists to the State House. I didn’t learn about this local history while attending Haverhill public school decades ago, and even now, few Bay Staters know that Socialist candidates also fared well in Holyoke, Amesbury, Brockton, Georgetown, Chicopee, and elsewhere more than a century before Burlington, Vermont, felt the mayoral Bern. [...] The views of Debs, Chase, Carey, and other American Socialists were shaped less by Karl Marx than by Chicopee Falls native Edward Bellamy, author of Looking Backward, the bestselling 1888 novel that envisioned a Utopian socialist America in the year 2000. Chase balanced ideology with practicality in his 1899 inaugural address: As mayor, he would support the principles of socialism, he said, but only “in so far as they may be applicable to a municipality.” His focus was progressive and decidedly good government: an eight-hour day and better wages for city workers, more honest and transparent contracting, public works jobs for the unemployed, lower gas prices, and public parks, clean streets, and other services and benefits today generally taken for granted. Socialists who were ideological purists dismissed this as “gas and water socialism.” But gas and water won elections; ideology did not. [...] electoral success proved short-lived as establishment parties regrouped and stoked fears that socialist proposals such as the eight-hour workday — however mainstream they now seem — threatened fiscal and social ruin. Like voters now, voters in 1898 probably did not really know just what “socialism” meant.*
 - Also Charles Coulter from Brockton, a pretty left-wing working class community at the time
- Which other socialist municipal governments have there been?
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_elected_socialist_mayors_in_the_United_States
 - Note several in Burlington VT, not just Bernie
 - 1 from Idaho (John Travers Wood, ironically he later became a 1-term right-wing Congressman from Idaho - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Travers_Wood), 5 from Utah

- John C. Menton of Flint Michigan served one term as mayor before the Dems, Republicans, and General Motors organized a unity ticket to oust him (with a literal GM co-founder, Charles Stewart Mott)
- Currently: Jackson MS mayor Chokwe Antar Lumumba (a millennial, whose father was very briefly mayor and was a black separatist figure)
- Here's a searchable map of all identifiable socialist elected officials from 1901-1960 (Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (University of Nebraska Press, 2015)):
 - https://depts.washington.edu/moves/SP_map-elected.shtml
 - 1911 was the peak year: 65 mayors and over 100 others
 - Ohio has had more socialist elected officials than any other state
 - The peak dues-paying membership year for socialist parties was 1912: 113k https://depts.washington.edu/moves/SP_map-members.shtml (in Idaho, 1 in every 200 residents was a dues-paying socialist; NY state had highest absolute number with nearly 10,000 members; there were about as many members in Texas as in Wisconsin - roughly 4,600)
- Milwaukee
 - <https://www.wuwm.com/post/how-did-socialist-mayors-impact-milwaukee#stream/0>
 - <http://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/articles/socialism-and-milwauees-amnesia/>
 - <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/daily-dose/john-gurda-socialists-saved-milwaukee/#/questions>
 - This continued as late as 1960 when the last (and 3rd) socialist mayor left office https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Zeidler - in 1958 he gave the amazing quote on suburban annexation politics: "The city consults with suburban governments, but we do not believe they have reason for existing."
- Chicago's current surge:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/03/americas-socialist-surge-chicago> *Three Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) members won their city council races in [2019] runoff elections on Tuesday: Byron Sigcho-Lopez in the 25th ward, Jeanette Taylor in the 20th and Andre Vasquez in the 40th. The fourth candidate, Rossana Rodriguez-Sanchez, is locked in a race in the 33rd ward that is too close to call and will await the counting of mail-in ballots, but was up by 64 votes once all precincts' votes were counted. [She subsequently won and was sworn in.] They will join two other socialists who handily won the first round of elections outright in February: Carlos Rosa, an incumbent in the 35th ward, and Daniel La Spata, who defeated an incumbent in the first ward. Add them up and you've got at least five, maybe six democratic socialists who will be on the 50-member Chicago city council. Few major American cities have seen even a single socialist councilor in generations; the third-largest city in the US could soon have half a dozen. It's the largest socialist electoral victory in modern American history.*