Chapter 10

The Open-Shop Offensive

A few days after the 1907 strike ended, lumber magnate Harry Jackson boasted that “the men have unconditionally surrendered and from now on it will be the open shop in Humboldt County.”1 In September 1907, Labor News conceded that the longshoremen and lumber workers had been “dealt severe blows . . . by the millowners.”2 Both the lumber employers and the labor movement had no doubt about the broader ramifications of the strike. The lumber companies lost no time in trying to capitalize on their victory. Even as the 1907 logging season drew to a close, they continued to flood the county’s labor market.3 Labor News charged that this was part of a deliberate policy to eliminate the last vestiges of lumber trade unionism and reflected bitterly that “some years ago the woodsmen and millmen of this county were treated with some degree of consideration. Now they are treated like so many machines and the whole question of labor is removed from the standpoint of humane consideration, and is reduced to getting the most possible out of the men for the smallest amount of money possible.” The article alleged that “slave driver Hammond’s methods” would reduce lumber workers to “a state closely bordering on medieval servitude.”4

This salvo represented the opening shot in a protracted battle by the Humboldt County labor movement to expose the virulently antilabor policies of Hammond and the HLMA and attempt to persuade people of the deleterious effects that the open-shop drive would have on the community. The county labor movement continued to exhort people to join unions, but it believed that the movement’s ability to survive a concerted open-shop offensive could succeed only by winning the community’s support.
The Lumbermen’s Counteroffensive

Hammond and his associates were determined to capitalize on the defeat of the strike. The deepening of the recession and a long-term decline in the fortunes of the lumber industry stiffened the resolve. In 1907, the dollar value of Humboldt County redwood lumber reached a peak of $7,702,205. Between 1908 and 1914, the annual dollar value was consistently less, falling by 21 percent between 1907 and 1908 alone. At the start of the 1908 logging season, most lumber companies cut wages 10 to 15 percent. Labor News claimed that lumber employers were able to make the cuts because of the sorry state of the IBWSW and that the lumbermen noted the failure of workers to attend meetings “with unconcealed glee.” But even the well-organized shingle weavers received a 21 percent wage cut. The Humboldt shingle weavers struck for almost three months in a desperate but futile effort to preserve wage rates. Adding insult to injury, the Big Three decided in 1908 that they would pay their men every 90 days rather than every month, although credit was to be granted liberally at company stores between paydays. William Carson, however, continued to pay his workers in cash every month, and no pressure was put on workers to patronize the company store.

After 1907, lumber companies refused to give workers a holiday on Labor Day, and on at least one occasion, went so far as to sponsor a rival Labor Day celebration. But the attempt by lumber employers to undermine the Union Labor Hospital constituted the most flagrant and bitterly resented attack on the labor movement. In 1908, several large companies, including the Hammond and Pacific Lumber companies, announced they would establish their own hospital facilities and insurance plans. Carson refused to have any part in this scheme. The decision came shortly after the labor movement had decided to expand and upgrade the Union Labor Hospital. The outraged Humboldt County labor movement obtained an injunction forbidding the lumber companies from proceeding with their hospital plans, but in 1910 this was overturned by the California Supreme Court.

Of more long-term consequence to the labor movement was the decision of lumber companies to accelerate the development of their company towns. The initial establishment and growth of company towns, it should be reiterated, resulted primarily from the need to bring workers closer to the point of production, which, because of the receding forest, was moving farther and farther from towns such as Eureka and Arcata. In the context of increasingly bitter labor conflict, especially in the wake of the 1907 strike, lumber companies saw that a company town
setting would enhance their ability to control their workforce. Many Pacific Lumber Company employees lived in company-owned housing from the outset. In the very early twentieth century, Hammond had allowed his workers at Samoa to own their homes, but soon he reversed this decision. Hammond expanded company housing at Samoa so that the proportion of his workforce living in Eureka declined steadily. By 1909, well over half his employees resided in Samoa. The population of Blue Lake declined from 507 to 441 between 1910 and 1920. The Arcata Union attributed the decline to the fact that many men working for the Northern Redwood Lumber Company were obliged to move into company housing at Korbel. Fortuna's population declined in the same period, partly because of the growth of Scotia and the company towns of Newburg and Metropolitan.

The Big Three also expanded their mercantile facilities at Scotia, Samoa, and Korbel and began putting pressure on their employees to patronize these facilities exclusively. Married men, and any others who preferred to do their own cooking, had to eat at the company cookhouse. Many foreign workers, especially the Italians, resisted this. In 1913, 100 Italian workers at Scotia went on strike, demanding the right to eat in their own homes. The quality of the fare at many lumber camps also deteriorated. John Pancner, a leading IWW organizer who was sent to Humboldt County in 1910, supplied graphic reports to the Industrial Worker of the poor food and harsh and unsanitary living conditions at many lumber camps in the county.

Labor News also provided periodic reports on deteriorating working conditions in the woods and mills. In 1910, the Pacific Lumber Company extended its working day by half an hour. The company magnanimously agreed to allow employees to stop work an hour earlier on Saturdays, but in order to ensure a full working day it began work an hour earlier, which meant waking the workers at 4:45 A.M. Labor News asserted that while the millman worked a ten-hour day, "the introduction of pacemaking and the speeding of machinery" reduced him to a "physical wreck" twice as fast as had been the case ten or twenty years earlier under a more benign regime. Moreover, it alleged, the risk of injury was much greater because of the new technology and the extensive use of inexperienced men.

Most lumber companies became systematically more repressive after the 1907 strike. Employees were asked not only whether they had ever belonged to a union but also to sign a yellow-dog contract. Blacklisting was employed more thoroughly than ever to weed out union sympathizers. A few months after the 1907 strike, Ernest Pape reported to the American Federationist that the most prominent members of
the IBWSW had been blacklisted.\textsuperscript{26} Organizers Pancner, "Rugger," and W. B. Lane of the IWW made numerous references to the blacklist in their reports to the \textit{Industrial Worker} and related several incidents where union men or sympathizers were instantly dismissed.\textsuperscript{27} The IWW organizers also charged that the Hammond Lumber Company made extensive use of company spies.\textsuperscript{28} A Pacific Lumber Company employee who was rash enough to distribute circulars publicizing a meeting of the Socialist party was fired immediately.\textsuperscript{29} A letter from a woodsman employed by the Pacific Lumber Company eloquently expressed the sense of powerlessness felt by many people:

There is no way to avoid the tentacles of the corporation as every foot of ground . . . is owned by the company. All over this vast baronial estate the "pluck-me" stores flourish like the proverbial green bay tree, and instances of families whose head has worked for twenty years or more that are in perpetual debt to these stores are numerous. The man or family working for this or similar corporations is always in danger of becoming peoned through inability to get out of debt.\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Fighting the Open Shop}

\textit{Labor News} devoted an enormous amount of space to exposing the policy of many of the county's lumber companies in an attempt to win the sympathy and support of the community. Front-page articles repeated a host of charges with almost monotonous regularity. \textit{Labor News} appealed both to the community's sense of justice and to its economic self-interest. The attack on the Union Labor Hospital was highlighted as a prime example of lumber company ruthlessness. \textit{Labor News} insisted that real wages in the lumber industry had declined since 1907, thus diminishing the community's overall purchasing power and hurting local business.\textsuperscript{31} The paper portrayed the lumber companies as greedy, impersonal corporations with few roots and little sense of obligation to the community. The old days were recalled nostalgically:

Most of the men . . . worked in the mills and woods [and] made Humboldt their home. The man who owned the lumbering plant also superintended it and was generally intimately acquainted with his employees. He realized he depended upon them for his success and treated them well. In most instances the manufacturer of lumber was not so far removed from the time when he himself was a working man. . . . He [the lumber worker] was recognized by his employer as a human being with opportunities before him and entitled to the free exercise of rights that since have been greatly abridged.\textsuperscript{32}
Labor News warned that the county was in danger of falling under the total social and economic hegemony of the lumber companies, claiming that by 1910 the Big Three accounted for three-quarters of the county’s lumber operations. In 1908, Labor News asked melodramatically, “Shall Eureka Be a Company Town?” The article asserted that if present trends continued, Eureka would become another Scotia or Samoa. The labor organ confessed ignorance of the precise extent of company ownership or involvement in nonlumbering businesses in Eureka, but cautioned that there was abundant evidence that the lumber companies’ direct interest was significant and growing. The article also dwelt on the fact that many lumber companies were transforming their company towns into self-contained communities, thus drawing business away from Eureka and some of the county’s other towns.33

Labor News insisted that there was no rationale for maintaining the 50 woods camps, or “hell holes,” that existed in Humboldt County. The camps could be abolished overnight if the lumber companies ran regular train services to the nearest towns. Under the wood-camp system, married woodsmen could see their families only on Sundays, while single men had little opportunity to develop stable family relationships and thus had no alternative but to resort to the Saturday night debauches at the saloons and brothels of the nearest town.34

One of the favorite arguments used by Labor News was that “the independent and family citizens” of Humboldt were being replaced by a “floating” population of single men. Good family men had been driven out of the county by low wages and the open-shop policy of Hammond and his allies.35 The new floating labor force not only had less money to spend but was also less likely to spend its limited savings in the community. The men spent their money in the company towns and took their savings with them when they left the county at the end of the logging season. Labor News produced some statistics to support its contention, noting that Eureka’s rate of population growth had slowed dramatically between 1904 and 1908.36 Using school census figures, Labor News estimated that the population of Eureka had declined by 800 people between May 1907 and May 1908.37 In 1909, Labor News drew attention to the fact that in the two years following the strike, the school population of Eureka had declined for the first time since the beginning of the century. All told, the number of schoolchildren in Eureka diminished by 275 between 1907 and 1909.38 The 1910 census showed that the population of Eureka declined from 12,147 persons in 1908, when the city took its own census, to 11,845.

Andrew Hammond visited Humboldt County in late May 1909, his
A vigorous exchange of views took place in the pages of the *Humboldt Times* between him and Joseph Bredsteen. Hammond initiated the exchange. Stung by criticisms of his land-acquisition practices in the *Humboldt Times*, Hammond attempted to divert attention from the issue by lashing out at the Humboldt County labor movement, claiming that the issue of trade unionism dwarfed all others in importance. He argued that Eureka was on the verge of being run by corrupt and ruthless union bosses of the type that had dominated San Francisco before their activities were exposed.

Hammond denied he was opposed to organized labor on principle, but at the same time he argued that only in an open-shop environment could the community's economy flourish. He pointed to the rapid growth of Los Angeles as an example of a place that thrived in an open-shop climate. He insisted that Humboldt labor demanded wages and conditions that made it hard for the county's industries to compete in national markets. Bredsteen rehashed many of the arguments he had used since the 1907 strike, and critically reviewed Hammond's labor policies since he commenced operations in Humboldt County. Bredsteen insisted that "a strong organized labor movement means better wages, shorter hours in all the saw mills of the county, steadier employment, more homes, more families, more business," and he asked, "Would an eight hour day in Samoa injure anybody in Eureka?" The debate served only to intensify Hammond's determination to crush the Humboldt County labor movement. Not satisfied with having played the leading role in crushing the once powerful Longshoremen's Union and the IBWSW, he broadened the scope of his attack on labor. Only a month after the debate, Hammond began using his influence in the banking community to persuade Eureka businessmen to cooperate with the open-shop drive. Securing the cooperation of the banking community was probably not difficult. Hammond controlled the First National Bank of Eureka, and at least one prominent lumber employer served as an officer or director at each of the four other banks in Eureka. It is unclear precisely what pressure was put on merchants in Eureka to join the open-shop crusade, but the story was treated seriously by the *Humboldt Times*, and the labor movement appealed to the merchants not to collaborate with Hammond.

In August 1909, Hammond pressured local businesses not to hire union carpenters. Emboldened by Hammond's intransigence, the Eureka foundry employers forced the Machinists' Union to accept a nine-hour day. The *Eureka Herald* described this concession as a "triumph for Eureka" and a blow "to an arrogant policy by the local union labor leaders." Two months later, the Hammond Lumber Company
forced caulkers and carpenters to accept a ten-hour day, and in the spring of 1910 all shipyard workers employed by Hammond agreed to work a nine-hour day. At the conference of the California Building Trades Council (BTC) in 1910, the delegate from the Humboldt BTC succinctly described the problem facing the county's labor movement:

Our most persistent, unrelenting and malicious enemy is one Hammond, the Monster of Samoa—head, shoulders, fore and hind feet of the movement to crush unionism. This man has enlisted bankers and tradesmen, and he has established a satellite of open shop committees all over the county. Merchants of Eureka have been pressured by the banks to succumb.

At the convention of the Pacific Coast Maritime Builders' Federation held in Eureka later in 1910, President Cheffers commented that "the people of this port must like Hammond for they let him hold them and nearly everything there is here in his arms... I hardly understand how he got such a hold."

Cheffers's assessment was somewhat harsh and did scant justice to the efforts of the Humboldt County labor movement to fight Hammond. Indeed, a year earlier, in July 1909, the Eureka Trades Council had established a special open-shop committee, composed of one representative from each member union of the council. Within weeks, thousands of handbills were printed stressing the adverse effects of the open shop on the community's economy and threatening to boycott any merchant who cooperated with Hammond. The theme of the 1909 Labor Day celebration was the open shop, and every speaker addressed the question. Hammond declined an invitation to debate Bredsteen on the occasion. In December 1909, a campaign was launched to publicize the importance of the union label as a means of combating the open-shop drive.

It is difficult to gauge precisely the extent to which the labor movement won community support. It is significant, however, that the historically antilabor, pro-Republican Humboldt Times not only gave coverage to the open-shop debate but, for a time, echoed many of the arguments used by Labor News. In January 1911, the Humboldt Times, disappointed at the county's sluggish growth, attacked Hammond's open-shop policies with particular vehemence in a series of articles. The Times harkened back to an age when employees of the lumber companies provided a steady demand for Eureka's products: "These men, in those days, were well paid. A large proportion of them were family men, whose families resided in Eureka, patronized the local grocers and retail goods merchants in all other lines." The Times conjured up images of frugal lumber workers queuing at banks to deposit
their savings on Saturdays, in the days when wages gave the lumber worker "a fair and just return for their labor." Then, sighed the Times, "came the change of policy on the part of the big three companies," and wage levels plummeted and local trade suffered terribly.\(^{55}\) The Times dismissed a rebuttal letter from George Fenwick, manager of the Hammond Lumber Company, claiming that real wages had not declined and that many Hammond employees still shopped in Eureka. The Times insisted that Eurkca had suffered a heavy loss of business, and added: "The laboring men of Eureka . . . can tell you of scores, doubtless hundreds, of their former friends and acquaintances—good family men, or single men of the best type—who have left Humboldt because of the unsatisfactory wages and the conditions imposed upon them." Rows of empty houses bore "mute but impressive testimony to the truth of these statements."\(^{56}\) In a subsequent article, the Times starkly contrasted the policies of the Big Three with those of William Carson:

William Carson has never found it necessary to build, equip, and operate a company town. Eureka has been his town . . . Many of the woodsmen and millmen employed by William Carson today have been with him from one to three decades—some perhaps longer. A large number of these have their permanent homes in Eureka. Many have raised their families here, acquired property and are among the prosperous men of the town. Mr. Carson hasn't been bothered by strikes and labor difficulties. . . . He hasn't sought to reduce the laboring men upon whom the merchants depend to serfdom and impecunious misery.\(^{57}\)

Notwithstanding the polemics of the Humboldt Times, the labor movement received little overt support from the Eureka business community. In his report to the annual convention of the California State Federation of Labor in 1912, Joshua Dale, who had visited Humboldt County the previous year, stated that Hammond had succeeded in coercing many businessmen into cooperating with the open-shop drive.\(^{58}\) Precise data on the fate of all unions and general membership levels are not available. Undoubtedly, even outside the lumber industry, the labor movement encountered setbacks in the decade after the 1907 strike. Overall union membership almost certainly declined, and union shop and eight-hour agreements were sometimes breached. The hod carriers, clerks, longshoremen, and a host of smaller unions representing unskilled workers struggled to survive.

Nevertheless, the Humboldt County labor movement remained a defiant force of considerable influence in the community in spite of the open-shop drive. Even Joshua Dale, in his pessimistic appraisal of the state of the county's labor movement, complimented the building trades for putting up a "heroic fight." The building trades managed
to retain the gains achieved in the early years of the twentieth century. The minutes of the Eureka Trades Council reveal that the labor movement continued to make effective use of the boycott. Many unions also continued to hold social gatherings, and Labor Day celebrations were usually well attended. Unquestionably, though, the position of the Humboldt labor movement after the 1907 strike was essentially defensive.

The Socialist Party and the Unions

In the political arena, the Humboldt County labor movement ceased to participate as directly and cohesively as it had in 1906 under the auspices of the Union Labor party. No attempt was made to reconstitute the ULP. In part this reflected the beleaguered position of the labor movement, and in part it resulted from revelations of corruption in the San Francisco Union Labor party, which had statewide repercussions. Certainly by the 1910s, the growing responsiveness at both state and national levels of most of the major political parties to issues affecting unions and working people negated the prospects for a union labor party. At the national level, Republicans, Democrats, and Progressives, confronted with a more class-conscious and better-organized labor movement than before, and the increasingly impressive performance of the Socialist party, vied for the working-class vote. In California, where the labor movement was strong in many areas, the Progressive party one of the most powerful in the nation, and the Socialists had substantial support, the competition for the working-class vote was especially keen. Ultimately, the gains attained by labor at both the state and national levels were limited, but the major political parties had to address labor's grievances more seriously than they had during the Gilded Age.56

In Humboldt County, labor did not withdraw from politics. The Eureka Trades Council took a strong stand on local and state issues, especially measures to provide for the initiative and recall. The council asked state legislators to explain their records on labor issues, and Labor News gave extensive coverage to the growing role of labor in English and Australian politics. At the 1908 Labor Day picnic, a four-cornered political debate took place between spokesmen for the Republicans, Democrats, Socialists, and Union Labor party, with Bredsteen speaking for the latter and George Keeling on behalf of the Socialists.60 But the ULP did not offer a slate at the 1908 elections; instead, Labor News tacitly endorsed the Socialist ticket.61
The embattled state of the local labor movement and the appeals of the major parties siphoned off some of the labor vote and undermined the cohesive voting bloc that was taking shape in 1906, but the long-standing tradition of dissent in Humboldt County politics did not expire. There was significant and growing support for the Socialist party. Aided by the endorsement of Labor News, the Socialists greatly improved their electoral performance in 1908. Between 1904 and 1908, Eugene Debs increased his share of the presidential vote from 9.2 percent to 13.3 percent. After the election, the relationship between Humboldt labor and the Socialists became increasingly close. Labor News unequivocally endorsed the Socialist party for the next decade. It is impossible to calculate exactly what percentage of union men voted Socialist. But certain facts are not in question. First, the Socialist party’s program was almost identical to the one offered by the ULP in 1906. Keeling and Bredstean could have swapped speeches on Labor Day, 1908, and nobody would have noticed the difference. Second, many of the leading unionists in Humboldt County were registered Socialists, and at least half of the Socialist party ticket was usually composed of union leaders. Third, several unions, including the Carpenters and the Cooks and Waiters, specifically endorsed the Socialists. Finally, Labor News was the official paper of the Eureka Trades Council, and the council was prohibited by its constitution from making partisan political endorsements. Yet it did not question or repudiate Labor News for its unabashed support of the Socialists.

The index to the Humboldt County Register of Voters for 1914 indicates that the Socialist party constituency was predominantly working-class. The voting register listed people’s party affiliations after the passage of the California primary law in 1909. Table 2 shows the number of registered Socialists for each occupational group that had five or more registered Socialists. A high proportion of the registered Socialist voters were laborers, woodsmen, millmen, and carpenters. Seventy-four farmers also registered Socialist. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know whether they owned farms or were farm laborers, although the Humboldt Socialist party made a deliberate effort to appeal to small farmers and farm laborers. All told, 387 housewives or housekeepers registered Socialist; most of them wives of working-class Socialist men. It is important to point out that the register represents only about half the people who actually voted Socialist. This is apparent if one takes the total Socialist vote for Debs in 1912 or the total vote for the victorious Socialist mayoral candidate for Eureka in 1915. This indicates that, even though voters had the option of declining to state party affiliation, a number of Socialist voters were fearful of registering...
Table 2

Registered Socialist Party Voters, Humboldt County, 1914, for Each Occupation with Five or More Registered Socialists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
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<th>Occupation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Laborers</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Cooks and chefs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodsmen</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Dairymen</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenters</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Shoemakers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mill workers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Barbers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranchers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Painters</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Longshoremen</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmiths</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miners</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Gardeners</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Index to the Affidavits of Registration of Humboldt County, 1914, To and Including October 3, 1914.

their affiliation. Indeed, in 1910, when voters were asked to declare party affiliation for the first time, the Humboldt County Clerk, George Cousins, found many voters unwilling to do so.65

The IWW resented the strong foothold that the Socialist party had established among the Humboldt working class. John Pancner, the IWW organizer in Humboldt County in 1910, complained bitterly: "In almost every camp I find a group of political socialists. All they seem to know is vote, vote, and read the "Appeal." They disgrace the fair name of socialism. . . . The working man whose brain is not clogged up with political dope can easily understand industrial unionism."66 Another IWW organizer, M. B. Butler, complained that one of the Wobblies' biggest handicaps in Eureka were the "Berger worshippers."67 In 1910, Pancner, who on several occasions was granted a forum by the local Socialist party, greeted the first electoral successes of Humboldt County Socialists with sarcastic derision: "Here I am living in a new Socialist republic," he wrote to the Industrial Worker. He added that he believed "the killing of a Ferrer does more for the Social Revolution than the election of a thousand socialists." Pancner concluded by arguing that "the doctrine of direct action is simple; it is easy for the slave to understand, while Political Socialism winds through the swamps of confusion."68

Pancner's disparaging judgments reeked of the sectarianism the IWW had displayed during the 1907 strike and can hardly have endeared many working-class Socialists in Humboldt County to the Wob-
blies' cause. Ironically, the refusal of the majority of the Humboldt County Socialist party to support the expulsion of IWW leader Bill Haywood from the party's National Executive Committee in 1913 and the radical political stance of local party leaders caused a split in the Humboldt Socialist party. The fact that the allegedly “pro-syndicalist” wing of the party emerged as its dominant and official branch did not allay the hostility of the Wobblies. At a Socialist-organized May Day celebration in 1914, an IWW organizer proceeded to incense most of the assembled company with an intemperate attack on the local AFL, the Socialists, and the American flag—“a rag unworthy of respect.”

In 1909, the Socialists recorded their first triumph when George McDaniel was elected to the Eureka City Council. The following year saw John Moore, president of the Eureka Trades Council, elected police judge on the Socialist ticket. In 1911, the Socialist party and the labor movement almost singlehandedly opposed a new charter for Eureka providing for a city commission and manager form of government. Under the proposed charter, the only elected city officials would be five commission members, who would appoint a city manager and all other executive officials. The power to recall local officials would have been severely circumscribed, and the ability of the city to acquire ownership of utilities greatly hindered. The city press praised the new charter as an excellent means of taking the politics out of local elections, but the charter was rejected overwhelmingly by 1,048 to 124 votes. The Humboldt Times acknowledged the decisive role of the Socialists in defeating the charter and noted that in the Socialists' stronghold in the Fifth Ward, only 1 of 19 people voted in favor of the new charter.

The fortunes of the Socialist party were clearly rising. When Bred-steen ran for mayor of Eureka on the Socialist ticket in 1909, he garnered a meager 9 percent of the vote in a three-way fight. In 1911, in a two-way contest, he got 40 percent of the vote. The following year, the Socialists succeeded in getting all their amendments to the Eureka charter passed at a referendum election, while all the amendments offered by the majority on the City Council went down to defeat. The Socialists defeated proposals that would have provided for the election of officials every four years, instead of every two; the abolition of the ward system in favor of city elections at large; and a measure that would have allowed the mayor to fill vacancies for elective office by appointment rather than special election. The Socialists passed amendments that greatly facilitated Eureka's ability to municipalize utilities, that established a superintendent of public works with clearly specified duties, and that provided for open-market bidding on public contracts.
In the early 1910s, the Humboldt County labor movement may have been on the defensive in the industrial arena, but in the political sphere a radical culture flourished. The Socialist party, Labor News, and many leading union members played the major roles in sustaining this culture, which amounted to more than a good turnout for the Socialists on election day. The Socialists created what can best be described as a counter sociopolitical culture. Beginning in 1912, the Socialists held their own Fourth of July celebrations. In 1912, 2,000 people attended an International Labor Day picnic. Leading trade unionists, including Keeling, spoke on the compatibility of trade unionism and Socialist political action.

The Socialists sponsored numerous special events, such as a “Women’s Day” celebration at Union Labor Hall in 1911. There were musical selections, a play, poetry recitations, and a rousing speech in favor of women’s suffrage. A special meeting at Union Labor Hall protested the arrest of the editor of the Appeal to Reason. On weekends, a “red auto,” carrying leading Socialist and labor officials, drove through the county distributing literature and copies of speeches. Debs and Haywood both spoke in Humboldt County, as did many leading California Socialists and trade unionists, including Stitt Wilson, the Socialist mayor of Berkeley, and Archie Mooney, secretary of the Los Angeles Building Trades Council. Mooney’s address, before one of the largest labor audiences in Humboldt County history, urged labor to support the Socialist party.

A Union Political Club formed in April 1912 with delegates representing 700 union members. Organizing the club circumvented a rule that prohibited the discussion of politics at union meetings, for the club was not to be a branch of any political party. Nevertheless, the club’s first chairman, W. H. Hemsted, a leading figure in the Carpenters’ Union, was a well-known Socialist.

The Socialist councilman George McDaniel fought valiantly for the interests of labor. At a Eureka City Council meeting, he complained bitterly when the city contracted a painting job to nonunion labor. With much applause from the floor, he warned the council that the labor party had elected him and that if such practices continued, there would be “something doing.” He also objected to the omission of an eight-hour clause from a contract the City Council had given to a quarry mining firm. When 30 quarry workers went on strike for the eight-hour day, the Socialist party vowed to use “all honorable means to assist the strikers.”

The close affinity between the Humboldt Socialist party and the labor movement could be seen in the 1912 platform of the Socialist
party. Although it was a presidential election year, the platform contained many planks that were of direct interest to Humboldt labor. The Socialist party pledged to make a special effort to fight for a shorter working day in the California legislature, with particular emphasis on obtaining an eight-hour day for lumber workers. The platform also pledged to fight for legislation providing for better conditions in the lumber camps and a law prohibiting the use of the blacklist. Significantly, the platform called for California to establish a network of banks and loan offices. It denounced “the present wage scale paid to the working classes of Humboldt County as inadequate and demoralizing,” and pledged “both politically and economically to aid the workers of Humboldt County to better their condition by every honorable means at our command.”

At the 1912 elections, the Humboldt Socialist party had to contend with strong competition from the Progressive party. Labor News denounced the record of both Theodore Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson, the Progressive governor of California, but it seems likely that the Progressives cut into the Socialist vote. Nevertheless, the Socialist performance in Humboldt County was creditable. Debs obtained 21 percent of the vote, more than three times the percentage he achieved nationally. Bredsteen garnered 18 percent of the vote in his battle for a seat in Congress, and George Keeling won an impressive 34 percent in the state assembly contest.

The Eureka Socialists scored their greatest triumph when a millman, Elijah Falk, was elected mayor of Eureka in 1915. Falk had worked in the Humboldt County lumber industry since 1878. His technical skill as a millwright soon won him great respect, and he assisted with the design of several county mills. In 1906, he abandoned the Republican party and became a devout supporter of the Socialists. Falk obtained 41 percent of the vote in a four-way race, edging out his main rival by seven votes. In addition, two Socialists won City Council seats, including Bredsteen. Socialist candidates for street superintendent and school supervisor also were successful. The latter, Newell Palmer, a machinist, was elected president of the Eureka Trades Council a few weeks later.

The election results demonstrated that the Socialist party had a very strong constituency in Eureka in the early 1910s. It should be noted, however, that in 1915 the Socialists achieved their victory by diluting their program to the point where it was almost indistinguishable from those of the Progressive and the Democratic parties. All references to the broader emancipatory role of the Socialist party were dropped from the 1915 platform. In previous elections, Eureka Social-
ists had pledged municipalization of all public utilities, a public works program for the unemployed, and a municipal free employment agency. The Socialists' 1915 platform modestly called for the public ownership of the local rock quarry, improved street-lighting and firefighting equipment, and more thorough inspection of slaughterhouses. Falk reiterated these demands in his inauguration address and stressed the need for greater efficiency in the administration of local government.

The Eureka Socialists accomplished relatively little. They got bogged down in acrimonious and tedious debates with other City Council members about whether the city should acquire its own rock quarry, what kind of materials should be used to pave the streets, and minutiae relating to the organization and administration of local government. Doubtless, many Socialist party supporters were not indifferent to such matters, but the Socialists failed to press for measures that might have strengthened their ties with the trade union movement and their working-class following. In April 1915, two months before the Socialists' electoral success, union leader George Keeling implored the City Council to adopt a public works program to alleviate the distress caused by high levels of local unemployment. A few days later, 300 workers descended on City Hall demanding such a program. Between 1915 and 1917, the Socialists failed to make a single proposal for public works, in spite of continuing high levels of unemployment. In large part, this reticence reflected the fact that the Socialists were in a minority on the City Council and that, in spite of their moderation, they were constantly on the defensive. Indeed, a recall drive was launched against them in February 1916 alleging that they were responsible for the poor maintenance of Eureka's streets and general incompetence in local government administration. The recall drive, however, petered out after a few weeks.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the Socialists' failure to propose measures that might have appealed more directly to their working-class and union constituency revealed a lack of political courage and imagination. The Socialists neglected to exploit the considerable political influence they wielded in Eureka. In a special referendum election in November 1916, all eight measures proposed by the Socialists passed, including one providing for Eureka's acquisition of the local rock quarry, while all three measures initiated by their opponents were defeated, including a proposal to have City Councilmen elected at large.

In the last analysis, however, the saga of the Eureka Socialists illustrated the limits of municipal Socialism. Even if the Socialists had been able to provide public works to the unemployed at union
wage levels and to municipalize all public utilities, it would have made relatively little difference to the balance of power between labor and capital in the community. Quite simply, the scope and functions of local government were such that there was little that the Socialists and the labor movement could do to translate their political power into the economic power necessary to thwart Hammond’s open-shop drive. The ascendancy of Hammond and his allies showed the degree to which employers, notwithstanding the presence of a defiant labor movement, could dominate an essentially single-industry community. The Eureka Socialists’ decisive defeat in the 1917 elections was primarily the result of their opposition to American involvement in World War I, but it also reflected their inability to translate political power into economic power at the local level.