

**FROM
LEAVENWORTH**

**TO
CONGRESS**



The Improbable Journey

of Francis H. Shoemaker

Frederick L. Johnson

AS A CONGRESSMAN-ELECT from Minnesota and recent Leavenworth prison parollee, he boasted, "I go from the penitentiary to Congress, not like a great majority of Congressmen who go from Congress to the penitentiary." He was arrested on four separate occasions during his two-year term in the House—once when he bloodied a Washington neighbor for "too much singing of Sweet Adeline."¹

His outrageous behavior and reckless campaign style made him repugnant to leaders whose organizations spanned Minnesota's broad political rainbow of the 1930s. From the left, where the Trotskyite leadership of the 1934 Minneapolis truckers' strike labeled him an irresponsible exhibitionist, to the right, where conservative Republican Congressman August H. Andresen sued him for slander—his name was anathema. Respected leaders from his own political camp denigrated him, and Henry C. Teigan, one of the Farmer-Labor (F-L) party's founding fathers, said he was given to "spilling fabrications instead of facts." A historian of the party called him a "party sycophant."²

He was Francis H. Shoemaker, a Farmer-Labor

candidate elected at-large to the Seventy-third Congress in 1932. He also was an editor, writer, lecturer, traveler, special investigator, farmer, union organizer, and self-proclaimed wrecker of political machines. (Ironically, Shoemaker's record was to prove that the "machines" he most often wrecked were those with which he was closely affiliated.)

BORN TO Francis M. and Regina D. Shoemaker in Minnesota's Renville County on April 25, 1889, Francis Henry Shoemaker was kept out of public school and educated at home by his mother because, as he was to claim in later life, he was more advanced than others and conventional school "retarded his progress." That progress, according to his 1932 campaign biography, included a long and active career as a labor organizer and leader. But the claims he made about his participation in the movement appear exaggerated. During his 1932 campaign, he asserted that he was a "known speaker" by age 14; a top organizer for the Western Federation of Miners by 17; and an investigator for William "Big Bill" Haywood. Shoemaker claimed to be "officially connected" with several post-World War I strikes and said that he was an advisor to Wisconsin's popular Progressive senator, Robert LaFollette.³

Shoemaker's first well-documented move into the national labor spotlight began with his appearance at a 1923 convention of farmer and labor groups in Chicago. Shoemaker, then editor of a Wisconsin pro-farmer newspaper, *The People's Voice*, was a delegate to the convention. He had developed Wisconsin roots during his days there as a Nonpartisan League organizer and had met and married Lydgia H. Schneider of New London in April, 1912.⁴

Frederick Johnson, a native of Red Wing and an award-winning teacher in the St. Paul school system, has a long-standing interest in the history of the Goodhue County area. He is the author of The Sea Wing Disaster (1986).

¹ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 136; *New York Times*, April 20, 1933, p. 1. All newspaper citations hereafter are to page 1 unless otherwise noted.

² Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion* (New York: Monad Press, 1972), 88–89; Teigan to Richard Manthey, June 19, 1931, Henry C. Teigan Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS); Arthur Naftalin, "A History of the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Minnesota, 1948), 216.

³ *Organized Farmer* (Red Wing), Mar. 21, 1930, June 3, 1932; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774–1971* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1971), 1692–1693; *Congressional Directory*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 55–56. No evidence supports his claim about LaFollette.

⁴ Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 6–14; *Congressional Directory*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 55–56.

For his efforts at the Chicago convention, Shoemaker was elected as one of the new farmer-labor group's two vice-presidents. William Bouck, leader of the Washington-based Western Progressive Farmers (WPF), was elected president. The Bouck-Shoemaker relationship was to ripen, and in the spring of 1926 Shoemaker joined Bouck as a WPF organizer in Wisconsin. With a bounty of \$3 for every \$5 membership gained, the new recruiter signed 450 farmers in one county alone.⁵

But the WPF, which had now evolved into the Progressive Farmers of America (PFA), was torn apart internally after Shoemaker was charged by a PFA official with misuse of funds. He was expelled following the group's December, 1926, convention in Minneapolis. President Bouck sided with Shoemaker in the dispute, causing a rift that doomed hopes that the PFA could evolve into an important American farm organization.

Although his reputation had suffered in Wisconsin, Shoemaker still possessed credentials enough in the farm protest movement to get an opportunity to use his talents in Minnesota. Fred A. Scherf, an early activist in the Nonpartisan League and former state legislator from Red Wing, was looking for help in reconstituting a Goodhue County farm weekly, the *Organized Farmer*. He decided that Shoemaker might well be the man for the job. It was part of the Scherf plan that Shoemaker serve as the point man for the revamped publication. In announcing the change in ownership, the *Organized Farmer's* board of directors made no mention of Scherf, reporting that the paper had been sold to F. H. Shoemaker of New London, Wisconsin. Scherf's influence was still quite clear when his daughter Mildred was named the newspaper publisher, with Shoemaker the editor.⁶

The Scherf-Shoemaker partnership displaced the *Organized Farmer's* prominent previous editor, Susie W. Stageberg—feminist, prohibitionist, and called by some the “mother” of the Farmer-Labor party. Shoemaker and Fred Scherf seemed intent on blazing a more radical path as spokesmen for farmers still suffering the effects of postwar price slumps in the commodities market. Shoemaker's radical editorial policies did not sit well with the conservative business community in the Red Wing of 1929, and major advertising sources began to dry up. Sensing a conspiracy against his paper, Shoemaker fought back. With alliterative elan, he lambasted his enemies in a story in the October 4 issue. Referring to the Red Wing Manufacturers Association opposition to city-owned power, the subheadline read “Leeching La[s]civious Liars Loathely Lacerate Local Lame, Limping Lazaruses.” The outraged editor claimed that the manufacturers' association, “this gang of looting, thieving liars,” was behind the apparent boycott of his newspaper.

By late 1929 the ambitious newspaperman began entertaining thoughts of running for Congress from Minnesota's conservative Third District, made up at that time of the state's south-central counties. Standing in his way was Andresen, the formidable Republican incumbent who, like Shoemaker, lived in Red Wing. Shoemaker's anti-Andresen barrage opened with a story headed “A. H. Andresen Betrays People” that dealt with the congressman's support of the controversial Hawley-Smoot tariff bill. The lead was full of Shoemaker vitriol. “Running true to form, and according to the dictates of those who live by robbing the farmers, Aug. H. Andresen member of Congress from this district again stabbed the farmers whom he misrepresents, in the back.”⁷

Shoemaker withheld official announcement of his candidacy until the Goodhue County Farmer-Labor party, at its March convention, formally asked him to file. The *Organized Farmer* published the party's request and a photograph of Shoemaker, pointing out that he would oppose the “present incumbent, whose record is intolerable.” Shoemaker, along with compatriot Fred Scherf, the county's F-L chairman, was also selected as a delegate to the group's state convention.⁸

But Shoemaker's Red Wing enemies had an ace that they were more than ready to play as they attempted to discredit and deflect his candidacy. Word was leaked that Shoemaker was to be charged with a crime, the exact nature of which was not immediately disclosed. Less than a week after announcing in Goodhue County that he would run, Shoemaker told the F-L state convention that he was withdrawing. He charged that there was a politically motivated move against him and said, “I do not wish to embarrass the Farmer-Labor party by my candidacy for congress.”⁹

Details on the charges against Shoemaker were soon public. The day before the Farmer-Labor convention was to begin, he had been arrested in Red Wing by postal authorities and brought to St. Paul for arraignment on charges of sending scurrilous and defamatory material through the mails. After spending a night in the Ramsey County jail, Shoemaker was released on \$5,000 bond. He was accused of sending a letter to banker Robert W. Putnam, addressed to: “Robber of

⁵ Here and below, see Dyson, *Red Harvest*, 6–14, 37–38.

⁶ Here and below, see interview with Mildred Scherf, June 24, 1987, notes in author's possession; *Goodhue County Historical News*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1980, p. 3; *Organized Farmer*, Nov. 30, p. 4, Dec. 14, p. 8, 1928.

⁷ *Organized Farmer*, Dec. 27, 1929. The tariff bill, widely criticized in Europe, imposed high duties on agricultural and manufactured imports.

⁸ *Organized Farmer*, Mar. 7, 21, 1930.

⁹ *Minnesota Union Advocate* (St. Paul), April 3, 1930, p. 4.

'THIEF AT WHITE HOUSE' RUNS WILD

American Freeman June 25 Issue Confiscated By Crooks

Organized Farmer Again Investigated By Government Snoopers

A Hollow Sham • Talk

THIS HEADLINE provides a good example of Francis Shoemaker's hyperbolic rhetoric.

Widows and Orphans, Red Wing, Minn. in care of Temple of Greed and Chicanery." This unfriendly salutation had been noted by local postal authorities who then sought to have Shoemaker indicted.¹⁰

The Red Wing radical, quick to recover his political balance, reported undiminished support for his candidacy and re-entered the race for the House by mid-April. Shoemaker easily captured the June Farmer-Labor primary election, outpolling John Lyons of Le Sueur 1,675 to 116 and drawing more Third District votes than the F-L incumbent candidate for governor, Floyd B. Olson.¹¹

But Shoemaker's main target was to be Congressman Andresen who was also known in the *Organized Farmer* as the "jellyfish," "rodent," and "Wall Street tool." The Shoemaker campaign slogan became "Vote for me in November and make it the last of August." November's election proved that Third District voters clearly preferred Andresen. The Republicans could proudly recite the list of counties taken in the rout: Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Nicollet, Rice, Scott, Sibley, and Washington. It was a clean sweep for Andresen forces, but Shoemaker could take some solace in the fact that he had outpolled the Democratic nominee.¹²

FEDERAL authorities were waiting to deal with the defeated congressional candidate a month after the elections. He was summoned to St. Paul to face U.S. District Court Judge John B. Sanborn. The issue was Shoemaker's now-notorious letter to banker Putnam, addressed to the "Robber of Widows and Orphans." The usually outspoken editor was quiet in the courtroom; he had explained his position in the *Organized Farmer*. There, in language that was strong even by his extravagant standards, Shoemaker castigated the banker. He detailed Putnam's alleged mistreatment of widows and orphans and told of how his bank shattered homes. The story labeled Putnam a hypocrite, a Jekyll and Hyde, financial dictator, tyrant, trainer of his own congressmen, and dared the banker to sue.¹³

Judge Sanborn was not impressed. "You have been saying things about people which have no basis in fact," stated Sanborn. He said the defendant's actions would

AUGUST H.
ANDRESEN,
Republican
congressman,
about 1936



¹⁰ *Organized Farmer*, Dec. 26, 1930; *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 28, 1930. The exact envelope notation is from a Shoemaker speech in the *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 5507.

¹¹ *Organized Farmer*, June 20, 1930.

¹² *Organized Farmer*, July 4, 11, 18, Nov. 7, 1930; interview with Morris Callstrom, July 9, 1987, notes in author's possession; Bruce M. White, et al., *Minnesota Votes: Election Returns . . . 1857-1977* (St. Paul: MHS, 1977), 111.

¹³ *St. Paul Dispatch*, Dec. 29, 1930; *Organized Farmer*, June 27, 1930.



AN EARLY picture of John B. Sanborn, Jr., the judge who sentenced Shoemaker to prison

be "watched closely in the future" for signs of similar behavior. There being "no question of the guilt of the defendant," Sanborn assessed Shoemaker a fine of \$500 and a suspended sentence of a year and a day in the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth.¹⁴

Unrepentant, Shoemaker published his account of the trial in the *Organized Farmer's* December 26 edition. Under the headline "Shoemaker Gets Christmas Gift," he gave his version of the case, noting that Putnam had first written to him using an envelope addressed to F. H. Shoemaker "Any Place But" Red Wing, Minnesota. The story concluded by noting that the judge had not given Shoemaker the "customary opportunity" to address the court before his sentencing.

In St. Paul, Judge Sanborn was incensed by Shoemaker's newspaper account and ordered him returned to the court. Revoking the suspension of the original sentence, he ordered the now-chastened and conciliatory newspaperman to Leavenworth. Shoemaker pleaded for another chance but got no sympathy. Arthur Le Sueur, his attorney and a prominent leader of the Minnesota left, declared his satisfaction with Sanborn's fairness. "I was pleased with Your Honor's handling of the case and I have gone the limit with this man," said the attorney. "Now I will make no more promises."¹⁵

Shoemaker served nearly his entire term in Leavenworth. Released on November 4, 1931, he published his account of the imprisonment in the *Organized Farmer*, including two letters written by Judge Sanborn to the U.S. Board of Parole. In the earlier letter, Sanborn favored paroling Shoemaker, but his second letter withdrew that recommendation. To Shoemaker this proved that a conspiracy indeed existed.¹⁶

Shoemaker returned to editing the *Organized Farmer* and took to speaker stands throughout Goodhue County to attack old antagonists and rebuild a political base. The newspaper claimed that the former convict editor had addressed 14 meetings at "halls packed to capacity" in a little over a month after his release and that Shoemaker's "incarceration at Leavenworth has made him more popular."¹⁷

A new battle now faced the editor. Postal authorities claimed that the *Organized Farmer* had violated regulations and the newspaper's second-class mailing privileges were being revoked. Shoemaker charged that the postal investigation was instigated by Andresen and "Hoovercrats" who were trying to silence him. He maintained that loss of second-class mailing status would cause a tenfold increase in expenses and threaten the weekly's survival. Support for Shoemaker's paper produced some results: on April 7, Senator Henrik Shipstead reported that the postal authorities would restore second-class mailing privileges to the weekly. The senator noted, however, that this was a difficult matter and it would take time to get the job done. Time was something the newspaper did not have. By mid-summer it was all over. Crippled by a combination of a depression economy, business antipathy, and postal warfare, the *Organized Farmer* ceased publication.¹⁸

ON THE FACE OF IT, prospects would have appeared dim for the out-of-work ex-convict in the summer of 1932. The deepening depression was not only crippling the American economy, it was shattering the people's confidence in the nation and themselves. Such desperate conditions would provide lifelong radical Francis Shoemaker with increased credibility and growing support from a fearful and frustrated constituency.

The unemployed Shoemaker officially announced in May that he would again run for Congress, but Minnesota Secretary of State Mike Holm refused permission. He questioned the proposed candidacy since Shoemaker was a convicted felon. State Attorney General Henry N. Benson overruled Holm and allowed the Farmer-Labor candidate to file even though Shoemaker's civil rights were not yet fully restored.¹⁹

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¹⁴ *Dispatch*, Dec. 22, 1930.

¹⁵ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Dec. 30, 1930.

¹⁶ *Organized Farmer*, Dec. 25, 1931. Sanborn's letters are reprinted in *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 5508-5509.

¹⁷ *Organized Farmer*, Dec. 4, 11, 18, 25, 1931.

¹⁸ *Organized Farmer*, Feb. 5, p. 1, 4, April 15, 1932.

¹⁹ *Pioneer Press*, May 6, 1932, p. 3. Although the Minnesota constitution would have disenfranchised felons, the U.S. Constitution superseded that of a state; see U.S. Constitution, Article 1, sec. 2, clause 2.

Andresen, the incumbent congressman, was still keeping a weather eye on Shoemaker. The two had unfinished business dating back to the 1930 campaign when Shoemaker had charged the Republican with profiting illegally from the construction of the Hastings dam. Andresen denied the charge and had sued for slander. Proceedings against Shoemaker had been delayed by his stay in Leavenworth, but now an August trial date had been set for a Faribault courtroom.²⁰

Undeterred, Shoemaker continued his flourishing 1932 campaign, which gathered respectability and momentum when he finished among the top nine vote-getters in the statewide June primary. Nine qualifiers were needed because the congressional campaign was to be conducted with all candidates running at-large. According to the Farmer-Laborites, the at-large designation was the result of Republican gerrymandering during a Minnesota reapportionment battle. The *Minneapolis Labor Review* charged that August Andresen, with help from Republican allies in the legislature, was most responsible for the form taken by the redistricting. The legislature's plan brought a veto by Governor Olson. The veto was upheld in a state Supreme Court test on May 11, and an at-large congressional race was the result.²¹

Shoemaker's aggressive and reckless campaign style began drawing attention, both positive and negative. For example, in Clarkfield he knocked lumberyard manager Matt Quist unconscious after the two had words during a Shoemaker speech. In a Goodhue County talk Shoemaker claimed to have uncovered Washington's notorious Teapot Dome scandal by stealing Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall's briefcase. And the abrasive candidate achieved the questionable distinction of having a radio broadcast cut short because of its content. Officials at a Twin Cities radio station said Shoemaker was interrupted seven minutes into his quarter-hour speech because they felt "he made assertions that might be regarded as slanderous." Management reported that the candidate was scheduled to speak again on the station but would have to provide a text and follow it verbatim.²²

Party leaders in Stillwater would not allow Shoemaker to address a Farmer-Labor rally there, fearing he would damage other party speakers, including Gov-

GIVE SHIPSTEAD HELP

Support--Elect
Farmer-Labor
Candidates



Shoemaker FOR Congress

A 1930 campaign poster ironically placed Shoemaker in the camp of Henrik Shipstead, his future opponent.

ernor Olson. H. O. Peterson, a Farmer-Labor newspaper editor, said the city still remembered an encounter during the 1930 campaign when Shoemaker had "crashed" the high school, entering classrooms, distributing campaign materials, and refusing to leave until the school principal pointed to a "bunch of husky foot ball [sic] players who were anxious to make a touch down [sic] with him." Peterson reported that Shoemaker left shouting, "An agent of Wall Street orders me out." "To several thousand people in Stillwater," Peterson wrote, "the name Shoemaker is poison."²³

One major roadblock in Shoemaker's path was cleared in August when he was found innocent of the 1930 campaign charge that he had slandered August Andresen. Shoemaker took the stand after four witnesses, including Andresen, had testified. Under questioning from his attorney, soon-to-be Minneapolis mayor Thomas Latimer, the defendant claimed that Andresen worked for "big interests" and had voted on both sides of several issues in Congress. He denied saying that the congressman was making a profit on each barrel of cement used at the Hastings dam project, but did say that Andresen had helped friends in securing

²⁰ *Pioneer Press*, Aug. 17, 1932; *Organized Farmer*, April 29, 1932.

²¹ *Minneapolis Labor Review*, July 1, 1932, p. 2. On reapportionment, see White, *et al.*, *Minnesota Votes*, 6; *Minnesota, Legislative Manual*, 1933, p. 546.

²² *Dispatch*, Oct. 6, 1932; interview with Lyle Kinvig, June 24, 1987, notes in author's possession; *Pioneer Press*, Nov. 3, 1932.

²³ H. O. Peterson to H. G. Creel, undated, but likely June, 1933, H. O. Peterson Papers, MHS.

the cement contract for the dam. Shoemaker's closing statement lasted nearly three-quarters of an hour. The five-man Faribault jury took 20 minutes to find the defendant not guilty.²⁴

NOVEMBER's early election returns indicated a triumph for Farmer-Laborites as the party, led by Governor Olson, captured all but two state offices. And for the first time it appeared that the F-Lers might claim a majority of seats in Minnesota's congressional delegation. It was clear that Farmer-Labor candidates Magnus Johnson, Paul J. Kvale, Henry Arens, and Ernest Lundeen would be among the top four finishers. Former governor Theodore Christianson, Jr., was the number-one Republican vote-getter, followed by Democrat Einar Hoidale and another Republican, Ray P. Chase. The race for the two remaining at-large seats was wide open, with Francis Shoemaker battling Republicans Harold Knutson and August Andresen for one of the last positions.²⁵

By Saturday, returns showed Andresen ahead and widening his lead over Shoemaker and Knutson, but the outstate support upon which Shoemaker relied was still coming in. Monday found Shoemaker surging past the others and moving out of their reach. Leading by more than 1,200 votes with just 30 precincts still out, the Farmer-Laborite was elected. He finished in eighth position, while Knutson edged Andresen for the final congressional seat.²⁶

The congressman-elect began preparations for the move to Washington, D.C., by setting up a Minneapolis headquarters, but controversy followed him to the Twin Cities. In this case Shoemaker reported being straitjacketed, handcuffed, and beaten in a Minneapolis hospital. The bizarre incident centered around a report from Shoemaker that he had been taken, while unconscious and under medication for a tooth extraction, to a Minneapolis hospital. When he awakened he protested that he was in the wrong hospital and demanded his release. In the commotion that followed, Shoemaker claimed that seven orderlies attacked him. Hospital officials reported a confrontation with Shoemaker, adding that they called for police to assist.²⁷

Shoemaker did not let the incident drop. He went to Governor Olson's office, stripped to the waist in front of reporters to display bruises, and demanded an investigation. Shoemaker declared that he had no trouble in escaping the handcuffs because he had once been a neighbor of the magician Harry Houdini. "I used to live near him and he taught me all the tricks," he claimed.

Three days after the Minneapolis hospital incident Shoemaker was in a new hospital bed and back in the newspapers. The congressman-elect was admitted to the Fort Snelling veterans hospital, drawing fire from

state veterans groups in the process. It was charged that Shoemaker was never in the service and that the politician was taking space that could be used by a disabled veteran. It was all "according to Hoyle," Shoemaker contended from the hospital. He went on to explain that he had gone into the army at Camp Grant, Illinois, and served for six days. He then injured an ankle while falling from a carload of lumber he was unloading and was given a medical discharge. "All this heat about my admission is coming from August Andresen. He can't take a licking gracefully," Shoemaker declared. The controversy ended when the congressman-elect left the hospital after a week's stay.²⁸

Five weeks later, upon arrival in Washington, Shoemaker found new conflict waiting. His right to claim his seat was challenged by California representative, Albert E. Carter, who maintained that the Minnesotan's felony conviction made him ineligible for the office. Carter also noted that Shoemaker "brazenly and flauntingly refers proudly to his conviction and imprisonment as a badge of distinction." Minnesota F-L representative Paul Kvale and North Dakota liberal William Lemke led Shoemaker's defense on the House floor. Shoemaker sat in the rear of the chamber smiling in appreciation. When the matter came to a vote, he received overwhelming support and was sworn.²⁹

Once in the House of Representatives, Shoemaker showed little interest in initiating legislation but instead used the national forum to go after old Minnesota political enemies. In June he presented a lengthy summation of his grievances in a speech titled "My Judicial Crucifixion—How a Judicial Oligarchy Railroaded Me to a Penitentiary." He vilified his enemies as "ravenous fiends" and "alley rats" and bombastically concluded by demanding that Congress clean up the rotten judicial system and end the persecution by public officials "compared to whom Judas Iscariot would be a prince and a benefactor."³⁰

In July, Shoemaker cleaned up some business of his

²⁴ *Pioneer Press*, Aug. 17, 1932.

²⁵ *Red Wing Daily Republican*, Nov. 10, 1932; White, *et al.*, *Minnesota Votes*, 119.

²⁶ *Daily Republican*, Nov. 12, 1932; *Legislative Manual*, 1933, p. 201.

²⁷ Here and below, see *Dispatch*, Jan. 25, April 19, 1933. A possible explanation of Shoemaker's behavior exists in persistent rumors that followed him throughout his career about his drinking; Kinvig interview, June 24, 1987.

²⁸ *Pioneer Press*, Feb. 2, 1933; *Dispatch*, Feb. 2, 1933, p. 8. According to the Veterans' Administration, Shoemaker did enter the army in January, 1919.

²⁹ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 71-74, 132-135.

³⁰ *Congressional Record*, 73rd Cong., 1st sess., 1933, p. 5506-5511. During his tenure, Shoemaker introduced only eight bills, five of them for relief of individual constituents.



SENATOR HENRIK SHIPSTEAD, speaking at a political gathering during the 1930s

³¹ *Time Magazine*, July 17, 1933, p. 11. Despite his notoriety there is little indication that his behavior caused embarrassment or concern back home in Minnesota. Perhaps the fact that he ran as an at-large candidate and not as a representative of a particular district helped to insulate him. The editorial pages of Twin Cities daily newspapers were devoid of comment on his activities until his open split with Shipstead in July, 1934.

³² *Minneapolis Tribune*, Aug. 12, 1933.

³³ *Dispatch*, Aug. 16, 1933, p. 1, 5; *Pioneer Press*, Nov. 7, 1933.

³⁴ *Dispatch*, Feb. 15, 1934, p. 4.

own when he went to the White House to receive from President Franklin D. Roosevelt a pardon for his 1930 conviction. In the process the congressman also picked up a pardon for his secretary, Franklin T. Wolf, a Leavenworth acquaintance. "Not only am I the only ex-convict in Congress," boasted the Minnesotan, "but the only man to emerge from the White House with two pardons as well."³¹

BY THE END of the first term of the Congress, Francis Shoemaker was contemplating an aggressive and dangerous political move. The freshman congressman was readying a challenge to fellow Farmer-Laborite and incumbent Minnesota senator, Henrik Shipstead. Banking on Shipstead's unpopularity with the party left and personally alienated by the conservative stance of the senator, Shoemaker had decided to act. He returned to Minneapolis in late summer and commenced his drive to supplant Shipstead. He was quickly in the news, but once again for police, not political, matters. In August he got into an early morning row with workmen who were using an acetylene torch outside his Hotel Ritz room. Shoemaker confronted the men and then smashed six of their lanterns at the job site. The lantern basher was arrested but was later released. All charges were dropped.³²

On the political front Shoemaker went after Shipstead in typical two-fisted style, but the careless oratory that had seemed acceptable from an out-of-work radical did not wear as well on a United States congressman. In August he fired a brief salvo at Shipstead during an American Legion convention in St. Cloud, moving one conventiongoer to yell, "We don't want any political gas attacks." Shoemaker was jeered at an important November meeting of war veterans, agriculturists, and labor representatives in the state capitol when he attacked Republicans, Roosevelt, and Shipstead. Wanting his turn to speak, Shoemaker shouted, "Who wants to listen to that blah blah? You can't keep a United States congressman waiting like this."³³

Shoemaker's attacks on Senator Shipstead shifted into high gear in February of 1934, a month before the Farmer-Labor convention. The congressman mailed a letter to all F-L county conventions indicating that he would be a candidate for the senate nomination unless Governor Olson was drafted into the race.³⁴

Preparations for the formal announcement of Shoemaker's candidacy and his plans for the March Farmer-Labor convention were sidetracked when the congressman became enmeshed in a controversy concerning his fight with a Washington, D.C., cab driver. Witnesses reported seeing Shoemaker ram into the back of a cab stopped at a traffic light and push it through the intersection. Then, Shoemaker reportedly approached the taxi driver and punched him in the face. Policeman

Herman Cook quoted Shoemaker as saying, "Yes I hit him and I'll kill him." When asked by the policeman for his identity, Shoemaker replied that he was a congressman known to everybody in Washington. He drove away but was later arrested by police.³⁵

Publicity from the incident was bad, even by Shoemaker's standards. The press pinned him with labels such as "Statesman Shoemaker," "I am a Congressman," and "You can't arrest Shoemaker." The case dragged on for two months, with trial lawyer and Wisconsin Congressman Raymond J. Cannon defending Shoemaker. An April trial resulted in a hung jury and a second trial set for May at which Shoemaker did not appear. Cannon withdrew, protesting his client's irresponsible tactics.³⁶

Throughout March and April, Shoemaker was fighting a two-front war—one in Washington against the cab driver and one in Minnesota against Henrik Shipstead. Back in his home state, the congressman's secretary made his boss's entry into the senate race official by filing Shoemaker's name with the secretary of state on March 10.³⁷

Henrik Shipstead refused to be goaded into a battle with Shoemaker, preferring to ignore his antagonist's sniping. Stanley Marshall, secretary of the Hennepin County F-L association, wrote to the senator on February 28, urging a reply to Shoemaker. Shipstead answered that he had "never stooped to discuss scurrilous and unfounded attacks upon my character" and added that he hoped his friends would "not permit our enemies to force a campaign of personal vilification and slander." Serenely steering his campaign along the high road, Shipstead declined the advice of supporters that he pre-empt the expected attacks by Shoemaker. The St. Paul F-L association on March 10 asked Shipstead to pledge support for the entire party ticket; the senator refused to make a blanket endorsement, reserving the right to judge the caliber of candidates.³⁸

It was soon apparent to Shoemaker that he did not have the immediate support needed to wrest the Farmer-Labor nomination from Shipstead, so he developed another plan. Arriving in the Twin Cities the day before the convention, he delivered a radio address announcing a pre-emptive attack. A banner headline in the St. Paul *Pioneer Press* on March 27 told the story: "Shoemaker Asks Ban on F-L Indorsements." In his talk the congressman stated that making endorsements was something "the Republican Party did." He asked his party to allow the voters to decide the F-L nominee through a primary. And he also made note of his legal troubles in Washington and referred to his "pugilistic proclivities." Shoemaker claimed he was the victim of a "frameup in Washington," saying that he had not struck the taxi driver and asserting that the cabman was "not a taxi driver but the middleweight champion

of the Marines, sent out to give me a nice trimming."

Shoemaker's position seemed tenuous at best, but the door to control of the convention appeared to open following a political mistake by Governor Olson. The governor stirred the party faithful with his ringing "I am a radical" speech in which he declared that he wanted a "definite change in the capitalist system" and that he would not be satisfied with tinkering or patching that system. The governor and his secretary, Vince Day, then left the floor, in effect abdicating control of the convention.³⁹

Shoemaker advanced to the podium shortly after Governor Olson had finished speaking and launched into a 45-minute tirade that sent a damaging broadside into the Shipstead camp. It was, perhaps, the most important speech the radical congressman had ever delivered, and it nearly torpedoed the candidacy of Henrik Shipstead. He excoriated the Farmer-Labor senator for failure to support the party and making secret deals with the Republicans. He maintained that Shipstead missed over 1,000 senate roll calls and had never used the name Farmer-Labor on the floor of the senate.⁴⁰

"Who made Shipstead?" asked Shoemaker. "The Mahoneys, the Van Lears, the Carlgrens, Starkeys, Stagebergs, Welchs, Townleys and the Shoemakers," he answered. He charged that the senator had been unfaithful to those Farmer-Labor leaders who had worked for him before and during his 12 years in the Senate. He noted that the senator had drawn over \$100,000 in salary and his wife, as his secretary, a fourth that much, yet had refused to give any to the party newspaper.

The challenger claimed that Shipstead was "not a member of the Farmer-Labor association, so how can you indorse him under your constitution?" Continuing, Shoemaker charged, "He is a Republican not a Farmer-Laborite. We have no representative in the Senate." Shoemaker concluded with a pledge: "I will be the next senator from Minnesota."⁴¹

The convention floor erupted with a roar of applause as the radical congressman stepped from the microphone, and the response temporarily unsettled Shipstead's campaign managers. Shoemaker's cannonade

³⁵ *Dispatch*, April 4, 1934, p. 1, 12.

³⁶ *Pioneer Press*, April 5, 1934, p. 1, 3; *Dispatch*, May 7, 1934, p. 2.

³⁷ *Dispatch*, Mar. 10, 1934.

³⁸ Sister Mary Rene Lorentz, "Henrik Shipstead, Minnesota Independent, 1923-1946" (Ph.D. thesis, Catholic University of America, 1963), 47-48.

³⁹ Millard L. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 187-192.

⁴⁰ Here and below, see *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 28, 1934, p. 1, 2.

⁴¹ *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 28, 1934, p. 1, 2.

against the senator struck an emotional chord with the conventiongoers, but the senator's proponents were able successfully to put down the mutiny against the incumbent. In a 2 A.M. showdown, Robley D. (Red) Cramer, editor of the *Minneapolis Labor Review*, led a strong defense of Shipstead and helped secure a narrow endorsement for the conservative Farmer-Laborite.⁴²

THE ERRATIC congressman's try for Shipstead's senate seat was interrupted when Shoemaker again encountered difficulty with the law. Twice during the month of May Shoemaker was arrested by Minneapolis police, embarrassing the party and attracting ridicule to his candidacy. A high-speed car chase down Hennepin Avenue on May 5 was at the heart of the first case. But Shoemaker became involved in a more significant issue—the Minneapolis truckers' strike of 1934. Minneapolis Teamster Local 574, under the leadership of mil-

itant Trotskyites, had decided to take on the city's Citizen's Alliance (CA), an association of industrialists, merchants, and lawyers. Formed during World War I, the alliance had been instrumental in keeping Minneapolis an "open-shop" town, and the teamsters had decided to challenge its dominance. The truckers' strike of May, 1934, led to a violent confrontation, and the ensuing battle became a landmark event in the history of the Minnesota labor movement. Shoemaker would be in the middle of it.⁴³

Early in the labor dispute the congressman convinced Judge Fred B. Wright to issue a 3 A.M. blanket bond and release 76 imprisoned strikers. Then, on May 21, Shoemaker took an active part in the picketing and was arrested by Minneapolis police. After posting a \$200 bail and being released, Shoemaker complained that he had been "manhandled" by police. In the midst of this Shoemaker found himself without his car. Sheriff John Wall seized the auto to satisfy a \$586 judgment against the congressman who had borrowed and not repaid that amount back in his newspaper days.⁴⁴

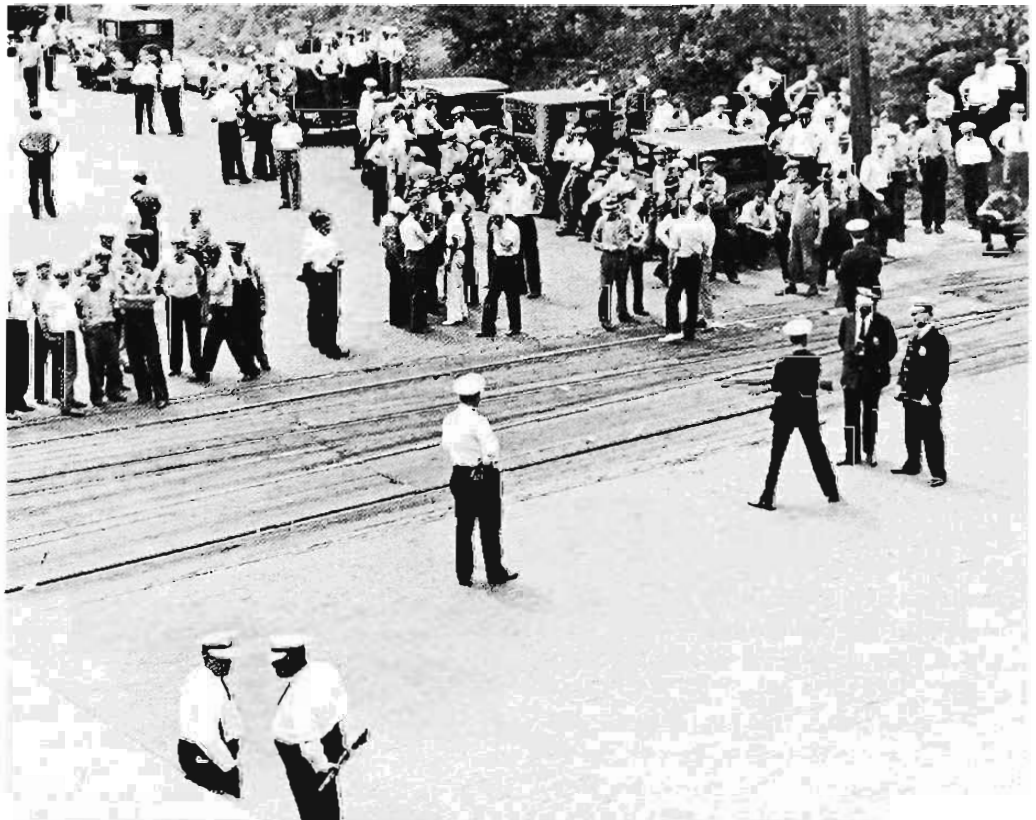
Shoemaker's trial for disorderly conduct was held the following day in Judge Wright's courtroom. The congressman claimed he was in the market area at the request of Governor Olson and also as a representative of the people. Mose Winthrop, attorney for the defense, challenged police witnesses to no avail. Shoe-

⁴² Gieske, *Farmer-Laborism*, 169–191; *Pioneer Press*, Mar. 29, 1934. In 1940 Shipstead moved to the Republican party.

⁴³ *Minneapolis Journal*, May 6, 1934, p. 1, 2; Lois Quam and Peter J. Rachleff, "Keeping Minneapolis an Open-Shop Town: The Citizen's Alliance in the 1930s," *Minnesota History* 50 (Fall, 1986): 105–117.

⁴⁴ *Journal*, May 19, 1934, p. 2; *Pioneer Press*, May 22, 1934; *Dispatch*, May 22, 1934.

STRIKING TRUCK
drivers face
Minneapolis armed
police during a tense
confrontation in
May, 1934.



maker was found guilty and given 10 days or a \$50 fine. Sentence was stayed until July 2 in view of the congressman's candidacy for the senate.⁴⁵

Although he was committed to the union's cause, Shoemaker soon drew the ire of Local 574 leadership. When two special police deputies were killed during the strike, Dan Tobin, national head of the labor organization, sent a telegram to the Minneapolis leadership asking that they seek arbitration. Shoemaker spied the Tobin telegram while at strike headquarters and took it upon himself to issue an insulting reply. "Keep your scabby nose and scaly face out," telegraphed Shoemaker. "This is a fight for human rights. Your rat job not involved." Shoemaker then signed the name of local strike leader Bill Brown to the dispatch.⁴⁶

Union leaders, who felt that Shoemaker had proven irresponsible and exhibitionist before the telegram to Tobin, were disgusted with his performance. They declared strike headquarters "off limits" to the congressman and officially repudiated Shoemaker's actions. Tobin accepted their explanation, although the Minneapolis leadership felt the incident added to Tobin's grudge against Local 574.

Shoemaker was also having his court troubles. He was found guilty of failure to stop in the May 5 car chase and fined \$75. The congressman returned to court on July 3, stating he had no money for the \$75 fine and asking for and receiving a stay of his sentence. Two days later he was in municipal court paying a \$50 fine levied for his actions during the truckers' strike.⁴⁷

Jail loomed once more for the congressman before he could get his Minneapolis legal problems behind him. Shoemaker failed to appear in traffic court when his continuance was up on August 6. The judge promptly issued a bench warrant and ordered Shoemaker to jail to begin serving his 30-day workhouse term. The congressman appeared in court the following day, indicating that he had intended to pay on time but had not recalled the clerk of court's name and made out the check improperly. The fine was paid and the jail stay canceled.⁴⁸

Despite his problems with the Minneapolis police and judiciary, Shoemaker continued to pound away at Senator Shipstead, still hoping to muster support for the primary election. During a speech in Windom on May 6, he lampooned Shipstead, saying, "He was a gas pumping dentist when I first knew him. He pumped enough gas to put him in the Senate." The congressman also slammed Roosevelt and his programs. "The NRA, AAA, CWA, and REA are going to end in a big I.O.U."⁴⁹

Five days before the June primary, he drew a large crowd in Willmar and treated them to a three-hour attack on Shipstead. He added to his list of Shipstead synonyms such names as "Judas," "big hunk of cheese,"

"grafter," and "yellow." With profanity and occasional spitting on the floor, the congressman ripped into the senator. The *Willmar Weekly Tribune* of June 13 called the speech "largely an entertainment." On June 16, Knud Wefald, the state railroad and warehouse commissioner, charged that Shoemaker had threatened him with political extinction if he spoke in favor of Senator Shipstead. Shoemaker answered the Wefald attack, saying that he would "tell about the fourteen relatives Wefald has on the payroll, all the outlaws and inlaws, to make a government of, by and for the Wefalds."⁵⁰

Shoemaker kept swinging, but his punches did not damage Shipstead. The congressman was crushed by a three-to-one margin in the primary, suffering elimination as a serious challenger. There were other signs in the results of the primary. The Democratic party, which had been for 15 years virtually moribund in Minnesota, made a strong comeback. Although the Farmer-Laborites could claim 39.3 percent of the vote, the Democrats were just a step behind at 37.4 percent. The days of the Farmer-Labor party as a strong, independent third party were numbered. It was the same for Francis Shoemaker.⁵¹

Critics of the congressman now took some shots of their own. After his drubbing in the primary, Shoemaker reported that a European news agency wanted him as a correspondent. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* commented editorially on the congressman's possible journey overseas: "Never have the citizens of the state more anxiously and passionately desired to believe the Congressman's word." The editorial maintained that the only thing more gratifying than the agency's proposal to send Shoemaker to Europe, "would be its offer to send him some place farther away."⁵²

SHOEMAKER'S personal and political fortunes began a steady decline following his primary loss to Shipstead. Lydgia, his wife of 22 years, filed for divorce in August of 1934. Except for some brief time spent in Washington with her husband, Mrs. Shoemaker had remained near her New London, Wisconsin, home where she operated a beauty parlor. The divorce was granted on September 3, 1934, with grounds listed as cruelty and infidelity.⁵³

⁴⁵ *Pioneer Press*, May 24, 1934, p. 1, 3.

⁴⁶ Here and below, see Dobbs, *Teamster Rebellion*, 88, 89.

⁴⁷ *Dispatch*, July 3, 5, 1934.

⁴⁸ *Dispatch*, Aug. 7, 1934.

⁴⁹ *Pioneer Press*, May 7, 1934, p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Dispatch*, June 16, 1934, p. 1, 3.

⁵¹ Gieske, *Farmer-Laborism*, 193, 194.

⁵² *Pioneer Press*, July 30, 1934, p. 6.

⁵³ *Time Magazine*, Aug. 6, p. 40, Sept. 3, p. 57, 1934; Scherf interview, June 24, 1987.

With just over a month until the fall elections, Shoemaker moved to Duluth and filed as an independent candidate for Congress in the new Eighth District. Shoemaker had remembered the support he had received in the area during the 1932 at-large election. He ran well but only succeeded in splitting the Farmer-Labor vote with A. L. Winterquist while Republican William A. Pittenger won the election.⁵⁴

Undeterred, the ex-congressman would run unsuccessfully in the next four congressional elections, with the most interesting contest a 1936 primary battle with John Bernard. Eighth District Farmer-Labor leaders felt that Shoemaker, who had again filed as an F-L member, had no chance to beat incumbent Pittenger and convinced Bernard to run. Meanwhile, Pittenger, appalled at the prospect of facing Shoemaker in another congressional contest, contributed money through an intermediary to opponent Bernard's campaign. Bernard defeated Shoemaker in the primary by just over 2,000 votes and went on to win in the general election.⁵⁵

In 1938, Shoemaker returned to his roots in southwestern Minnesota where he challenged Paul Kvale, the man who had helped champion his cause during the congressional seating controversy in 1933. Again, Shoemaker put on a good showing but lost the primary by a vote count of 25,949 to 20,687.⁵⁶

The 1940 election found Shoemaker facing two Farmer-Labor challengers in the party primary. This time he finished a poor third to Harold L. Peterson and Kvale as signs of F-L weakness became more evident. In 1942 Shoemaker won the party nomination, but that distinction no longer carried much weight. Republican H. Carl Andersen easily won the congressional seat with 46,570 votes followed by Democrat Theodor S. Slen with 21,192. Shoemaker mustered only 17,241.

⁵⁴ Minnesota, *Legislative Manual*, 1935, p. 379.

⁵⁵ Barbara Stuhler, "The Man Who Voted Nay: The Story of John T. Bernard's Quarrel with American Foreign Policy, 1937-39," *Minnesota History* 43 (Fall, 1972): 84-85.

⁵⁶ Here and below, see Minnesota, *Legislative Manual*, 1939, p. 200, 1941, p. 213, 1943, p. 258, 451-452.

⁵⁷ *Dispatch*, Aug. 3, 1935, p. 1, 5, Oct. 7, 1938; *Pioneer Press*, Sept. 29, p. 6, Nov. 28, p. 3, 1939.

⁵⁸ *Dispatch*, June 18, 1946; *Pioneer Press*, July 28, 1950, p. 13.

⁵⁹ *Biographical Directory of the American Congress*, 1692-1693.

If election eluded him, controversy did not. Francis Shoemaker was still having trouble with his cars and his fists. In August, 1935, he got into a fight in Minneapolis after his car was rear-ended by another; an altercation near his Redwood Falls farm in October, 1938, resulted in his being arrested, taken to the county jail, and fined \$10 for assault. In September, 1939, Shoemaker was charged and later found guilty of attacking and knocking a neighboring farmer unconscious, despite his argument that the neighbor had come at him with a club.⁵⁷

Shoemaker was still dabbling in politics during the postwar years. In 1946 he tried for a comeback in the Seventh District as a Republican, a move full of irony for those who remembered the creative skills he used to castigate the GOP in the 1930s. He had now run for Congress under three labels: Farmer-Labor, Independent, and Republican. Then, in July, 1950, he completed the circuit by filing for the Seventh District's congressional seat as a Democrat. His efforts again went unrewarded.⁵⁸

Demagogue or drunkard, crusader or charlatan, good guy or gadfly, Shoemaker did reflect the restlessness and unease of the early 1930s. He appealed to the widening circle of have-nots in the voting population at a time when many Americans were ready for radical solutions. Shoemaker's espousal of ideas such as those promoted by the Nonpartisan League and the Progressive Farmers of America enhanced his public identity as champion of the underdog. He clearly benefited from the reapportionment that resulted in the at-large election in 1932.

The emotional, divisive speech Shoemaker made at the 1934 F-L convention was perhaps a fitting farewell from the party radical. His broad, ineffectual attacks on Republicans, Democrats, and his own party comrades ultimately crippled his attempts to further his own political career, sending him down to two decades of defeat. Shoemaker died in a Minneapolis hospital on July 25, 1958, at age 69. He was buried not far from his Renville County birthplace in Flora Township's Zion Cemetery.⁵⁹

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