

GAA PAA

A Scandinavian Voice of Dissent

“Socialism is coming,” the radical Minnesota newspaper *Gaa Paa* (Press Forward) announced optimistically on its front page following the election of 1910. This Norwegian-language socialist weekly became a strong voice of dissent in the state, and for more than two decades—1903 to 1925—it added fuel to Minnesota’s tradition of insurgency and reform. *Gaa Paa*’s agitation and influence had an impact on the emergence and character of the Farmer-Labor movement of the 1920s. Its prediction of 1910 illustrated the strong conviction of idealists such as Emil Lauritz Mengshoel, *Gaa Paa*’s founder and editor, who envisioned the creation of a new and just society; their program of reform was destined to triumph, they believed, because it addressed the major inequities in society. Failure was beyond their contemplation; they viewed socialism as the natural and inevi-

table progression of American life. *Gaa Paa* even calculated in 1910 that “the Red Banner” had moved 70 percent closer to its goal of destroying capitalism.¹

The newspaper echoed the optimism encouraged by the steady growth of the Socialist party of America since its founding in 1901. Ethnic working-class communities in Minnesota gave major support, and expanded labor activity strengthened the political left, which was further fortified by persistent farmer discontent. On a national level, the 1912 election brought 1,200 public servants into office on the ticket of the Socialist party. The surge of support for socialism gave *Gaa Paa* an impressive circulation of 5,000 by 1912, and the election of 1914 moved Norwegian-born Andrew O. Devold of Minneapolis into the Minnesota legislature. He was only the second socialist representative in the state, following Swedish-born Nels S. Hillman from Two Harbors, who had represented the socialists, or the Public Ownership party, from 1910 until 1914. Devold was by 1914 listed as editor and publisher of *Gaa Paa* together with Emil Mengshoel, who by marriage in 1899 to Devold’s mother, Helle Crøger, became his stepfather and moved young Devold into the newspaper venture.²

¹ *Gaa Paa*, Nov. 28, 1910. All English-language translations from Norwegian sources in this article are the author’s. This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the “Voices of Dissent” conference, St. Paul, May 20, 1989.

² *Legislative Manual of the State of Minnesota*, 1911, p. 503, 695, 1913, p. 354–355, 670, 1915, p. 686; *Gaa Paa*, Nov. 7, 1914; Odd-Stein Granhus, “A Socialist among Norwegian-Americans: Emil Lauritz Mengshoel, Newspaper Publisher and Author” (cand. philol. thesis, University of Oslo, 1988), 51–52. *Folkets Røst* (successor to *Gaa Paa*) explained in its Aug. 5, 1922, issue that “in Minnesota the [Socialist] party leaders were so cautious that they gave the state party the awkward name ‘Public Ownership Party’ from an exaggerated consideration of the biased ignorance that existed among farmers and workers frightened by the Socialist name.”

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Odd S. Lovoll



Nels S. Hillman, representative from district 51

This was also a period when ethnic socialist leaders displaced old-stock American centrist and conservative socialists. Federations, such as the Scandinavian Socialist Union (Skandinaviske Socialistforbund), organized in Chicago in 1910 by Scandinavian socialist clubs from all over the United States, strengthened the position of the foreign-language groups within the Socialist party and mobilized them to greater political activity. But the party's viability was brief. There was a decline in membership from its height of 118,000 in 1912. Its political influence was effectively contravened in 1919 with a rebellion on its left wing and a splintering caused by the formation of two Communist parties. The Socialist party, however, had gained strength through organizational consolidation; between 1910 and 1919 it consequently acted with some success in the national and local political arenas, and it left a legacy of strong reform urges.³

Scandinavian workers, farmers, and intellectuals, many of them participants in earlier reform crusades, joined the mass movement of the left. *Gaa Paa* represented the Dano-Norwegian voice of the American So-

cialist party. The launching of *Gaa Paa* was closely associated with the radical newspaper enterprises of J. A. Wayland: the *Coming Nation*, begun in 1893 in Greensburg, Indiana, and *Appeal to Reason*, published from 1897 in Girard, Kansas. These two publications reached unprecedented circulations for socialist organs in the United States. They were a part of a movement that expressed itself in the founding of socialist colonies and the formation of socialist clubs and societies.⁴

Wayland exhibited strong proclivities toward northern European immigrants; he expressed clear antipathies toward Catholics. This bias would alienate him from major constituents of the expanding working class, consisting of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe; simultaneously, it allied him with Scandinavian workers. It obviously complicated the idea of worker solidarity.

Wayland decided to attempt the publication of a Scandinavian socialist newspaper for the American scene and in 1903 invited Mengshoel, a contributor to *Appeal to Reason*, to Girard to undertake this task. Mengshoel previously had edited the radical Populist organ *Nye Normanden* (New Norseman) in Minneapolis and was then editor of *Republikaneren* (The Republican) in Lake Mills, Iowa. Though a professed atheist, he shared Wayland's anti-Catholicism, which historian Lowell Soike has called "the central impulse of Norwegian-American political behavior in America." When the editor arrived, however, Wayland had changed his mind about publishing the newspaper himself, but he gave generous assistance to Mengshoel and his wife, Helle Crøger Mengshoel, a major coworker in the venture. They were able to get out the first issue of *Gaa Paa* on November 29 that same year.⁵

³ James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967), 27; Odd S. Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930* (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association [NAHA], 1988), 268-269; Hyman Berman, "Mr. Wilson's War and Mr. Lenin's Revolution: Minnesota Labor and Radicals Enter the Twentieth Century" (Paper delivered at "Voices of Dissent" conference, St. Paul, May 20, 1989).

⁴ Here and below, see Elliott Shore, *Talkin' Socialism: J. A. Wayland and the Role of the Press in American Radicalism, 1890-1912* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 55, 75-76, 194; Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 301; Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 175-209; Lowell J. Soike, "Norwegian-Americans and the Politics of Dissent, 1880-1924" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 1979), 84.

⁵ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 31-32, 34, 38; Shore, *Talkin' Socialism*, 194.

THE LIFE STORY of Emil Mengshoel and the existing misinformation surrounding it have been clarified in an excellent academic thesis at the University of Oslo in Norway by Odd-Stein Granhus. Mengshoel's formative years were difficult ones. He was born out of wedlock in 1866 at the small town of Gjøvik on the shores of Lake Mjøsa to a 42-year-old widow of low social status and an irresponsible man 20 years her junior, a younger son from the large Mengshoel farm close by. From the time he was ten years old, Emil lived there under the stigma of illegitimacy.⁶

At age 18 he escaped from this unfortunate situation and enrolled in the school for noncommissioned officers in the nation's capital, Christiania (present-day Oslo), from which he graduated in 1887. While a student he witnessed the brutal use of military units to break up strikes by workers, and he was attracted to the socialist ideas and protests against the use of such force that were spread by the newspaper *Vort Arbeide* (Our Labor). This was the initial organ of the trade unions in the capital, which were strongly influenced by socialist ideology. *Vort Arbeide* was distributed in the barracks where the students lived, and its message of class struggle and social injustice was well received by the students, who mainly came from the lower classes.⁷

Mengshoel removed himself further from unfortunate circumstances in 1888 by going to sea, where he experienced the maltreatment commonly the lot of ordinary sailors. His experience clearly influenced his sense of social inequities, and later, when a newspaper publisher, it provided him with a maritime terminology. Among other things, Mengshoel referred to *Gaa Paa* as the cannon boat, himself and staff as captain and crew, and subscription payments as ballast; contributors adopted similar metaphors. Like many other discontented sailors, Mengshoel jumped ship in Pensacola, Florida, in 1891 to begin a new life in America. And, like many of his immigrant countrymen with an intellectual and cultural bent but lacking previous experience or training, he eventually entered Norwegian-American journalism. Mengshoel made his way to the Norwegian Midwest, spent some years in Sioux City, Iowa, where among other occupational pursuits he contributed articles to the Norwegian-language *Sioux*

City Tidende (Times). In late 1896 he moved from there to Minneapolis. From 1897 until 1903 when he left for Girard, Mengshoel expressed his social and political radicalism in the columns of *Nye Normanden*, which had been started by Hans A. Foss in Moorhead in 1894 and moved to Minneapolis the following year.

Foss edited the radical Populist paper himself, but for about two years Olav Kringen served as contributing editor before he returned to his native Norway in 1897 and became a leading personality in the Norwegian labor party and editor of its official organ, *Social Demokraten* (The Social Democrat), the successor to *Vort Arbeide*. Mengshoel was made coeditor of *Nye Normanden* in September, 1899, but because of the absence of Foss, he actually functioned as the paper's editor from that time and until May, 1902, when Laurits Stavnheim, another Norwegian-American socialist journalist, assumed editorial responsibility. It is revealing of trans-Atlantic connections that leading Norwegian politicians on the left directly experienced political

Helle Crøger and Emil Lauritz Mengshoel at the time of their marriage, 1899



⁶ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 8-13; Aksel Zachariassen, *Fra Marcus Thrane til Martin Tranmæl. Det norske Arbeiderparti fram til 1945* (Oslo, Norway: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 1977), 71-72.

⁷ Here and below, see Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 25; Johs. B. Wist, *Norsk-amerikanernes festskrift 1914* (Decorah, Iowa: The Symra Company, 1914), 124-125, 128-129; Dirk Hoerder, ed., *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s-1970s, An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 1:193.

dissent in America before engaging in reform efforts at home. Kringen would later contribute to *Gaa Paa*, especially during its final years, and he conducted personal correspondence with the Mengshoels. He thereby allied *Gaa Paa* with the moderate reform wing of the Norwegian Labor party, to which he belonged, which advocated social-democratic processes. Kringen's contributions are further evidence of an exchange of impulses between political idealists in Norway and the United States and suggest a direct influence exerted on Norwegian-American Farmer-Laborism by Norwegian labor leaders.⁸

Helle Crøger Mengshoel's career and that of her son Andrew O. Devold are another facet of this trans-Atlantic connection, indicative of how political thinking and experience from the homeland combined with local and national conditions in the United States to affect the political climate of the state. Helle Crøger was born into a distinguished family in Bergen, Norway, in 1860, Emil Mengshoel's senior by six years. She married Niels Devold, of a prominent family of textile mill own-

ers in Ålesund in 1878, and they moved to Christiania in 1887. The two had three children before Helle in 1890 separated from and eventually divorced her husband. In 1893 Helle moved to America with her children, settling in Minneapolis. During her six years in the Norwegian capital she had attended socialist meetings together with her son Andrew Olaf, born in 1879. There she became friends with leaders in the Labor party and took part in organizing strike activity. Most likely she and Emil first met in radical Scandinavian political circles in Minneapolis.⁹

For his part, Andrew Devold was described as having "revolutionary tendencies even as a little boy." Reared with socialism in Norway, he became a force in *Gaa Paa*, which basically was a family venture. Later, as a traveling socialist organizer, newspaper columnist, and state representative and senator through the 1930s, the Norwegian-American radical was able to reach a statewide—even regional—constituency.

The Mengshoels' foray into Kansas in 1903 was brief. The next year they moved *Gaa Paa* to Minneapolis, which presumably would give a firmer base for a Norwegian-language socialist organ than Girard had. But even there its financial foundation was precarious. In what might seem paradoxical for a socialist business, though not unique, the paper was a private capitalistic enterprise, and it provided a meager living with much sacrifice for the Mengshoel family. *Gaa Paa* was consistently close to the ideological views of the Socialist party and loyally printed the party's program on the front page. It was at the time of its founding the only, although not the earliest, socialist journal in America that appealed directly to Danish and Norwegian workers in the common Dano-Norwegian literary language, a position it enjoyed until the appearance in 1911 of *Social-Demokraten* (The Social Democrat). This newspaper was the work of the Danish and Norwegian clubs in the Scandinavian Socialist Union, headquartered in Chicago, and a feud developed between Mengshoel

Olav Kringen



⁸ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 23–26; Zachariassen, *Fra Marcus Thrane*, 109, 116; see, for instance, Kringen's articles in *Folkets Røst*, Nov. 8, 1919, April 30, 1921. *Nye Normanden* was sold and renamed several times, eventually becoming a socialist organ under the editorship of Stavnheim. Publication ceased in 1909; Hoerder, *Immigrant Labor Press*, 193–194.

⁹ Here and below, see Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 27–29, 50, 291–292n17; *Folkets Røst*, Nov. 1, 1919; W. F. Toensing, comp., *Minnesota Congressmen, Legislators, and other Elected State Officials, An Alphabetical Checklist, 1849–1971* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society [MHS], 1917), 29. Toensing incorrectly gives Devold's birth as 1881; see *Folkets Røst*, Nov. 1, 1919, for an announcement of his fortieth birthday. Devold's sister Dorthea Johanne was born in 1881 and his sister Agnes in 1883.



Helle Crøger (front row, center), with the striking matchpackers she helped organize, Oslo, 1889. The sign at left reads "Help the striking women matchpackers"; the other proclaims "We demand only one øre [less than one cent] more per twelve dozens and better sanitary conditions."

and the *Social-Demokraten* publisher over the issue of the relative efficacy of a privately owned publication over one controlled by the workers themselves through party organizations. This battle established a lasting hostility between the two socialist papers as they competed in a restricted market.¹⁰

¹⁰ Granhus, "A Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 53-54; *Gaa Paa*, Aug. 26, Sept. 30, Oct. 14, 1911, May 22, July 1, 1912. For mention of earlier socialist publications, see *Gaa Paa*, Sept. 9, 1911; Lovoll, *Century of Urban Life*, 169-170, 268.

¹¹ Byron J. Nordstrom, "Ethnicity and Community in the Sixth Ward of Minneapolis in 1910," in *Scandinavians and Other Immigrants in Urban America: The Proceedings of a Research Conference October 26-27, 1984*, ed. Odd Lovoll (Northfield: St. Olaf College Press, 1985), 33-53; Carlton C. Qualey and Jon A. Gjerde, "The Norwegians," in *They Chose Minnesota: A Survey of the State's Ethnic Groups*, ed. June D. Holmquist (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1981), 231; John R. Jenswold, "In Search of a Norwegian-American Working Class," *Minnesota History* 50 (Summer, 1986): 63-70.

BEGINNING in the last part of the 19th century, Norwegians as well as the masses of other immigrants arriving from Europe increasingly sought the promise of America in an urban and industrialized setting. By 1910 there were 16,401 Norwegian-born residents in Minneapolis and another 4,063 in St. Paul; the heaviest concentration in Minneapolis was in the old sixth ward, within easy walking distance of the central business and warehouse districts of the city. Within this ward 55 percent of Norwegian-born men were employed in skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled blue-collar occupations. Immigrant laborers exhibited working-class loyalties, and perhaps, as urban historian John R. Jenswold has suggested, rejected an ideology of success and took part in both working-class organizing and union movements.¹¹

These workers were the obvious target for a socialistic enterprise like *Gaa Paa*, which, as historian Carl H. Chrislock stated, commanded "some influence in Twin City working-class wards." Reporting in 1911 on the second meeting of the Scandinavian Socialist Society (Skandinavisk Socialist Forening), where the veteran

radical Laurits Stavnheim had spoken, for example, *Gaa Paa* commented that there had been "many souls but one conviction." Andrew Devold was active in this organization as he had been in an earlier disbanded one. Such societies had great educational value, and Devold himself credited the experienced socialist agitator Thomas H. Lucas, whom he had heard on many occasions, with being his mentor. The columns of *Gaa Paa* give ample evidence of working-class activity in Minneapolis and St. Paul—in cultural and social events, in clubs, coffeehouses, and even saloons, in meetings, rallies, and organizations.¹²

The collective life of the Norwegian-American community can be viewed through the prism of this socialist organ. In 1913, for instance, *Gaa Paa* hoped to print its May 1 issue on red paper, but found none available; it gave its usual extensive coverage of the festivities, that year in the IOGT Hall (Independent Order of Good Templars) in Minneapolis, where Helle Mengshoel was one of the speakers. There were also several one-act plays—one of them having the slanted title "Politisk Vold" (Political Violence)—socialist readings, Norwegian games, coffee, cakes, and sandwiches, all for only 15 cents. Working-class first- and second-generation Norwegian Americans gathered at such events, which provided ambience as well as political education and generated a spirit of comradeship. Other Norwegian-language publications like *Minneapolis Tidende* (Times) and *Decorah-Posten* in Iowa, gave scant notice to socialist-sponsored gatherings, and *Gaa Paa* dismissed these journals as reactionary capitalist newspapers (*bagstræverblade*).

In the 1890s Scandinavians in the Twin Cities had given strong support to Populism, which had established a broad consensus for progressive reform efforts and the need to redress social inequities. Following the political demise of the Populist movement many of its former supporters heeded the voice of *Gaa Paa*, energizing the increased labor activism of the pre-World War I period. Many small farmers, seeing their profits dwindle and feeling at the mercy of capitalist economic interests, persisted in an agrarian revolt by supporting the socialist platform advocating a co-operative society. It was precisely in the Populist wheat belt in western Minnesota, especially in the Red River Valley, that *Gaa Paa* found a responsive audience. Obviously, many Norwegians had joined the socialist cause after the failed Populist movement. And perhaps, as Helle Mengshoel stated in her correspondence with Olav Kringen in Norway in 1919, the latter districts provided the majority of the newspaper's subscribers. *Gaa Paa* reflected the idea of common objectives and political alliance of the farmer and the laborer.¹³

But *Gaa Paa* found a readership far beyond the bounds of Minnesota; it had regular correspondents in



Andrew O. Devold, about 1915

several parts of North Dakota, in Seattle, and in Astoria, Oregon, another hotbed of Scandinavian radicalism, as well as an office in Chicago. The latter was managed by Wilhelm Petersen, a socialist of long standing, previously associated with the large Chicago newspaper *Skandinaven*, which expressed sympathy for the cause of labor. Petersen contributed articles on

¹² Here and below, see Carl H. Chrislock, *Ethnicity Challenged: The Upper Midwest Norwegian-American Experience in World War I* (Northfield: NAHA, 1981), 66; *Gaa Paa*, Sept. 16, 1911, Aug. 17, 1912, April 3, Sept. 6, 1913, Jan. 5, 1918; *Folkets Røst*, Nov. 1, 1919, Aug. 19, 1922.

¹³ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 115; Berman, "Mr. Wilson's War"; Chrislock, "The Norwegian-American Impact on Minnesota Politics: How Far 'Left-of-Center'?" in *Norwegian Influence on the Upper Midwest: Proceedings of an International Conference, University of Minnesota, Duluth, May 22-24, 1975*, ed. Harald S. Naess (Duluth: University of Minnesota, 1976), 108, 113; John D. Hicks, "The Persistence of Populism," *Minnesota History* 12 (Mar., 1931): 3-20.

the history and nature of socialism. *Gaa Paa* earned a reputation of being the most radical Norwegian-American socialist newspaper, largely due to the militant tone of such articles and Mengshoel's own consistent use of Marxist terminology. This terminology produced ridicule among more conservative Norwegian Americans, who tended to take socialist agitation at its face value. In fact, *Gaa Paa* contained no real advocacy of a revolutionary upheaval against the capitalist system. Mengshoel's concept of class struggle was largely confined to the political arena—the use of the ballot—and a strong faith in the power of education, which he thought would convince the electorate of an ultimate victory for socialism due to its inherent rightness and social justice.¹⁴

While appealing to class consciousness in Marxist terms, *Gaa Paa* rejected the idea of direct action and sabotage advocated by elements within the radical and syndicalistic Industrial Workers of the World (IWW); in industrial conflicts the newspaper embraced the nonviolence plank adopted by the Socialist party in 1912. The political process would, Mengshoel believed, transform America into a socialist society. In these views he and the American Socialist party might have been as much influenced by Edward Bellamy's utopian society in his novel *Looking Backward 2000-1887* as by the revolutionary ideas in Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*. The Danish immigrant Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, published in 1884 as a simplified analysis of Marxism in English, while rejecting the class-struggle thesis, predicted that socialism would come because capitalism and the established order it supported were destined to decay and fall to pieces of their own weight. Bellamy incorporated much of Gronlund's message in his famous utopian vision.

Mengshoel's confidence in the inevitable passing of the capitalist system in America was bolstered by these arguments, but he did not think it would occur any time soon without organized opposition. In a pragmatic fashion he insisted editorially in *Gaa Paa* that farmers were not a part of the doomed capitalist class but natural allies of the working class, and on occasion he even called on the small endangered businessmen to join the two groups to defeat capitalism. Only by a

popular appeal could socialist rule have any chance of materializing; workers alone could not do it.¹⁵

THE SOCIALIST PARTY of America may be viewed as a counterpart to the mass social-democratic movements at that time in Europe; it did not, of course, ever become a major political party in the manner of its European contemporaries. Mengshoel wrote of "our sister party, the Norwegian social-democratic Labor party," and his convictions and attitude owed much to those ideologies in Norway and in Scandinavia in general. These included a pragmatic reform socialism, confidence in the power of education, and a broad appeal to all anticapitalist groups—urban workers, to be sure, but also rural laborers, small farmers, and fishermen. *Gaa Paa* and its readers benefited not only from the views of Olav Kringen, but also from direct correspondence with other luminaries in the Norwegian Labor party. These included Christian Holtermann Knudsen, as the editor of *Vort Arbeide* considered to be the founder of the social-democratic movement in Norway, and Carl Jeppesen, one of the founders of the Norwegian Labor party in 1887 and the first editor of its official newspaper, *Social-Demokraten*.¹⁶

Helle Mengshoel had met Jeppesen before she emigrated, and she knew Kringen from his Minneapolis

Syndicated cartoon from the May, 1918, issue of *Gaa Paa*



¹⁴ Here and below, see Lovoll, *Century of Urban Life*, 133; Quint, *Forging of American Socialism*, vii, 28–30; *Gaa Paa*, Nov. 13, 1909, June 1, 11, 1912, Dec. 15, 1917.

¹⁵ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 193–195. On broad appeal to farmers, laborers, and small businessmen, see, for instance, *Gaa Paa*, Sept. 22, 1917.

¹⁶ *Gaa Paa*, Sept. 14, 1912; Berman, "Mr. Wilson's War"; Zachariassen, *Fra Marcus Thrane*, 82–83, 94–95; Berge Furre, *Norsk historie 1905-1940* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1976), 56–61; Jostein Nerbøvik, *Norsk historie 1870-1905* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1976), 138.

FOLKETS RØST

(Successor of "Gaa Paa" Volume 16)
SCANDINAVIAN WEEKLY WITH A GENERAL CIRCULATION
THROUGHOUT THE NORTHWEST

Phone

Editors and Publishers
E. L. Mengshoel & Mrs. H. Mengshoel

Minneapolis, Minn., 24 - Dec 19.

Kjære, Hr. Kringen!

Mange Tak for deres Artikkel med Hækkell
fra den første Artikkel de sendte os -
den var saa oplysende og sand, saa jeg
og med Ordbrøerne, man forstod at
de faldt i Luften. Sender mig \$5
i Båndobrev, som et gæstgædligt Veder-
lag for deres Artikkel i Nr. 48-49-50 og
den vi fik i Gaar. for Nr. 1 i 1920. —
For 4 uger siden sendte vi et frankeret
Brev med \$5, har de faaet det? Vi ven-
der vore Breve fra en liden Station
her og ved ikke hvordan den Postma-
ster er. Men mig skal de høre! —

Letter from Helle Mengshoel to Olav Kringen, 1927

days. It was she who often corresponded with them; she also wrote articles for *Gaa Paa*, not infrequently on social issues. For instance, she discussed the problem of prostitution in Minneapolis several times, seeing it as another evil of capitalism that could only be curbed when workers were paid sufficient wages so that men could marry and support a family and women were

granted economic freedom and opportunity. Only socialism could produce such a society, Helle Mengshoel insisted. Despite such advanced views and the prominent role played by women like her and the other Norwegian-American women who agitated and wrote for socialism, Emil Mengshoel, through *Gaa Paa*, expressed a lack of concern for woman suffrage, because

"women's participation in politics will not improve social conditions in the least."¹⁷

Mengshoel here simply revealed that he was no more progressive than the American Socialist party in general, whose traditional complacency on the enfranchisement of women was broadly challenged after 1910, as was *Gaa Paa's* position. As expressed by Mengshoel, the typical defense, one inherent to the socialist movement, was that "we socialists support women's suffrage as a matter of principle," but that all major issues related to class and not gender.

One of the women who frequently wrote for *Gaa Paa* was Ingeborg Monsen, who lived on a farm near the town of Elbow Lake and contributed her ideas in articles like "The Farmer and Socialism." Women's support of the socialist movement can not be documented as easily as men's since they were denied the franchise and consequently did not leave a voting record. Monsen represented comrades that Helle Mengshoel's son Andrew Devold made a point of seeing on his many tours as a socialist agitator and organizer. One of Minnesota's most effective socialist activists, he argued the cause eloquently in Norwegian as well as in English throughout the state and beyond, most notably on his several visits to North Dakota.¹⁸

His extensive tour on behalf of the Minnesota Socialist party before the election in 1912 is revealing of his activity. It was faithfully reported over many issues of *Gaa Paa* under the title "In the Service of the Party." The coverage identified rather well the extent of Scandinavian socialist activity in the districts he visited. "The five 'red' towns in northern Minnesota are Brainerd, Bemidji, Crookston, Staples, and Thief River Falls," Devold wrote in an insert printed in *Gaa Paa* July 27, explaining that "they all have socialist officials—and are actually completely run by socialists." Devold devoted much time to the heavily Norwegian district in the northwestern part of the state. In its issue of June 22 *Gaa Paa* reported his visit to Thief River Falls: "This city is now run by socialists," he wrote,

"except for the mayor and one alderman the entire council consists of 'comrades.'" When Devold discovered that even the chief of police was a "comrade," and Norwegian to boot, he uttered a "Fan" (Damn), in surprise. The traveling activist found the northwestern counties of Minnesota together with Minneapolis "ripe for socialism." "The ground has been cleared," he declared, "for the new social order created by the proletariat: the wage earner, the farmer, and the little businessman."¹⁹

Political reality might, however, have been less favorable to socialist strength and progress than Devold optimistically assessed it to be. The goal of socialists in the northwestern district was to replace the progressive Republican United States Congressman Halvor Steenerson of Crookston with Comrade M. A. Brattland, both Norwegian politicians. Their failure to do so, both in 1912 and 1914, suggests that Steenerson better represented the political opinion of the majority of Norwegian Americans during the Progressive Era, with its broad reform consensus and its Protestant middle-class character. Not until the Farmer-Labor successes in the election of 1922 was Steenerson removed from public life, defeated by Norwegian-born Knud Wefald of Hawley, the candidate of the Farmer-Labor party.²⁰

Devold's election to the Minnesota House in 1914 and the Senate in 1918 on the ticket of the Socialist party made him a prominent player in developments that funneled protest movements into a Farmer-Labor coalition and the formation of the Farmer-Labor party. At the time of his death in 1939 he had served five terms in the Senate, representing the thirty-second district in Minneapolis. Though he became closely associated with the Farmer-Labor party, he identified himself as a socialist. The virtual passing of the Socialist party in the 1920s, however, moved him more firmly into the Farmer-Labor political camp, and his obituary in the *Minneapolis Star-Journal* called him a "Farmer-Labor senator." In the columns of *Gaa Paa*, Devold also expressed his sympathies to the Nonpartisan League (NPL), where the Farmer-Labor party had its roots. The North Dakota Republican Nonpartisan League, founded in 1915, adopted a platform of state ownership of elevators, mills, and credit banks, which embodied the chief features of the Socialist party of North Dakota, a political unit that functioned fairly well from 1908 until 1914. It was the NPL's effort to enter Minnesota politics and duplicate its successes in North Dakota that engaged Devold and *Gaa Paa*. Devold left the newspaper in 1917, the year that he was admitted to the bar (after law studies at the University of Minnesota) and began to practice in Minneapolis. His relationship with *Gaa Paa* remained close, however; the weekly printed his reports and speeches on the front page to the benefit of both. His prestige in state politics gave

¹⁷ Here and below, see *Gaa Paa*, Dec. 11, 1909, Dec. 31, 1910, Sept. 6, 1913, June 6, 1914; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 214-245. Helle Mengshoel's letters are in the archives of Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek in Oslo. Copies have been deposited in the NAHA archives.

¹⁸ *Gaa Paa*, Dec. 30, 1911, June 15, 1912.

¹⁹ *Gaa Paa*, June 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, July 13, 20, 27, 1912.

²⁰ *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Nov. 23, 1926, p. 1; *Gaa Paa*, June 22, 1912; Chrislock, *Ethnicity Challenged*, 35, and "Norwegian-American Impact on Minnesota Politics," 111-112; Bruce M. White et al., *Minnesota Votes: Election Returns by County for Presidents, Senators, Congressmen, and Governors, 1857-1977* (St. Paul: MHS, 1977), 98, 99.

GUVERNÖR KANDIDAT!



CHAS. A. LINDBERGH

FRA TALER.

Vort første Problem er at vinde Krigen, og for at vinde Krigen må vi først løse de Løkker, som Produktionerne har lagt paa Industrien.

"En ny Tid er ved at oprinde, da Folketystret vil gaa ind til Industrien søvel som til Politikken — De Producerende — Arbejderne og Farmerne — som udgør den store Masse af vort Folk, må ogsaa føres i denne store Bevægelse. Vi må staa sammen om et bestemt Program."

"Deuge Magthaverne som fordrer et sammenhøbet Profit, mens Folket stræber, gør mere end de tyske Lige Spioner for at bremse vort Krigsprogram. Dette er Billedet af den mest forbandede og foragtelige Art."

"National Nonpartisan League er den eneste politiske Organisation i Amerika, som har et konstruktivt Program for Beglæbte Unger og efter Krigen. Det er den første politiske Organisation til at forbyde Regeringskontrol af Industri og et udtrækkende Program for Fastholdelse af Priser."

"Folketribunal er det virkelige Spørgsmaal i Minnesotas Kampagne. Det er en Affære med Profitkømmere mod Folket, og Folket vil vinde."

"Færd og Fabrikproduktionerne må befries for de monopolistiske Mellemmænds ublu Tald."

"Arbejderne søger ikke at beseje nogen, hvad der virkelig er hans, men Arbejderne har kontrollere det, som de frembringer."

"Den er en sand loyal Patriot, som søger at rette paa det dengelige hjemmets søvel som ude."

"Vi tjener Verden bedst ved at stilles til Retfærdighed og Retfærdighed blandt os selv og ved at grundlægge et System, som vil tjene til de mangees Velfærd."

"Mænd og Kvinder søger overalt at forbedre deres Kaar. De må gøre dette selv og ikke se hen til Kapitalisten eller Politikeren om Hjælp."

VORE KANDIDATER.

Disse Mænd har lovet at udføre Farmer-Arbejder Programmet. At stemme paa dem er at stemme paa sig selv — for virkelig Folkestyre. De alle Kandidater for the Republikanske Parti.

CHARLES A. LINDBERGH

For Guvernør

RALPH E. ORANE

For Lieutenant Guvernør

THOMAS V. SULLIVAN

For Statsadvokat

S. O. TJOVOLD

For Statsadvokat

ALBERT A. FABEL

For Statsadvokat

FRED H. TELQUIST

For Jernbane og Varehus Kommissær

HERMAN MUELLENB

For Clerk i Højesteret

HENRIK SHIPSTED

Kandidat for Congress, Seventh District

FRANK M. BARTON

Kandidat for Congress, Ninth District

Gaa Paa credibility, while the newspaper communicated his socialist message and candidacy.²¹

IN MARCH, 1918, *Gaa Paa* opened its columns to Sigvald Rødvik, the Norwegian correspondent at the NPL's national office, which had been moved to St. Paul in 1917. The paper endorsed the league's program of reform, which in Minnesota, with its industrial as well as agricultural economy, sought to enlist both farmers and laborers. In the 1918 election *Gaa Paa* naturally gave strong support to Devold's successful bid for the Minnesota Senate and the socialist Thomas Van Lear's failed attempt at reelection in the Minneapolis mayoral race, but it also gave cautious endorsement to the NPL's candidate for the governorship, Charles A. Lindbergh. "In these peculiar times," Mengshoel editorialized, "we cannot but support the Nonpartisan League's call to 'vote for the Nonpartisan League's plan! Vote for Lindbergh!'" Losing in the Republican primary, Lindbergh entered the general election designated as the candidate of the Farmer-Labor party, though it represented at best a loose federation that included only some of the protest groups—identified by historian Chrislock as "grain farmers, trade unionists, left-wing progressives, and pragmatic Socialists."²² This was the beginning of a powerful third-party coalition, which four years later officially became the Farmer-Labor party.

Gaa Paa harshly condemned mob actions against Lindbergh in some Minnesota communities during the election campaign, a consequence of the intensified intolerance and persecution of political groups on the left during World War I. The newspaper described the candidate's arrest in Martin County on charges of illegal assembly and advocacy of international socialism as "the last desperate actions of the capitalist class in order to rid itself of a troublesome man."²³ *Gaa Paa's* defense of Lindbergh made it the target of vandals and exposed it to extra surveillance by state authorities.

NPL candidates were regularly accused by their adversaries of disloyalty, sedition, and socialism. Even

²¹ *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, Dec. 13, 1939, p. 17; *Legislative Manual*, 1939, p. 526; Millard L. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism: The Third Party Alternative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 45–61, 158–159; Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West 1900–1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 154–158; Lovoll, "The Norwegian Press in North Dakota," in *Norwegian-American Studies* (Northfield: NAHA, 1970), 24:92–93; Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League 1915–1922* (Reprint ed., St. Paul: MHS Press, 1985), 22–46.

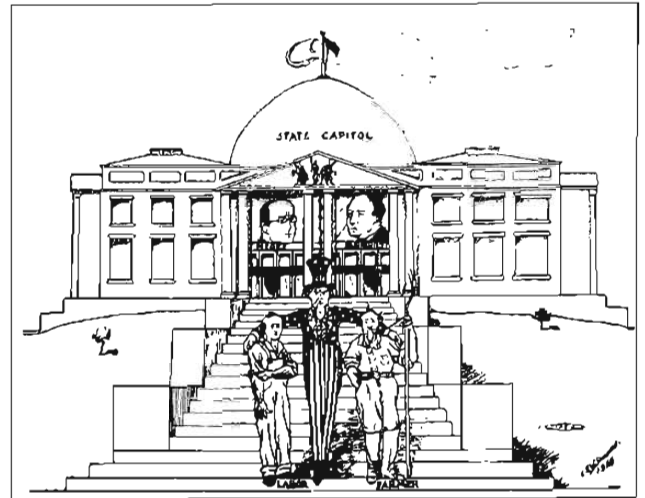
²² Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota, 1899–1918* (St. Paul: MHS, 1971), 182.

²³ *Gaa Paa*, June 22, 1918.

though an implied understanding might be said to have existed between the socialists and the NPL in the 1918 election, the Socialist party objected on principle to the league's platform, since it did not call for a total transformation of society. Mengshoel's accommodation to NPL policy and candidates caused some displeasure with fellow socialists. The editor's position demonstrated his independent and pragmatic approach, the main consideration, as he expressed it, being to rid the state of "local Junkers."²¹

Gaa Paa was at that time entering a critical juncture, which threatened its existence and Emil and Helle Mengshoel's only means of livelihood. After the outbreak of the European conflict in the summer of 1914, *Gaa Paa* had moved with the American Socialist party to an attitude of strong opposition to U.S. involvement in the hostilities; these objections only intensified with the declaration of war in April, 1917. The ravages that followed did not cause *Gaa Paa* to abandon its expressed faith in the power of international worker solidarity to prevent capitalist interests from waging war; rather, Mengshoel gave wholehearted support to the socialist peace movement. The newspaper as a matter of course assailed all forms of civil repression, such as the arrest and imprisonment of Olaf Berild, its agent in Seattle, and of Carl Ahlteen, editor of the Swedish-language IWW newspaper *Allarm*, for their antiwar and antidraft propaganda; it denounced mob disruption of socialist peace rallies and raids on IWW offices. *Gaa Paa* voiced strong exception to the creation in April, 1917, of the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety, which the editors feared would further suppress civil liberties and the rights of labor. It was such broadsides that convinced the commission to move against *Gaa Paa* to silence its disparaging voice. In October, 1918, the newspaper became a casualty of the conservative warfare on socialists when it lost its second-class mailing privilege.²⁵

On the war issue Devold vacillated uneasily between the antiwar and prowar socialist factions, perhaps because the socialist opposition to American entry



Commissioners of Public Safety John F. McGee and Governor J. A. A. Burnquist overwhelming the law, from Gaa Paa, January 18, 1918

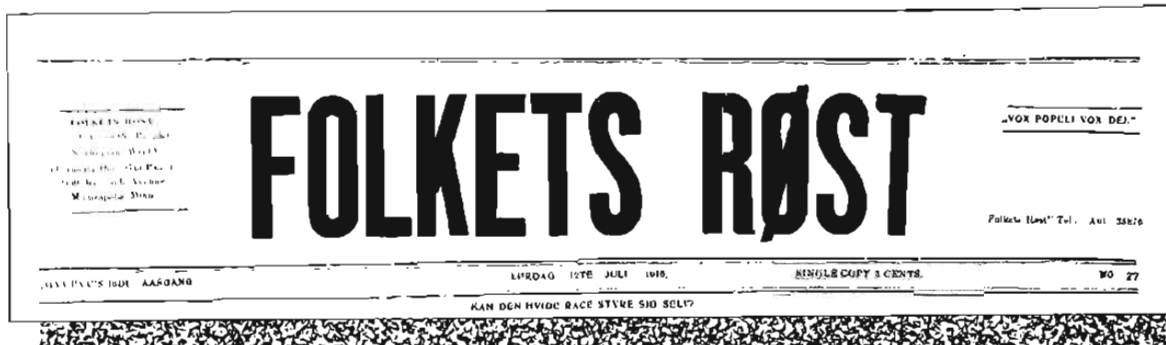
was at odds with the ardent support for preparedness of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Thus, the position of the Socialist party on this issue cut it off from the labor movement, or at the very least from the AFL. Devold's opposition to the Commission of Public Safety was, however, firm, as were his attacks on capitalist war profiteering. The revolution in Russia in March, 1917, gave new munitions to opponents of oppressors and profiteers. To Devold and Mengshoel it signaled "a new dawn in the East." The democratic reforms introduced by the provisional government made Russia "the freest nation in the world," *Gaa Paa* insisted; the newspaper used this claim to ridicule the curtailment of civil liberties in the United States. Hopeful signs of the victory of socialism could be detected as well in the emerging workers' democracies in the Nordic nations and, closer to home, in the farmer insurgency in the Northwest and in labor activism and militancy. "The proletariat's future is ours: the workers and the farmers," Devold declared confidently in September, 1917.²⁶

The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks or Communists in November, 1917, was also hailed joyfully by *Gaa Paa*, which lauded the new government for its "fidelity to the Russian worker." John Glambeck, earlier associated with the Danish-language socialist newspaper *Arbejderen* (The Worker) published in Chicago from 1896 to 1900, explained in the columns of *Gaa Paa* how the war had actually liberated the worker and promoted socialism in many lands, among these Germany itself. That nation's "reactionary capitalist government," to quote socialist literature, many radicals now argued had to be defeated in order to protect the Russian revolution. Such changes of opinion allowed socialists like

²¹ *Gaa Paa*, Aug. 11, 1917, June 15, July 27, 1918. See also Bruce L. Larson, *Lindbergh of Minnesota: A Political Biography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973); William E. Lass, *Minnesota, A Bicentennial History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977), 180-181; Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism*, 44-48; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 191-192.

²⁵ H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917-1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 157-166; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 119; Chrislock, *Progressive Era*, 131-132; *Gaa Paa*, July 7, 14, 21, 28, Sept. 22, Nov. 17, Dec. 15, 1917, Jan. 5, 12, 1918.

²⁶ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 45-46; *Gaa Paa*, Mar. 24, May 2, Sept. 22, 1917.



Devold to move gracefully to support the administration and its goals expressed in President Woodrow Wilson's peace proposal of early January, 1918. This proposal embodied the socialist principles of no annexation and no indemnities. Consequently, less than two weeks after Wilson's speech to Congress *Gaa Paa* reported, and also endorsed, a declaration of support of the peace plan adopted at a mass meeting of Minneapolis socialists.²⁷

AS *GAA PAA* was silenced shortly before the armistice on November 11, 1918, a hiatus of two months was created in its commentary on world and local events. It reappeared again with a Christmas issue on December 21, 1918, with the name changed to *Folkets Røst*; although still a Norwegian-language weekly, it displayed its English title, *The Voice of the People*, below the Norwegian one on its masthead. It was printed thus until its demise in 1925, the last issue being dated October 31. The new name had significance on two levels: it was a less blatant socialist appellation, and it can be said to reflect political reality at that time, locally as well as nationally.

The national hysteria of the Great Red Scare in 1919, caused by fear and ignorance—legacies of the indoctrination of hate, prejudice, and 100-percent Americanism during the years of war—created intolerance on a massive scale and left a socialist newspaper like *Folkets Røst* with little freedom of action. The Mengshoels as a consequence showed a new degree of restraint in their commentary, which also likely had something to do with their dependence on *Folkets Røst* for their daily bread. Yet violent manifestations of the Red Scare were harshly condemned, as the nation dealt with labor unrest, the arrest of radicals, and the deportation of foreigners on the left. *Folkets Røst* was equally opposed to the formation in June, 1919, of the American Committee of Minneapolis, whose purpose it was to fight "Bolshevism and radical Socialism."²⁸

On the other hand, *Folkets Røst*, appealing to "the people," opposed the radicalization that was occurring in the Socialist party following the Russian revolution. Under the heading "The Spirit of Unrest" it regretted the formation of the two Communist parties at a meeting in Chicago in August–September, 1919. *Folkets Røst* was out of step with the majority of the Scandinavian Socialist Union, which, meeting in Chicago in 1920, voted itself out of the Socialist party in favor of joining the Third or Communist International; it thereby followed the move of the Norwegian Labor party, the only social-democratic party in western Europe to adopt the Moscow Theses. This victory by the radical wing of the Norwegian "sister party" *Folkets Røst* directly rejected, printing extensive rebuttals written by party moderates like Christian Holtermann Knudsen and longtime friend Olav Kringen.²⁹

Locally, the split in the socialist ranks nearly obliterated the party in Minneapolis, if not in the state, though a left wing emerged to exclude Thomas Van Lear because of his affiliation with Farmer-Labor politics. Andrew Devold as well joined the promising political coalition of farmers and laborers; the fact that he retained a socialist identity in his political career, however, appealed to his supporters. These supporters could be brought into the larger coalition, where they constituted a socialist element in the Farmer-Labor movement. In the 1922 election *Folkets Røst* endorsed

²⁷ Peterson and Fite, *Opponents of War*, 158–159; Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 162–163; *Gaa Paa*, Nov. 17, 1917, Jan. 19, Feb. 16, July 27, 1918; *Folkets Røst*, Jan. 18, 1919.

²⁸ Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919–1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 16–17, 50–56; *Folkets Røst*, Feb. 15, April 5, May 17, 31, June 28, 1919, Oct. 31, 1925.

²⁹ In 1920 the two Communist units merged as the Workers' party under order from Moscow. The Norwegian Labor party removed itself from the Third International in December, 1923. A minority formed the Norwegian Communist party.

only three declared socialists, among these Devold, under the heading "Our Candidates" and added most of the ticket of the Farmer-Labor group, notably Henrik Shipstead for U.S. Senate, the Swedish immigrant and NPL politician Magnus Johnson for governor, and Susie W. Stageberg for secretary of state. The endorsements were written by Helle Mengshoel, who encouraged both men and *women*, now that they also had the vote, to cast their ballot for "Røstens Liste," The List of the Voice. Political insurgency succeeded, and the election of 1922 saw the breakthrough of a viable Farmer-Labor party, the second largest political party in the state. *Folkets Røst* interpreted this development as a beneficial "movement toward progressive, even partly radical politics" and was especially pleased with the election in 1922 of two socialists, Devold and Otto Nellermoie to the state Senate and House, both from the same district, and with Shipstead's U.S. Senate victory. The alliance with the Farmer-Laborites increased *Folkets Røst's* circulation, equal to its prewar record, at a time when other leftist publications were failing.³⁰

ONLY THREE YEARS later, however, *Folkets Røst* ceased publication. Granhus identifies a number of causes for its demise, including the general agricultural crisis and labor unemployment during the decade, as well as the gradual loss of a Norwegian-speaking audience through assimilation and the restrictions on new immigration. Factional dispute on the left produced competitive publications, many less controversial and more attractive than *Folkets Røst*. But there were clearly also the personal circumstances of advancing age and declining health, which directly affected an exhausting enterprise solely dependent on the efforts of two individuals. Helle Mengshoel suffered serious health problems, leading to her death in 1929; in the final years of her life it was difficult for her to assist in the newspaper work, and Emil had to consider other employment to support the family. *Folkets Røst* declined in quality and lost much of its appeal as less and less time could be devoted to producing an interesting



Andrew Devold (back, far right) and friends at an NPL gathering; standing third and fourth from right are Magnus Johnson and Henrik Shipstead.

and stimulating weekly. Before its termination, it was reduced to a bimonthly journal.³¹

Emil Mengshoel's view that at the ballot box all who in some way worked against capitalism—radicals, moderates, and even those not wholly capitalists—were natural allies made him see the mission of his newspaper ventures in broad terms. This conviction led him to give complete and favorable coverage to the NPL and to Farmer-Labor politics, with the encouragement of Devold and his legislative successes on behalf of labor assuring Mengshoel's direct endorsement of the Farmer-Labor party in the 1920s. Following the Red Scare, socialists lost much of the appeal that Farmer-Laborism was gaining, and the support of this movement, which directly challenged conservative Republicanism in the state, represented both a continuation of past politics as well as political expediency. Those who listened to the voice of *Gaa Paa* and *Folkets Røst* thus were encouraged to seek the way to social democratic reform within the Farmer-Labor party.

The illustration on p. 89 is used courtesy of Odd-Stein Granhus; those on p. 90, 91, and 94 are from the Arbeiderbevegelsens arkiv og bibliotek, Oslo; that on p. 96 is from the June 18, 1918, issue of *Gaa Paa*; all others are in the MHS collections.

³⁰ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 115, 143, 180–183; Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism*, 44–48, 69–77, 81–87; Lovoll, *Century of Urban Life*, 270; Zachariassen, *Fra Marcus Thrane*, 180–183, 202–205; *Folkets Røst*, Mar. 9, Aug. 23, Sept. 20, Nov. 8, 1919, April 30, 1921, Mar. 18, May 13, Oct. 14, 28, Nov. 4, 11, 1922.

³¹ Granhus, "Socialist among Norwegian-Americans," 153–159, 164, 172. Helle Mengshoel died on Jan. 29, 1929, and Emil Mengshoel on May 25, 1945. They are both buried at Hillside Cemetery in Minneapolis.



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