

Frank Zeidler, Most Recent Socialist Mayor (1948-1960)



Frank Zeidler was mayor from 1948 until 1960. Zeidler remained a Socialist his entire life. When asked why he was a Socialist, Frank Zeidler said Socialists believe in the brotherhood of people all over the world. They believe in working for peace, not war. They believe in the equal distribution of economic goods. They believe in achieving ends through cooperation and democratic planning. Those all seemed like good ideas to him. When he was asked what constituted a successful life, he replied that a successful life opposes militarism, fights against the destruction of human rights, and works against the despoliation of the planet.

DURING ZEIDLER'S TIME IN OFFICE:

Modernization: The city doubled in size through aggressive annexation. Milwaukee was modernized without raising taxes and reached its greatest level of population. Zeidler had a role in starting the national system of interstates, and began construction of Milwaukee's interstate highway system. Milwaukee built a stadium and got the Braves to come to town. With Zeidler's persistence, Wisconsin's first public TV station (MPTV) started operations. Numerous neighborhood fire and police stations were constructed.

Good Government: Zeidler continued the Socialist tradition of pay-as-you-go spending, thus keeping the city out of debt. During Zeidler's time in office, Milwaukee had a triple-A financial rating and was declared by "Fortune" magazine to be one of the three best-run cities in America.

Housing: There was slum clearance and large-scale public housing developments, including the veteran's housing development on 24th and Morgan and the first housing for the elderly.

Education: UWM was created as a four-year university. A four-year public university for Milwaukee was one of Zeidler's long-time goals. Zeidler, working with others, fought for and shepherded the idea through the Wisconsin legislature. Zeidler expected UWM to provide access to affordable education, especially for working and middle class families, and to provide expertise for solving the community's problems and providing for community's needs. The Public Library Annex and the Arena were built during the Zeidler Administration along with many neighborhood libraries. Money to build a new Public Museum building was allocated.

For more information contact the Socialist Party of Milwaukee,
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Milwaukee Socialists, Thank You

What is Democratic Socialism? Socialism in its essence is a state of society in which all people are equal and work cooperatively for the common good. In recent times people who hold this principle have described it as *democratic socialism*, to distinguish the principle from authoritarian and undemocratic states, which have wrongly described themselves as *socialist* in character.

- **Socialism describes a society in which people work together to increase the benefit of all. Thus, democratic socialism is the radical idea that people should live and work cooperatively in a democratic society.**
- **A socialist society will provide for the general welfare by insuring that each individual's human rights are respected and ensured, including basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, transportation, education, health and access to opportunities.**
- **The spirit of cooperation acknowledges that we strive to live in a peaceful, environmentally sustainable world.**

Roots of Socialism in Milwaukee: The early groups were mostly made up of immigrants, primarily **German immigrants**. Among them were:

- **"Freethinkers"** who had fled persecution in Germany. These were the people who started the first kindergarten in Wisconsin.
- **Turner societies**, which believed in promoting a strong mind in a healthy body. Classes on gymnastics were offered, and public forums on issues of public interest were held. (The 4th Street Forum, often held at Turner Hall and broadcast on public television, continues this tradition.)
- **Labor Organizers:** Branch 1 of "Social-Democracy of America" was formed in Milwaukee on July 9, 1897. It was partially in reaction to the Bay View tragedy of May 5, 1886 when seven people were killed by the Wisconsin National Guard while demonstrating for an 8-hour workday at the rolling mills in Bay View. (At that time people worked 10 and 12-hour days, 6 and 7 days a week.)
- **Labor Newspapers:** Newspapers were started, often in conjunction with union groups and supporting a political view. One such paper was the *Milwaukee Leader*, a daily paper offering a democratic socialist perspective.

**It was Socialists who gave Milwaukee
a reputation for and a tradition of
good, honest, frugal government!**



Seidel Administration

Socialists take Over in Milwaukee (1910-1912)

In 1910 at a time of unequalled corruption and disarray in city government, the Socialists won a sweep of city and county offices. Emil Seidel was elected mayor and Dan Hoan was elected City Attorney. Seidel was mayor for two years, but in those two years, although constrained by state law, the Socialists managed to institute reforms revolutionizing local governments.

Clean Government: Seidel established a bureau of economy and efficiency and put a UW economics professor in charge. Additionally, the Socialists began the practice of hiring public employees based on their qualifications for a position.

Health and Sanitation: The city Health Department conducted sanitation and health test in one slum area and the death rate in that area dropped 50%. The Socialists passed legislation to improve the lives of working people in Milwaukee.

Budget: The Democrats and Republicans had never had a municipal budget. They just spent and borrowed, at high interest rates, as they went along. The Socialists established a city budget, and initiated planning as an integral part of all city operations. Milwaukee debt for the first time decreased instead of increased. This was at a time when cities across the country were going bankrupt.

Parks and Recreation: Charles B. Whitnall, the Socialist whose vision created the Milwaukee park system, encouraged Socialist officials to buy up unused and undeveloped lands to turn them into public parks. Socialists believed that people, who toiled in factories all day, needed recreation and beautiful green spaces to balance their lives. Democrats and Republicans, who wanted to sell the land to private interests, opposed this.

Labor: To improve the lives of working people, Milwaukee Socialists worked with Progressive Republicans to pass the following:

- 1) Workmen's compensation laws protecting workers injured on the job,
- 2) Child labor laws restricting abuses of children by employers,
- 3) Laws regulating the number of hours worked by women employees,
- 4) Laws providing for an Industrial Commission to mediate disputes between labor and employers along with licensing various businesses and trades.

The Socialist **leaders** paid city employees union-level wages. Socialists granted municipal workers an eight-hour day. They adopted tough factory and building regulations. They reined in police brutality against striking workers and improved working conditions for rank-and-file cops.

Dan Hoan's Mayoral Tenure (1916-1940)



Dan Hoan was elected mayor in 1916 and served until 1940. Previously, he had been City Attorney from 1910 to 1916.

Milwaukee's Harbor: The Socialists foresaw the development of the St Lawrence Seaway and so bought up all the land along the lakeshore. (This land includes the water filtration plant, Lake Park, Veterans Park, the War Memorial, the Summerfest grounds, the Port of Milwaukee and the Sewage plant.) The harbor was established with municipally owned docks. A sewage plant was built. Today, our publicly owned and run port is a financial success while many private ports on the Great Lakes have failed.

Health and Sanitation: Hoan built the water filtration plant at the north end of Lake Park, just off Kenwood. Milwaukee's pioneering Health Department saved numerous lives and reduced childhood mortality rates. The Health Department has won many awards for its efforts!

Labor: Mayor Hoan drafted the first Worker's Compensation bill in North America for the Wisconsin Federation of Labor. During the Great Depression, Hoan was a major advocate for building model communities, as a means of creating jobs and developing livable communities. The Village of Greendale is one of three "greenbelt" such communities that were built in the nation.

Clean, Caring and Efficient Government: During Hoan's service, the "spoils system" was replaced by a civil service system for the hiring of city workers. Hoan put the city on a "pay-as-you-go" basis **eliminating municipal debt**. Competitive bidding on city contracts was instituted for the first time. During World War I, Hoan fought price-gouging by having the city buy army surplus goods (including food) and selling it to Milwaukee residents at cost (prices 50% to 66% lower than the private sector). During the depression, Hoan kept Milwaukee from going bankrupt. Milwaukee was the only major city in the U.S., which did not default during the depression.

Recreation and Education: The public park system was established. Workers' night schools were established, which eventually evolved into Milwaukee Area Technical College. The library system was established, which became the Milwaukee Federated Library System.

Air Transportation: Recognizing the potential of the airplane, Mitchell Field in the City of Milwaukee was developed as a publicly owned airport.

Housing: High quality public housing was built. The first was Garden Homes, a cooperative housing project.