

Delegates

Annual Conference of the IALHI International Association of Labour History Institutions

c/o International Institute of Social History
P.O. Box 2169
NL 1000 CD Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Dear Friends:

I am writing in support of the nomination of the Socialist Labor Party Hall in Barre, Vermont to be designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as part of a proposed network of "People's Houses" in the United States and Europe. These People's Houses are an important cultural legacy of the struggle of ordinary working people to improve public welfare, education, healthcare, and above all else, justice in the workplace.

Built in 1900 primarily by Italian immigrants who came to work in Vermont's granite industry, the Socialist Labor Party Hall served as a center for debate and discussion, education, mutual aid, and cultural and sporting events. Here, workers, their families and supporters would gather and organize for worker protections that many of us take for granted today: the eight hour work day; the 40 hour work week; child labor rules; a minimum wage; unemployment insurance; overtime pay; worker safety rules; social security, and so much more.

For decades, the Labor Hall was not only a hub of political and economic activity in central Vermont, but it developed a national and international reputation as well. Socialist Party leader Eugene Debs spoke at the Hall during each of his presidential campaigns. Labor leaders like "Mother Jones" and "Big Bill" Haywood gave speeches there. The anarchist Emma Goldman was a frequent visitor, as was Luigi Galleani, leader of the Italian anarchist movement. During the famous 1912 "Bread and Roses" textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the Labor Hall housed dozens of children of the striking workers.

The Barre Labor Hall is the only known hall built by members of the Socialist Labor Party – the first socialist political party in the U.S. with national reach – and the only remaining hall of its kind in the country. However, the Hall fell into a state of disrepair after decades of use as a produce warehouse. In 1994, it faced the prospect of being torn down.

Consistent with UNESCO's World Heritage mission that encourages participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural heritage, a local historical society and supporters of the hall raised funds to save the building. It was officially designated a National Historic

Landmark in 2000, and is once again a gathering place for events of all kinds. It is the regular meeting place of several local labor unions, and the home of the Barre Historical Society.

I had the honor of being the keynote speaker at this year's annual *Primo Maggio* – International Workers' Day – celebration at the Labor Hall. It was, for me, a memorable event celebrating the history of the most successful third party candidate for President of the United States, Eugene Victor Debs. Over the years, I have been to the Hall many times, and I can tell you that the spirit and history of the building is inspiring and unique.

To my mind, the Social Labor Party Hall is worthy of being designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Such designation would not only recognize and celebrate the Labor Hall's important place in history, but it would help preserve this outstanding cultural heritage site for future generations to enjoy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bernard Sanders", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator