

The Communist Party of the United States
and the Communist International, 1919-1929

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ABSTRACT

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The American Communist movement, born out of a left-wing split from the American Socialist Party in 1919, was divided into several hostile organisations that understood very little about American politics, culture or society. In its early years, the Communist International (Comintern) repeatedly intervened into the American Party. Far from hindering the Party's understanding and appreciation of American conditions, this intervention helped transform the Party from a marginal sect of isolated immigrants in 1920, to an important part of American politics in the 1930s.

This intervention stemmed from the desire of the early Comintern, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, to create an international revolutionary Communist movement. However, in the mid-1920s, as the leadership and ideology of the Russian Communist party changed. Under the rubric of building 'socialism in one country', the Comintern now intervened more and more to create a stable, pro-Stalin leadership.

The first portion of this thesis, comprising the first four chapters, illustrates how between 1919 and 1923 Comintern intervention was necessary to politically and organisationally construct a Party. The Comintern helped achieve unity amongst the competing groups; forced the Party to take advantage of the opportunities for legal work; compelled the Party to intervene into the labour movement.

The next four chapters examine the change in Comintern intervention between 1923 and 1929. During this period, internecine factionalism, increasingly devoid of a political basis, tore the Party asunder, and sapped its ability to intervene into society. The Comintern continued to intervene, but largely to play one faction off against

another. In the aftermath of the 1928 Sixth Congress, the Party leadership purged first its left, Trotskyist wing, led by James P. Cannon, and within the year, the right, Bukharinite, wing, led by Jay Lovestone. The Comintern then installed a pliant leadership that finally ended factionalism and carried the now Stalinised Party into the 1930s.

The final chapter analyses the changing Communist perspective on the 'Negro Question', from ignoring black rights to championing the right of Southern blacks to independence. Here, the Comintern, acting on pressure from pioneer black Communists, insisted that the Party address this important issue. At the Sixth Congress, the Comintern adopted the theory that blacks in the American South were a oppressed nationality, and had the right to form a separate state. Whilst this programme was not in accord with reality, it forced the Party to aggressively fight for black rights, so that by the 1930s it was well known for its stand for black liberation.

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1. Introduction

The historiography of the American Communist Party (CP) has been contentious. The classic debate, which is as much about politics as history, centres around how ‘foreign’ (i.e., dependant on the Soviet Union) or ‘American’ (i.e., firmly rooted in US radical and labour history) the party was. The standard, Cold War perspective on American Communism holds that the CP was almost entirely a creation of the Soviet Union, or at least quickly became a Soviet tool. An extreme example is the foremost American professional anti-Communist, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) head J. Edgar Hoover, who described the archetypal Communist militant in his classic *Masters of Deceit* (1959): ‘Even though he lives in the United States...[he] is a supporter of a foreign power, espousing an alien line of thought. He is a conspirator against his country.’¹

Of course Hoover’s arguments were little more than a justification for government repression against leftists. Former *Daily Worker* editor Theodore Draper, in a more literate and less rabid line of argument, holds that the Communist International and its Soviet leadership perverted American Communism from its origins in the American left and labour movement, and twisted the Party into a Soviet tool. This in turn hurt the CP’s ability to speak to American. Draper—who left the party in 1940—wrote the standard twin studies of early American Communism, *The Roots of American Communism* (1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (1960). These are masterful pieces of historical scholarship that E.H. Carr justifiably labelled as one of only two ‘reasonably adequate’ studies of Communist Parties

¹ J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit* (New York: Pocket Books, 1959), 4.

throughout the world.² No other study of the Party has outlined in broad strokes the Party's history so well; nonetheless, they contain important weaknesses.

In analysing 'the relation of American Communism to Soviet Russia', Draper concluded that 'this relation has expressed itself in different ways.... But it has always been the determining factor, the essential element' in the development of the CP.³ The conclusion of *American Communism and Soviet Russia* answers the question implicit in its title: 'even at the price of virtually committing political suicide, American Communism would continue above all to serve the interests of Soviet Russia.'⁴ Draper yearns for 'other forms of American radicalism such as the open, democratic, pre-World War I Socialist party, the farmer-labor movement, or the syndicalist movement, all of which were far more indigenous and independent than the American Communist party'.⁵

Draper, then, erected a Chinese wall between 'American' radicalism and 'foreign', i.e., Soviet-dominated, Communism. The latter was by-and-large imposed upon American soil, and ignored, or even disregarded, earlier American radicalism. That is, the Comintern essentially aborted the birth of an authentically American radical movement. Thus Draper rejects a priori the possibility that either the influence of the Communist International or the Soviet Union could have been anything but negative for the early Communist movement. In the 1980s, Harvey Klehr—with the help of Draper's research materials, but without his sympathetic or creative talents—

² Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (Chicago: Elephant Publishers, 1985[1957]); idem., *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Vintage, 1986[1960]). E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country, 1924-1926* (London: Macmillan, 1964), v-vi. Carr also recommended Joseph Rothschild, *The Communist Party of Bulgaria: Origins and Development, 1883-1936* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

³ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 5.

⁴ Ibid., 441.

⁵ Ibid., 446.

extended Draper's analysis, with a sinister edge, into the 1930s 'popular-front' era.⁶ For Klehr, searches for Soviet control and 'Moscow Gold' read like a lawyer's brief for attacking the CP.⁷

Newer 'revisionist' or 'social' historians have downplayed 'Soviet control', arguing instead that the party sprouted largely from native soil. In a series of specialised monographs these historians focused on the rank-and-file effectiveness of the CP among certain constituencies such as blacks or immigrants.⁸ Perhaps the most innovative attempt is by Robin D.G. Kelley, who, in examining the activity of black rank-and-file CP members in the South during the Great Depression, illustrates that while Moscow-influenced politics did play a role in setting CP policy, for the rank-and-file membership, there was much more localised autonomy.⁹

A third school of historiography exists, namely Communists' own attempts to review their history. By and large these studies are designed more as textbooks for Party cadre, and thus justify whatever the current Party position was at the time of writing. The official CP view of its own history is, not surprisingly, more favourable to American Communism and hostile to Draper. From this perspective, the CP grew

⁶ Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

⁷ See Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, 'Radical History', *New Criterion* 20 (June 2002): 10, 17-23.

⁸ Examples include Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982); Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Autoworkers Union* (New York: International Publishers, 1991); Mark Naison, *Communists In Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); more recently, Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia* (London: Verso, 1998) and Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African-Americans, 1917-36* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998) examine key intersections between the CP and blacks.

⁹ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991). Kelley was not the first to argue that the American cadre had a degree of autonomy. Former CP leader J.B. Salutsky noted: 'The direction from the International Communist headquarters in Russia is held responsible for the inept tactics of the Communists in the United States. What Moscow has actually given its American followers is color, tone, and general direction, not detailed technique.... If some one must be blamed for the utter failure of the communist movement in the United States, that blame is to be laid at the door of the American performers.... Moscow's biggest sin was that of having too readily paid the traveling expenses of the American tacticians and strategists', J.B.S. Hardman, 'Postscripts to Ten Year of Labor Movement', in

almost organically out of the American class struggle and America's radical heritage. Instead of being foreign, American Communism was overwhelmingly an American phenomenon. As Earl Browder crudely put it: 'Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism'¹⁰ Anybody who asserts the importance of the Soviet Union is therefore engaging in red baiting—an accusation, in many cases, all too true. As Rutgers historian Norman Markowitz has written in the CP's *Political Affairs*:

For both the cold-war revival scholars and the makers of Reagan foreign policy, the standard of danger is how 'pro-Soviet' a party, movement, or organization is. A 'pro-Soviet' position is used as evidence that it is 'foreign' and 'controlled' by the Soviets, an 'anti-Soviet' position is used to portray it as indigenous, 'democratic', and in the U.S. context, 'American'. This, of course, attempts to reduce both the scholarly 'debate' and foreign policy questions to a renewed cold-war consensus based on the categories of the Smith and McCarran Acts.¹¹

In the upshot, the official CP histories—especially those written by William Z. Foster—illuminate the political history of the Party about as much as Stalin's *History of the Bolshevik Party (Short Course)*—i.e., not much.¹² But the main point is that they, like their enemies in the Draper school, also accept that there is a Chinese Wall between American and foreign influence, and differ only in their contention that the CP's roots were in American, and not Russian, soil. The perspective that the American CP's political (as opposed to organisational) roots were firmly based in the Comintern and the impact of the October Revolution, *and this gave the Party strength*, is absent from the debate entirely.¹³

J.B.S. Hardman, ed., *American Labor Dynamics in the Light of Post-War Developments* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), 24-25.

¹⁰ See Earl Browder, *What is Communism?* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1936), especially the first chapter, 'Who are the Americans?'

¹¹ Norman Markowitz, 'The New Cold War "Scholarship",' *Political Affairs*, October 1983, 6-7.

¹² See William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968). For a fuller discussion of the CP's own historiography, see Jacob Zumoff, 'The Stalinization of the Communist Party, USA: James P. Cannon and William Z. Foster' (BA dissertation, Rutgers University 1997), 5-7.

¹³ The only scholarly treatment of the positive impact of Comintern intervention is Robert Jay Alperin, 'Organization in the Communist Party, U.S.A., 1931-1938' (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1959): 'Cominform [sic] advice sent Communists into unions, taught them to raise and struggle for immediate demands, form united fronts...and focused for the first time the attention of the American

Even almost a decade after the end of the Cold War this debate still rages.¹⁴

The debate has lost none of its intensity, with each side reiterating the same arguments in an almost Sisyphusean procession. Indeed, especially now, with capitalism restored in Russia and East Europe, and with the chorus that 'Communism is dead' being sung from right-wing as well as erstwhile left-wing intellectuals and politicians, the controversy over Communism has achieved new vigour. It is now fashionable to tar-and-feather anything having to do with Marxism and the Soviet Union as great evils. Communism, we are told, was as bad, if not worse, than Nazism. One of the few benefits of the destruction of the Soviet Union, however, was that now there are more available sources--especially the former archives of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow. This is certainly no consolation to the workers of East Europe and Central Asia, nor does it offset the last decade's offensive against socialism and the working class; it does, however, allow historians to further expand our knowledge of early Communism.

From its inception in 1919, the Comintern collected documentation relating not only to the central Comintern apparatus, but also to its member parties. For various reasons, the American files are among the best organised of extant files. Nonetheless, the issue is still not so much the facts about the CP but what these facts *mean*.

Marxists (and Left generally) on the particular problems of the Negroes. From the point of view of the stated goals of the organization these would seem to be quite helpful suggestions' (26). Unfortunately, this line of analysis was not developed.

¹⁴ See, for example, John Earl Haynes, 'The Cold War Debate Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 2:1 (Winter 2000); and the subsequent exchange between Haynes and Ellen Schrecker on the Harvard Project for Cold War Studies website, <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~hpcws/haynesforum.htm>>. Cf. also Jacob Weisberg, 'Cold War Without End', *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 28 November 1999.

Some writers (represented in Yale University Press' Annals of Communism series), such as Klehr and his followers,¹⁵ have seized upon the Soviet archives to prove, once and for all, that American Communism was nothing more than an appendage to Soviet totalitarianism. Others, such as Barrett and Johanningsmeier, have painted a more sympathetic portrait of American Communism. Several things need to be said about the utility of the Soviet archives. First, they cannot supplant the use of more traditional archival and documentary sources such as the papers of former Communists and Socialists, and the material collected by Draper. Unlike, say, China, Vietnam or Japan, where the Communist movement was often severely repressed and its leaders jailed or even executed, in the United States, Communists and former Communists have left a rich documentary record. The importance of the Comintern archives, above even the best archives in the US, is both their completeness, and the fact that they present a fuller picture of the back and forth between the Comintern and American leaderships. However, there is a danger in relying too much on the archives. First, one must take on face value the accuracy of the records in the archives. Ironically, those most likely to denounce Soviet treachery and deceit during the Cold War are also those most likely to hail the archives. While I do believe that the material contained in the archives are largely true, it must also be kept in mind the

¹⁵ See Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and F.I. Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Klehr, Haynes, and K.M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998). Other anti-Communist historians who use the Comintern archives include John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anti-Communism in the Cold World Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999); Vernon L. Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919-57* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001). For examples who have used these archives for more sympathetic portraits of American Communists, see James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*.

conditions under which they were maintained.¹⁶ by themselves they do not offer any social or historical context; thus Vernon Pedersen's *The Communist Party in Maryland* (2001), while based extensively on the Comintern sources, presents a very incomplete view of the Party. Second, while there are district and local reports in the archives, by and large they present a centralised, top-down view of the Party; it is hard to gather a picture of what the Party was like for most members (except to confirm the fact that it consisted of many meetings), or what it actually did on the ground.¹⁷ Nonetheless, for a historian of American Communism, it would be unthinkable to not use the Comintern archives.

Focusing my research efforts on both these documents and more traditional primary sources, I call into question *both* the 'consensus' and the social historians' 'revisionist' writings, which each accept that there was a fundamental contradiction between the foreign, i.e., Comintern, and the American, trends within the CP. The chief difference of these schools lies only in the *relative weight* they assign to 'foreign/Soviet/Comintern' and 'American' aspects of the CP. 'Orthodox Draperites' argue that the CP's relationship to the Comintern and to the Soviet Union was the 'original sin' that precluded its tapping into and making use of a more indigenous heritage of American radicalism. And, in fact, Draper is right that the historian must examine 'the interrelation between the American Communist party and the Communist International, and in the interrelation between the Communist

¹⁶ According to Wolfgang Leonard, *Child of the Revolution* (London: Ink Links, 1979) during the Second World War, the Comintern archives were evacuated from Moscow. In 1943, upon the dissolution of the Comintern, they were quickly, if methodically, resorted. According to Leonard, who helped sort the American files, 'the Communist Party of the U.S.A. was readily conceded first place for chaos and confusion. The sacks belonging to my American comrades contained not only whole bundles of Party documents which had been simply stuffed in without even a file-cover being put round them, but also the remains of cinema advertisements, old numbers of the *New York Times*, broken pencils and every kind of rubbish that had not the slightest connection with the archives' (233).

¹⁷ The best use of the archives to present a local picture of the Party is Randi Jill Storch, 'Shades of Red: The Communist Party and Chicago's Workers, 1928-1939' (PhD thesis, University of Illinois at

International and the Russian Communist party.’ According to this view, Draper continued: ‘We must study an American movement whose seat of power was not located in the United States.’¹⁸ Yet, Draper—writing from a Cold War perspective—failed to fully grasp the role that ‘Moscow’ played in the party. My research suggests that far from *hindering* the early American Communists’ understanding and appreciation of American conditions, the Party’s links to the international Communist movement provided *indispensable assistance*.

Yet, the ‘social historians’ who took issue with Draper and his followers, *accept* his basic framework that Soviet ‘domination’ was the evil that was constant throughout the CP’s history. They merely invert Draper’s schema: they stress that the native radical traditions were much more prominent than Draper allows.¹⁹ The relationship between the Soviet Union and the Party was still bad—only, it was not so important in the Party’s history, especially its cultural history, as Draper had argued. Many of these ‘revisionist’ studies are marked by their almost exclusive focus on the *culture* of American Communism instead of its *politics*. Some even go so far as to bemoan that, in Buhle’s words, leftists in the immediate post-October Revolutionary period emphasised politics and ‘culture vanished from the foreground of Marxists concerns.’²⁰

This narrowness can in part be explained by the fact that most of the social historians were influenced by the ‘new labor history’ which, following the lead of E.P. Thompson and Herbert Gutman, examines history ‘from the bottom up’. They argue that, in the case of the labour movement, the most important factor was not the

Urbana-Champaign, 1998). Also, the papers of individual Communists are indispensable to penetrating the factions that riddled the Party in the 1920s.

¹⁸ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 12.

¹⁹ See for example Naison’s review of Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, in *Radical History Review* 32 (March 1985), 97-101.

²⁰ Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the USA from 1870 to the Present Day* (London: Verso, 1987), 116

institutional lives of unions and their leaders, but the actual lives of the working class. It is indisputable that historians such as Naison and Kelley have contributed immensely to our understanding of the importance of the American CP, just as the 'new labor' historians more generally have pushed the frontiers of labour and working-class history forward, and have certainly contributed to a fuller picture of American Communism. But there is another explanation for their emphasising 'social' issues: it allows historians to de-emphasise the importance of the political dimension in the CP. This means that the actually-existing politics (Soviet-influenced) of the CP can be viewed as secondary to the lived experiences of American communists (American). One recent biographical study of a leading American Communist, for example, relegated a chapter on 'the politics of the CPUSA' to the last.²¹ This accepts Draper's framework, but merely inverts the relationship between American and foreign.

In reaction to the standard anti-Communist historiography, one scholar observed that 'it is possible to accept this portrait if one is so influenced by the anti-Communist atmosphere that one considers the men and women who worked in the plants and belonged to the Communist Party as abstractions rather than people.' If 'social history' re-humanises Communists, then this is significant. However, we must also remember the other half of the historian's warning: 'while there is no need to cannonize them, there is a real need to take them seriously as workers, as organizers,

²¹ For Draper's critique of this perspective, see the afterward to the 1986 edition of *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, reprinted from two articles in *the New York Review of Books*. The seminal 'new labor history' are E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963) and Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society In Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1966); Kathleen A. Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor: The Politics of the Personal in the American Communist Party' (PhD thesis, University of Washington, 1996). See also Kathleen A. Brown and Elizabeth Faue, 'Social Bonds, Sexual Politics and Political Community on the U.S. Left, 1920s-1940s', *Left History* 7:1 (Spring 2000), 9-45, for another example of trivialising the political aspects of the left in favour of personal relationships. James R. Barrett, 'Revolution and Personal Crisis: William Z. Foster, Personal Narrative, and the Subjective in the History of American

and as Communists.’²² Another biography of an American Communist heralds the ‘revisionist’ historiography for ‘examining the thoughts and actions of the men and women involved in the [Communist] movement’. It must not be forgotten, however, that the Communists’ ‘thoughts and actions’—which often brought discomfort, hardship, dislocation, unemployment, torture and beatings, arrest and even death—were conditioned by the politics of the Communist Party.²³ By dismissing the politics that Communists, rightly or wrongly, struggled and sacrificed for, social historians often do their subjects a grave injustice.²⁴

The Comintern and the American Party

It is essentially this opposition between ‘American’ and ‘foreign’ in the historiography that is deficient about Draper’s analysis. The original Comintern--led by Bolshevik revolutionaries such as V.I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky—sought to establish national sections that would be rooted firmly in both their own working classes *and* in the international Communist movement. Lenin outlined this perspective in a speech at the third Comintern congress in the summer of 1921 dealing with Italian Communism. He made clear that ‘the revolution in Italy will take a different course from that in Russia,’ and that even though the Comintern’s ‘fundamental

Communism’, *Labor History* 43:4 (November 2002), 465-82, at least attempts to integrate the political and personal dimensions of its subject.

²² James Robert Prickett, ‘Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement, 1920-1950’ (PhD thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1975), 26-27. While both Prickett and I are critical of various CP policies and actions, this is often so from different directions.

²³ Fletcher C. Smith, ‘Clyde Johnson, American Communist: His Life in the Labor Movement’ (PhD thesis, University of Arkansas, 1999), 2.

²⁴ A quintessential example of the personal approach to Communist history, at the expense of the political, is Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); a more recent example, which, using oral history, tells the story of Communists with very little political context is Joe H. Roach, ‘Women in the American Communist Party and How their Party Activities Affected their Home Lives as Wives and Mothers’ (PhD thesis, New York University, 2000). In a review of Gornick’s book in the *New York Times* (‘Real Beliefs, False Ideals’, 12 February 1978), the social-democratic anti-Communist writer Michael Harrington illustrated how it is possible to pay homage to the humanity of Communists whilst denigrating their politics and thus demonstrated that while the new historians may have illuminating insights on individual Communists, they are less useful in analysing the Communist movement.

revolutionary principles' were the same everywhere, these 'must be adapted to the specific conditions in the various countries' by national sections of the Comintern. In fact, he stressed that it 'would have been stupid' for the Italian Communists 'to copy the Russian revolution'.²⁵ Later, Trotsky wrote in a similar vein: 'In politics, it is very important, and yet very difficult, on the one hand to define the *general* laws that determine the life or death struggle throughout the modern world; and on the other, to describe the *special combination* of these laws as they play out in each individual country.'²⁶

Lenin, Trotsky and the other Comintern leaders had explicit goals. Almost two decades before the Russian Revolution, Lenin had argued in *What Is To Be Done?* (1902) that the previously accepted social-democratic forms of working-class organisation were no longer sufficient. A motion at the 1904 Congress of the Second International, led by German Social Democratic leader Karl Kautsky, had outlined these traditional methods:

In order that the working class may put forth all its strength in the struggle against capitalism it is necessary that in every country there exist vis-à-vis the bourgeois parties, only *one* socialist party, as there exists only *one* proletariat. Therefore, it is the imperative duty of all comrades and socialist organizations to make every effort to bring about this unity on the basis of the principles established by the international congresses, a unity necessary in the interests of the proletariat before which they are responsible for all fatal consequences of a continued breach.²⁷

Against this view, Lenin argued for a revolutionary vanguard, made up of advanced workers and declassed intellectuals, which would lead the working class to socialist consciousness. Unlike most of the other left-wing tendencies within international social democracy, the Bolsheviks emphasised that the labour movement needed to be

²⁵ V.I. Lenin, 'Speech on the Italian Question', 28 June 1921, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, 464-66.

²⁶ Quoted in Osvaldo Coggiola, *Historia del trotskismo argentino, 1929-1960* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de America Latina, 1985), 11-12.

²⁷ Quoted in Joseph Seymour, *Lenin and the Vanguard Party* (New York: Spartacist Publishing Company, 1978), 4.

split, between its revolutionary and reformist elements. Famously, at a 1903 conference in London, the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party split into two factions, the Bolsheviks ('men of the majority'), lead by Lenin, and the Mensheviks ('men of the minority'), lead by Jules Martov, over this very question. Lenin summed up his view of the differences shortly after the split:

We argued that the concept Party member must be *narrowed* so as to separate those who worked from those who merely talked, to eliminate organisational chaos, to eliminate the monstrous and absurd possibility of there being organisations which consisted of Party members which were not Party organisations, and so on. Martov stood for *broadening* the Party and spoke of a broad class movement needing a broad—i.e., diffuse—organisation, and so forth.²⁸

Lenin, although he did not fully realise it at the time, was attacking the essence of the standard social-democratic party. It was not until the world war and significant sections of social democrats in belligerent countries supported their own governments, that Lenin generalised this split and insisted that it was impossible to coexist in the same party as pro-war 'social-chauvinists'.²⁹

Lenin and Trotsky saw the Comintern's goal as forging such parties internationally. This was integrally tied to the standard Marxist conception that it was impossible to build socialism in one country alone and that revolutions internationally, especially in the industrialised world, were necessary. This was the reason that the Comintern was founded in 1919, as a revolutionary replacement to Kautsky's 'social-chauvinist' Second International. Thus the Bolsheviks sought to establish the Comintern as a way of defending their revolution by extending it internationally.

²⁸ Lenin, 'Account of the Second Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.', *Collected Works*, vol. 7, 27. Cf. also Isaac Deustcher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879-1921* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 75-85.

²⁹ See, e.g., V. I. Lenin and Gregori Zinoviev, *Socialism and War* (1915), in *Collected Works.*, vol. 21, 295-334.

The Comintern sought to impart its conception of Leninist organisation to its international affiliates. Far from hindering the development of a strong American Communist movement as both ‘Draperians’ and his ‘social history’ adversaries have posited, this ‘interference’ by the early Comintern was the *precondition* for the development of a truly American Communist Party. In my thesis I trace this development in several ways. First I examine the relationship of early American Communism to its predecessors, especially the Socialist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. The Comintern attempted fuse of elements of both these traditions into the early CP—i.e., tap into ‘indigenous’ American radicalism. This required not only organisational but political changes, especially in the seemingly endless attempts to finally unite the disparate revolutionary left into one party with a cohesive and collective leadership. Unlike in Britain, where the fact that large sections of the left-wing of the workers movement—especially Sylvia Pankhurst’s group, the syndicalists around John MacLean in Scotland, and the Socialist Labour Party—remained outside of the new CP gave the party a stillborn character, American Communism sparkled with vitality, marked by many fights.

Even after the American Communists had joined together into one party, they were still cleft by deep factional divisions as well as differing opinions of the Communist path in the US. By attempting to end this endless factionalism, creating a legal party apparatus, forcing the CP to pay attention to unionised English-speaking workers, the Comintern—counter to Draper’s analysis—actually forced the American CP to ‘Americanise’. The Comintern also made the early Party acknowledge the American trade-union movement as a way of gaining influence amongst the working class. It is in this context that the Comintern, acting on the pressure of black Communists such as Cyril V. Briggs and Claude McKay, forced the early CP to deal

with the ‘American question’ par excellence: the fight for black liberation, i.e., the ‘Negro question’.

The oppression of black people, since the forging of the United States in the crucible of slavery, has been the bedrock of American capitalism. As has been demonstrated several times throughout American history, the struggle for black rights can act as a catalyst for fundamental social change, such as during the abolitionist movement, Reconstruction and the civil rights movement. Yet the early Communist Party, like the American labour and socialist movement in general, ignored the ‘Negro Question’ until prodded by the Comintern. The Comintern’s emphasis on addressing this issue illustrates that only with such guidance was the Party able to sink deep roots in American soil.

Without Comintern ‘interference’ it is quite likely that the CP would have remained several small, foreign-language, isolated sects with very little interaction with American reality—i.e., it would have remained stillborn, with no chance ever of revolutionising American society. Comintern intervention—‘foreign domination’—did not create a party that was alien to American reality, but forced the Party to ‘Americanise’. Without Comintern aid, the early Party would have been unable to grapple with the reality of US society. Far from ‘aborting’ American Communism, the Comintern acted as its midwife.

Against the simple schema presented by Draper, early Comintern intervention was also not entirely a one-way street. Although the American Communist movement was too weak and young to have much input with the Comintern, its opinions and ideas were solicited from Moscow and its members sat on such Comintern bodies as the Executive Committee (ECCI). Comintern representatives to the US were not all Russian, as the central apparatus of the Comintern drew upon Communist militants

from across the world. Americans also served as Comintern representatives in foreign parties. This reflected both the Bolshevik's deep-seated internationalism and the reality that Russia—a largely illiterate peasant society—could not provide the cadre to create a modern administration for either the Soviet state or the Comintern.³⁰ The sum of the Comintern's membership, i.e., the International itself, was designed to be greater than all its parts, i.e., its national sections. More broadly, as Trotsky had written in July 1920:

By joining the ranks of the Third International, an organization of a given country not only becomes subordinate to the common vigilant and exacting leadership, but itself acquires the right to actively participate in the leadership of all other sections of the Communist International.³¹

Even when the Comintern made decisions about the American CP--such as whether the Party should seek to become legal--it was only after hearing arguments from all sides in disputes. The Comintern also made questions of policy for individual sections the purview of the entire International. This contrasted with the traditional method of the Second International which essentially allowed its constituent parties to follow whatever line they wanted to. The importance that Lenin attached to this internationalism can be seen by the fact that he took the time in the middle of the Civil War to write his polemic against 'ultra leftism', *'Left Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. These were all part of the Comintern's plan to build a democratic-centralist international organisation.

When discussing 'Comintern control', it is important to keep a sense of perspective. Although international in scope, the Comintern was not omnipotent; in fact, it was hindered by financial, transport and communication difficulties. Although

³⁰The appendix to Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, contains a list of Americans who held Comintern offices or undertook Comintern assignments in foreign countries.

³¹ Leon Trotsky, 'The French Socialist Party', 22 July 1920, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (London: New Park, 1973), vol. 1, 112.

leading Bolsheviks played important roles in the Comintern, and at times participated in decisions affecting constituent parties, they often found their attention needed more urgently on Soviet affairs.³² What time they had left over was often spent on the more important parties.

By the mid 1920s, with Lenin's death, the increasing bureaucratisation of the Soviet Union and Stalin's ascension, the programme of the Comintern qualitatively changed, from 'revolutionary proletarian internationalism' to 'socialism in one country'. Instead of trying to forge parties that were capable of overthrowing capitalism as part of international revolution, the Comintern sought to create conservatising parties: 'socialism in one country' was translated as 'socialism in Russia only'. This framework rejects the traditional consensus that there is no qualitative difference between Leninism and Stalinism.³³

Nonetheless, even though much larger or more immediately important parties such as the German KPD³⁴ may have experienced this changed Comintern intervention first and foremost, smaller parties like the American CP also were affected, although for a variety of reasons which will be examined, over a longer

³² On the limits of Comintern power over individual parties, see Andrew Thorpe, 'Comintern "control" of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-43', in *English Historical Review* 113 (June 1998).

³³ For a 'revisionist' discussion on the historiography concerning the relationship between Stalin and Lenin, albeit largely in the context of internal Soviet politics, see Stephen F. Cohen, 'Bolshevism and Stalinism', in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Norton, 1977), 3-29. For a more traditional view that 'Stalin was a Leninist in that he faithfully followed his patron's political philosophy and practices,' see Richard Pipes, *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime, 1919-1924* (London: Harvill, 1994), 506-508. Of course Pipes argues also that in the rise of Nazism, 'the influence of Marxism in both its original and Bolshevik guises was unmistakable' (259).

³⁴ Carr, in *The Interregnum*, locates the decisive moment in which—to borrow Lenin's term—'quantity became quality' in the role of the Comintern in the botched revolutionary situation in Germany in 1923, in which Stalin and his allies heavily intervened in the KPD as a means of braking revolution. Trotsky, on the other hand, had stressed the importance of the KPD's preparing a revolutionary insurrection; articulated in his 1924 *Lessons of October* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937), Trotsky's polemic was both directed against the Brandler leadership of the KPD and the Stalin-Zinoviev-Kamenev 'troika' leadership of the Soviet party. For an overview of the KPD and the Comintern, in light of documents from the Comintern archives, see Aleksandr Vatlin, 'The testing ground of world revolution: Germany in the 1920s', in Tim Rees and Andrew Thorpe, *International Communism and the Communist International, 1919-43* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

period of time. As the latter chapters in this study demonstrate, manipulating feverish factional divisions that already existed within the top leadership of the CP, the now-Stalinist Comintern in turn Stalinised the American party, creating in the process a servile leadership. This process did not occur overnight, but took several years. And, at least in the case of the American Party, this process was not merely a 'top-down' imposition by the Comintern leadership in Moscow. The conservatism emanating from Moscow resonated among sections of the American Party's leadership, especially that around Jay Lovestone, who increasingly despaired of the possibility of socialist revolution. Also, the change in the Comintern was also resisted by sections of the Party leadership, especially those around James P. Cannon.

The Stalinisation of the Party, then, was a complex process that did not occur instantly or smoothly. Even in the late 1920s the Comintern's intervention had salutatory results at times. Stalinist efforts such as Bolshevisation, the Third Period, dual unionism and the Black Belt theory, although at odds with American reality and designed to increase the grip of the Stalinist bureaucracy on the American Party, resulted in gains as well as losses, often in ways beyond the imagination of their designers. This was most clear in the case of the 'Negro Question'.

In researching his histories of the Party, Draper found Cannon's recollections of the early years of American Communism among the most useful of those he consulted.³⁵ Cannon observed, 'Between the early years of integrity and its later corruption there was a transition period of a transformation of the once revolutionary organization into its opposite.' Cannon outlined three periods in the early CP's history. First, is its genesis from the left-wing of American social democracy and

³⁵ These were published as James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism: Report of a Participant* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962). See Draper's introduction for his account of the usefulness of Cannon's book.

syndicalism, when, prompted by the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, elements split from the Socialist Party in 1919. Second, from 1920-1923, the CP engaged in a process of orienting itself to American terrain through a series of factional debates. In both of these periods, the Comintern played a beneficial role, offering its own experience to help create an American Communist Party. But, in 1924-1928, Cannon observed, 'Something went wrong, and the party began to gyrate crazily like a mechanism out of control.' The creation of hard factional battles, consisting not of temporary debates over political issues but of permanent struggles for party power, inevitably created frustration, cynicism and demoralisation, even among pioneer Communists who had been able to withstand state repression. The post-Leninist Comintern, first under Zinoviev and then Stalin, encouraged this weakening of the Party, and then utilised it to ensure its own political and organisation hegemony.³⁶

Thus, the dynamic of debate and discussion within the CP as the Comintern itself changed. Instead of free and open debate as earlier, the Comintern intervened into the internal battles—which were often predicated on the earlier factionalism—not to strengthen the party as before, but rather to eliminate all opposition to its course. The last portion of my thesis examines this process, which culminated in the expulsion of the party's right wing—led by Jay Lovestone, a sympathiser of Nikolai Bukharin—and its left—Trotskyists led by James P. Cannon—while a pliable pro-Stalinist leadership under Earl Browder was installed.

The American Party and the Comintern

If the history of the Communist Party must be viewed not only as part of the American labour movement, but also part of the Communist International, then I hope

³⁶ Ibid., 15-19.

that this study also contributes to broader historical debates about the Comintern since it is impossible to write coherently about the development of a national section of the Comintern without grappling with the development of the Comintern itself. The question of the relationship between the Comintern leadership and individual parties has been debated in many, many, national contexts. For example, one recent study of early Indian Communism argues that ‘it was the highly centralized and erroneous policy of the Comintern which was a major factor in preventing the Communist movement from taking root in India’, and which above all illustrated the ‘complete alienation and ignorance that the Comintern leaders had of the developments on the ground in India’, especially Gandhi and nationalism. The author’s conclusions could be accepted by historians in many different countries:

The success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and the creation of the Comintern, seem to have acted more as a handicap to the development of an indigenous communist movement in India rather than an effective aid.³⁷

Of course, all Communist Parties were not the same. First, different parties had more or less centralised relationships with the ECCI, whose ability to control various parties was frustrated or aided by circumstances including language, geography, interest and importance. Various studies have noted that the Comintern could not automatically impose its decisions on all its member parties, especially in North America, for these reasons.³⁸

Secondly, because the Communist Party was so marginalised in US society, the importance of focusing on its politics increases. In some countries, one can

³⁷ Dushka H. Saiyid, *Exporting Communism to India: Why Moscow Failed* (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1995), v. This is based on Dishka Hyder Saiyid, ‘The Comintern and the Communist Party of India, 1920-1929 (MPhil thesis, London School of Economics, 1978); interestingly enough, in 1996 Saiyid was a fellow at the Salzburg Seminar where she helped develop a workshop on ‘Radicalism in Interwar America’ (see www.salzburgseminar.org/ASC/csac/progs/reform/radicalism.htm).

³⁸ Storch, ‘Shades of Red’, 17; Cf. Stanley Markotich, ‘International Communism and the Communist Party of Canada’ (PhD thesis, University of Indiana, 1992). These works reach similar conclusions

imagine that local and trade-union politics, family tradition and other more mundane concerns weighed more heavily in a party's ability to recruit, and therefore a social approach may be more valid than in the US, where joining the Party was, based almost entirely upon political commitment to Communism. The 'Red Clydeside', and certain areas in Italy and France have a much larger Communist history which could be fruitfully analysed socially than most similar US Party history. The very uniqueness of 'certain social groups', such as Finns and Jews, for whom, in Nathan Glazer's words, 'it was neither eccentric nor exceptional to become a Communist', indicate that such cases were the exception rather than the rule.³⁹

With the opening of the Comintern's archives in the former Soviet Union beginning in the late-1980s, this debate has assumed new intensity.⁴⁰ One historian of the Comintern recently identified what he sees as 'the major controversies in Comintern history':

First, continuities and discontinuities between the Leninist and Stalinist regimes in the Comintern: was the latter the logical outcome of the former? Second, relations between the central Comintern authorities in Moscow and the national Communist parties: was the highly centralist Bolshevik model universalised or did parties retain a measure of autonomy? Third, the relationship between the Comintern and official Soviet foreign policy: was the Communist International merely an instrument of the Soviet state? And, finally, the crucial issue of the attitudes adopted by Communists towards the social democrats: how were they to win over a majority of the organised working class for revolutionary perspectives in an essentially non-revolutionary era?⁴¹

about the relationship between the ECCI and national sections, but from opposite ideological perspectives.

³⁹ See Paul C. Mishler, 'Red Finns, Red Jews: Ethnic Variation in Communist Political Culture during the 1920s and 1930s', *YIVO Annual* 22 (1995), 131-54. Quote is from Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961), 6.

⁴⁰ For an opening salvo of this new exchange, see Fridrikh Firsov, 'What the Comintern's Archives will Reveal', in *World Marxist Review* 32 (January 1989), 52-57. Firsov—then the 'section head at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, CC CPSU'—has since the collapse of the Soviet Union switched sides, and is now a collaborator with Klehr. See Rees and Thorpe, ed., *International Communism and the Communist International*, for generally interesting, if uneven, articles on several different Communist Parties.

⁴¹ Kevin McDermott, 'The history of the Comintern in light of new documents', in Rees and Thorpe, ed., *International Communism and the Communist International*, 31-32.

The first two questions my study speaks to directly, and the last two, at least indirectly.

Of course, one must use caution in generalising too much from a study of a single Communist Party a pattern for the entire Comintern. This is especially true for the American CP, which was essentially on the periphery of the Comintern, while West and Central European parties—especially Germany—occupied the centre. And of course, throughout the 1920s, socialist revolution was more palatable in many countries than in the US. In 1921, James Ballister, representative from the US Party to the Comintern, used the parlance of the underground Party to note ‘the little esteem that the general office has for the American business in general’ and bemoan that ‘the main office considers the American branch more as a nuisance than as a bona fide business institution.’⁴²

In 1926, of the 46 parties in the capitalist world, while the American CP was the sixth largest, its myriad members paled in comparison to the hundreds of thousands which the German and Czechoslovak parties claimed.⁴³ Furthermore, most of those countries had gone through near-revolutionary situations while the seemingly indestructible nature of American capitalism had American Communists speculating about ‘American exceptionalism’.

Communists in the US occupied a middle role in the Comintern solar system. Although very small both in absolute numbers and in relationship to the population of

⁴² James Marshall [Ballister] to ‘Dear Friends’, 25 April 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39. Later, he complained that ‘the honor conferred upon me turned out to be quite a tedious and disagreeable job’, letter to ‘Dear Friend’, 4 May 1921, in same file. On the other hand, leading British Communist J.T. Murphy recalled that ‘leaders and would-be leaders were always streaming in from the U.S.A., lending life and colour to the proceedings,’ but of course he wasn’t assigned to bring order to the chaos of the American Party (*New Horizons* [London: John Lane, 1941], 240).

⁴³ ‘Introduction’ to Rees and Thorpe, ed., *International Communism and the Communist International*, 2. According to official Comintern figures, in 1927 the American CP had 12,000 dues-paying (or 14,000 ‘actual’) members; in comparison, the KPD had 124,720 dues-paying members; the CPGB 9,000 (down from 12,000 in 1926); the PCF 52,370; and the Soviet CP, 1.2 million members. (*The*

the US, the obvious importance of ascendant American capitalism ensured that the Comintern leadership did not entirely ignore their American comrades as was the fate of smaller parties in less important countries far from Moscow (such as Canada).

Speaking at the Petrograd Soviet in September 1919, Zinoviev noted this importance:

the birth of a communist party in America, however young and weak it may be, is looked upon by the whole of the third International as one of the greatest events of world history.... The world revolution can be established only when it will be victorious not only in the European continent, but when it will also embrace America. The birth of the American Communist Party, and its growth, is the first swallow which foretells the coming of the world-wide spring.⁴⁴

While the very early issues of the *Communist International* confined its coverage of the United States to essentially reprinting clippings from the North American left-wing press, by the mid-1920s it was carrying articles written by leading American cadre.⁴⁵ In the mid-1920s, Stalin and seven other important Soviet Communists were on the Comintern's American commission. As Stalin himself put it: 'The American Communist Party is one of those very few Communist parties of the world that are entrusted by history with tasks of decisive importance from the point of view of the revolutionary movement.'⁴⁶ In 1928, at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Stalin chose the factional battles within the American Party to debut his model of the correct relationship between the Comintern leadership (i.e., him) and the individual parties.⁴⁷ It was over the question of American 'exceptionalism' that Stalin and Bukharin

Communist International Between the Fifth and Sixth World Congresses, 1924-8 [London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1928], 30.)

⁴⁴ *Communist International*, old series no 6, October 1919.

⁴⁵ For examples of the first coverage of the US, cf. 'The Social Revolution before the Courts' (about the IWW) and the American section of 'Chronicle of the Revolutionary Movement', in *ibid*, old series no 2, 1 August 1919. The coverage of the split from the SP ('America: The Founding of a Communist Party', *ibid.*, old series no 5, no date [September 1919?]) is obviously based on a reading of the various manifestos and pleads ignorance of detail.

⁴⁶ *The Communist*, June 1930, quoted in Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1975), 44.

⁴⁷ Joseph Milton Kling, 'Making the Revolution—Maybe...Deradicalization and Stalinism in the American Communist Party, 1928-1938' (PhD thesis, City University of New York, 1983), 142.

locked horns and the former eclipsed the latter.⁴⁸ Of course, this importance had less to do with the role of Communism in American politics than with the role of the US in international politics. Or, as Jay Lovestone immodestly bragged in 1927: ‘with America playing the role it plays today in world politics, finance and industry, it is obvious that the importance of building a Communist movement here is inestimable.’⁴⁹ Thus, ironically, the very features that decreased the Party’s importance in American politics—the strength of American capitalism and imperialism—magnified its importance in international Communism.

One other characteristic of US society, reflected in its socialist movement, increased the importance of US Communism to the world movement. Since the US is an immigrant society, the ranks of immigrant socialists there often included figures who would play important roles in the international labour movement. If Russian socialists such as Nikolai Bukharin, Alexandra Kollontai and Leon Trotsky only spent a small amount of time in the US, some like Boris Reinstein, Max Goldfarb (Petrovsky) or V. Volodarsky (Moisey Goldstein) stayed longer before returning to Russia. Other foreign communists who had been active in the US include James Larkin, from Ireland; M.N. Roy, from India; Sen Katayama, from Japan; Giacinto Serrati, from Italy; and S.J. Rutgers, from Holland.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism*, 138; Cf. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 294.

⁴⁹ Jay Lovestone, ‘Toward Another Wave of Revolutionary Struggles’, *Communist*, May 1927.

⁵⁰ On foreign Communists’ activities in the US, see generally Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, 73-79. On Bukharin’s time in the US, see Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 43; on Trotsky, see Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 242-43; on Serrati, see Mario de Campos, ‘Storia del Movimento Socialista Rivoluzionario Italiano’, *La Parola del Popolo* [Chicago] 9:37(December 1958), 136-63; on Katayama, see Hyman Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary: The Life of Sen Katayama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), chapter 12; on Larkin, see Emmett Larkin, *James Larkin: Irish Labour Leader, 1876-1947* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), chapter 10; Emmet O’Connor, ‘James Larkin in the United States 1914-23’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 37 (April 2002) 2, 183-96; Claire A. Cullerton, ‘James Larkin and J. Edgar Hoover: Irish Politics and an American Conspiracy’, *Eire-Ireland* 35 (Fall-Winter 2000) 3/4, 238-59; on Boris Reinstein, see William H. Siener, ‘The Red Scare Revisited: Radicals and the Anti-Radical Movement in Buffalo,

Finally, since this thesis attempts to place examine not only the US Party, but the development of the Comintern itself, I have attempted to locate the development of the American CP within the context of the history of its fraternal parties.

‘Americanisation’, Americans and the American Communist Party

This topic also begs the question of what exactly ‘American’ radicalism is, since going back to at least Tom Paine it has been forged in the crucible of international events. The American labour movement—including both its right and its left wings—cannot be divorced from international events ranging from the Russian struggle against the tsar to the Irish fight against Britain and the Mexican struggle against US domination and more native tyranny.⁵¹ The concept of ‘Americanisation’, like its cousin, ‘American exceptionalism’, has meant different things at different points to different people. The debate about, what, exactly is ‘American’—and if such a beast really exists—is largely outside the scope of this thesis. Most concepts of ‘American’ are essentially repressive and restrictive, and tend to be defined usually by what ‘American’ is *not*. Thus, for example, American is speaking English, and not Italian, Yiddish or Spanish. To many—including the House Committee on Un-American Affairs and the American Legion—American is decidedly not Communism. In 1920, the former mayor of Seattle summed up this perspective in a book called simply *Americanism versus Bolshevism*.⁵² Due to the immigrant roots of American society, attempts to define what American is usually falter, since American staples such as Apple Pie, hamburgers and John Locke’s liberalism and even the English

1919-1920’, *New York History* 79:1(1998), 30, 47-48; Selig Adler and Thomas E. Connolly, *From Ararat to Suburbia: The History of the Jewish Community of Buffalo* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 247.

⁵¹ On this point, see for example Michael Miller Topp, *Those Without a Country: The Political Culture of Italian American Syndicalists* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 12-15.

⁵² Ole Hanson, *Americanism versus Bolshivism* (Garden City, New York and London: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1920).

language are actually rooted elsewhere and only tortured logic worthy of Bernard Bailyn can render them 'American'.

It should be kept in mind that one of the strengths of Communism to its supporters is that it is a universalising, catholic world view. By joining the CP, an immigrant worker in New York, a Chicago black intellectual or a former IWW militant did more than just join the American CP; he joined an international fraternity, dedicated to international unity and solidarity. Marxism is heir to a long tradition of Enlightenment universalism. As Robin Kelley put it, 'Although the relationships have not always been comfortable, the Communist movement enabled many different people to identify with other oppressed peoples, and to reject patriotism and national identity.'⁵³

One Party leader, in an article called 'What Americanization means to our Party', after noting that the impetus for the CP came from the Russian Revolution, described 'Americanisation' as 'the application of Leninism to America', chiefly consisting of the necessity 'to win the leadership of the American working class'.⁵⁴ This answer is still vague. However, within the context of the study of American Communism, 'Americanisation' has usually meant several things—often, all at the same time. At various times, the Party, the Party members, or the Party ideology that, by turn, are 'Americanised' in the literature.⁵⁵ Most basically, it has meant transforming the Party from an organisation with a foreign-born membership to one with a native-born, English-speaking membership. However, it has also intersected

⁵³ Robin D.G. Kelley, 'How the West Was One: On the Uses and Limitations of Diaspora', *The Black Scholar* 30 (Fall-Winter 2000), 32. Cf. Joseph Seymour, *Enlightenment Rationalism and the Origins of Marxism* (New York: Spartacist Publishing Company, 1997).

⁵⁴ *Party Organizer*, March-April 1928.

⁵⁵ Perhaps the most pertinent example is Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, which at various times uses almost these senses of 'Americanisation' while making the strong argument that the '(inter)national question' has all too often been overlooked by historians in assessing the history of American socialism.

discussion of the ‘Americanisation’ of its foreign-born membership—or as Buhle put it, ‘Communism provided a true Americanizing experience’.⁵⁶ It has also been applied to the ‘Americanisation’ of the Party’s leadership in the same sense that mass Communist Parties spoke of ‘Eurocommunism’ decades later—i.e., becoming more responsive to domestic political considerations than Moscow orders.⁵⁷

In this thesis, however, the term ‘Americanisation’ refers not to the background of the Party membership or leadership, but rather to the political relationship of the Party to American society. All Communist parties shared the programme of replacing capitalism with the rule of the working class as a step towards building a socialist society. ‘Americanisation’ consisted not in eschewing this goal in favour of a more realistic, ‘American’ one (as happened during the popular front in the 1930s), but learning how, given the unique historical development of American society, this goal could best be accomplished.

While a key component of this was learning English—no small task for the early Party—it also required, to borrow from José Carlos Mariátegui, an interpretation of North American reality. Very often the political and theoretical tasks of Americanisation were integrally tied up with the organisational tasks, such as lessening the dependence of the Party upon foreign-language federations. This thesis argues that while the Comintern, thousands of kilometres away in Moscow, could not

⁵⁶Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 123. For discussion of the ‘Americanising’ aspects of the Party, see Paul C. Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Paul Buhle, ‘Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question’, *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring 1980) examines this function of the Party in relationship to Jewish Communists. The Popular Front—by asserting that the Party was part of a long line of American Radicalism, extending to Thomas Jefferson and the American Revolution and that ‘Communism is Twentieth Century Americanism’—also, whatever the political ramifications or historical accuracy, participated in the ‘Americanisation’ of its followers, as did its gung-ho support to the US during the Second World War.

⁵⁷This tension lies at the centre of the book by former Party cadre Joseph R. Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis*. It is axiomatic for Klehr that the Party never thus became ‘Americanised’; Draper ended his study before this tension became the most acute, in the post-war period.

know enough to do this itself, its political experience and organisational guidance enabled the American Communists to begin this process.

2. The Origins of American Communism

In their attempt to forge a new, revolutionary international from the wreckage of the Second International, the Bolsheviks sought to tap into what they saw as the best elements of the working-class movement throughout the world. Indeed, the impact of the October Revolution was so great, especially after the betrayal of the Social Democracy in the face of World War I, that large sections of the socialist and labour movement rallied to it as in France or Italy.¹

In the US, as well, the first supporters of Bolshevism and its new International sprang from the left-wing of the American labour movement, especially the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), Socialist Party (SP), and Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). This chapter examines how the American Communist movement developed out of these antecedents. In the early years of the American Communist movement, the Bolsheviks and the Communist International were invaluable in two different ways. First, they provided the ideological basis for the new movement, one which was often quite different from either the left-wing social-democracy of both the SLP and the SP or the syndicalism of the IWW. The early Communists had to learn what Communism was, and to assimilate Bolshevik politics. However, even after splitting from the SP in solidarity with the Russian Revolution, the would-be American Bolsheviks still needed to learn what it meant to organise themselves in a truly Bolshevik manner. The Comintern politically and organisationally helped the pioneer Communists, primarily encouraging them to unify into one Party instead of several smaller hostile groups, and to take advantage of democratic rights to organise. In these ways, the Comintern and the Bolsheviks acted as a midwife to American Communism; without them, the movement would have been stillborn.

¹ See R. Craig Nation, *War on War: Lenin, the Zimmerwald Left, and the Origins of Communist Internationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989).

American social democracy:

The Socialist Labor and the Socialist parties

Both native American and post-1848 German émigré radicals helped developed American Marxism in the nineteenth century. Until the Civil War created the basis for industrial capitalism throughout the United States, what few socialists there were concerned themselves largely with the struggle against slavery. Labour radicalism took off amidst the tremendous class battles at the end of the century, including the 1877 Railway strike, the 1886 Haymarket ‘riot’, the 1892 Homestead strike and the 1894 Pullman strike.²

The first significant American socialist organisation was the Socialist Labor Party, founded in 1876, and which had 10,000 members by the end of that decade.³ In 1890, Daniel De Leon joined the SLP and quickly became its most prolific writer and its general leader until his death in the early 20th Century, leading the SLP in a more orthodox Marxist fashion.⁴

A former laws lecturer at Columbia University who had been radicalised by the industrial unrest in the late 1800s, De Leon was the first real American Marxist.⁵ He not only translated Marxist classics into English for the first time, but attempted to analyse the American labour movement from both an American and a Marxist perspective. Socialists, then as now, often criticised him for his sectarianism,

² Cf. Philip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York: Pathfinder, 1977), especially chapters 6-9, for the history of early American Marxism. The first chapters of Paul Buhle, *Marxism the USA* also discuss this. Cf. also, Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, 11-35. Membership figures taken from Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 1.

³ Stephen Coleman, *Daniel De Leon* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1990), 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁵ On De Leon’s life, see Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*; and L. Glen Seretan, *Daniel De Leon: The Odyssey of an American Marxist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Cf. Carl Reeve, *The Life and Times of Daniel De Leon* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972).

dogmatism, and large ego.⁶ Although De Leon's thought would continue to play an important, although not always positive, role in American socialism, by the Bolshevik Revolution, the SLP was organisationally spent and had all-but hardened into a sect.⁷

Yet, as Stephen Coleman has noted, 'Most of the people who founded the Communist Party of the USA...had, at some point in their political evolutions, been politically educated by De Leon.' The most important example is Louis Fraina, the first theorist of American Communism, whom Paul Buhle labelled De Leon's 'most important protégé'. A recent biographer of William Z. Foster claimed that, 'Foster was most impressed by the works of Daniel De Leon.' Foster's later factional opponent, Jay Lovestone, was first attracted to the writings of De Leon. Communist organiser Ella Reeve Bloor, one of the Party's most famous women leaders, had been an SLP organiser before helping to found the Party. Caleb Harrison, an early leader in the Workers Party, had been a member of the SLP, and had used his contacts from the SLP to organise in the US as well as Canada, where a number of former SLPers joined the nascent Communist movement.⁸ Boris Reinstein, a Russian émigré who had been a leader in the Buffalo SLP, represented the US at the first Comintern congress and advised Lenin on American issues.⁹

Two important features of De Leon's thought pulsed through the blood of the American left even long after he died in 1914. The first was a refusal to fight for

⁶ Buhle, *American Marxism*, 50; Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, 151-52.

⁷ Among sections of the American left, the term 'De Leonist' is still used to describe a small sect with little interaction with the working class except to publish its paper.

⁸ Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, 154; Paul M. Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995), 5; James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism*, 31. On Lovestone, see Morgan, *Jay Lovestone*, 9-10; On Bloor (who had also been a member of the SP), see Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor', 17, 109, 274; Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 24. On Harrison, including his work in Canada, see Tim Buck, *Yours in Struggle: Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto: New Canada, 1977), 91.

⁹ George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), 135-36.

‘minimum demands’ or social reforms such as child labour laws and the 8-hour day, which De Leon viewed only as ‘palliatives’ granted by capitalists to dupe the working class. The second distinguishing feature about ‘De Leonism’ is the role he assigned to unions in the struggle for socialism. After Gompers expelled his followers in the early 1890s, De Leon developed a theory of dual, revolutionary, unionism instead of working within the AFL, which was the basis of leftist labour activity for several decades.¹⁰

In 1900, a reformist right-wing left the SLP, led by New York lawyer Morris Hillquit and California attorney Job Harriman, in part in reaction against De Leon’s dual-unionist perspective. A year later, this group merged with another small socialist group, led by Victor Berger and Eugene V. Debs, to form the Socialist Party (SP). The SP steadily grew, from its founding membership of less than 10,000, to its pinnacle in 1912. That year it counted almost 118,000 members and polled nearly 900,000 votes—6 per cent of the popular vote—for its presidential candidate, Debs.¹¹ By 1912, 1039 SP members held office, including 56 mayors, more than 300 aldermen, several state legislators and one US Congressman. At the same time, the SP published five English and eight foreign-language dailies; 262 English and 36 foreign-language weeklies; and ten English and two foreign-language monthlies.¹²

¹⁰ See Nathan Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States, 1828-1928* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1928), 182; Foster, *The Bankruptcy of the Labor Movement*, 26-27. On Gompers’s antipathy to De Leon and the SLP, see David Nack, ‘The American Federation of Labor Confronts Revolution in Russia and the Early Soviet Government, 1905 to 1928: Origins of Labor’s Cold War’ (PhD thesis, Rutgers University, 1999), 21-23.

¹¹ Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 33-36, 61-64; Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, 46-48; Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, 294-310; David A. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America* (Chicago: Quadrangle Publishers, 1967), 5.

¹² On the Milwaukee SP, led by Berger, which came the closest of all SP locals to a mass labour party, see Charles Robert Leinenweber, ‘Immigration and the Decline of Internationalism in the American Working Class Movement, 1864-1919’, (PhD thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1968) 177-89; on number of SP office holders, see Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States*, 214. On publication information, see Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 79.

The SP, which soon became the American section of the Socialist (Second) International,¹³ at one time recruited many important American intellectuals such as Max Eastman, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, Jack London, John Spargo and William English Walling.¹⁴ The SP was the first socialist organisation not made up predominately by German or Jewish immigrants.¹⁵ The SP's politics were more conservative than the SLP: its right wing supported reforms as well as the pro-capitalist AFL led by Samuel Gompers. Within the AFL, the SP had substantial support, although it never achieved the same organic links to the labour movement that its European cousins developed.¹⁶ Yet its left-wing, grouped around Debs, opposed the AFL. This difference on the question of unionism pointed to one of the main weaknesses of the SP: it was extremely politically heterogeneous. The party included middle-class progressives, farmer populists, Christian socialists, trade-unionists, as well as revolutionaries and supporters of the IWW.¹⁷

American syndicalism: the Industrial Workers of the World

Debs and De Leon, along with other left-wing socialists and radical unionists, founded the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or 'wobblies') in 1905 in Chicago. Its largest union component was the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), which had split from the AFL in 1897, and whose militant leaders, including William 'Big Bill' Haywood, Frank Little and Vincent St. John, went on to become leading wobblies.

¹³ In fact, the Second International, in facing several countries with split socialist movements, seated both factions at its congress while stressing the need for socialist unity; the SLP had a minority of seats while the SP had more. See Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, 71.

¹⁴ Bertram D. Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries* (New York: Stein and Day, 1981) 186.

¹⁵ Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 204.

¹⁶ Michael E.R. Bassett, 'The Socialist Party of America, 1912-1919: Years of Decline' (PhD thesis, Duke University, 1964), 328.

¹⁷ Cf. Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 262-64, for some of the political differences between the left and right wings of the SP.

Unlike the narrow craft-based AFL, the industrially-organised IWW embraced unskilled, immigrant, black and Asian workers who were becoming increasingly important in American industry. At the same time, the IWW's goals were loftier: nothing less, Haywood had declared in 1905, than 'the emancipation of the working class from the slave bondage of capitalism' to put 'the working class in possession of the economic power, the means of life, in control of the machinery of production and distribution, without regard to capitalist masters'.¹⁸ Within the IWW, there was little agreement on how to accomplish this. De Leon—who advocated the industrial struggle as an adjunct to political action—soon split,¹⁹ leaving the organization in the hands of syndicalists like St. John, who believed industrial unionism itself was revolutionary. Yet even then the lines between political action and unionism were somewhat fluent, as shown by the fact that the left-wing of the SP and the IWW overlapped, including Haywood himself.²⁰

The fatal weakness of the IWW's syndicalism was that unions—even industrial unions—are not by themselves revolutionary. The IWW attempted to construct both a revolutionary organisation of dedicated militants, *and* a broad union encompassing all workers. The result was extremely unstable: thousands would join the IWW during strikes, only to fall away quickly, leaving a hardcore cadre. While as many as three million workers at one time held IWW cards, the average monthly membership figure was closer to 60,000—compared to the AFL's four million, much

¹⁸ *Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: New York Labor News, 1905), 1, 247.

¹⁹ See Daniel De Leon, *As to Politics* (Brooklyn: New York Labor News, 1966). For accounts of this split, see Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, chapter 5, and Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 66, 121.

²⁰ See William D. Haywood and Frank Bohn, *Industrial Socialism* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1911), 54; cf Vincent St. John, *The I.W.W.: Its History, Structure and Methods* (Chicago: IWW, 1919 revised edition), 45. On Haywood's relationship to the SP and the IWW, see Melvyn Dubofsky, '*Big Bill*' *Haywood* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1987), 50-94.

more stable, members at the end of World War I.²¹ Cannon located the IWW's major weakness in 'its attempt to be both a union of all workers and a propaganda society of selected revolutionists—in essence a revolutionary party' and that 'this duality hampered its effectiveness in both fields.'²² Nonetheless, the Wobblies' unique American radicalism—forged in strikes and class battles throughout the US—formed an important tributary to American Communism.

The Socialist International and the American Socialist Party

As European capitalism entered its imperialist phase in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, international social democracy increasingly was unable to grapple with this, dividing the Second International into a revolutionary left wing and reformist right wing. With regional variation, the American socialist movement reflected these divisions as well, and, as the SP grew, its internal life became more turbulent, and real opportunities brought battles over opportunism. The first large fight within the SP centred around the issue of sabotage, and more broadly, the SP's relation to the IWW and syndicalism. The conservative AFL craft unions had used sabotage as much as the radical IWW,²³ but the wobblies hostility to the capitalist system itself made them seem more dangerous. A key skirmish involved the Party's reaction to the 1910 McNamara case—in which two Los Angeles AFL ironworkers leaders were convicted for bombing the Los Angeles *Times* building in the midst of a strike. Right-wing

²¹ Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 3. Cf. Leland Walter Robinson, 'Social Movement Organizations in Decline: A Case Study of the I.W.W.' (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1973), 54. For example, during the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, textile strike, the IWW recruited some 10,000 members, but by autumn 1913, that number had declined to 700 (*ibid.*, 40).

²² Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 287. See also, *idem.*, 'The IWW Convention', *Labor Herald*, January 1924, reprinted in James P. Cannon, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920-1928* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 1992), 192. However, the failure of the IWW must be seen in the context of the repression meted out to it by employers and the state, as well as its success in organising many workers whom the more stable AFL never touched. See Thomas McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World: Theories, Organizational Problems, and Appeals, as Revealed Principally in the *Industrial Worker*' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1960), 2; William Preston Jr, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

SPers, including Harriman, who lost his election bid for Los Angeles mayor in 1911 partly due to the blowback over the case, openly attacked the McNamaras and their defenders as apologists for force and violence.²⁴

The highpoint of this fight came when Hillquit attacked Haywood for advocating illegal, terrorist practices.²⁵ Yet Haywood was extremely popular in the Party, which, in 1911, elected him to its National Executive Committee (NEC) with more votes than Hillquit.²⁶ With the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, IWW textile strike, the spectre of syndicalism began to haunt not only capitalists but the SP right-wing. The uneasy *modus vivendi* between the right and the left became increasingly untenable.²⁷

Hillquit amended the IWW's constitution to expel any member who 'opposes political action or advocates sabotage or other methods of violence as a weapon of the working class to aid in its emancipation'. When Haywood defiantly reaffirmed that the SP 'should say that it is our purpose to overthrow the capitalist system by forcible means if necessary', the party leadership recalled him from the NEC in February 1913

²³ See Louis Adamic, *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America* (New York: Chelsea House, 1983).

²⁴ Bassett, 'The Socialist Party of America', 13; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 45; Bell, *Marxian Socialism*, 73-77. On the 1911 SP in Los Angeles, see Daniel J. Johnson, '“No Make-Believe Class Struggle”: The Socialist Municipal Campaign in Los Angeles, 1911', *Labor History* 41:1 (February 2000). Despite the controversy over the McNamara case, the SP still polled 37 per cent of the vote.

²⁵ See Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement, 1897-1912* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 382. See in general, chapters 17 and 18 for the broader struggle between the Left- and Right-Wings during this period.

²⁶ Deborah Mackson, 'Class-Struggle Defense Work in the United States', *Women and Revolution* 45 (Winter-Spring 1996), 29-30.

²⁷ On the split between the Left and Right wings of the Socialist Party in this period, see Anthony Vincent Esposito, 'A Class to End Class: The Ideology of the Socialist Party, 1901-1917' (PhD thesis, University of Connecticut, 1992), 312 and *passim*. On Lawrence, see Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An I.W.W. Anthology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), 158-197; Michael Miller Topp, 'Immigrant Culture and the Politics of Identity: Italian-American Syndicalists in the U.S., 1911-1927' (PhD thesis, Brown University, 1993), 62-105. On the breach between the SP and Italian syndicalists during and after the Lawrence strike, see especially pages 86-94.

and effectively purged him from the party.²⁸ While the SP lost as many as 50,000 members, the IWW gained members and popularity.²⁹

The development of the 1919 left wing

Domestic questions alone were not enough to fully splinter the SP. The combination of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution accomplished this although not so neatly as in Europe. Because of the official stance of the Wilson government, the SP at the onset of hostilities opposed the war, unlike most of the Second International.³⁰ This was captured in the SP's famous 'St. Louis Manifesto', which 'proclaim[ed] its unalterable opposition to the war' and 'call[ed] upon the workers of all countries to refuse support to their governments in their wars'. Instead, the resolution continued: 'The only struggle which would justify the workers in taking up arms is the great struggle of the working class of the world to free itself from economic exploitation and political oppression.'³¹ In 1915, the SP refused to continue its membership in the Second International because of its failure to act against the war.³²

For all its left-wing rhetoric, the St. Louis Manifesto was essentially a compromise, concocted by prominent right-wingers such as Hillquit, Harriman and Berger in collaboration with Cleveland left-winger C.E. Ruthenberg.³³ Both the left and the right were critical; only the centrist Hillquit came out the victor since, as Draper pointed out, his alliance with Ruthenberg split the leftists because it 'made it

²⁸ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 42-46; Salerno, *Red November, Black November*, 78; Dubofsky, 'Big Bill' Haywood, 78-79.

²⁹ Bell, *Marxian Socialism*, 73-77; Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 418.

³⁰ Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 98.

³¹ *Class Struggle*, July/August 1917.

³² Shannon, *Socialist Party of America*, 86.

³³ *Class Struggle*, July/August 1917; Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 102.

impossible for the Left-Wing to emerge at the convention as a fully developed, independent political force'.³⁴

Nonetheless, after the US entered the war, the government swiftly cracked down on the party for its position on the war. Using the 1917 Espionage Act the post office refused to deliver leftist material, including the *Masses*, *Appeal to Reason* and *International Socialist Review*. The government arrested almost every single SP leader, left, right and centre.³⁵

The party lost almost all its intellectual supporters, who quit en masse to support the war.³⁶ But the SP's posture of opposing the war was often more illusory than real. Hillquit, after his election campaign for New York City mayor centred on the slogan 'a vote for me is a vote against war', announced that if there were a national referendum on US withdrawal from the war that he 'would vote *no*'. Other prominent SP spokesmen urged US support to the allies.

In the place of the intellectual deserters, the SP recruited thousands of members, largely younger Eastern Europeans in the large cities, who took the party's opposition as good coin. Within two months of the St Louis manifesto, the party recruited more than 12,000 new members. In New York City's mayoral election, Hillquit's vote increased almost 500 per cent since four years earlier: 22 per cent of voters in the five boroughs, and 31 per cent in the Bronx, cast Socialist ballots. Representative was Bertram D. Wolfe, who had joined the SP because it opposed the war, even though he 'knew nothing about socialism except that it seemed to stand

³⁴ Sally M Miller, *Victor Berger and the Promise of Constructive Socialism, 1910-1920* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1973), 166-71; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 93. On the 'superficial' nature of much of the SP leadership's opposition to the war, see Esposito, 'Class to End Class', 364-65, 374

³⁵ Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 103-105. The one exception was Hillquit, who spent 1918-1919 in hospital for tuberculosis.

³⁶ Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 8; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1988), vol. 8, 237; Kathleen A. Sharp, 'Rose

solid and brave against the war, and base itself on a long anti-war and internationalist tradition'.³⁷ The foreign-language federations in 1919 constituted some 53 per cent of the 110,000 party members. The Slavic federations alone made up 20 per cent of party membership.³⁸ As western and southern native-born Socialists left the party, immigrants joined in large numbers, shifting the party to the left politically and to the industrial, urban north demographically.³⁹

An example of Eastern European immigrant socialists was the Boston-based Socialist Propaganda League (SPL), composed largely of Lettish Socialists. Paul Buhle described this as 'one of the smallest, most insular, and until the late 1910s surely one of the least important of the language groups'. The founder of the SPL, Fricis Rozins, had been a Bolshevik in Russia before emigrating to the US in 1913. According to one history, the SPL had originated as the American section of the Latvian Party, and Rozins later briefly headed a revolutionary government in Latvia after the Bolshevik Revolution. Louis Fraina, who edited the SPL paper, later claimed that Russian émigrés Nikolai Bukharin and Alexandra Kollantai were briefly members as well.⁴⁰

In July 1915, after these Lettish left-wingers had unsuccessfully attempted to gain control of the Massachusetts Socialist Party, they founded the SPL. An October open letter claimed that 'The Socialist Party, under present management, shows too great a tendency to drift away from democratic, revolutionary tactics and toward those of bureaucracy and reform.' The SPL's goal was, its founders declared, to win the

Pastor Stokes: Radical Champion of the American Working Class, 1879-1933' (PhD thesis, Duke University, 1979), 130-32, 136.

³⁷ Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 99, 102-103; Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 162.

³⁸ Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 99; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 94-95; Bassett, 'Socialist Party of America', 274-76.

³⁹ James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 182.

⁴⁰ Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost*, 66-67. On the relationship between Latvia and SPL, see Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 184.

party ‘uncompromisingly for Revolution, Democracy, Industrial Unionism, Political Action in the full acceptance of the term, Unity of Socialist Parties, True Internationalism and Active Anti-Militarism’.⁴¹ Lenin, in a letter to the SPL, declared that their open letter ‘corresponds fully with the position our party...has taken from the beginning of this war and has always taken during more than ten years’. Yet, importantly, Lenin highlighted some political differences between the Bolsheviks and the SPL, especially the SPL’s a priori condemnation of ‘immediate demands’ for reforms. Socialists should fight for reforms to help the working class, even while recognising that ‘no reform can be durable, sincere, serious if not seconded by revolutionary methods of struggle of the masses.’ Lenin admonished the SPL ‘that a socialist party not united this struggle for reforms with the revolutionary methods of working-class movement can become a sect, can be severed from the masses, and that that is the most pernicious menace to the success of the clear-cut revolutionary socialism.’⁴²

The SPL’s November 1916 ‘Manifesto’ ‘strongly denounce[d] all brands of social patriots and social imperialists as opposed to the interests of the working class.’ They argued that: ‘A true revolutionary spirit and action has never been less in evidence among party leaders than during the period of war.... Is it not high time for a thoro [sic] reorganization of our party?’ Towards this end, they endorsed the European left-wing, and the creation of a revolutionary Third International. The manifesto ignored Russia, except to declare that there was no qualitative difference between tsarist Russia and the US.⁴³ Their last manifesto, written in January 1918, did

⁴¹ On the founding of the SPL, see Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 68-69; letter is in Daniel Mason and Jessica Smith, eds., *Lenin’s Impact on the United States* (New York: New World Review, 1970), 149-50.

⁴² Lenin to SPL, 13/22 November 1915, in *Lenin’s Impact on the United States*, 146-49.

⁴³ ‘Manifesto of the Socialist Propaganda League of America’, 26 November 1916, in *International Socialist Review*, February 1917.

hail the Bolshevik Revolution. On the question of its relationship with the SP as a whole, it was more ambiguous and committed to ‘wag[ing] a struggle on two fronts, inside and outside of the Socialist Party’.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Ruthenberg, a long-time SP organiser and perennial candidate for Cleveland mayor, represented the non-immigrant left-wing. In his election campaigns, Ruthenberg, no less than right-wing Socialists, had stressed better government. In fact, the *Cleveland Press* in 1911 had titled an article about him, ‘“Municipal Ownership” is the Length, Breadth and Width of his Mayoralty Campaign’.⁴⁵ A 1917 pamphlet also gives a sense of his politics: ‘By taking control of the police and military establishment [the working class] can wrest powerful weapons out of the hands of the capitalists, and the legislative powers of the government are also of utmost importance to the working class in shaping industry in harmony with their needs.’⁴⁶ Yet Ruthenberg was steadfastly opposed to the war. In 1917, he received more than 20,000 votes for mayor of Cleveland, when he stood on an anti-war platform.⁴⁷ Along with fellow Ohio Socialists Alfred Wagenknecht and Charles Baker, he was arrested for violating the conscription laws for allegedly urging young men not to register.⁴⁸

A key attempt to bring together these two trends in the left-wing occurred on 14 January 1917, at the Brooklyn flat of Ludwig Lore, where Louis B. Boudin, Louis Fraina, Sen Katayama, Nikolai Bukharin, Leon Trotsky and Alexandra Kollantai,

⁴⁴ SPL, ‘A Program for Revolutionary Socialism’, January 1918, in Bernard K. Johnpoll, ed., *A Documentary History of the Communist Party of the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 7.

⁴⁵ *Cleveland Press*, 7 July 1911 (clipping is in C.E. Ruthenberg Collection, Ohio Historical Society, box 2, folder 1).

⁴⁶ C.E. Ruthenberg, *Are We Growing Toward Socialism?* (Cleveland: Local Cleveland Socialist Party, 1917), 40.

⁴⁷ *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 16 August 1934 (clip in Ruthenberg Collection, box 2, folder 2).

⁴⁸ See *Guilty? Of What? Speeches before the Jury in Connection with the Trial of C.E. Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht, Charles Baker* (Cleveland: Ohio Socialist Party, 1917). The judge who sentenced them was the same judge who jailed Debs for his famous Canton, Ohio, antiwar speech.

among others, met and debated the future of the American left. Hopes ran high: Trotsky recalled that at the time ‘America showed more steadfastness in this period than Russia, and many European countries as well.’ For the Russians, however, the only lasting result of the meeting was that it was followed several months later by a fruitful co-operation between Trotsky and the Bolsheviks.⁴⁹ Trotsky and Bukharin, along with other Russians, edited *Novy Mir*, a Russian-language paper which soon became the ‘headquarters for internationalist revolutionary propaganda’ in all languages in the party, according to Trotsky.⁵⁰ Shorn of the Russians, this meeting would form the basis for the editorial board of *Class Struggle*, which was to become the focal point of the developing left wing.⁵¹

The impact of the Russian revolutions

The February Revolution—which toppled the brittle tsarist autocracy and replaced it with the ‘dual power’ shared by the workers soviets and the capitalist Provisional government—was almost unanimously hailed by both liberals and socialists of all shades. Even pro-war socialists supported it, because, in one historian’s words, the revolution ‘purified the Allied cause’ and ‘removed what for

⁴⁹ Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed*, 241-42; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 80-86; Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 182-83. Trotsky to Lore, 26 March 1930, in exile papers of Leon Trotskii, Houghton Library, Harvard University, reel 18 (document 8938); Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 43. Bukharin’s autobiographical statement, from a Soviet encyclopaedia, is printed in Georges Haupt and Jean-Jacques Marie, eds., *Makers of the Russian Revolution: Biographies of Bolshevik Leaders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 33; Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 240-44. In his 1919 preface to *Results and Prospects* Trotsky recollected: ‘Having stood outside both of the two factions in the period of emigration, the author did not fully appreciate the very important circumstance that in reality, along the line of the disagreement between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, there were being grouped inflexible revolutionaries on the one side and, on the other, elements which were becoming more and more opportunist and accommodating.’ (Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects* [New York: Pathfinder Press, 1969], 31-32.)

⁵⁰ Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (Gloucester, Ma: Peter Smith, 1970), 274-76; Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 44. On *Novy Mir*, see Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 118-19.

⁵¹ Weinstein, *Decline of Socialism*, 188.

most liberals was the chief stumbling block to participation in the war on the side of the Allies', tsarism.⁵²

Most liberals and leftists consequently perceived the Bolshevik Revolution in October as an extension of the February Revolution. Except for small circles of Russian émigrés, most Americans, even socialists, were ignorant of Lenin or Trotsky and therefore saw Bolshevism 'in the image of more familiar kinds of radicalism'.⁵³ For American socialists—even those closer to the Mensheviks than to the Bolsheviks—'for the first time in the history of American radicalism, all radical groups had a similar stand on a single issue: support of the Bolshevik Revolution'.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, the Bolshevik Revolution instigated the final disintegration of the SP into mutually hostile left- and right-wings. What separated the left and right wings of the Socialist Party was not whether to support the Russian Revolution. Hillquit, too, supported the Bolshevik Revolution...in Russia. They differed over the question of what the Revolution meant to American socialists. Even the socialists most sympathetic to the October Revolution tended not to see it as the modern-day equivalent of the Paris Commune, but as one of a series of anti-tyrannical revolutions and uprisings including the ongoing Mexican Revolution. Solidarity with the Bolsheviks—especially with such strong support amongst the Socialist rank-and-file—was relatively cheap; actually trying to seize power for the proletariat in the US was another story.⁵⁵

⁵² Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1962), 26-29; On the AFL's attitude toward the February Revolution, cf. Nack, 'The American Federation of Labor Confronts Revolution in Russia', chapter 3; Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Bolshevik Revolution: Its Impact on American Radicals, Liberals and Labor, A Documentary Study* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 15.

⁵³ Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution*, 57, 121-22.

⁵⁴ Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 27.

⁵⁵ Foner, *The Bolshevik Revolution*, 23; For articles in support of the Revolution, see also Paul H. Anderson, 'The Attitude of the American Leftist Leaders Toward the Russian Revolution, 1917-1923' (PhD thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1942); Peter G. Filene, *Americans and the Soviet Experiment, 1917-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), chapter 6 and passim. On the impact of the

The workers movement and 1919

The war had contradictory effects on the labour movement. Increasingly, the state assumed a more important role in the economy, planning and guiding development and production under the auspices of government bodies such as the Fuel Administration, the Emergency Fleet Corporation, the War Trade Board, the Railroad Administration and the National War Labor Board (NLWB). To meet the demands of war, and transcend the challenges of labour shortages, the state offered the labour movement in effect either the carrot or the stick. Those unions who supported the war flourished, and NLWB intervention tended to favour these unions with recognition, equal pay for women, increased wages and a 44 hour workweek. Union membership swelled by almost one million during the war. On the other hands, the government repressed trade unionists such as the IWW, or radicals such as the SP and Debs, who opposed the war.

After the war, workers and trade union leaders, including those who had supported the war, felt that not only should the pro-labour stance of the NLWB continue in the post-war 'Reconstruction' period, but that these gains should be expanded.⁵⁶ The stage was set for a showdown between labour and capital. In 1919 more than four million workers went on strike—an increase of almost three million workers since 1917.⁵⁷ Meat packers, telephone workers, steel workers, streetcar conductors, textile workers, shipyard workers, and workers in many other trades and industries, struck throughout the country.

Revolution on the American left and the left's response, see also Paul Le Blanc, 'Leninism in the United States and the Decline of American Trotskyism', in George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc and Alan Wald, *Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 169-71.

⁵⁶ See William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 40, 70; Andrew Strouthous, *US Labor and Political Action, 1918-1924* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 7-8.

⁵⁷ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol. 8, 1-3 (quote).



The Russian Revolution also lent a sense of gravity to the strike wave. J.B.S. Hardman a decade later remembered that ‘The year 1919 was the banner year of radicalism in the United States. Revolution was seriously discussed among honest people.’⁵⁸ This strengthened the capitalist response. The Attorney General declared, ‘I will use the power of the government to prevent the labor unions of the country from destroying the open shop.’⁵⁹ The government also went after ‘reds’, arresting and often deporting immigrants. This soon drove Socialists and other radicals underground.

Beginnings of American Bolshevism

For leftists, the October Revolution demonstrated the possibility of socialist revolution. In November 1917, John Reed cabled the *New York Call* from Petrograd that ‘This is the revolution, the class struggle, with the proletariat, the workmen, the soldiers and peasants lined up against the bourgeoisie.’ In the *Liberator*, he declared that ‘The real revolution has begun.’⁶⁰ Left wing socialist soon rallied to the new revolution. In November 1918, Louis Fraina founded the first American Communist journal, *Revolutionary Age*, and observed that ‘Mighty currents of ideas and of action are pulsing through the party, the germinal sap of new ideas producing a new life’. This caused impatience with the although the Hillquit-Berger leadership for not ‘measuring up to the opportunity’.⁶¹

When the Bolsheviks proclaimed the Third International in March 1919, the left wing rallied to it. John Reed’s *New York Communist*, the ‘official organ of the

⁵⁸J.B.S. Hardman, *American Labor Dynamics*, 9; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 88-149. On the importance of the 1919 strike wave on the formation of the CP, see the editors’ introduction to Cannon, *Early Years*, 7-9; Foner, *History*, 8: 237-56. On the steel strike, see David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁵⁹ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 99.

⁶⁰ Eric Hornberger and John Biggart, eds, *John Reed and the Russian Revolution: Uncollected Articles, Letters and Speeches on Russia, 1917-1920* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 69, 74.

⁶¹ *Revolutionary Age*, 30 November 1918.

Left Wing, Socialist Party, Greater New York Locals', declared in its lead editorial in its first issue that: 'We take our stand with the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviki), with the Spartacides of Germany, and the Communists of Hungary and Bavaria, believing that only through the Dictatorship of the Proletariat can the Socialist order be brought about.'⁶²

As the left-wing's strength increased, the battles within the party deepened. Arne Swabeck recalled that the Revolution 'shook the Socialist Party to its foundation and brought new lessons and new inspiration to the left wing'. Wolfe and Reed in February 1919 drafted a left-wing manifesto that spelt out their opposition to party leadership and their determination 'to secure control of the Party, to conquer the Party for revolutionary Socialism and impose upon it a consistent proletarian-Bolshevik policy.'⁶³

The struggle raged throughout the spring. In the mail-in elections for the SP NEC in March 1919, the left won 12 of 15 seats. Reed defeated Victor Berger for the position of international delegate, and the left defeated Hillquit in his bid for the post of international secretary. By April 1919, the Boston, Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens locals were solidly left-wing, and Seattle, Cleveland, Rochester and Philadelphia were also moving towards the left. In response, Hillquit pushed through a resolution at an Albany meeting of the New York State party to purge locals sympathetic to the Left Wing. In short order, the leadership 'reorganised' 16 Kings County locals and purged the Bronx and Buffalo organisations.⁶⁴

⁶² Buhle, Fraina; Foner, *History*, 8:240-41; Manus O'Riordan, 'Larkin in America: The Road to Sing Sing', 67; *New York Communist*, 19 April 1919.

⁶³ Arne Swabeck, 'Let's Re-Write History: When History Collides with Facts' (review of Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*), *Progressive Labor Magazine*, May 1969, 30; *Revolutionary Age*, 8 February 1919; 22 March 1919; 17 May 1919. Cf. Bassett, 'Socialist Party of America', 297.

⁶⁴ Seyler, 'The Rise and Decline of the Socialist Party' 331-35; Bassett, 'The Socialist Party of America', 304.

In May, SP Executive Secretary Adolph Germer circulated a memo to the NEC, decrying the party's 'abnormal and unhealthy condition' because more than half of the membership was in language federations which he accused of organising a 'concerted movement to capture the party and subject it to' the rule of the federations.⁶⁵ A few days earlier, right-wing leader Victor Berger had filed a complaint with the NEC against Ohio left-winger and SP national officer Alfred Wagenknecht for 'wilfully and maliciously' attacking Berger.⁶⁶

Debs and the left-wing

The left wing sought to convince Debs, the most authoritative national Socialist. At the time of the New York left wing convention, he described himself as 'in sympathy with the radical tendencies in our party'. But, he continued:

the changes that are necessary can all be made and should be made within the party. I am opposed to splitting the party and I refuse to get into the squabble the New York comrades may have between themselves. I have no time for that sort of business.⁶⁷

The same month, leftists Jim Larkin, Rose Pastor Stokes, John Reed and Maximilian Cohen forwarded Debs a copy of their manifesto, seeking his endorsement.⁶⁸ A few days later, Lewis Fraina and C.E. Ruthenberg cabled Debs urging him to accept their nomination as international secretary, claiming that 'the party's future demands it and you can also serve the radicals.'⁶⁹ Yet Debs, true to form in ignoring internal party politics in favour of mass work, and hobbled by being in prison, merely stated that 'I have no stomach for factional quarrelling and I refuse to be consumed by it.... I can

⁶⁵ Adolph Germer to NEC, 24 May 1919, enclosed in Germer to Victor Berger, 26 May 1919, in Victor L. Berger papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, reel 15. A copy can also be found in the Socialist Party Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University, IX:9.

⁶⁶ Victor Berger to NEC, 22 May 1919, in Berger papers, reel 15.

⁶⁷ Eugene V. Debs to Julius Gerber, 27 February 1919, in Tamiment Library Debs collection, reprinted in Eugene V. Debs papers, microfilm edition, reel 2.

⁶⁸ Jim Larkin, Rose Pastor Stokes, John Reed and Maximilian Cohen to Eugene Debs, 28 February 1919, in Indiana State University, Terre Haute, reprinted in Debs papers, reel 2. Stokes, who also been prosecuted for her anti-war agitation, had become quite close to Debs while he was being tried for his opposition to the war; cf. Sharp, 'Rose Pastor Stokes', 153-54.

fight capitalists but not comrades.’⁷⁰ According to one future Communist, if Debs had thrown his weight behind the Left, then ‘there is no doubt he could have carried the majority with him’.⁷¹

Throughout the early post-war period, the left pinned its hopes on Debs, who stood for President in 1920 as a federal prisoner. He spoke favourably of the Bolshevik Revolution during his ‘campaign’.⁷² When Ruthenberg visited Debs in prison in June 1920 to ask him to join the Communists, Debs declined. Until his death in 1926, Debs had a complicated relationship with the Party, at times hostile, at times friendly. As late as November 1921, the Communists openly speculated that Debs might join them, although he did not break from the SP.⁷³ By 1922, the Party and Debs had fallen out over the question of the policies of the Soviet regime and his former close comrade, Rose Pastor Stokes, declared that Debs ‘is not a proletarian revolutionist’ even if he had ‘succeeded for many years in making a great many workers believe he was’; a year later the Party labelled Debs the ‘revolutionary’ wing of the SP.⁷⁴

Hillquit ‘clears the deck’

Hillquit fought the growing left-wing in a fierce battle. Even while paying lip service to the Bolshevik Revolution, he derided the Left Wing as ‘a sort of burlesque on the Russian Revolution’ and advocated that the left and right ‘separate, honestly,

⁶⁹ Louis C. Fraina and C.E. Ruthenberg to Eugene V. Debs, 6 March 1919, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Debs Collection, reprinted in Debs papers, reel 2.

⁷⁰ Debs to David Karsner, 30 April 1920, *Labor Age*, June 1920.

⁷¹ James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 267.

⁷² Ray Ginger, *The Bending Cross: A Biography of Eugene Victor Debs* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1949), 396-98.

⁷³ See the *New York Times*, 27 November 1921, for this speculation.

⁷⁴ Rose [Pastor Stokes] to Dan [Kiefer], 1 February 1922, in Rose Pastor Stokes Papers (Socialist Party Collection, Tamiment Institute, Bobst Library, New York University), XIX:15F. See Arthur Zipser and Pearl Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), 233, 263. On the Party’s attitude in 1923, cf. John Pepper, ‘*Underground Radicalism*’: *An Open Letter to Eugene V. Debs and to All Honest Workers within the Socialist Party* (New York: Workers Party of America, 1923), 35.

freely and without rancor'. Sensing that he could not defeat the left, whose support was growing, Hillquit declared that it was time to 'clear the decks' of the leftist menace. The right refused to accept the results of the NEC elections and began to expel the left.⁷⁵

At an almost week-long meeting at the end of May, the NEC—split into a right-wing majority and leftist minority—began the wholesale purge. The NEC majority reorganised the Michigan local, expelling the leftists; suspended the New York City branches; suspended seven language federations; and refused to count all the ballots for the upcoming convention, claiming that the Left Wing was organising a parallel party. The only dissent on the NEC came from left-wingers Wagenknecht and Katterfield. These suspensions and expulsions eliminated one third of the party membership.⁷⁶

Extending the purge to the Massachusetts and Ohio branch, the Hillquit leadership had purged some two-thirds of the party by August 1919. The SP's membership declined from almost 110,000 in January to less than 40,000.⁷⁷ A final split was all but inevitable. The question, however, was who was going to hold the

⁷⁵ *New York Call*, 21 May 1919; this editorial was reprinted as Morris Hillquit, *The Immediate Issue* (New York: The Socialist, 1919), quotes are from pages 14 and 15; Norma Fain Pratt, *Morris Hillquit: A Political History of an American Jewish Socialist* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1973), 142.

⁷⁶ See the minutes of the SP NEC, 24-30 May 1919, in Johnpoll, ed., *A Documentary History of the Communist Party*, 75-121. The expelled foreign-language federations were the Russian, Lettish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, South Slavic and Polish; interestingly, as explained in the next chapter, the Finnish Federation—the largest SP federation and later a major part of the CP—stayed with the SP, although it did oppose the expulsions. For a detailed description of this purge, see Seyler, 'The Rise and Decline of the Socialist Party', 336-58.

⁷⁷ Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 111; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 158; Foner, *History*, 8:242; Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 193, 199; *New York Communist*, 19 April 1919. For the right wing's view of the split, see, in addition to the *New York Call*, the *Socialist*, a newspaper published in New York throughout 1919 and which was dedicated to attacking the left of the SP; Bassett, 'The Socialist Party of America', 315.

mop when the decks were cleared: to maintain control of their Party, the NEC majority was willing to trample any semblance of organisational democracy.⁷⁸

Meanwhile the left-wing had also been organising. In June 1919, ‘about seventy five delegates—some from as far west as the Pacific Coast’⁷⁹—arrived in New York for a National Left-Wing Conference ‘to create a revolutionary working class movement in America’. The delegates opposed parliamentary strategies, declaring that ‘the workers can only win the state power by extra parliamentary action which must have its basis in the industrial mass action of the workers’. Similarly, they eschewed reformist strategies, arguing that when capitalists accepted reforms, they ‘have as their object and their result the further exploitation and deception of the workers’.⁸⁰

Yet, at this meeting, the left itself split over its relationship to the SP in what Ruthenberg described as ‘a bitter fight about staying in the party in the convention or organizing a new party at once’.⁸¹ One group pushed to stay within the SP, at least through the 31 August convention and avoid a premature split. As the *Revolutionary Age* argued in May 1919: ‘We refuse to turn over the Socialist Party to the moderates. We shall not abandon the struggle to revolutionize the Party, for the bulk of the

⁷⁸ See Miller, *Victor Berger*, 230-240, for an analysis of the right-wing perspective of the 1919 schism. See also the right-wing *Socialist*, published in 1919. For studies of how the 1919 split played out in individual locals, see Sally M. Miller, ‘The Socialist Party Schism of 1919: A Local Case Study’, *Labor History* 37:4 (Fall 1995), 599-611 (on St. Louis); Ralph Edward Shaffer, ‘Radicalism in California, 1869-1929’ (PhD thesis, University of California at Berkeley, 1962), 283-300, and Ralph E. Shaffer, ‘Formation of the California Communist Labor Party’, *Pacific Historical Review* 36 (1967), 59-78; Daeha Ko, ‘Rough Beginnings: The 1920s’, on the website *Communism in Washington State: History and Memory Project* <<http://faculty.washington.edu/gregoryj/cpproject/>> viewed 22 January 2003.

⁷⁹ C.E. Ruthenberg to Rose Ruthenberg, undated letter, postmarked 22 June 1919, in Ruthenberg Collection, box 2, folder 3. *Revolutionary Age*, 5 July 1919, claimed ‘over 90 delegates from 20 different states’. Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 166, claimed 94 delegates.

⁸⁰ ‘Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party: report of the labor organization committee’, 21 June 1919 (John S. Reed papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bms Am 1091:1449). The *Revolutionary Age*, 5 July 1919, carries a detailed report on the convention.

⁸¹ C.E. Ruthenberg to Rose Ruthenberg, op. cit.

membership is overwhelmingly revolutionary.’⁸² Virtually all the indigenous American Communists—and future CP leaders—had this position.⁸³ Another group led by the Russian federation, Isaac Hourwich, and the expelled Michigan branches, advocated organising a Communist Party immediately. Noting the NEC’s ‘expulsion of nearly half of the membership’, the self-styled National Office of the Organization Committee issued a ‘Call for a National Convention for the Purpose of Organizing a Communist Party in America’ which argued that ‘the time has passed for temporizing and hesitating’ and urged ‘those who realize that the capturing of the Socialist Party as such is but an empty victory [to] not hesitate to respond to this call and leave the “right” and “center” to sink together with their “revolutionary” leaders’.⁸⁴ To further complicate things, on 28 July, there was yet another reshuffling. A majority of those previously favouring going to the SP convention, including Ruthenberg, Fraina, Wolfe and Ballam, changed their position and agreed with the need for a new party, although Gitlow and Larkin still maintained their original position.⁸⁵

At the September 1919 SP convention in Chicago, the NEC defended the anti-left expulsions as necessary to maintain a centralised and unified party as part of what it called ‘our clear duty, as the trustees of the party, to do all we could to preserve the integrity of the Party.’⁸⁶ After being denied their elected seats at the convention, the left met for the last time before once again splitting among themselves into Fraina, Ruthenberg and Wolfe’s Communist Party of America (CPA), which opposed

⁸² *Revolutionary Age*, 24 May 1919.

⁸³ Supporters of this position included Cannon, Ruthenberg, Reed, Fraina, Gitlow, Ballam and Larkin; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 168.

⁸⁴ Dennis E. Batt, S. Kopnagel, D. Elbaum, J. Stilson, O.C. Johnson, Alexander Stoklitsky and John Keracher, ‘Call for a National Convention’, July 1919, enclosed in letter from Adolph Germer to Morris Hillquit, 14 July 1919, Morris Hillquit papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, reel 2, document 858.

⁸⁵ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 175.

⁸⁶ James Oneal, A. Shiplacoff, Victor L. Berger, George H. Goebel, Dan Hogan, John M. Work, Seymour Stedman and Frederick Krafft, ‘Supplementary Report of the National Executive Committee’ to the Special 1919 Convention, in the Socialist Party Papers, Duke University, series I, part D.

remaining within the SP, and Gitlow and Reed's Communist Labor Party (CLP) which advocated doing so. Even after the SP leadership, with the assistance of the Chicago police, prevented the CLP supporters from entering the convention, the two organisations hardened into mutually hostile groups.⁸⁷ 'Few things', Draper argued, 'left a deeper and more lasting mark on the American Communist movement than this seemingly unnecessary split.'⁸⁸ The main difference was not programme, but composition: the CPA consisted of mainly non-English speaking immigrants, largely from Eastern Europe, who had years of experience in the international socialist and labour movement but little connection to American reality. The smaller CLP was more native, less theoretically sophisticated, but more in tune with actual American society.⁸⁹

The acrimonious nature of the split can be discerned from the first issue of the CPA's paper, the *Communist*.⁹⁰ It described the larger CLP as '[r]endered impotent by the conflicting emotions and lack of under-standing' of those who pursued the 'centrist' policy of trying 'to capture the old party machinery and the stagnant elements which have been struggling for a false unity, who are only ready to abandon the ship when it sinks beneath the waves of reaction'. The CLP was, one article argued, a 'fetid swamp'.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 158; C.E. Ruthenberg, 'Seven Years of the Communist Party of America', *Workers Monthly*, September 1926. For an interesting, if SP-biased, report of the August convention, see Harry W. Laidler, 'Present State of Socialism in America: Three Party Conventions', *Socialist Review*, January 1920. The federal government had spies in these conventions, and their reports can be found in 'U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the U.S., 1917-1941', series 10110-853, parts 13 and 14.

⁸⁸ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 169.

⁸⁹ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 40-42; Ruthenberg, 'Seven Years of the Communist Party of America'; *Communist (CP)*, July 1921.

⁹⁰ Each faction of the early Communist movement named its paper the *Communist*. In the footnotes below, each paper is identified by the name of the organisation that issued it. See Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 432n21 and 451n4 for a detailed explanation of these different papers.

⁹¹ *Communist (CPA)*, 19 July 1919.

It is hard to overestimate the damage done by such a pointless division. First, it squandered thousands of sympathetic Socialists who, while dissatisfied with the SP, could make no sense of the division. As Cannon put it, 'Nobody knows how many thousands of American radical socialists—potential communists—were lost and scattered.' While two thirds of the SP's 104,000 members supported the left wing, only a much smaller number joined either Communist organisation.⁹² According to the CPA, in October-December 1919, average CPA membership was 23,744; by January-April 1920, it had dropped to 5,584.⁹³ Of course, Red Scare repression against the left also weakened the early Communist movement, but this disunity wasted resources that should have been spent on more urgent tasks.

The post-split SP

Even after the Hillquit leadership expelled the soon-to-be Communists, some 35 leftists continued to fight within the convention, versus more than 90 rightists and centrists.⁹⁴ And no matter how many times Hillquit swept the deck, there was still significant support among the rank-and-file for the newly-founded Comintern. Hillquit, a classical centrist, happily verbally endorsed the Russian Revolution and padded the SP programme with Marxist rhetoric, so long as he could maintain control of the SP in the USA.⁹⁵ For example, the convention's manifesto, written by Hillquit, opposed imperialist war, and 'declare[d] our entire solidarity with the revolutionary

⁹² See the editors' introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*, 8. Zinoviev, in a September 1919 speech to the Petrograd Soviet on the occasion of the founding of the Communist Party (he didn't indicate which) gave Party membership as 40,000, in *Communist International*, old series no 6, October 1919. Paul Buhle, without citing a source, estimated that the left wing was 90,000 strong. Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 126. Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 158-59, indicates that some 'two thirds of the Socialist party was expelled or suspended' and that, in May 1919, 'the Left Wing could claim almost 70,000 members of sympathizers.' He argued, thus, 'No new American radical movement had ever jumped off to a more promising start.'

⁹³ Report to Secretary of CPA, 10 [13?] July 1920, in Comintern archives, 515:1:30; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 50; James Oneal, et. al., 'Supplementary Report of the National Executive Committee', 2.

⁹⁴ Daniel Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 111; John Perry Leavell, Jr., 'The Socialist Party Conventions of 1919 and 1920' (MA dissertation, Duke University, 1962), 28, 29-30.

⁹⁵ Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 150-51.

workers of Russia in the support of the government of their Soviets, with the radical Socialists of Germany, Austria and Hungary in their efforts to establish working-class rule in their countries, and with those Socialist organizations in England, France, Italy and other countries, who during the war as after the war have remained true to the principles of uncompromising international Socialism'. It ended with the call: 'Long live the international Socialist revolution, the only hope of the suffering world!'.⁹⁶ By a vote of 56 to 26, the convention declared that 'the Second International is no more' and threw its support to 'only such organizations and parties should be given representation which declare their strict adherence by word and deed to the principle of the class struggle'. While the resolution included the Bolsheviks and Spartakists in such a camp, it excluded any party which 'participates in a government coalition with parties of the bourgeoisie'.⁹⁷

On 4 March 1920 the party, no longer affiliated to the Second International, applied for membership in the Comintern. Yet the Socialist Party still remained divided, despite its rhetorical endorsement of Bolshevism. In May 1920, a minority led by J. Louis Engdahl submitted another referendum to the party that 'the Socialist Party of the United States of America reaffirms its affiliation with the Third International.' Another minority, led by Berger, advocated that the SP eschew the Comintern altogether. A centrist compromise, supported by Hillquit, was passed which advocated affiliation to the Comintern only if 'no formula such as "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat in the form of Soviets" or any other special formula for the attainment of the Socialist commonwealth be imposed or exacted as condition of affiliation with the Third International'. At the same time, however, Hillquit still felt

⁹⁶ Morris Hillquit, typescript of Manifesto of the Socialist Party in Emergency Convention, 4 September 1919, in Hillquit papers, reel 6, document 112. See also the 29 May 1919 statement of the SP NEC, document 111.

the need to distance himself from the Second International, which he called 'morally bankrupt', and he pledged that the SP would 'work towards the creation of a larger International on the basis of the Third'. Ever the centrist, though, he also refused to 'blindly accept every formula, every dogma coming from Soviet Russia as holy, as a Papal decree' whilst still proclaiming his support to Soviet Russia.⁹⁸

In 1920, the Second Comintern Congress approved conditions for any party wishing to join it, the famous '21 Conditions'. The Bolsheviks designed these to split the international socialist movement and purge right-wing and centrist elements. Condition number 7, in fact, singled out Hillquit, along with other 'notorious opportunists' such as Rudolf Hilferding, Kautsky and Ramsay MacDonald as leaders who would need to be purged to join the Comintern. The Socialist National Committee declared that these 'conditions of affiliation are absolutely incompatible with the position of our party'. In November 1920, the Comintern rejected the SP's application for membership. As the SP continued to atrophy, increasing numbers of members left in sympathy with the Comintern, including the 'Workers Council' group which is discussed in the following chapter.⁹⁹

Leftists within other organisations, especially the IWW, also saw the Revolution as a justification of their struggles and a beacon amid the wreckage of war.

⁹⁷ Report by SP Committee on International Relations, September 1919, Morris Hillquit papers, reel 6, document 905.

⁹⁸ See *Labor Age*, June 1920. On the 1920 Convention dispute, see Virginia Ottini, 'The Socialist Party in the Election of 1920' (MA dissertation, Stanford University, 1948), 56. Cf. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 86, for the cessation of membership in the Second International; Pratt, *Morris Hillquit*, 165, 167. On 11 October 1918, SP Executive Secretary Adolph Germer wrote to Hillquit: 'We have not paid International dues for several years. The reason for it is that the International has not functioned and if my serves me correctly, it was the understanding of the old N.E.C. that no payment should be made until a stable International Bureau was re-established', in Morris Hillquit papers, reel 2, document 803.

⁹⁹ On the SP's attempt to affiliate to the Comintern, see note by NEC on relations to Communist International, 1920, in *Revolutionary Radicalism: Its History, and Purpose and Tactics with an Exposition and Discussion of the Steps Being Taken and Required to Curb: Report of the Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, filed April 24, 1920, in the Senate of the State of New York* (Albany: J.B. Lyon Co, 1920), vol. 2, 1815-21. See also Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 113-14; Degras, *The Communist International*, 170.

In 1919, the Bolsheviks, seeking to create the Third International, issued a call to 39 left-wing socialist organisations to meet in Moscow. Four of these groups were American: the SLP; the SP lefts; the IWW; and De Leon's split from the IWW, the Workers International Industrial Union.

Although elements of the SLP did join the Comintern the party as a whole maintained its distance from Bolshevism. In part this was because the SLP leadership rejected the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' as applicable to American conditions. Boris Reinstein, a former leader of the Buffalo SLP, joined the Comintern at its first convention, and Fraina, the first noteworthy American Communist intellectual, had at one time been a leader in the SLP.¹⁰⁰ The IWW had a more sympathetic response.

The Comintern and early American Communism

The early Comintern sought to unite all socialists who had broken from the Second International into a new revolutionary movement. In the US, this was no easy task: not only was the left splintered, but repression had driven it underground. Nonetheless, while evading repression was important, early Communists were most concerned with overcoming the split in their ranks. Faced with two competing Communist Parties,¹⁰¹ many early sympathisers were unable to figure out the difference.¹⁰² From 1919, the CLP campaigned for unity. An editorial titled 'Communists Unite!' in the CLP's *Ohio Socialist* noted that: 'The rank and file of both sections see no fundamental differences between the two parties' since the

¹⁰⁰ See Robert H.L. Wheeler, 'American Communists: Their Ideology and their Interpretation of American Life, 1917-1939' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1953), 20. According to one observer, the SLP representative, Boris Reinstein, 'declined to act, except in a fraternal capacity, on the grounds that he had no credentials from his party' (Angelica Balabanoff, *My Life as a Rebel* [Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973], 214.) Cf. Boris Reinstein, 'On the Road to the First Congress', *Communist International*, vol. 6 nos. 9/10 (1929), 429.

¹⁰¹ That is, two main organisations. In January 1920, the expelled Michigan Socialists split from the Communists, forming a small group, the Proletarian Party; see Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, 210-11.

‘programs of both parties are based upon the programs of the Third International formed at Moscow.... What differences exist in tactics and inner party construction are not of such nature as should create a permanent division of the two sections.’¹⁰³

One organiser predicted that ‘unless unity between the two communist parties comes soon, we will loose all the membership’ because of frustration.¹⁰⁴

In 1920, the CPA split over these overtures. Its majority insisted that the CLP was centrist, and regarded their campaign for unity as ‘deliberately started and...being carried out in order to create discord and disintegration in our party’. A minority, led by Ruthenberg (‘Damon’), which included many of the CPA English speakers, fused with the CLP to form the United Communist Party (UCP). According to the rump CPA, Ruthenberg—the national secretary of the CPA—took with him three other members of the 13-member Central Executive Committee and some 28 per cent of the membership. This only increased hostility between the two groups in what one participant later described as ‘a most bitter factional battle’. For example, the CPA denounced the CLP’s ‘meaningless pleading for Communist Unity’ and maintained that the ‘Communist Labor Party has no vestige of principle, Communist or any other kind.’ The CPA also declared that ‘Unity with the U.C.P. as a party of centrists is impossible’ except ‘on the basis of our principles, program, and tactics.’¹⁰⁵

Ruthenberg’s letters to his wife show that he was increasingly frustrated at what he predicted would be ‘nothing but personal squabbles for months to come’. Immediately before forming the UCP, he mused: ‘I am sick and tired of the whole

¹⁰² For an example of the convoluted nature of this split, see Alfred Wagenknecht’s explanation of the actions of the Ohio delegation, minus Ruthenberg, its leader, at the time; A. Wagenknecht ‘To all Ohio Locals and Branches’, nd [1919], Ruthenberg Collection, box 2, folder 3.

¹⁰³ *Ohio Socialist*, 29 October 1919.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in a letter from EF to Damon. 24 April 1920, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, Box 195, folder 11. ‘EF’ is Ed Fisher or Ed Five, pseudonyms of Isaac Edward Ferguson, CPA organiser in Chicago; Damon is Ruthenberg.

business and only wish I could drop out without leaving people who are depending on me in the lurch.’ Two months later, upon moving to Chicago, Ruthenberg described the situation as ‘drifting and generally unsatisfactory.’ Not surprisingly, thousands of rank-and-file leftists *did* drop out.

Mass action and action of the masses

The lack of a political basis for this split is confusing. Trying to manufacture political differences to justify the split, the contending organisations debated whether Communists should support ‘mass action’ or ‘action of the masses’. But, in fact, the difference between the two groups over this question was less than the difference between both and Lenin.

‘Mass action’ was not a Leninist concept, but a cognate of left-wing European social democracy, especially from Germany and Holland. Yet the concept was vague enough to include anything either side wanted. Before the split from the SP, Fraina had defined ‘mass action’ as ‘the end of the exclusive concentration on parliamentary tactics’ which would result in ‘awakening the industrial proletariat to action, the bringing of mass proletarian pressure upon the capitalist state to accomplish our purpose’.¹⁰⁶ For the left, mass action was almost mystical, and seemed to include anything—from strikes to even standing for parliament—so long as it was done from a revolutionary, and not opportunist, perspective. ‘Mass action’, wrote Fraina in 1918, ‘is not a *form* of action as much as it is a *process and synthesis* of action.’ S.J. Rutgers in *International Socialist Review* elaborated the ‘different forms of political mass action: meetings, street demonstrations, political strikes and revolts, which gives an opportunity to develop gradually into higher forms of mass action.’ Of course, most

¹⁰⁵ *Communist* (CPA), 4 October 1919, 22 November 1919, 1 May 1920, 1 July 1920; 1 August 1920; *Communist* (CP), July 1921; Report to Secretary of CPA, 10 [13?] July 1920, in Comintern archives 515:1:30.

reformist social-democratic parties also carried out these actions, but by definition they could not be revolutionary.¹⁰⁷

In fact, Lenin had frequently polemicised against the concept of mass action in his arguments against Rosa Luxemburg's 'mass strike'. She had argued that through a spontaneous uprising the working class would achieve revolutionary consciousness.¹⁰⁸

Following the same trend as Luxemburg, the CPA's programme declared:

Mass action is the proletarian response to the facts of modern industry, and the forms it imposes upon the proletarian class struggle. Mass action develops as the spontaneous activity of the unorganized workers in basic industries; its initial form is the mass strike of the unorganized.¹⁰⁹

Lenin had argued against such a conception, in *What is to be Done?*, that the working class can only become socialist through the intervention of a revolutionary party and that although the workers will spontaneously struggle, their consciousness will remain 'trade-union', i.e., bourgeois: 'There could not have been Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without.'¹¹⁰ For Lenin the paramount question was the forging of a revolutionary party, which was the paramount purpose of the Comintern.¹¹¹

Before bolting the CPA, Ruthenberg put forward a motion in the CEC of the CPA which advocated unity with the CLP, warned against becoming another sect like the SLP, and argued that:

There never was any division between the C.P. and the C.L.P. on fundamental Communist principles.... The differences between the two party programs are differences merely in the form of expression....

Unity with the C.L.P would aid in bringing the Communist movement into contact with the American workers. For instance the CP[A] has hardly any

¹⁰⁶ Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 88, passim; Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 194; Louis C. Fraina, 'The Left Wing and the Revolution', *New York Communist*, 26 April 1919.

¹⁰⁷ Louis C. Fraina, *Revolutionary Socialism: A Study in Socialist Reconstruction* (New York: Communist Press, 1918), 178-197 (quotes on 195-96); S.J. Rutgers, 'The Left Wing Socialists: Mass Action', *International Socialist Review*, October 1916.

¹⁰⁸ Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions*, in Mary Alice Waters, ed., *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Publishers, 1970), 202.

¹⁰⁹ The Communist Party of America, *Manifesto and Program* (Chicago: CPA, nd[1919?]), 11-12.

¹¹⁰ Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, in *Collected Works*, vol. 5, 375.

¹¹¹ Trotsky, *Lessons of October*, 91.

English-speaking membership and no prospects for doing any organization work west of the Mississippi.¹¹²

In the spring of 1921, the UCP claimed 5927 members in 771 groups, of whom 3566 paid dues. It was organised into 14 districts with 12 paid organisers and 3 paid sub-district organisers. It published 35 monthly journals in eight languages, including English, with a circulation of over 1.6 million. The CPA for its part claimed 6328 dues paying members organised into 6 districts, each with a paid organiser, and 4 paid sub-district organisers. It published, also in eight languages, 19 papers with almost one million monthly readers.¹¹³

Unity from the Comintern

This split threatened to abort American Communism: left to their own devices, the two organisations would have found their existence solitary, nasty, brutish and short. Only the Comintern could force its American followers to transcend such personal squabbles, and provide a political basis for unity. In a letter to both parties, the Comintern complained that ‘the split brings much harm to the Communist Movement in America’ and could only ‘lead to [a] division of revolutionary forces, to harmful duplication and unnecessary friction and unjustifiable waste of energy on internal struggles’.¹¹⁴

Describing how a ‘close study of the documents from both sides has convinced us that there are no serious differences in the programs of the two parties’, the Comintern stressed that the division ‘must by all means be liquidated’. ‘Unity’, the Comintern explained, ‘is not only possible, but absolutely necessary’ and the ECCI insisted on ‘its immediate realization’ since ‘only by bringing [the parties] together will it be possible to create a strong Communist party in America’.¹¹⁵ The ECCI

¹¹² Minutes of 17/18/19/20 March 1921 CEC of CPA, in Comintern archives 515:1:51.

¹¹³ *Communist* (CP), July 1921.

¹¹⁴ *Communist* (UCP), 17 July 1920, 15 August 1920.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 August 1920. See also Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 1, 101-103.

demanded an immediate joint unity convention, and harshly noted that continued division was 'absolutely not allowed'.

The role of the language federations in a unified party also divided the two groups. Since the CPA was largely made up of such federations, it wanted them to play an important role in any future unified Party, while the UCP had the opposite view. Perhaps drawing on the Bolsheviks' struggle against the Yiddish Bund, the ECCI insisted that the federations should 'amalgamate as closely as possible with the organization of the American workers' within the Party: 'The language federations may reserve their autonomy regarding the work of propaganda in their respective languages, but in the case of political and economic struggles they must be subordinated to the regular party organ.' These issues were important to resolve, the letter concluded, because 'The victory of the International proletariat depends upon the success of Communism in America.'¹¹⁶

Responding to Comintern prompting, the CPA and UCP convened a unity convention, which, after two days of debate, adopted a unity constitution. Ruthenberg noted that despite this wrangling, 'No compromise was needed on either side to reach agreement on principles. The discussion soon showed that on program there was practically unanimity of opinion.'¹¹⁷

This unity was secured only, as the Party recognised, 'in accordance with the mandate of the Executive Committee of the Communist International'. The *Communist* announced that the 'Third International has spoken and its mandate could no longer be postponed.'¹¹⁸ The Comintern, then, not only provided the political programme for the early Communist movement, but what one veteran Communist called 'some effective prodding from the Communist International' proved necessary

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Communist* (CP), July 1921.

for creating, on even the most basic organisational level, a Communist Party in the United States.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Swabeck, 'Let's Re-Write History', 38.

3. The Third Comintern Congress and the Fight for Legality

Throughout the Communist International, the Third Congress (1921) heralded the beginning of methodical work aimed at winning support from the majority of the working class. For the American Party, this meant forging a united Party capable of intervening openly in the American labour movement. This chapter examines the importance of the Congress on the Party, and argues that the fights at this Congress were integral to the CP's 'Americanisation'.

The Third Congress took place within the context of the Bolsheviks' realisation that capitalism had managed to temporarily stabilise itself after the post-war wave of revolutionary upheavals. Soviet Russia had won, after tremendous hardship and devastation, its war against the forces of counterrevolution. But the economy was all but destroyed, and in 1921, amid the demobilisation of the Red Army, famine threatened the new Soviet Republic. The Bolsheviks saw their Revolution threatened from all sides: the economy was in shambles, famine threatened, sailors at the Kronstadt naval garrison had rebelled, and, above all, Soviet Russia remained isolated in a capitalist world. In response to this situation, the Bolsheviks compromised in order to buy time for a revolution in the west to come to their aid. The Soviet government introduced market mechanisms in the guise of the New Economic Policy; the Bolsheviks forbade party factions in order to avoid a split, and the dire situation gave rise to growing bureaucratisation of the party and the new state. With the increase in the importance of world revolution in the Bolsheviks' estimation, the Comintern—the leadership of international revolution—also became more important.¹

¹ Lenin, 'Theses for a Report on the Tactics of the RCP', 13 June 1921, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, 453.

The 'Theses' of the Congress declared that since the Second Congress a year earlier, 'a series of working-class uprisings and battles have resulted in partial defeats'. As a result, the period of revolutionary ferment which had been initiated by the October Revolution had ended and capitalism had stabilised itself somewhat.² Elsewhere Trotsky argued that 'Overthrowing the bourgeoisie, even though it has been condemned by history, is neither so simple nor so easy as it might have seemed.' The Comintern resolution on tactics predicted 'a long period of revolutionary struggle' because 'the world revolution is developing even more slowly than expected', in part because of the treachery of the 'strong workers organisations and workers parties, namely the social-democratic parties and trade unions, which were created by the proletariat to fight the bourgeoisie' had turned into 'into organs of counter-revolutionary influence that ensnared the proletariat and are continuing to hold it in their grip.'³

In a letter to Zinoviev, Lenin observed that 'none of the Communist Parties anywhere have [sic] yet won the majority of the working class, not only as regards organisational leadership, but to the principles of communism as well.' Consequently, Lenin argued, 'the tactics of the Communist International should be based on a systematic drive to win the *majority of the working class*, first and foremost *within the old trade unions*.' Lenin utilised the phrase 'you have to step back to make a better jump' in order to note 'that this retreat must serve as a preparation for the offensive'.⁴ For Lenin and Trotsky, the Comintern needed to impart to the newly formed CPs not just the experience and lessons of the Bolshevik Party in making the October

² [Leon Trotsky], 'Theses of the Third World Congress on the International Situation and the Tasks of the Comintern', 4 July 1921, in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (London: Inklinks, 1980), 184-85.

³ Leon Trotsky, 'A School of Revolutionary Strategy', July 1921, *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (London: New Park, 1974), vol. 2, 6; 'On Tactics', in *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos*, 274-75.

Revolution, but also understanding of the struggles to forge such a party—what Trotsky later termed the ‘lessons of October’.⁵ Central to this was the production of a manual, *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work*, which detailed with painstaking care how a revolutionary party should be organised. Throughout this period, Lenin polemicised against what he saw as revolutionary impatience and the belief that a small parties could take power irrespective of their actual working-class support.⁶

Primarily, Lenin had in mind the disastrous ‘March Action’ of the German Communists (KPD) earlier that year in which the party attempted to stage a revolution without the support of the working class. Problems of the French and Italian Parties also occupied Lenin and Trotsky. In all three cases, the main question was how to win advanced sections of the working class from their traditional social-democratic leadership—i.e., completing the split in the workers movement between revolutionaries and reformists. The united front, a tactic of winning over the rank-and-file of other organisations in the workers movement through proposing and carrying out joint actions was one solution offered by Lenin at the Third Congress. Whatever their differences, the French, Italian and German parties seemed, in the eyes of the Comintern, to be quickly approaching revolutionary opportunities. Since this was not true in the US, the need for painstaking preparatory work was even more important.⁷

⁴ Lenin to Zinoviev, 10 June 1921, *CW*, vol. 42, 320-21; ‘Speech at a meeting of members of the German, Czechoslovak, Hungarian and Italian delegations’, 11 July 1921, *ibid.*, 327-28.

⁵ Leon Trotsky, *Lessons of October*.

⁶ The best translation is *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties, on the Methods and Content of Their Work: Resolution of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 12 July 1921* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 1988). An earlier, and much inferior, translation is also available in *Decisions of the Third Congress of the Communist International* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922). The introduction to the 1988 translation situates the resolution in the context of the development of the Comintern.

⁷ See Trotsky, ‘A School of Revolutionary Strategy’, for his perspectives facing the Comintern in these three countries.

Open or underground party?

One issue, examined in the next chapter, was whether to work within the established trade unions, or to continue emphasising only revolutionary unions. Lenin argued that in order to gain support amongst workers, the American Party must be present in the American Federation of Labor, however anti-Communist its leadership was. This was part of the Comintern's efforts to root itself within the international labour movement, signified on a global level by the strengthening of the Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern).

The most fundamental concern in implementing the lessons of the Third Congress was the question of legality. The early CP was underground by necessity. Within a month of its founding in November 1919, the California Communist movement was all but crushed when the state arrested thirteen of its leaders—including Max Bedacht—under the California Criminal Syndicalism Act. Nationally, the Labor Department declared, that 'it is mandatory upon [the Secretary of Labor] to take into custody aliens who are members' of the CP 'and deport them'.⁸ Among those targeted were foreign radicals such as James 'Big Jim' Larkin, in the US after the 1913 Dublin transport strike as a union organiser, who had helped to found the Communist movement in the US.⁹ In the first week of 1920, over 6000 Communists were arrested. Most of the early leading cadre of the movement spent time in jail in

⁸*House Immigration and Naturalization Committee Hearings* (Washington DC: GPO, 1920), 2,3.

⁹Manus O'Riordan, 'Larkin in America: The Road to Sing Sing', in Donal Nevin, ed., *James Larkin: Lion of the Fold* (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1998); Emmet Larkin, *James Larkin*, chapter 10; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 206. On state repression against blacks, see Theodore Kornweibel Jr., *'Seeing Red': Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), chapter 5 for the government's repression against the radical black newspaper *Messenger*. On Hoover's obsession with black radicalism in general, in addition to Kornweibel, cf. Mark Ellis, 'J. Edgar Hoover and the "Red Summer" of 1919', in *Journal of American Studies* 28 (1994), I, 39-59. On accounts of the Red Scare in individual cities, see William H. Siener, 'The Red Scare Revisited: Radicals and the Anti-Radical Movement in Buffalo, 1919-1920', *New York History* 79 (1998)1, 23-54; Shaffer, 'Radicalism in California, 1869-1929', 300-29; Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland*, , chapter one.

this period. Some, like Larkin, were deported; others, like Benjamin Gitlow, had their cases wind through the court system for years.¹⁰

This situation limited the ability of the Party to organise. Charles Wallace, a delegate to the Third Congress, reported back to the CEC that ‘our comrades in Moscow are astounded at the meager results of the American movement’ since the economic situation would apparently ‘make the general unrest of the masses fertile ground for Communist propaganda.’ In fact, Wallace continued, Lenin himself had insisted on meeting the entire US delegation and told them (in Wallace’s words) that in his ‘opinion the American comrades do not utilize all the opportunities of struggle’ and that he ‘considers a daily legal newspaper in the English language as the most essential necessity for spreading our propaganda.’ Wallace continued that Lenin ‘advised us to take the necessary steps to establish a legal Communist organization’ in order to recruit workers unable to join the illegal Party.¹¹

Lenin did not advocate outright liquidation of the illegal apparatus, and it would have been foolhardy for the Party to insist on above-ground work at its founding. Nonetheless, socialists had always fought for the right to organise legally, and even Lenin, in tsarist Russia, had argued that Communists should take advantage of opportunities for legal work, including even standing candidates for the Duma.¹² This perspective was maintained in the *Guidelines* voted at the Third Congress. They first criticised those parties which had neglected illegal work altogether, but also

¹⁰ See Mackson, ‘Class-Struggle Defense Work in the United States’; introduction to *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*, 8; On California, see Shaffer, ‘Formation of the California Communist Labor Party’, 77-78. Two Supreme Court cases, *Gitlow v. People of State of New York*, 268 U.S. 652 (1925), and *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357 (1927) dealt with members of the Left Wing who were arrested under criminal syndicalism statutes; in both cases the convictions were upheld. Justices Holmes and Brandeis used both cases (dissenting in *Gitlow* and concurring in *Whitney*) to elaborate their ‘clear and present danger’ limitations on the First Amendment.

¹¹ Undated report by Charles Wallace, attached to the 1921 minutes, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51. According to Wallace, the US delegation was Andrew (Isaac Hourwich), Ballister (Robert Minor), Baldwin (Oscar Tynеровsky), Gorny (John Reed?), Haywood, Marshall (Max Bedacht) and Wallace.

assailed the tendency in illegal parties towards ‘often insufficient understandings of the possibilities for exploiting legal activity and for building a party organization in living contact with the revolutionary masses. In this case, party work shows a tendency to remain a fruitless Sisyphean labor or impotent conspiracy.’¹³

An ECCI letter recognised that ‘Under existing circumstances it is impossible for the Communist Party in the United States to be a legal party’. Nonetheless, the Comintern leadership stressed the need to establish a legal apparatus, especially an English-language press.¹⁴ In early 1921, Zinoviev wrote a note to the CP leadership labelling any delay in the creation of a legal party ‘a *very great mistake*.... We are very late with this matter in America, and every week of further tardiness brings the greatest harm.’ Although he agreed that it was impossible to create a legal party immediately, ‘it is necessary to make use of every inch of the ground’ towards this end. Otherwise, ‘it would be the greatest mistake to lock ourselves in amongst ourselves.’ He noted that this was an ‘unquestionable instruction of the Comintern’ and threatened those, ‘particularly the Russian comrades’, who sabotaged it.¹⁵

Many US Party members, especially in the Lettish and Russian foreign-language federations, defended underground work in principle. But after the initial hysteria died down, repression subsided. In 1920, the Republicans won the White House, and the Democrat Palmer retired. ‘Normalcy’—which was certainly pro-capitalist but also more respectful to civil liberties than Wilson’s war-time progressivism—was on order.

¹² See A. Y. Badayev, *Bolsheviks in the Tsarist Duma* (London: Bookmarks, 1987) for a description of how the Bolsheviks used even this tsarist institution to propagate Communism.

¹³ Victor Serge, *What Everyone Should Know About State Repression* (London: New Park, 1979), 44; *Guidelines on the Organizational Structure of Communist Parties*, 52.

¹⁴ N. Bukharin, K. Radek and O. Kuusinen for the ECCI, ‘Concerning the Next Tasks of the CP of A’, 1921, in Comintern archives 515:1:38; also reprinted in CEC ‘Special Bulletin on Party Situation’, May 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:28.

¹⁵ Zinoviev to CPA, marked ‘NOT for publication’, 9 February 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:32.

Against the desire of the foreign-language federations to remain illegal, the CP's native-born cadre, including Browder, Cannon, Lovestone and Ruthenberg, sought to establish 'living contact' with the masses through increasing legal work. Legalisation became one of the first battlegrounds in the war to 'Americanise' the Party. Cannon recalled that the 'labor party policy, the development of the trade union work, and the whole process of Americanizing the party were subsumed under the overall issue of legalizing the party'.¹⁶ Without a legal apparatus, almost no other work could be accomplished, and the Party would remain an isolated sect of foreigners.

The Workers Council and the Workers Party

The Party split into complicated groupings over the issue. The immediate cause was the Workers Council group, consisting of dissident ex-SPers such as Alexander Trachtenberg, J. Louis Engdahl, Moissaye J. Olgin and J. B. Salutsky. It had originated as a pro-Bolshevik formation within the Socialist Party after the 1919 expulsions. Engdahl and Kruse had waged a fight at the 1920 SP convention to push the party to the left. By 1921, however, the SP was moving back to the right: when William F. Kruse submitted a resolution for Comintern affiliation, the delegates at the SP's conference voted, 31 to 8, against affiliation with any International. Then, the Council concluded that the SP could not be reformed and left, creating the 'Committee for the Third International'. Their journal, *The Workers' Council*, argued: 'The Workers' Council will stand uncompromisingly and unreservedly with the Third (Communist) International and its principles. It will attempt to carry agitation into

¹⁶ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 58.

working class circles that have never been reached before.’ They were tireless advocates of creating a legal Party and remained aloof from the underground CP.¹⁷

Seizing upon Lenin’s attacks on ultra-leftism at the Second Comintern Congress, *‘Left Wing’ Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, the Workers Council argued: ‘The “Infantile Sickness” might have been written with the American Movement in mind, so well does it fit the mistakes made by the Left Wing.’ They described the CP’s fetishisation of illegality as ‘not only an obvious mistake, but a violation of the conditions laid down by the Communist International’. Rather than eschewing the official CP altogether, it stressed the need ‘to combine their efforts in the building of a sound communist movement in harmony with the present conditions in this country’. The refusal to surface from the underground, in the eyes of the Council, meant that the ‘revolutionary movement in the United States is not only weaker than that of other countries, but...is also hopelessly divided’.¹⁸

The Workers Council stressed that American Communism ‘cannot, at present, enlist the support of the American working class unless it does so in the open’. It published two manifestos, titled ‘The open Communist Party—The task of the hour’ and ‘We want an open Communist Party,’ which left no room for misunderstanding. For the official CP, the first argued, ‘illegality becomes the end and aim instead of a necessity’ so that ‘the only question,’ the second stressed, ‘that still divides these groups from complete amalgamation is the question of continued existence of a secret organization side by side with the open party.’¹⁹

¹⁷ *Workers’ Council*, 1 April 1921; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 327-334; Pratt, *Morris Hillquit*, 170-73. On Kruse and Engdahl’s position at the 1919 convention—of supporting the left but seeking unity—see Leavell, ‘The Socialist Party Conventions of 1919 and 1920’, 32; on their activities at the 1920 convention, see *ibid.*, 48, 50-53; on the debate to affiliate to the Comintern, see *ibid.*, 44-46, 54. See also Ottini, ‘The Socialist Party in the Election of 1920’, 34-44, 47-56. On the evolution of the SP in the aftermath of the expulsion of the left-wing, see Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, chapter seven.

¹⁸ *Workers’ Council*, 1 May 1921, 15 June 1921.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15 June 1921, 15 October 1921, 15 November 1921.

At first, the CP was somewhat stand-offish towards the Council. In November 1921, the CEC drafted a letter to the Council which made clear the CP was the official Comintern party in the US and that unity could only be based on the CP's programme. However, Bukharin, Radek and Kuusinen sent a letter to the CPA that ordered the Party to begin the 'immediate construction of a legal political party on a national scale', even if this meant that 'the program of the legal party will have to be somewhat restricted.' Yet, they emphasised, underground Party leaders must hold the key leadership positions in the legalised party as well.²⁰ In late 1921, a legal CP 'front group', the American Labor Alliance (ALA), and the Workers Council organisation negotiated forming a legal party. It was relatively easy to achieve unity by forming a legal party, called the Workers Party (WP), since the Workers Council and the CP shared the same programme but differed only in whether to have a legal party. The WP, with an estimated 25,000 members, was, in J. Louis Engdahl's words, dedicated 'to wage the open struggle for communism in the United States.' Yet, crucially, the WP was subordinated to the illegal CP, in keeping with the Comintern's instructions.²¹

Another ex-Socialist Party grouping that supported the Bolsheviks but opposed an illegal organisation was the Finnish Socialist Federation (FSF). By a peculiar combination of factors, socialism was extremely popular amongst many immigrant Finns. In the seven years after its founding in 1907, the ranks of Finnish Socialists swelled from less than 3000 to almost 14,000. In 1914, 25 to 30 per cent of Finnish-Americans were Socialists—roughly the same number as supported the

²⁰ Bukharin, Radek, Kuusinen, 'Concerning the Next Tasks of the CP of A', 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:38.

²¹ CEC minutes, 3-9 November 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 44-45; J. Luis Engdahl, 'The Workers Party is Launched', *Labor Age*, February 1922; J.B.S. Hardman, 'Postscripts to Ten Years of Labor Movement', in. Hardman, ed., *American Labor Dynamics*, 22.

Finnish-American Church.²² The first language section to affiliate with the SP, the FSF had created an entire 'hall socialist' culture around the FSF's newspapers and meeting halls. Although a majority of the 10,000-odd Finnish Socialists supported the Bolshevik Revolution early on, they, with few exceptions such as Santeri Nuorteva, maintained their distance from the Left Wing.²³ Instead, the Finns hoped to pressurise the SP to support the Third International and regain a Marxist programme. FSF leaders feared the illegal Party would both be ineffective and jeopardise FSF legality and assets, including its halls. Only at its December 1920 conference did the FSF vote to break from the SP; still, however, it remained aloof from the illegal Party. The FSF enthusiastically supported the foundation of the WP and, in February 1922 the unanimously voted to join the new WP, bringing almost seven thousand members.²⁴

According to the CP's *Communist*, the CEC of the Party had voted, in the cryptic parlance of the underground:

To organize No. 2 [the legal party] with the purpose of building a mass movement in this country and win the majority of the workers to our program. To maintain our No. 1 machinery [illegal party], making merely adjustments just now and final adjustments at our next Party convention.

The motion continued by noting the importance of a legal party:

With the more or less exclusive and static membership of No. 1 we can not reach out to the broad masses and exercise a directing influence over them.... The CP is underground and only reaches the outskirts of the Labor Movement.²⁵

Along these lines, the CP sought discussions with 'those who state that they are willing to follow the direction of our Main Directing Body', i.e., the Comintern: 'The formation of No. 2 is in conformity with the needs of the workers of America. It is in

²² John I. Kolehmainen, 'The Inimitable Marxists: The Finnish Immigrant Socialists', *Michigan History* 36 (1952), 396; Auvo Kostainen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism, 1917-1924: A Study in Ethnic Radicalism* (Turku, Finland: Turun Yliopisto, 1978), 32. The unique history of the Finnish-American Communists will be examined in the chapter on Bolshevization, below.

²³ On Nuorteva, see David John Ahola, *Finnish-Americans and International Communism: A Study of Finnish-American Communism from Bolshevization to the Demise of the Third International* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981), 6-13, and Auvo Kostainen, 'Santeri Nuorteva and the Origins of Soviet-American Relations', *American Studies in Scandinavia* 15 (1983), 1-13.

²⁴ See Kostainen, *Forging of Finnish-American Communism*, 70-127.

accordance with the instructions of our Main Directing Body.’ Equally important, the aims of the Comintern did not contradict the ‘needs of American workers’, but instead sought to foster them by creating a legal Party.²⁶ Far from hurting the Party, the Comintern greatly assisted early Communists to adopt their tactics to American society.

Cannon presided over the formation of the WP and was its first chairman. His keynote speech at its founding in December 1921 stressed that the Workers Party ‘brought together into a convention practically every left wing element in America’, although, he noted, ‘we have come here from different roads.’ The founders ‘fighting men and women from all fields, from all movements’ who ‘came to submit in the name of unity, and the sealed and guaranteed our pledge to present a unified movement to the workers of America’. If these delegates came, however, they came only because the Comintern had prompted them to do so. ‘I think’, Cannon continued, ‘every man and woman in this hall will say with me that we look for our guidance to the inspirer, the organizer and leader of the world proletariat, the Communist International.’²⁷

Cannon urged his comrades to ‘take out of our minds the last bit of small personal malice’ and, ‘in the true spirit of revolutionary comradeship, join together in this work’.²⁸ Nonetheless, the newly-formed WP was still fragile, as evident by the coverage of the unification in the CP’s *Communist*. A front page editorial, ‘Our attitude towards the Workers Party’, declared the WP programme ‘a revolutionary fighting program that needs only to be lived up to by a well organized and disciplined party to create the real beginning of an independent political movement of the

²⁵ *Communist* (CP), January 1922.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Voice of Labor*, 6 January 1922, in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*, 90-93.

American working class'. The editorial dubbed the ALA—i.e., the CP itself—'the moving spirit and backbone of the whole affair' and 'the most revolutionary'. Yet, it continued, 'Unfortunately the same can not be said about the Workers' Council group, particularly its leadership. We shall abstain for the present from mentioning their old sins against the Communist Party of America and the Communist International. We shall only do so when necessity shall compel.'²⁹

Fights over legality

The creation of the WP did not end the internecine warfare over legality. The former members of the Workers Council—now the 'Right Opposition' within the WP—continued to support total legality. But the 'Left Opposition', led by CEC members 'Henry, Curtis and Dow' (or rather, George Ashkenudzie, John. J. Ballam, and Charles Dirba, respectively), split to form an illegal party organisation.³⁰

Their proclamation, published in yet another *Communist*, promised that the split had been part of 'a struggle to prevent the liquidation and destruction of the Communist Party as planned by those centrist and semi-centrist elements within the communist movement in this country'. The former Workers Council leaders were no better than warmed-over social democrats who had been 'for more than two years...seeking to stab the young communist movement in the back'. The very act of fusion with the CP was their greatest treachery since it 'unit[ed] in one camp all the menshevik elements in the American movement'. For clarity, this organisation assumed the same name as the official CP—'the Communist Party of America, Section of the Third International'—and adopted the same constitution, with the addition of the proviso that 'The Communist Party of American is an underground

²⁸ Ibid., 94.

²⁹ *Communist* (CP), January 1922.

and illegal organization.’ They dedicated themselves to ‘carry on the fight to expose and destroy the Workers’ Party as completely as we smashed to bits the Socialist Party of America’. Time was short, they warned, since the majority’s ‘agents were busy in Moscow’ duping the Comintern.³¹

Although tiny, this split once again threatened to sacrifice American Communism upon the altar of factionalism. And, once again, the Comintern rescued the Party. In November 1921, the Comintern cabled the CEC that: ‘Full board directors yesterday officially unanimously confirmed president’s stand unreservedly endorsing new corporation, demanding all salesmen immediately comply.’ When the opposition did not comply, they were suspended from both the CEC and the Party.³²

In early March 1922, Kuusinen communicated the ECCI’s agreement with the suspension of the minority, denouncing their ‘serious and intolerable breach of discipline’. Nonetheless, he urged the CEC to create ‘as little permanent disorganization as possible’ by getting the opposition to return to the Party and Party discipline.³³

Both the ‘left opposition’ and the ‘right opposition’ dispatched members to argue before the Comintern. The hefty composition of the American Commission—consisting of Comintern leaders Heinrich Brandler, Matyas Rakosi and Kuusinen, and later Boris Souvarine, among others—indicates the efforts that the ECCI expended on the American Party.³⁴ At first, Ballam—now using the name Moore—was

³⁰ See the CEC minutes of 3-9 November 1921, for the splitters opposition to legalisation, and their appeal to the Comintern; see the minutes of 28 November 1921 for their suspension from the CEC and the Party, and the Comintern’s rebuke, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51.

³¹ *Communist* (LO), February 1922; See especially John More (Ballam), ‘The Communist Party of America and the Communist International’, and ‘Bluffing the Comintern’, *ibid.*, February 1922 and March 1922.

³² CEC minutes, 28 November 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51.

³³ O.W. Kuusinen for the ECCI to the CPA CEC, undated but received 9 March 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:128.

³⁴ ‘Report of the International Delegate to the Conference of the C.P.A.’, *ibid.*, June 1922; Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 356.

unrepentant. He fired off a missive, decrying the 'haphazard' nature of the commission, and claiming that the 'entire question has been misrepresented.'³⁵ In his testimony to the commission, he claimed the support of 5000 comrades, and stubbornly announced: 'We will stay outside of the Communist International, if we must, but within one year the Communist Party will recognise the Communist Party of American which I represent, or they will recognise nobody.'³⁶ Actually, in fact, the commission unanimously supported the 'right' leaders, Max Bedacht and Ludwig Katterfield, on the necessity of forging a legal party. The Commission stated that ECCI 'refuses recognition' to Moore's 'split-off faction', and 'demand[ed] of all members of the faction...that they re-join the C.P. of A. as soon as possible, while promising 'full membership rights'.³⁷ The ECCI 'severely reprimand[ed] them [the opposition] for their refusal to abide by the decisions of the C.I. and their destructive breach of Communist discipline.' If the opposition did not accept the this decision within thirty days, they would be 'expelled from the Communist International, and cannot be readmitted to any section of the Third International, except as new members.'³⁸

The cryptic cable announcing the decision is worth quoting in full, if only to give a flavour of Comintern directives:

HENRY CURTIS DOW COMPANY INSTRUCTED QUIT USING OUR FIRM NAME AND TRADEMARK STOP THEY MUST DISSOLVE AND REJOIN OUR COMPANY IMMEDIATELY OR LOOSE THEIR STOCK STOP JOHN [BEDACHT] IS WRITING THEM TO QUIT COMPETING AND ATTACKING OUR BUSINESS STOP YOU MUST ACCEPT THEM

³⁵ Moore's protest to ECCI, 18 March 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:128.

³⁶ Statement by Moore, 18 March 1922, *ibid.*

³⁷ Letter from Matyas Rakosi for the American Commission of the CI to the American CP, *Communist (LO)*, June 1922.

³⁸ 'To All Members of the Communist Party of America', March or April 1922, in Comintern archives 495:1:26, published in Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, 19.

WITHOUT PREJUDICE AND POSTPONE STOCKHOLDERS
CONFERENCE UNTIL THEY CAN PARTICPATE.³⁹

The Commission ordered that the 'left' opposition return to the Party, and instructed the Party to call a convention to work out the relationship between 'No. 1' and 'No. 2'. Within days, Moore decided to rejoin the Party and accept its discipline, declaring that 'I cannot oppose...the policies of the Comintern.'⁴⁰ He then attempted to convince his erstwhile followers to return to the Party.⁴¹

Although the Comintern had sided with the legalisers, it was not very happy with its American section. A year earlier, Ballister, then the US representative to the Comintern, noted in a letter to his comrades back home that 'it is considered a crime to only mention America in the presence of any of the responsible heads of the concern' and he rued that 'the main office considers the American branch more a nuisance than as a bona fide business institution.'⁴² Things had not qualitatively improved in the ensuing year. An ECCI letter to the CP noted that it had 'for the last two years...been following with deepest concern the strife in the Party in America, which presents constant obstacles to the creation of a strong revolutionary Party.' This letter, once again, 'reassert[ed] in the most emphatic manner' the ECCI's support for a legal party. It denounced the minority's conception of the Party as 'a religion for the chosen ones', and repeated the order for the opposition to return to the Party. Yet, the letter also introduced something new. Besides calling for a convention to hash out these differences, the Comintern also announced that it was sending a 'plenipotentiary

³⁹ R.M. Whitney, *Reds in America* (New York: Beckwith Press, 1924), 36. A copy of this telegram, signed 'Block and Company', is in the Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

⁴⁰ See Moore's letter to Zinoviev, 'In Re: American Situation', 24 March 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:128; and J. Carr [Ludwig Katterfeld] and John Moore's 'Declaration' on the Party situation, 25 March 1922, *ibid.*

⁴¹ For evidence how this played out on the ground, see letter from L.C. Wheat [Lovestone] for the CEC to Curtis, Dow, Henry, 11 April 1922, inviting the minority back into the Party; the 'Special Bulletin on Party Situation' issued by the CEC in May 1922 and containing several relevant documents, all in Comintern archives, 515:1:128.

⁴² Letters from James Marshall [Ballister] to 'Dear Friends', 25 April and 4 May 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

representative' to the conference, and warned: 'We already had to contend with even greater difficulties than yours in some countries, and have learned to overpower them.'⁴³

This convention took place, illegally, at Bridgman, Michigan, in August 1922.⁴⁴ Ironically, the police raided the conference, seized many documents, and arrested leading CPers such as Ruthenberg and Foster. Despite this inauspicious start to legal work, this was the last of the overt repressive attacks against Communists during this period. Jacob Spolansky, an early government spy against the Party, declared after the arrest that the raid had less to do with the threat posed by the Party than with the anti-radical panic caused by a national railroad strike at the same time. Nonetheless, virtually all the leadership of the Party faced arrest or indictments. The Party had to post \$100,000 surety because of the raid.⁴⁵

At the Bridgman convention, Ballam, Dirba and Ashkendzie resigned from the CEC and Robert Minor, Alfred Wagenknecht and Earl Browder took their places, thus signalling the end of the struggle against 'Henry, Curtis and Dow'.⁴⁶ But the relationship of the legal party to the illegal party had not been finally settled, and another factional battle was soon raging between two new factions, the 'geese' and the 'liquidators'. The 'geese' advocated, as a matter of principle, keeping the illegal party in charge of legal work, while the 'liquidators' sought to legalise the party and abolish the underground work. The 'geese' were centred in the foreign-language federations, while the 'liquidators' had the support of most of the native American

⁴³ 'ECCI to the Communist Party of North America', 30 May 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:128.

⁴⁴ For an analysis of the composition of the delegates to this conference, see Harvey Klehr, 'The Bridgman Delegates', *Survey*, Spring 1976.

⁴⁵ See *The Menace of 'Criminal Syndicalism'* (New York: Labor Defense Council, nd), for a description of the raid and the government persecution of the Party. Spolansky's own account of his activities for the state can be found in Jacob Spolansky, *The Communist Trail in America* (New York: MacMillan, 1951).

cadre, including Cannon, Lovestone, Ruthenberg and Foster. These American leaders understood that in order to be a factor among the United States labour movement, the Party would have to transcend its subterranean existence, and branch out beyond immigrants into the anglophone proletariat. The curious names came from each faction's insults about the other. Lovestone had once remarked that the undergrounders-on-principle cackled like geese about saving the underground party, while the 'geese' in turn sought to associate their opponents with the faction within the Bolshevik Party that wanted to abolish underground work after the defeat of 1905.⁴⁷

The 'liquidators' were not sanguine about democratic rights under American capitalism. Besides the fact that the convention itself was raided, one of their chief spokesmen, Cannon, had just finished a prison sentence. Foster and Ruthenberg were both under indictment from the Bridgman raid. But they believed that, on the whole, inter-war America was not tsarist Russia, and that by dogmatically remaining underground the Party was letting opportunities slip by.

The fight over legality can be seen by several documents from the conference.⁴⁸ The Geese submitted a 'Thesis on Relations of One and Two' which argued that the 'legal political party which such restrictions can not replace the Communist party'. For them, the 'underground machinery of the Communist party' should not be 'not merely a temporary device.... The underground machinery is for permanent use.... It is for constant use.' To safeguard the illegal party, the underground should retain 'full control of such legal party' and the 'personnel of

⁴⁶ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 158. According to Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1939), 425, Ashkendzie eventually transferred to the Russian Party and by the late 1920s was working in the Comintern.

⁴⁷ Earl Browder, *No Man's Land: A Political Autobiography* (undated MS, Earl Browder Papers, Syracuse University), 167.

committees of Number Two should consist of its majority of the personnel of the corresponding committees of Number One'.⁴⁹

Against this, the liquidators argued 'that not only had the No. 2 absorbed almost all the ordinary tasks carried out through the C.P. in the workers' everyday struggle but these tasks are performed more efficiently by the No. 2' rather than the illegal party. In addition, it was hard to recruit workers to a completely underground organisation and a dual-party structure was chaotic. The document, by J.P. Collins (Joseph Zack), ended by urging the Party to 'get away from this hocus-pocus and on to the task of developing an open Communist Party'. Instead of creating a completely legal party overnight, Zack proposed that No. 1 'carry out the many tasks that will develop during the struggle which cannot and should not be done in the open' but emphasised that 'No. 1 cannot remain the kind of organization it is now.'⁵⁰

The result of the convention was a 'compromise' resolution, developed by Robert Minor, that labelled 'open work' as 'the main task of the party', yet nonetheless asserted that 'the illegal Communist party must continue to exist' in order to 'direct the whole Communist work'. The resolution categorically stated, 'A legal Communist party is now impossible.' Besides giving the illegal party control over the activities of the legal party, the agreement went so far as to posit that, 'in spite of all the differences, America belongs in the category of countries like Finland, Poland, Roumania, Jugoslavia, where the Communist party must be illegal.'⁵¹

In order to understand the Bridgman convention, and also the relationship between the Party and the Comintern at the time, it is necessary to examine the role of

⁴⁸ The main source of these seized documents is R.M. Whitney's *Reds in America*. Many of the documents were also printed in the *Communist* in 1922, although with modifications in order to make them more cryptic.

⁴⁹ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 225-30; see also, *Communist* (majority), July 1922.

⁵⁰ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 14-16.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

the Comintern's representative. This was Henryk Valetski (or Walecki), a Polish mathematician. He was assisted by the Hungarian Joseph Pogany, and Boris Reinstein.⁵² The delegation illustrated the internationalism of the Comintern. Valetski had seen internecine factionalism in the Polish movement, and the Bolsheviks no doubt expected him to be able to cut through the problems in the American Party with the assistance of Reinstein, who had much experience in the US.⁵³

Luckily for the historian, Valetski detailed his services in a report back to the Comintern. He began by noting, that at the time of his arrival, 'The meetings of the family council were spent wholly on personal matters, [while] the big struggles which were going on outside never came up for discussion.' Even though there existed only a 'slight difference of views' on serious matters between the factions,

they have conducted their fight in such a way that the interests of the Party as a whole disappeared behind those of the factions, and because without the timely intervention of your representative and his two friends a new split might have taken place, the most senseless of all splits that ever took place in the American movement.

The factions, he wrote, 'represented more different frames of mind than different tendencies'. Valetski immediately created an eight-person committee to reach agreement between the factions. And he also played a prominent role: 'I adopted no conciliatory attitude, did not pose as arbitrator; rather I fought openly every heresy, every false judgement of the political solutions in the published theses.'⁵⁴ Despite his bragging, he hesitated to strongly take a side in the dispute, as shown by the compromise. The most important example of his intervention into the Party, however, was to safeguard Party unity, and prevent unnecessary splits, by flexing Comintern muscle.

⁵² For the Comintern delegation, see Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 363-65.

⁵³ Cannon emphasised this point to Draper in his letter of 18 August 1954, in Theodore Draper papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, box 31.

⁵⁴ Waletsky to Kuusinen, 8 October 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:128.

Valetski also met the Workers Council. Although he believed that some Council leaders—especially Salutsky—were more right-wing than others, he believed that they were being pulled to the left by the Workers Council as a whole. More importantly, he addressed a convention of the ‘left opposition’, representing some 2500 people, and convinced them to return to the official Party. This meant swaying them from their more extreme positions, such as their labelling the WP a ‘palpable fraud’ and a ‘centrist sect’, and their demand that reunification be based upon the expulsion from the Party of Cannon, Bedacht, Ruthenberg and Lovestone—i.e., the entire leadership of the Party!⁵⁵

After the Bridgman convention, the Party was at a crossroads. While officially accepting the Comintern’s insistence on legal work, in practice its members still emphasised illegal activity.⁵⁶ But such a compromise was not tenable. In the summer of 1922, Ketterfeld, a Goose factionalist, and Cannon, a liquidator as well as WP chairman, travelled Moscow to attend the Fourth Comintern Congress. In a speech on the eve of the Congress, Trotsky argued that ‘a revolution in the United States would be most advantageous’ because it was ‘the most independent’ and ‘the richest country in the world’. He continued, however, by noting that ‘we must say that in this strongest, largest, and most decisive leading capitalist country, the political premises, i.e., premises on the plane of the creation of a systematic party and class organizations, are the least prepared’. Reflecting this importance, the Soviet delegates

⁵⁵ For details of this convention, see the ‘continuation of report’ appended to *ibid.*, and the ‘Left Opposition’ ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party of America on the Workers Party’, 1922, attached to report. Salutsky would later be expelled from the Party and, under the name J.B.S. Hardman, became the educational director, and, later, editor, for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union.

⁵⁶ Ironically, the decisive vote in favour of maintaining the illegal apparatus was cast by one Fred Morrow, a government provocateur. See Browder, *No Man’s Land*, 179; Draper, *Roots*, 366-69.

to the American Commission consisted of such heavy weights as Zinoviev, Radek and Bukharin.⁵⁷

Cannon and Alexander Bittelman (whose official remit was to present a report on the Jewish movement in the US) lobbied the Comintern leadership over the importance of legal work. Cannon recalled that he had spoken with Zinoviev, Radek, Bukharin, and the ECCI secretary, Kuusinen. They were 'extremely friendly and patient', but 'as though by a prior decision on their part, remained noncommittal'. Fearful of being associated with the 'liquidators' in the history of the Bolshevik Party, Cannon argued that while he supported Lenin in that historic fight, 'I thought there was a difference between Czarist Russia and Harding's America.'⁵⁸

This was the crux of the issue. Cannon and the liquidators desired to orient American Communism towards American reality, rooting it in the American labour movement. Beyond certain immigrant circles, the working class could not be convinced of the necessity of Communism by a small, underground organisation. The geese, however, believed that America *was* tsarist Russia. During the Congress, Cannon and Bittelman were frustrated in their quest, until Max Eastman—in Moscow to write a biography of Trotsky—arranged a hearing with his subject, the Comintern's second-in-command. Cannon, in his discussion with Trotsky, emphasised the political backwardness of the American working class, and the possibility of a legal party. He stressed 'the necessity of Americanizing the party, of breaking the control of the foreign-language federations and assuring an indigenous national leadership'. Contrary to the common belief that this is exactly what the Comintern feared, Cannon

⁵⁷ Leon Trotsky, 'The Fifth Anniversary of the October Revolution and the Fourth World Congress of the Communist International', 20 October 1922, in *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 2, 186; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 70.

⁵⁸ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 65-6.

later recalled that for the American party, this discussion ‘changed everything overnight’.⁵⁹

Trotsky threw his weight behind the liquidators. He ordered Cannon to write its position on ‘one sheet of paper—no more’, to facilitate presenting them to the ECCI. In it Cannon argued that the ‘illegality of the Communist Party of America is a major obstacle in its work’. Since ‘American workers are still dominated by democratic illusions’, the letter advocated ‘a determined struggle for a legal Communist party’. It also highlighted the weakness that a majority of the Party’s membership consisted of foreign-born comrades ‘who judge things not from the standpoint of objective conditions prevailing in America, but on the basis of their subjective conceptions, which are based on events in Europe’.⁶⁰

The American Commission opened soon afterward, hearing from both the geese and liquidators, as well as the earlier splitters. According to Cannon, ‘the big guns began to boom’, as the Commission attacked the notion that a Communist Party must be illegal in principle. The Commission unanimously ordered the Party to become legal, work for a labour party, and tell the Left Opposition, once again, to rejoin the Party (and again, assure them full rights).⁶¹

Cannon, in an article afterwards, credited a ‘long argument and a push from Moscow’ for this new policy.⁶² The Comintern’s ‘push’ was indeed necessary for the Party to seize the opportunities for open work. However, Trotsky and the Comintern leadership did not just announce their position from Mount Olympus, but rather pursued a policy only after intense discussion with the leadership of the American

⁵⁹ Ibid., 68-69. George Hardy, a leader of the IWW who later joined the CP, wrote that he had a similar discussion with Lenin about the need for a legal Party in 1921; Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 135-36.

⁶⁰ Cannon, *Early Years*, 95-97. The letter, whose original is deposited in the Comintern archives in Moscow, was signed by the ‘Minority of the delegation to the Comintern’, including Marshall, Cook and Lansing (Arne Swabeck, J.P. Cannon and Max Bedacht).

⁶¹ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 70-71.

Party. Two years later, Israel Amter noted that this legalisation 'widened the vista of the Communist movement in the United States to a degree hardly conceived by the American Communists.' In a letter to Draper decades later, Cannon argued that 'a great problem of American communism, which it had not been able to solve by itself, was settled conclusively and definitely by the Comintern for the good of the movement'.⁶³ How American Communists learnt how to become legal offers perhaps the best illustration of the early, beneficial, relationship between the Communist International and its section in the United States.

⁶² Cannon, *Early Years*, 117-23.

⁶³ Cannon., *First Ten Years*, 71; I. Amter, 'The Communist International and the American Movement', *Communist International*, no 5 new series, 1924.

4. The Communist Party and the Labour Movement

Most historians who study the influence of Communists in the American labour movement usually begin in the 1930s, skipping the Party's first decade. One such study simply called the 1920s a 'decade of failure'.¹ While the early 1920s were not the most successful period of Communist work in the unions, they did help pave the road the Party would take later, especially since many of the trade union leaders in the 1920s, including John L. Lewis, William Green, Philip Murray and Sidney Hillman, played important roles in the 1930s. At its formation, the Party, believing revolution was near, all but ignored the organised working class, dismissing the unions as reactionary, and isolating Communists from the labour movement. Instead, the Party focused on the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Just as the Comintern had forced the Party to understand the need for unity and for legal organisation, Lenin and other Bolshevik leaders intervened to make sure that the Party both recruited from the IWW and played a role in the much larger American Federation of Labor (AFL). This formed a crucial part of 'Americanising' the Party, by forcing it to learn about the labour movement and recruit native-born workers. While the IWW as an organisation remained aloof from the Party, many rank-and-file wobbly militants joined the Party, and, along with a group of syndicalists around William Z. Foster, infused American Communism with important industrial experience and knowledge. These Communists, including Earl Browder, William F. Dunne, and James P. Cannon, in turn struggled to orient the Party towards the American labour movement. This chapter examines the interaction between the Comintern, the early Communist leadership, and the American labour movement in the first half of the 1920s. By the mid-1920s, thanks to the Comintern's intervention

¹ Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 20.

and Foster and Cannon's struggles, the Party was able to become a real, if small, factor in the labour movement, as described in the following chapter.²

The American Federation of Labor

Under Samuel Gompers' leadership, the AFL was extremely conservative, eschewing radicalism or even class-based politics in favour of working within the capitalist system. This was compounded by the AFL's emphasis on skilled crafts. The AFL had a weak national structure, so there was room in the numerous local and international unions, and municipal and state labour councils, for a significant anti-Gompers opposition to develop. While the AFL as a national organisation had one of the most right-wing leaderships in the world at the time, many different radical tendencies could be found throughout it. John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor and James Duncan from the Seattle Central Labor Council often opposed Gompers from the left; although not a radical, Lewis from the largest AFL union, the mineworkers, had challenged Gompers for leadership of the Federation in 1921.³

Radicals had dealt with the AFL in two ways. Some worked within it by 'boring from within'. Others, disgusted with Gompers, organised competing, radical unions through a policy of 'dual unionism'. Both positions were strongly rooted in the left by the 1920s. The Socialist Labor Party (SLP) had tried both policies, finally settling on dual unionism; the Socialist Party (SP) leadership favoured working within the AFL. In 1905, radicals from both the SLP and SP had come together to try to split the AFL through the organising the IWW. After this attempt failed, the IWW became

² Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 89.

³On the dangers of identifying the AFL leadership with its membership, see Strouthous, *US Labor and Political Action*, 2 and passim. See also, John Howard Keiser, 'John Fitzpatrick and Progressive Unionism, 1915-1925' (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1965), 20, 23, 29, 101. On dissent, socialist and otherwise, within the AFL, see Stanley Shapiro, 'Hand and Brain: The Farmer-Labor Party of 1920' (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1967), 76-77; Melvyn Dubofsky and Warren Van Time, *John L. Lewis: A Biography* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1986, abridged edition), 57-58; David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace,*

a rallying point for dual unionists. Still, by the 1920s, the AFL remained the largest trade union in the United States.⁴

Most early Communists, forged in the Socialist Left Wing, supported dual unionist IWW against the AFL. The June 1919 left wing conference declared that ‘the American Federation of Labor, in its present organization and under its present leadership, is *entirely reactionary*, and *cannot be of any value* in the workers’ struggle for emancipation.’⁵ Interestingly, Irish syndicalist James Larkin, a founder of the Party, opposed dual unionism as part of his desire for American and English-speaking leadership. His experience in Ireland, and perhaps the fact that many Irish-American workers remained in the AFL, led him to advocate that Communists ‘go into labor unions and try to revolutionize them’. Larkin, however, was arrested in 1919, and sentenced to five to ten years in prison for his role in initiating the Left Wing and played no significant role in the American left afterwards. (Al Smith pardoned him in 1923, and he quickly returned to Ireland).⁶

The IWW and the CP

While many early Communists were workers, they were not necessarily members of unions. Also, most were immigrant workers, and the Party had trouble recruiting English-speaking workers. In the automobile industry, for example, the Party recruited from the third of the auto workforce which consisted of immigrants, but had trouble in the other two-thirds.⁷ Several early Communists had extensive

the State and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 404-406.

⁴ David J. Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Politics and Tactics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1976 [1926]), 18-32; see also Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), vol. 3, 368-69; Bell, *Marxian Socialism in the United States*, 65.

⁵ ‘Left wing section of the Socialist Party: Report of the labor organization committee’, 21 June 1919 (John S. Reed papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bms Am 1091:1449), emphasis added.

⁶ Larkin, *James Larkin*, 234-43. See also, O’Connor, ‘James Larkin in the United States’, 183-96.

⁷ Roger R. Keeran, ‘Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry, 1920-1933: Paving the Way for an Industrial Union’, *Labor History* 20:2 (Spring 1979), 190, 205-207.

experience in the labour movement. Some had been IWW militants, such as Cannon and Browder, who had been a part of the original left wing.⁸ Other early recruits from the labour movement included William F. Dunne, who along with his brothers had been active in the Montana labour movement, and Arne Swabeck, a leader of the 1919 Seattle General Strike, who were both charter members of the Party.⁹ Another charter member was Ella Reeve 'Mother' Bloor, who had been a member of both the SLP and the SP and an organiser amongst women textile workers as well as a collaborator with Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in the Workers Defence Union.¹⁰ Rose Pastor Stokes, amongst the early SP leaders to join the left wing, had been active in strikes by garment, hotel and other workers, and had also been a socialist journalist and birth control advocate.¹¹ These members provided a cadre for the early Party to intervene into the American labour movement.

Their first target was the IWW. In the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution, many wobblies sympathised with the Bolsheviks and, in late 1917, the IWW wrote to Lenin and the Bolsheviks as 'colleagues in the struggle for social revolution', to hail them for 'inspiring and accelerating a revolutionary movement, the like of which has never been seen before.'¹² During this period *Industrial Worker* described the Revolution as achieving the IWW's goals.¹³ In 1918, the IWW published a pro-Bolshevik pamphlet, *Red Dawn*, by Harrison George (who was in prison) which declared the Soviet regime 'pure and simple working-class rule' and

⁸ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 111.

⁹ See Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 113. Dunne's interesting pre-Communist phase is described in Kurt Wetzel, 'The Making of an American Radical: Bill Dunne in Butte' (MA dissertation, University of Montana, 1970).

¹⁰ Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor', 221-222, 280-86. On the WDU see Helen C. Camp, *Iron in Her Soul: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the American Left* (Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press, 1995), chapter four.

¹¹ On Stokes' activities in the labour movement, see Sharp, 'Rose Pastor Stokes', chapter 3.

¹² 'Letter from American Workers to the Soviet Government', December 1917/January 1918, *Political Affairs*, March 1970, 27-28.

hailed the Bolsheviks as 'entitled to first place among the tacticians of the Modern Working Class'. In this way, the early IWW supporters of Bolshevism depicted the Russian Revolution as a reflection of the syndicalism of the IWW and not a political party.¹⁴

The IWW's *New Solidarity* in the spring of 1919 exhorted its comrades that 'Russia has blazed the way, let us broaden the trail to make Freedom a fact and Industrial Democracy a reality thout [sic] the world.'¹⁵ In July 1919, another IWW newspaper, *Rebel Worker*, declared, 'The Soviet is One Big Union and nothing else' and urged its readers to 'Line up with the Soviet both in theory and in fact.'¹⁶ In late August, the GEB passed a resolution establishing a committee on international relations, that would 'provide for the representation of the I.W.W. as a constituent member of the Third International'.¹⁷

The Comintern wanted to recruit the IWW, and in January 1920 Zinoviev wrote a letter urging the IWW 'to rally to the Communist International, born in the dawn of the World Socialist Revolution' and 'to take the place to which your courage and revolutionary experience entitles you to in the front ranks of the proletarian Red Army fighting under the banner of Communism'. Zinoviev appealed to the IWW as fellow revolutionaries 'to join the Communist International' and discard anarchist and syndicalist positions. Even though parliamentary cretinism as a hallmark of reformist Social Democracy, he stressed, revolutionary Communists could not ignore politics altogether. He also emphasised the need for a post-revolutionary state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, instead of merely abolishing the state all at once. But while

¹³ See McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 340-44, for the early reaction of the *Industrial Worker* to the Russian Revolution (quote on 343).

¹⁴ Harrison George, *The Red Dawn: The Bolsheviki and the I.W.W.* (Chicago: I.W.W. Publishing Bureau, nd [1918]), 12,15-17.

¹⁵ *New Solidarity*, 1 March 1919.

polemical, the letter was friendly and comradely. 'The Communist International extends a brotherly hand to the IWW', it ended.¹⁸

When the IWW finally received this letter, after more than six months' delay, members debated their relationship to the Comintern. 'Big Bill' Haywood, who like many IWW organisers faced repression because of his opposition to the war, read this declaration and decided that 'Here is what we have been dreaming about; here is the IWW all feathered out.' The IWW endorsed the call for a Moscow meeting but was unable to send anyone. Many veteran wobblies had already left the IWW to organise the Party and many of those who remained distrusted the Comintern. When Haywood jumped bail (leaving the IWW to pay) and moved to Russia, Communist influence in the IWW declined more.¹⁹

Unlike in Europe and parts of Latin America, the early Party did not quickly recruit many rank-and-file syndicalists, although not from the lack of trying.²⁰ John Reed, the Harvard graduate who had witnessed the Bolsheviks shake the world, and who had earlier helped Haywood organise the 1913 Patterson strike pageant in Madison Square Garden, attempted to recruit IWWers: 'if these men can be reached,' he argued, 'if the position of the Communist can be explained to them in their own language, their native common sense will show them that we are right. And this must be done, for the I.W.W. is the advance guard of the American proletariat, and it is they who must lead the assault on capitalism in American.' More proletarian

¹⁶ *Rebel Worker*, 15 July 1919, quoted in Anderson, 'The Attitude of the American Leftist Leaders toward the Bolshevik Revolution', 53.

¹⁷ *Solidarity*, 21 August 1920.

¹⁸ *Communist* (UCP), 17 July 1920; *Solidarity*, 14 August 1920; cf. also Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. I, 71-74.

¹⁹ *Solidarity*, 14 August 1920; William D. Haywood, *Bill Haywood's Big Book* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 360-61

²⁰ On the inability of the CP to recruit syndicalists at the same rate as elsewhere, see Larry Peterson, 'Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike: The Origins of Communist Labour Unionism in Europe and North America', *Labour/Le Travail* 13(Spring 1984), 128.

Communists with links to the IWW tried as well. Cannon spent hours to trying to recruit Vincent St. John, and, while coming close, failing in the end. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, whose cottage in Staten Island was the setting for this debate, did eventually join the Party in the mid-1920s.²¹

For the time being, wobblies were ambivalent towards Communism. In the autumn of 1920, the IWW's General Executive Board (GEB) rebuffed the UCP's appeals for joint work.²² According to George Hardy, a future Communist who was then General Secretary of the IWW, many wobblies disagreed with polemics against the IWW in the Party press.²³ An article in the *Communist International* by a former editor of the IWW Russian-language paper, regretted that 'all the distrust that the I.W.W. felt towards the Socialist parties, is transmitted to the Communist parties of America.' Reed recalled being told 'I'm a Bolshevik, but not a Communist. A Communist is a member of a political party.'²⁴

Most wobblies supported the Russian Revolution, but not necessarily Bolshevism itself. In *The Red Dawn*, Harrison George hailed the Bolshevik Revolution as an 'inspiring light that penetrates even the prison windows and floods my cell with the glory of the Red Dawn'. In 1920 the GEB expelled with 'horror and disgust' their Philadelphia dockers' union upon discovering that some members had helped load war materiel to be used against 'our brave fellow workers in Russia who have established the first working class government in the world':

²¹ On the Patterson Pageant, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *'Big Bill' Haywood* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1987), 78-79; for Reed's description of the IWW in 1918, see *ibid.*, 118. On the Communist Reed's approach to the IWW, see John Reed, 'The Fighting I.W.W. in America', *Communist International*, old series no 13, [August?] 1920; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 305-306; On Flynn, see Camp, *Iron in her Soul*, 122.

²² On the UCP overtures, see McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 364-65

²³ George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), 131.

²⁴ V. Lossieff, 'Industrial Workers of the World', *Communist International*, old series vol. 3, nos. 16/17 [1921?]; Reed, 'The Fighting I.W.W. in America'. On Lossieff, see McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 344.

We call upon the membership of our organization to use their utmost power to assist the Soviet government of Russia in fighting the world's battle against capitalism.... The IWW holds out the clean hand of brotherhood to the revolutionary workers of the world.²⁵

Lenin, the former syndicalist J.T. Murphy recalled, maintained 'an admiration for the Industrial Workers of the World as fine courageous fighters but thought that they would pay dearly for their mistaken attitude to politics'.²⁶

The IWW and the CP in 1920

Solidarity refused to take a position on Zinoviev's letter, but declared that 'we grasp the hand of brotherhood that the Communist International holds out the I.W.W.'²⁷ Yet not all wobblies were so favourable. One former leading wobbly recalled that the Bolshevik Revolution split the IWW 'into antagonistic camps'.²⁸ In May 1920, the IWW held a General Convention. According to Hardy—who, upon returning from England, had been elected chairman of the meeting and would soon be voted General Secretary—the meeting approved affiliation with the Comintern unanimously, but with very little discussion. This merely allowed the divisions to fester, especially since the convention voted a new GEB. A combination of over-enthusiastic and maladroit attacks on the IWW in the Communist press and a similarly vicious anti-Communist campaign led by John Sandgren increased hostility.²⁹ A three-month debate on affiliation to the Comintern followed. Some IWW leaders, such as Sandgren, editor of the *One Big Union Monthly*, and H.F. Kane, editor of the Seattle-based *Industrial Worker*, bitterly opposed affiliation, as did the new GEB,

²⁵ *Solidarity*, 14 August 1920. The IWW union in question, Local 8 of the Marine Transport Workers Industrial Union, was atypical in a number of ways. It consisted largely of blacks, and it also was much less politically motivated than many other IWW locals. See Kimmeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, chapter two on the local's history and pp. 61-64 for the explosives issue.

²⁶ J.T. Murphy, *New Horizons* (London: John Lane, 1941), 129.

²⁷ *Solidarity*, 14 August 1920.

²⁸ George, *The Red Dawn*, 2; Cf. Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 82-83, for an account of the greeting of the Russian Revolution amongst IWW prisoners. 'Antagonistic camp' quote from Ralph Chaplin, *Wobbly: The Rough-and-Tumble Story of an American Radical* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 288.

²⁹ Hardy, *These Stormy Years*, 129-31.

largely on an anti-political impulse.³⁰ At the same time, the Chicago-based *Solidarity* supported affiliation so fervently that one historian has written that it ‘seemed during this period to belong to a different organization’.³¹

The confusing nature of the debate can be seen by the motions the IWW passed. In late August 1920, the GEB defeated a motion to endorse the Comintern and moved: ‘That we do not endorse the Third International officially, and that we notify the Third International that our position makes it impossible to endorse same as it is outlined in the Zinovieff appeal to the I.W.W., and that we are in favor of an Economic Industrial International.’ At the same time, the GEB passed another motion, declaring ‘That we endorse the Third International with reservations, as follows, that we take no part in parliamentary action whatsoever and that we reserve the right to develop our own tactics according to conditions prevailing.’ Finally, the GEB unanimously decided to submit the three above choices to the general membership.³² ‘Unconditional affiliation’ failed 602 to 1658, but affiliation conditioned on not having to participate in parliamentary action passed.³³

As General Secretary, Hardy, after visiting Moscow and meeting Lenin, returned to the US via London, and organised a tour with Jack Tanner, a former British syndicalist who had just joined the British CP, to convince IWW members of the correctness of the Communist programme.³⁴

The Comintern and the Profintern

In 1921, the Party, while trying to recruit from the IWW, rejected dual unionism and began to work within the AFL. Like the attempt to legalise the Party,

³⁰ See *New Solidarity*, 1 February 1919, for Sandgren’s anti-Soviet position. On the differences between the old and new GEB, see McEnroe, ‘Industrial Workers of the World’, 356-57.

³¹ John S. Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 80.

³² *Solidarity*, 28 August 1920. Ironically, these conditions mirror those of the SP: a rejection of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a condemnation of Moscow-domination.

this shift came largely from Comintern efforts to root American Communism in American reality and the American labour movement. This was part of the a broader shift at the Third Comintern Congress towards painstaking work to recruit amidst a re-stabilising capitalism; this was a reversal of the attitude at the First Congress, when the Bolsheviks had been so sure of imminent revolution that they largely neglected trade-union tactics and took no side in a debate over whether Communists should work within established unions. Ironically Boris Reinstein argued against dual unionism, and the German Eberlein—who had opposed the founding of the Comintern to begin with—believed the unions were hopelessly reactionary.³⁵

The seeds of this new policy were planted the Second Congress. In preparation for that Congress, Lenin wrote *'Left Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder* as a polemic against those Communists who supported dual unions. An entire chapter answered the question, 'should revolutionaries work in reactionary trade unions?'³⁶ To win the masses to Communism, Lenin stressed, Communists 'must absolutely *work wherever the masses are to be found*'. Lenin did not dispute that the trade-union bureaucracy was anti-Communist—in fact, he quoted favourably De Leon's 'profoundly true' description of them as 'labour lieutenants of the capitalist class'—but argued that the best way to defeat them politically was *inside* the unions they led.³⁷

During the Second Congress, English briefly replaced French as an official language to facilitate discussion because American delegates opposed the idea of

³³ On the Zinoviev letter, and the debate and referendum in the IWW, cf. McEnroe, 'Industrial Workers of the World', 347-63.

³⁴ Hardy, *These Stormy Years*, 131, 141.

³⁵ Albert Resis, 'The Profintern: Origins to 1923' (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1964), 14-15. See Pierre Broué, ed., *Les Congres de l'Internationale Communiste: le premier congres, 2-6 Mars 1919* (Paris: Etudes et Documentation Internationales, 1974), 81-85, for Reinstein's report

³⁶ This was first published in the US as N. Lenin, *Should Communists Participate in Reactionary Trade Unions?* (New York: Workers Party of America, [1922]).

³⁷ Lenin, *'Left-Wing' Communism, An Infantile Disorder* in *Collected Works*, vol. 31, 53.

working within the AFL and British delegates opposed Lenin's proposal to affiliate with the Labour Party.³⁸ This debate occurred in response to a report by Karl Radek on the trade-union question. Radek, a veteran Bolshevik, declared that the Communist Parties must not ignore the unions, and noted as an aside that since some 80 per cent of the US working class was unorganised, 'that it was necessary first of all to organize the active laboring class as far as possible and therefore to form new trade unions' to carry out this task. Fraina asserted that the IWW played this role in the US. In his summary, Radek strongly criticised Communists who left the AFL. 'We therefore,' he thundered, 'should not only establish the definite position of the Communist International with respect to trade unions, but also we should emphasize a specific, supplementary amendment, that the revolutionary proletariat considers the position of our American comrades absolutely incorrect.'³⁹

John Reed vehemently opposed Radek's report. He agreed that the IWW would not soon supplant the AFL, and predicted that 'as an organisation, the I.W.W. will never be able to gain the majority of workers.' However, unlike Lenin, Reed did not see this as the decisive question:

But as a propaganda centre, as a destructive and revolutionary force, it is one of the chief agents in wrecking the great American Federation of Labour, in reaching and making class conscious vast proletarian masses, and for fifteen years it has held aloft with unflinching heroism the ideal of the overthrow of capitalism, an example to the workers everywhere.⁴⁰

Since the AFL had itself not organised most American workers, Reed advocated a combination of independent unions and work within the AFL. He regarded Radek's

³⁸ James W. Hulse, *The Forming of the Communist International* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964), 195.

³⁹ *Petrograd Pravda*, 3 August and 7 August 1920, reprinted in the US State Department's dossier on the Congress, *The 2nd Congress of the Communist International, as Reported and Interpreted by the Official Newspapers of Soviet Russia* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 60, 68.

⁴⁰ Reed, 'The Fighting I.W.W. in America'.

position as contradicting the Bolsheviks' earlier overtures to the IWW.⁴¹ In a note he passed to Lenin, Reed wrote:

I object to Radek's assertion that we have tried to sabotage the work of the Commission on Trade Unionism. That sort of remark takes the place of argument with Comrade Radek, because, knowing very little about Trade Unionism, he naturally has no attitude on the question. This is the real explanation.⁴²

He told Alfred Rosmer, a former French syndicalist on the ECCI, that 'We cannot go back to America with a decision like that. In the [American] trade unions the Communist International has supporters and sympathy only among the Industrial Workers of the World, and you're sending us to the American Federation of Labour where it has nothing but implacable enemies.'⁴³ In the end, although Radek conceded that building independent unions might be possible if the trade-union leadership refused to organise certain workers or expelled Communists, Reed lost the battle: the trade union commission endorsed Radek, 57 to 8.⁴⁴ Opposing Radek meant opposing Zinoviev and Lenin. But rather than punish Reed his dissent, the Comintern's central leadership nominated him for the ECCI. At this point, the Comintern valued internal political debate and not rigid centralisation. Furthermore, Lenin's notes make it clear that he wanted to bend over backwards to ensure that British and American syndicalists 'should remain affiliated to the Third International', despite his differences with them.⁴⁵

At the Third Comintern Congress, Lenin and the Bolsheviks continued this trade-union fight. In a letter to Zinoviev, Lenin asserted that 'The tactics of the

⁴¹ Resis, 'The Profintern', 54-55.

⁴² Note from John Reed to Lenin during meeting of executive committee [nd, but during Comintern Congress], in John S. Reed papers (Houghton Library, Harvard University, fms AM 1091:557).

⁴³ Alfred Rosmer, *Lenin's Moscow* (London: Pluto Press, 1971), 74.

⁴⁴ Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionayr: A Biography of John Reed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 373-76; Resis, 'The Profintern', 56-59. Reed's support was centred among British syndicalists, who were also fighting against Lenin's insistence that British Communists affiliate to the Labour Party (cf. Murphy, *New Horizons*, 148-50).

Communist International should be based on a steady and systematic drive to win the *majority of the working class, first and foremost within the old trade unions.*⁴⁶ To further this goal, the Third Congress organised the Red International of Labour Unions, or Profintern, to fulfil the previous Congress' call for 'an international centre for the trade union movement which, together with the Communist International, will make one whole, a single steel block'.⁴⁷ According to official sources, 380 delegates from 41 countries attended the Profintern's first Congress in July 1921.⁴⁸

In one resolution, Losovsky, the head of the new formation, described the AFL's leadership as 'direct agents of capital' and 'a classic example' of the 'fusion of working-class leaders with the bourgeois state'. At the same time, he criticised the IWW as 'still too weak to replace the old unions', and imbued with 'purely anarchist prejudices against politics and political struggle'. For American Communists, the most acute task was 'to form revolutionary groups and cells in the heart of the AFL and independent unions' towards 'conquering the working masses in America' through 'systematic struggle in the hearts of these unions'.⁴⁹ Losovsky added that 'the more the IWW is isolated from the masses, the more aloof their organisations will be, the longer and slower the development class consciousness amongst the American proletariat.' He continued that the 'coordination and unity of action with the AFL locals affiliated' to the Profintern was obligatory for the IWW. The IWW

⁴⁵ See Lenin, 'Material for the Second Congress of the Communist International', section 2, 'Re Jack Tanner's Speech at the Second Congress of the Comintern', 23 July 1920, *Collected Works*, vol. 42, 202.

⁴⁶ Lenin to Zinoviev, 10 June 1921, *ibid.*, 320-21.

⁴⁷ 'Manifesto to All Trade Unions on the Decision to found a Red Trade Union International', August 1920, Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 1, 187. See Murphy, *New Horizons*, 157-58, for the early days of the Profintern.

⁴⁸ Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 1., 274.

⁴⁹ A. Losovsky, 'Les taches et la tactique des syndicats', in *Resolutions et Decisions du Ier Congres International des Syndicats Revolutionnaires* (Moscow: Internationale Syndicats Rouge, 1921), 24-25. Cf. also, J. P. Morray, *Project Kuzbas: American Workers in Siberia* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 76, for a partial English translation of this passage, as well as a discussion of the IWW's reaction.

representatives to the Congress resented this, decrying what they saw as the Comintern's desired 'liquidation of the revolutionary labor organizations into the conservative labor bodies of the various countries'.⁵⁰

Once again, the Comintern stressed the need for Communists to work within non-communist unions, and reiterated the differences between trade unions and the revolutionary party and also stressed creating Party cells in the unions.⁵¹ Some delegates seemed too optimistic: Browder, in a letter to Trotsky, claimed that 'it is within the realm of possibility in the immediate future for the Communists of America to take over the direction of the labor movement.'⁵² However, most American delegates still opposed this perspective. Haywood argued that 'it is absolutely impossible to carry on any work inside the Federation [AFL], so reactionary is it.' He even blamed 'the institutional paralysis which exists in Russia today' on the absence of an IWW-type group in tsarist Russia to train workers 'in the technical and industrial control of industry'. Haywood described the AFL as 'the buffer organisation of capitalism' and declared that 'Never during the nearly forty years existence of the A.F.L. has it done a single thing in the interests of the Working Class.' Privately, he denounced this new perspective even more vociferously. He labelled the 'majority of the American Delegation' a 'reactionary outpost' who dismissed the work of the IWW and were planning to 'return to the U.S. against the

⁵⁰ A. Lozovsky, 'La question d'organisation', *Resolutions et Decisions*, 50; Cf. Gordon Cascaden, *Shall Unionism Die? Report on 'Red' Union International Congress* (Windsor: Industrial Union League of Canada, [1922?]), 34, for a partial English translation of the relevant section of Losovsky's report as well as a hostile account of the Profintern Congress by one of two Canadian delegates. Quote from IWW representative is from Morray, *Project Kuzbas*, 77.

⁵¹ 'Theses on the Communist International and the Red International of Labour Unions', 12 July 1921, in Degras, *Communist International*, vol. 1, 277.

⁵² Earl Browder to Leon Trotsky, 9 May 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

I.W.W.’ Till his death in exile in 1928, Haywood remained opposed to boring from within.⁵³ However, the ECCI disagreed:

It is unthinkable...that a colossal trade union organisation such as the American Federation of Labor could be composed entirely of enemies of the working class, as are such organisations like the Ku Klux Klan or the various professional strike-breaking bodies. Here a strict distinction must always be made between the reactionary traitorous leadership and the unconscious petty-bourgeois-minded mass which we have to win.⁵⁴

While the letter stressed the ‘special duty’ of American Communists to recruit ‘the best elements of the I.W.W.’, it described the Party’s chief task as ‘immediately advanc[ing] the slogan of a united front for Labour, as for instance, for the protection of the unemployed’. If Gompers opposed such a struggle, then this would undercut his authority.⁵⁵ The Party adopted a flexible approach, which Cannon described as working ‘according to the concrete facts as it finds them, not according to a cut and dried formula’. The Party, Cannon wrote, should ‘survey each industry separately, and in each case ask the question: “Where are the masses of the workers?”.’

Since the Party’s goal was not to politically support the AFL leadership, but to build a base amongst the rank and file, ‘its approach to the question in each case is practical, not just theoretical.’⁵⁶

The Profintern and the IWW

The Party continued to work within the IWW to recruit out of it. In January 1921, the ECCI addressed a letter to the ‘comrades and fellow workers’ of the IWW,

⁵³ *The Third Congress of the Communist International* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1922), 141-42; William D. Haywood, ‘Revolutionary Problems in America’, *Communist International*, old series vol. 3, nos. 16-17, undated but published at the time of the Third Congress. ‘Reactionary outpost’ quote from WDH to Chas. E. Scott, 10 August 1921, in Lovestone papers, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford University, box 195, folder 12. On Haywood’s opposition, see Edward P. Johanningsmeier, ‘The Trade Union Unity League: American Communists and the Transition to Industrial Unionism, 1928-1934’, *Labor History* 42:2 (May 2001), 164-66.

⁵⁴ Bukharin, Radek, Kuusinen, ‘Concerning the Next Tasks of the CP of A’, 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:138. The letter also told the Party to pursue electoral activity, publishing a daily English-language paper, and take steps toward legalisation.

⁵⁵ ‘Theses on the United Front for Labour...’, *Bulletin of the Executive Committee of the Communist International*, no 5, 7 July 1922.

⁵⁶ Cannon, ‘The IWW and the Red International of Labor Unions’, in *Labor Herald*, 1 December 1923, reprinted in Cannon, *Early Years*, 184.

asserting that 'our greetings to you is [sic] a recognition that your historic position entitles you to a place in the front ranks of the revolutionary army of labor'. In a comradely fashion, the ECCI then took up the central disagreements with the IWW: the question of political action and the need for a proletarian state. The letter ended with the statement, 'You must dethrone the Gompers machine and drive them into oblivion.'⁵⁷ The Communists tried to convince the IWW to affiliate with the Profintern, and, against Sandgren's opposition, the IWW voted to send a delegate to the Profintern congress in 1921.⁵⁸ Ironically, this hurt the Comintern's support within the IWW, because the IWW's delegate, George Williams, became a sworn enemy of Bolshevism. He denounced as heavy-handed Comintern manoeuvres to guarantee Bolshevik domination and opposed the Communists' emphasis on political organisation, and their stress on working within established trade unions. He and other disgruntled delegates met in Berlin afterwards to establish a syndicalist bureau, counterposed to the Comintern and Profintern. Upon returning to the US, he carried out an anti-Bolshevik campaign within the IWW.⁵⁹

Nonetheless, in a report to the ECCI in August 1921, the Party representative claimed that due to a 'special drive' in the IWW, the Party had 'succeeded in winning to the Party ranks almost all of the best known leaders'. He continued that 'The Communist nuclei are so strong in the I.W.W. that the capture of the organization is likely to come at an early date.'⁶⁰ In November, the minutes of the CEC note that

⁵⁷ ECCI letter to 'comrades and fellow workers', 25 January 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:38.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 143-44.

⁵⁹ McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 375-78. See George Williams, *The First Congress of the Red Trade Union International at Moscow, 1921* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, nd [1922?]). Cf. Cascaden, *Shall Unionism Die?*, for another hostile report, from a similar perspective, from a Canadian delegate. For an account of the Berlin syndicalist bureau, cf. Wayne Thorpe, *The Workers Themselves': Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour, 1913-1923* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1989).

⁶⁰ George Baldwin, 'Statement of the Communist Party of America to the ECCI', August 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

some 25,000 copies of the Profintern's resolutions and appeals had been distributed amongst the IWW, and 'things coming to head in the IWW.'⁶¹

Not all former syndicalists reacted the same way as Williams. Foster and Bloor, as well as Haywood, all supported the Comintern.⁶² Internationally, Larkin, Rosmer and Serge also threw their lots in with Communism, and Tom Mann, who attended the conference as well, soon joined the British Communist Party.⁶³ Many left-wing social democrats *and* syndicalists saw Bolshevism as a way forward.⁶⁴

However, the IWW as a whole did not follow Mann, Murphy, Larkin, Serge or Rosmer into the Communist movement for several reasons. First, the Communists' emphasis on winning the mass of workers through political action and work in trade unions with pro-capitalist leaders repelled many wobblies. Second, the IWW feared that affiliation with the Comintern would destroy their autonomy. Finally, the leadership of the post-war IWW, after unstinting government repression and the Red Scare, was a shadow of its former self and led by different leaders than in 1914 or 1903. On 10 December 1921, the GEB declared that it was not going to affiliate with the Comintern or the Profintern. It denounced working within the AFL and political struggle, and noted that since the Communists advocated 'liquidating' dual unionists, 'the G.E.B. does not expect the I.W.W. will care to be a party to a carefully conceived plot for its own destruction.' It announced that 'the IWW would find it impossible to cooperate with the Communist Party of America.' The 13th Convention of the IWW, held in May 1921, rejected affiliation.⁶⁵

⁶¹ CEC minutes 3/9 November 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51.

⁶² Foster's experience is recounted below; see Ella Reeve Bloor, *We Are Many* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 172-75, for another favourable account of the Congress.

⁶³ Tom Mann, *Tom Mann's Memoirs* (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967 [1923]), 270-71.

⁶⁴ For the development of this argument, see Peterson, 'Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike'.

⁶⁵ See Roy Brown, '“High Spots” of the Thirteenth I.W.W. Convention', *Industrial Pioneer*, June 1921. Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices*, 324. For the CP's coverage of the debate, see for example, 'Another Renegade' in the *Toiler*, 11 December 1920, reprinted in *Cannon and the Early Years of*

Even after the defeat, Communists continued to recruit IWWers. From Moscow, Haywood smuggled letters to his former comrades urging support to the Profintern. Although no longer in power, Hardy wielded his considerable prestige and authority within the IWW by touring locals to argue for affiliation with the Profintern. When the GEB forbade him from speaking he helped build a pro-Communist 'minority movement within the I.W.W.' and published *Unity Bulletin* to advance these views. According to Hardy, the anti-Comintern forces responded with violence and gangsterism. In January 1922 the GEB threatened to withdraw the bail money it had provided when he had been arrested along with other wobblies; this would have subjected him to immediate arrest and deportation. Finally, in early 1922, the IWW expelled Hardy, its former General Secretary, thus making it (according to Hardy) the first North American union to expel Communists.⁶⁶

The defeat of the proposal to affiliate with the Comintern blocked systematic recruitment of IWWers into the Party. The divorce between the Communists and the IWW hurt both sides. The IWW entered a period of decline as it was poorly positioned between the shoals of state repression and the sirens of Communism.⁶⁷ In 1928, Cannon recalled that it was tragic that the Party 'allowed so many good proletarian fighters in the west fall into the hands of syndicalists and anarcho-syndicalists' because it 'had not learned to combine the ideological fight against syndicalism with the task of fighting side by side with the syndicalistic workers and winning them to the Party'.⁶⁸ Still later, Cannon recalled that 'The failure of the main

American Communism, 75; George Williams, *The First Congress of the Red Trade Union International at Moscow, 1921* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, nd [1922?]).

⁶⁶ Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, 145-47. On Haywood's letters, see Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 333.

⁶⁷ See Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, for a study of the organisation from 1917 onwards; cf. Leland Walker Robinson, 'Social Movement Organizations in Decline: A Case Study of the I.W.W.' (PhD thesis, Northwestern University, 1973), 66 for hostility towards Communism within the IWW, and see the thesis generally for the description of the IWW 'in decline' during this period.

⁶⁸ James P. Cannon at the Ninth W(C)P Plenum, 5 February 1928, in Jay Lovestone papers, box 213, folder 7.

cadres of the IWW to become integrated in the new movement for the Communist Party in this country' was 'a historical miscarriage which could have been prevented' since 'in their practice, and partly also in their theory, the Wobblies were closer to Lenin's Bolsheviks than any other group in this country.'⁶⁹

However, the repeated votes within the IWW indicated significant pro-Communist sympathies within the union despite the hostility of the leadership⁷⁰ The Party continued to organise nuclei within the IWW. In early 1926, for example, in the context of a Pan-American seamen conference called by the IWW, Harrison George described his continuing efforts to 'working within it to bring it closer to the Red International'.⁷¹ A TUEL National Committee meeting in September 1926 detailed the organisational disarray of the IWW and planned Party intervention in the IWW. Later, in early 1927, the minutes indicated that 'I.W.W. is so dead that it cannot even stir up an effective faction fight.'⁷² Still, through at least 1928, the Party kept nuclei in the IWW.⁷³

Enter William Z. Foster

By 1932, one historian estimated that perhaps as many as 2000 IWW members had joined the CP, and that some 10 to 20 per cent of the Party membership had been in the IWW. These tended not to be rank-and-file wobblies, but IWW cadre. The list includes, besides Cannon, Foster and Johnstone, Harrison George, Vernon Smith,

⁶⁹ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 302.

⁷⁰ See for example, Cannon, 'The IWW and the Red International of Labor Unions', in *The Worker*, 1 December 1923, reprinted in Cannon, *Early Years*, 183-89, and idem., 'The IWW Convention', *Labor Herald*, January 1924, reprinted in *Early Years*, 190-95. See letter of James P. Cannon 'To all Party Editors' about a campaign to refute the IWW and Emma Goldman's attacks on the Soviet Union and the Comintern, 27 May 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:146.

⁷¹ Harrison George to James N. Soger, 2 January 1926, in Bertram David Wolfe Papers, New York Public Library, box 4.

⁷² TUEL National Committee minutes, 21 September 1926; *ibid.*, 17 January 1927; both in Earl Browder papers, Syracuse University, series 2-150.

⁷³ Cannon, speech at Ninth Convention.

George Mink, Harold Harvey, George Hardy, Charles Ashweigh and Roy Brown.⁷⁴ Finnish IWW leaders such as William Tanner and Leo Lauki along with between ‘a few hundred’ and a thousand such Finnish wobblies joined the CP, although many ended up returning to Finland or going to the USSR. Vladimir Lossieff, one-time editor of the IWW Russian-language *Vsermirny Souiys*, and cellmate of Haywood in Cook County Jail, defended the Bolsheviks in the *Industrial Worker*; by 1921 articles in the *Communist International* bore his by-line.⁷⁵

The Profintern’s greatest recruit to Communism was William Z. Foster, a former Socialist, dissident wobbly, and AFL organiser. In 1921, the Comintern assigned its member parties to find suitable delegates for the Profintern Congress. In the US, the Party, at Cannon’s suggestion, enlisted Browder for this task. Among the delegates was Bloor, amongst the Party’s experienced labour organisers.⁷⁶ But by far, Browder’s most successful catch was one of the heroes of the left-wing of the labour movement, and possibly the greatest contemporary labour organiser, William Z. Foster. This quartet—Browder, Cannon, Cannon’s associate William F. Dunne and Foster—were to become instrumental in ‘Americanising’ the early Party by rooting it in the labour movement.⁷⁷

Foster has long been a favourite of sympathetic historians of American Communism, and there has recently been a veritable deluge of books about him.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.*, 88-89. The estimate of membership was determined by ‘guesses, based on conversations with members of both organizations’.

⁷⁵ Kostianen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism*, 64, 128-37. Tanner, for example, like Haywood, jumped bail and fled to Soviet Russia to avoid anti-radical repression. On syndicalists joining the Communist movement, see Reiner Tosstorff’s resume of his German thesis, ‘“Moscow” or “Amsterdam”? The Red International of Labour Unions, 1920/21-1937’ (PhD thesis, Johannes Gutenberg University, 1999) in *Communist History Network Newsletter* 8 (July 2000).

⁷⁶ Brown, ‘Ella Reeve Bloor’, 227, 285.

⁷⁷ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 69.

⁷⁸ In addition to Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism*, see Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*. On Foster’s early life, see: William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 1937), 14; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 10-30. On Foster’s early years, see Edward Johanningsmeier, ‘Philadelphia “Skittereen”

In 1901, Foster joined the SP after an SLP soapboxer whetted his appetite the year before.⁷⁹ By 1909, in Seattle, he split from the SP along with a local leftist, Herman Franklin Titus, and later that year, joined the IWW and played an important role in the fight for free speech in Spokane. Soon Vincent St. John commissioned him to travel to Europe as a reporter for the *Industrial Worker*, where he absorbed the ideas of European syndicalism, especially the French CGT and the British Tom Mann.⁸⁰ From Mann, he developed his lifelong union philosophy: that leftist workers should 'bore from within' the conservative unions instead of forming more radical alternative unions. That way, he held, radicals would be able to influence the rank-and-file, rather than perpetuate their own isolation.⁸¹

Upon returning from Europe, Foster struggled within the IWW to 'give up the attempt to create a new labor movement, turn itself into a propaganda league, get into the organized-labor movement, and by building up better fighting machines within the old unions than those possessed by our reactionary enemies, revolutionize these unions'. After failing to convince the IWW to renounce its reason for existence, in 1913 he organised the Syndicalist League of North America (SNLA), which by 1915, had become the International Trade Union Educational League (ITUEL).⁸²

and William Z. Foster: The Childhood of an American Communist', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 117:4 (October 1993), 287-308.

⁷⁹ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 19-20, 23-24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 30; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 37-47. On Titus, see Carlos A Schwantes, *Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho Press, 1994), 95-96 and passim.

⁸¹ Cf. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *I Speak My Own Piece* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1955), 160-63; On Mann, see for example Brian Pearce, *Some Past Rank and File Movements* (London: Labour Review, 1959), 12-17. See Mann's *Industrial Syndicalist*, July 1910 and September 1910, for examples of Mann's opposition to dual unionism.

⁸² Foster quote from *Industrial Worker*, 2 November 1911, reprinted in 'Boring from Within: The Debate', in *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 31 (Spring 2001), 16; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 48ff, 79; Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919*, 140. Foster gave contradictory dates for the formation of the ITUEL. In 1936, he described its founding as falling 'a few months after the beginning of the World War, in the midst of the 1914-15 industrial crisis' (William Z. Foster, *American Trade Unionism: Principles, Organization, Strategy, Tactics* [New York: International Publishers, 1947], 19); in 1925, he had given the date as 1916 (William Z. Foster, James P. Cannon,

He spelt out his political views in a pamphlet he co-wrote at this time, *Syndicalism*,⁸³ much of this which is similar to the standard IWW perspective. He advocated a general strike to place society in the hands of the working class. After this revolution, he theorised, ‘there will be no state’ since ‘the workers in each industry shall manage the affairs of their particular industry’ with ‘no need for any general supervisory body’.⁸⁴

There are several notable features of Foster’s politics. Like most syndicalists, he supported industrial struggle instead of political action. Foster elevated the union movement—at this time, albeit one which ‘intends to overthrow capitalism’—as the only revolutionary force in society. He wrote that only ‘one working class organization—the labor union—is necessary’ and denounced ‘working class political action’ as ‘even worse than useless’.⁸⁵

Foster’s writing tended to be anti-democratic and elitist: he directed *Syndicalism* to that rare ‘American worker who arouses himself from the customary state of indifference characterizing workingmen’. He asserted that ‘Syndicalism and democracy based on suffrage do not mix.’ Coupled with this was Foster’s view of working-class ‘direct action’, based on the assumption that the masses of workers could not be won to revolutionary consciousness, but that only a ‘militant minority’ would lead the workers. Since sabotage—‘all those tactics, save the boycott and the strike proper, which are used by the workers to wring concessions from their employers’—did not depend on organising the majority of the working class, it uniquely fitted Foster’s perspective. ‘Sabotage’, Foster wrote, ‘is peculiarly a weapon of the rebel minority.’ But even the general strike, which in Foster’s view was

Earl R. Browder, *Trade Unions in America* [Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Company, (1925?)], 15).

⁸³ Earl C. Ford and William Z. Foster, *Syndicalism* (Chicago: William Z. Foster, [1913?]).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3, 5.

destined to herald the end of the capitalist system itself, was to be a minority affair. 'Great strikes break out spontaneously', he predicted, and thus 'they spontaneously produce the organization so essential to their success.'⁸⁶ For Foster, the key task was for a militant minority to build the labour movement and manoeuvre to control it. The greatest sin of a radical, according to Foster, was to leave the ranks of organised labour, as De Leon and the IWW had, in the process because this deprived the movement of the input of radicals.

For all his radicalism, Foster shared many positions with the right-wing of the labour movement. Like most AFL leaders and conservative Socialists, he believed that the majority of American workers were intrinsically conservative. He also shared with Gompers the view that organisation was more important than politics; in fact, in retrospect, Foster supported Gompers' expulsion of De Leon's followers from the AFL in 1890.⁸⁷ Like Gompers, Foster was obsessed with combating dual unions. At bottom, Foster probably would have shared with Eduard Bernstein the view that the labour movement was everything, whilst the ultimate goal was nothing. Foster differed only by asserting that the movement was on a 'natural evolutionary course' towards revolution. The real difference between Foster and Gompers was that Foster spurred the workers towards increasing militancy; yet, whilst Foster was ensconced in the AFL, the differences between them blurred.

War highlighted both the weakness and strength of Foster's approach. In *Syndicalism*, Foster had denounced militarism. Yet, during the war, he actively sold

⁸⁵ Ibid., 4, 19, 23.

⁸⁶ Ford and Foster, *Syndicalism*, 9, 12, 17. This aspect of Foster has been criticised by modern-day supporters of anarchism; cf. Jon Bekken, 'The Tragedy of Fosterism', *Anarcho-Syndicalist Review* 31 (Spring 2001), 13-15.

⁸⁷ William Z. Foster, *The Bankruptcy of the Labor Movement* (Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, [1922?]), 26-27.

Liberty Bonds.⁸⁸ Most likely, like many in the labour movement—including non-AFL radicals such as Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union (ACW) leader Sidney Hillman—Foster realised that opposing the war would provoke draconian repression. According to Foster’s logic of building the labour movement irrespective of political principle, supporting the war and exploiting the government’s desire for labour peace, must have seemed logical. From this vantage point, Foster was successful since in the post-war period he made tremendous strides in organising workers.⁸⁹

Foster’s strategy first found success within the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), which, under the leadership of John Fitzpatrick, had a reputation for being more to the left than the AFL in other cities.⁹⁰ Foster became the business manager of the CFL’s *New Majority* and the official CFL delegate to the 1918 AFL Convention. Along with Edward Nockels and Robert Buck, Foster played an important role in the CFL leadership in this period, even though the *New Majority* focused largely on organising the CFL-supported Chicago Labor Party.⁹¹

In quick succession, he organised massive strikes, under the auspices of the AFL—and with the close support of Fitzpatrick and the CFL—of Chicago meat packers, and after that, steel workers. Of all the strikes of 1919, these two perhaps

⁸⁸ Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 80-83, 88-90; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 105-8. This did not stop Foster from later criticising those ‘A.F. of L. leaders, as faithful labor lieutenants of capital, [who] were not slow to leap in as the recruiting agencies for the government’. Indeed, he claimed that ‘As for my own attitude, I was, of course, opposed to the World War and also the United States’ participation therein.’ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 86-87.

⁸⁹ Foster was not unique in his reasoning or decision; on the ACW and the war, see Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 114-17. Even the IWW, while not supporting the war, attempted to focus on organising workers instead of anti-war propaganda, although this did not save the union from repression. See Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), 354-55.

⁹⁰ On Fitzpatrick and the radical nature of the Chicago labour movement, see Andrew Strouthous, ‘A Comparative Study of Independent Working-Class Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Third Party Movements in New York, Chicago and Seattle, 1918-1924’ (PhD thesis, University of London, 1996), 23-24, 31-38, 52-53. See also, Keiser, ‘John Fitzpatrick’; On Fitzpatrick himself, see Keisser, ‘John Fitzpatrick’, 2-11; L.A. O’Donnell, *Irish Voice and Organized Labor in America* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Publishers, 1997), chapter 6.

captured best of all the restlessness—and power—of labour in the post-war period.

Although both strikes were defeated, they catapulted Foster into the national imagination as a dynamic trade-union organiser.⁹²

These strikes also seemed to confirm Foster's strategy. He had taken advantage of the opportunities created by the war in order to organise large numbers of workers. If he had either been in jail or outside the AFL, he probably would not have had the same success. Foster came out of these strikes more convinced than ever of his correctness. Several years later, Foster cited these struggles, 'the work of a mere handful of rebels' with 'no backing from the thousands of militants' outside the AFL, to illustrate 'the power of the militants among the organized masses'.⁹³

The Steel Strike also confirmed Foster's belief in the inherently revolutionary nature of unions. His *Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (1920) criticised radical opponents of the existing labour movement and asserted that the trade unions were 'directly anti-capitalistic'. The conservative slogans used by the AFL leaders, whether believed by the leaders themselves or not, were nothing more than 'a sort of camouflage layer or protective covering'. He continued:

The trade unions will not become anti-capitalistic through the conversion of their members to a certain point of view or the adoption of certain preambles, they are that by their very make up and methods. The most that can be done is to clarify the aims and intensifying their efforts towards freedom.

Dual unionism was a 'devitalizing drain' that 'must be stopped, and the great body of progressives and radicals won over to a whole-hearted support of the trade unions.'⁹⁴

In 1921, Foster asserted that 'dual industrial unionism' was 'the principle ailment of

⁹¹ Keisser, 'John Fitzpatrick', 11-14. On the *New Majority*, cf. Jon E. Bekken, 'Working-Class Newspapers, Community and Consciousness in Chicago, 1880-1930' (PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992), chapter nine.

⁹² See Johanningsmeir, *Forging American Communism*, 88-149; on the steel strike, see Brody, *Labor In Crisis* as well as Foster's own *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (New York: Huebsch, 1920).

⁹³ Wm. Z. Foster, 'Dual Unions a Mischievous Idea', *Labor Age*, January 1922.

⁹⁴ Foster, *The Great Steel Strike*, 256-61.

American radicalism.' Further, he added, 'If the trade union movement in this country is weak and conservative, the radicals are chiefly to blame.'⁹⁵

Shorn of his earlier rhetoric, Foster's perspective in the early 1920s was to build the labour movement through strengthening the existing unions in co-operation with their leaderships if possible. Towards this end, he and a small number of followers organised the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) in November 1920.⁹⁶ The TUEL quickly became a vessel for Foster to fill: One contemporary remarked that 'not often does one find an organization so completely dominated by the philosophy and personality of one man as is found in the case of the Trade Union Educational League.'⁹⁷ Foster stamped the TUEL with his conception of union organisation, and the early TUEL was peopled with his supporters such as Jack Johnstone and Earl Browder. Because of their investment of the AFL with revolutionary potential, one historian noted that 'without a scorecard it would have been hard to distinguish Foster's followers from other AFL trade-unionists.'⁹⁸ While Foster's advocacy of working within the AFL found support within the SP, most Communists distrusted him. Haywood called the Steel Strike a 'dismal failure' because Foster had squandered an 'opportunity for revolutionary propaganda' and instead pleaded for national patriotism, even printing membership cards in red, white and blue. And the Party's few black members preferred the IWW over Foster because of the wobblies' better treatment of blacks than the AFL's.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ William Z. Foster, 'What Ails American Radicalism', *Socialist Review*, April-May 1921.

⁹⁶ James R. Barrett, 'Boring from Within and Without', in Eric Arensen, et al, *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working Class* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 311.

⁹⁷ Earl Beckner, 'The Trade Union Educational League and the American Labor Movement', in *The Journal of Political Economy* 33 (August 1925), 410.

⁹⁸ Victor G. Devinatz, 'The Labor Philosophy of William Z. Foster: From the IWW to the TUEL', *International Social Science Review* 71:1/2 (1996), 11.

⁹⁹ Foster addressed the 1920 SP Convention and 'received a tremendous ovation, second only to that given Debs'; see Ottini, 'The Socialist Party in the Election of 1920', 36-37; Haywood, 'Revolutionary Problems in America'; Claude McKay, *The Negroes in America* (Port Washington and London: Kennikat Press, 1979[1924]), 31-33.

Despite the gulf separating him from the Party, in 1921 Foster decided to become a Communist.¹⁰⁰ He claimed ‘Lenin’s stand on the trade union question’ first attracted him. ‘After more than twenty years of intellectual groping about’, he added, ‘I was at last, thanks to Lenin, getting my feet on firm revolutionary ground.’¹⁰¹ Certainly, without this shift in Communist policy away from dual unionism, Foster could not have conceived of becoming a Communist. Yet, by itself, this would not have turned Foster into a Communist, especially since the SP had long maintained a similar position.

Foster, in fact, did not join the CP per se; instead, he saw himself as joining the American section of the Comintern. No doubt, Foster sympathised with the Bolsheviks. In a pamphlet written upon returning to the US, Foster described the fledgling Soviet Republic as realising his own political perspectives. ‘In my judgement,’ he wrote, ‘the Russian revolution will live and accomplish its great task of setting up the world’s first free commonwealth.’¹⁰² While their American followers may have been a bunch of insignificant, in-fighting immigrants, Lenin and Trotsky were in 1921 amongst the most powerful forces in the international labour movement. Joining them, even more than joining the AFL, provided an avenue to power within the labour movement. In Russia, Foster was struck that the Bolsheviks were constructing an alternative to capitalism on the ground; their ideology was secondary. As Foster’s biographer put it, ‘The fact that the Russians seemed to have created an effective, exportable workers’ system was what attracted Foster, not Marxist-Leninist theory.’¹⁰³ Cannon suggested that Foster’s trajectory was based on adapting to powers

¹⁰⁰ On the announcement of Foster’s decision to ally himself with the Comintern, see Ballister to Lozovsky, Radek, Zinoviev, marked ‘urgent and private’, 26 September 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

¹⁰¹ William Z. Foster, *Pages from a Worker’s Life* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), 295.

¹⁰² William Z. Foster, *The Russian Revolution* (Chicago: Trade Union Education League, 1921), 7.

¹⁰³ James R. Barrett, ‘Revolution and Personal Crisis’, 469.

stronger than himself, such as Gompers and the AFL bureaucracy, towards his own ends. After ‘Gompers insisted on using the adaptation for his purpose—Foster could find an alternative field of operations, still within the labor movement, by adapting himself to Moscow.’¹⁰⁴

With hindsight, it appears bizarre to join the Communist movement in order to avoid marginalisation. However in 1921, amidst a radicalisation in the US and Europe, it was not clear that the Communists would not succeed in reconfiguring the American labour movement, but instead would with brief exceptions remain unwanted guests in the house of labour. Had Foster been French or Italian, his choice would not have appeared so quixotic. Again, there are striking parallels to ACW leader Sidney Hillman who, in his biographer’s words, was drawn to Bolshevism ‘less out of admiration for their tangible accomplishments than from his own magnetic attraction to power’.¹⁰⁵ One historian speculated that ‘Perhaps Foster would not have turned to the Communist Party if the steel strike had succeeded and if the legitimate trade-union movement had offered a better outlet for his talents.’¹⁰⁶

In effect, Foster made a deal with the CP. He would (secretly) contribute his knowledge and connections in the labour movement, as well as the TUEL, to help the Party build a base amongst the working class. In exchange, his TUEL would have a near monopoly over the Party’s trade union activities. Amter, in a report to the Comintern in 1923, described the early relationship between the Party and Foster: ‘The CEC, of which Foster is a member, lays down the general policy for the trade union work, which Foster is then free to carry out according to the methods best

¹⁰⁴ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 218-19.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 184. Hillman would, for a period, ally himself with Foster and the Communists within the needle-trade union struggles.

¹⁰⁶ Keiser, ‘John Fitzpatrick’, 15.

suiting, in his judgement.’¹⁰⁷ Once again, the Comintern helped pave the way for the Party to break out of isolation and reach its desired constituency, the organised industrial working class.

Early work of the TUEL

At the underground Party convention in Bridgman, Michigan, in the summer of 1922, Foster (still not publicly a Communist) outlined his conception of how Communists should approach trade-union work. ‘The fate of the party,’ he argued, ‘depends upon its control of the masses.... When we lay stress on the importance of this work, we realize we must capture the trade unions if we want to get anywhere.’ He asserted, ‘it is absolutely impossible to have a revolution in this country unless we control the mass trade unions’.

This was the goal of the TUEL. He sensed that the TUEL had already ‘succeeded in making an inroad into a number of organizations’, that ‘the American trade union movement is very receptive to a great deal of the program’ and that American workers ‘are ready for new ideas’, for Communism.¹⁰⁸ An advertisement in Foster’s *Russian Revolution* (1921) described the TUEL as ‘an organization to carry on educational work in the trade union movement. It aims to infuse the mass with revolutionary understanding and spirit.’ The TUEL opposed dual unions, favoured ‘the closer affiliation and solidification of our existing unions until they have been developed into industrial unions’ and advocated that ‘all workers should stand together regardless of their opinions’. Its ultimate goal was ‘to bring the policies and the structures of the labor movement into harmony with present-day economic conditions’.¹⁰⁹ Despite Foster’s previous history, the early TUEL emphasised winning

¹⁰⁷ I. Amter, report to Comintern, 7 March 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:174.

¹⁰⁸ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 24-26.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Militants, Notice!’ in inside cover of Foster, *Russian Revolution*.

workers to its political programme, not merely winning power in the labour movement.

The TUEL's early perspectives are spelt out in the *Labor Herald*, which Foster edited. In its first issue, Foster elaborated his views of the labour movement. The US was home to a 'very elaborate industrial system and the world's most militant and powerful capitalist class', yet, 'paradoxically enough', it also had 'a trade union movement which, for general weakness and backwardness, has few if any equals in the predominantly industrial countries'. In fact, American craft unions were 'at about the point of development that the European unions were 15 years ago', unique in their 'unequaled lack of idealism and social vision'. So backward were American unions that they were not affiliated with either the Profintern or the Second International's trade-union umbrella organisation in Amsterdam, and were 'the laughing stock of the international labor world, revolutionary and reformist alike'. This emboldened the capitalist to attack the unions more ferociously than in any other industrialised society. Again, Foster blamed dual unionism for these weaknesses, dismissing the effects of a strong capitalist economy or a diverse workforce. Instead the 'prime cause of the stagnation of the American movement' was at bottom 'the wrong methods used by our progressive and revolutionary unionists' who 'systematically deserted and neglected the trade unions' through 'chronic secessionism'.¹¹⁰

The TUEL fought to vanquish dual unionism and to organise a bloc of leftists and progressives within the unions. If the pre-Communist TUEL resembled Mann's early organising in Britain, the Communist TUEL resembled Mann's work in Britain for the Profintern. While the British Party supported the 'Minority Movement', and helped elect more left wing labour leaders within the unions, its American comrades

¹¹⁰ *Labor Herald*, March 1922

were carrying out a similar plan. According to one early British Communist, this gave birth to 'a broad oppositional movement within the trade unions', with more than a quarter of million supporters and enough strength to help elect the left-leaning A.J. Cook as miners' leader. Under Mann, the British Party's supporters fought for amalgamation and industrial unions whilst condemning dual-unionism.¹¹¹ Foster shared this perspective as well.

Labor Herald stressed that the TUEL 'is an informal grouping of the progressive and revolutionary elements throughout the entire trade union movement' and not a dual union. It was 'an auxiliary of the labor movement, not a substitute for it'. In his speech before the Bridgman convention, Foster described how, to avoid being labelled a dual union, the TUEL did not set up a membership structure parallel to the established unions.¹¹² The programme of the TUEL stressed amalgamation, attacked Gompers and criticised dual unionism. While affiliation to the Profintern was mentioned favourably, other aspects of the Bolshevik programme were not. Echoing his lines about 'camouflage' at the Bridgman convention, Foster, himself still a secret Communist, recalled: 'We did not dare say it was a Communist organization. It was necessary to camouflage to a certain extent, and for that reason it had to start differently.' To have done otherwise, Foster maintained, would have invited repression by the Gompers bureaucracy. Only at Bridgman, after the TUEL had gained some respect in the labour unions, did Foster finally advocate that the TUEL 'adopt a clear-cut revolutionary program'.¹¹³ In April 1922, the Party leadership urged all members to 'become active at once' within the TUEL, as part of the Party's new

¹¹¹ Murphy, *New Horizons*, 202-204.

¹¹² *Labor Herald*, March 1922; Whitney, *Reds in America*, 27.

¹¹³ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 27-28. For advocacy of affiliating with the Profintern, see Earl Browder, 'Which International?', *Labor Herald*, April 1922.

turn towards the labour movement.¹¹⁴ Simultaneously, the Party established a national industrial organiser, and demanded that members ‘take active part in the trade union movement’.¹¹⁵

In 1921-23, the TUEL seemed to make headway. Hillman, after travelling to Russia with Foster to observe the Profintern Congress, decided (in the Party’s words) to ‘not formally affiliate with the International but to work out with the International a system of relationships by which the International could direct the crystalization of a left bloc in the American trade union movement’.¹¹⁶ J.B. Salutsky (Hardman), an official in the ACW, briefly became a member of the Party’s CEC after the regroupment with the Workers Council in 1921. Thus, in 1922 the Party reported to the Comintern that the ACW ‘has a very able leadership which is moving quite readily towards the Left Position’ and that the Party had ‘a working agreement with the administration of the union against the reactionary elements’ in the SP and around Abraham Cahan’s Yiddish daily, *Vorwaerts* (Forward).¹¹⁷ The Party hoped to use its relationship with Hillman as a springboard to influence in the needle trades, whose workers tended to be either Jewish socialists or Italian syndicalists. In November 1922, the TUEL founded a needle trades section, with significant support amongst the ACW, the ILGWU and the furriers, all of whom were historically connected to the Socialist Party. Benjamin Gitlow, the head of this work, later claimed that the Party had 2000 members in the needle trades in New York.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ James P. Cannon to all branch and local secretaries, 21.04.1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:146.

¹¹⁵ See 25 April 1922 report on 21 April 1922 WP Administrative Council meeting; C.E. Ruthenberg memo to all Party branches, 13 June 1922, both in Comintern archives, 515:1:146; a similar resolution was passed at the Second National Convention of the WP, 24-26 December 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:141.

¹¹⁶ Ballister to Lozovsky, Radek and Zinoviev, 26 September 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

¹¹⁷ ‘Report on the United States of America’, unsigned, undated [1922?], in Comintern archives, 515:1:162.

¹¹⁸ David Gurowsky, ‘Factional Disputes in the ILGWU, 1919-1928’ (PhD thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1978), 103; Philip S. Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union: A Story*

The TUEL also found support in other unions. In early 1922, Fitzpatrick's CFL 'indorsed the prominent features of the League's program', against the wishes of Gompers.¹¹⁹ The Party also made headway in the machinist and miners unions.¹²⁰ In 1923, Debs himself hailed the TUEL as 'the one rightly directed movement for the industrial unification of the American workers'.¹²¹ At its height in the early 1920s, the TUEL had as many as five hundred local industrial committees organised in forty-five to fifty cities and affiliated with fourteen national industrial groups.¹²² In early 1923, then, both Foster and the CP seemed to have gained from their new association.

While the Communists had fallen short of their original goal of creating a Revolution overnight, they had, in barely three years, gone from a marginal presence in the labour movement to growing influence. They had cohered an impressive cadre of labour leaders, with experience amongst almost all sectors of the organised working class, under the leadership of the perhaps the greatest living labour organiser, William Z. Foster. Other groups and personalities in the labour movement, whatever their opinion, saw the Party as a force to be reckoned with. Soon, in 1923, amidst tactical mistakes, principled political problems, and the growing anti-Communist mood in the country, the Party would once again find itself isolated. However, its real, if modest, success in its first several years illustrate the fact that the Comintern's interventions had helped the Communist in understanding American reality.

of Dramatic Struggles and Achievement (Newark: Nordan Press, 1950), 124-26; Gitlow, *I Confess*, 337.

¹¹⁹ Beckner, 'The Trade Union Educational League', 426.

¹²⁰ See David Schneider, *The Workers (Communist) Party and American Trade Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928).

¹²¹ *Labor Herald*, April 1923.

¹²² Barrett, 'Boring from Within and Without', 311.

5. Early Communist Trade Union Work

In 1919, the American working class seemed increasingly militant: more man hours were lost to strikes than in the next six years together. Yet this militancy soon collided with a campaign of government repression and a business anti-union offensive. The government repeatedly used the Sherman Anti-Trust Act against unions, and the Supreme Court outlawed minimum wage laws and legalised anti-union 'yellow dog' contracts. The 'roaring twenties' saw the rise of mass consumer culture and great strides in business profits, but a diminishing share for workers. While productivity rose 72 per cent between 1919 and 1929, real wages grew only 9.1 per cent on average from 1923 to 1928. At the start of the decade AFL membership was 5 million; in 1929, it was less than 3.5 million. In 1920, some 20 per cent of non-agricultural workers were unionised; ten years later, barely 10 per cent were. Irving Bernstein, in his survey of the working class in the 1920s conveyed this by simply titling one of his chapters 'the paralysis of the labor movement'.¹

The Gompers leadership in the AFL responded to this anti-labour onslaught by moving even further to the right. The same year, John L. Lewis, head of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) and perhaps the strongest union leader after Gompers, launched a tirade at a January union meeting against Communist 'industrial buzzards' and ordered them to go to their 'beloved Russia'.² After Gompers died in 1924, his successor, former UMW leader William Green, remained hostile to Communism.

The growing anti-Communism of the labour bureaucracy, combined with a general anti-union environment, limited the Party's opportunities whatever strategy

¹ Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960).

² Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 75.

Communists chose. While Bert Cochran³ is probably correct that nothing the Party did could have lead to much success, the Party's particular course increased the isolation of Communists within the labour movement for much of the decade. This is particularly true of the disastrous efforts at forming a 'farmer-labour' party, which simultaneously left the Party with very few friends among organised labour and threatened to damage the political health of the Party. In the end, the Comintern leadership, particularly Trotsky, helped the Party navigate these dangers; however, by 1923-25, the Comintern itself was already reflecting the process of Stalinisation going on in Russia. This chapter analyses the role that the Communist Party played in the labour movement in the mid 1920s, as well as the intervention of the Comintern into the Party's labour activities. First the chapter examines the participation of the Party in the political labour movement, specifically the Farmer-Labor movement and the campaign of Robert La Follette. Second, this chapter examines the Party's activities in specific industries to understand the work of the Party on the ground.⁴ By the time the chapter ends, in 1926, the Party was at its nadir of influence in the labour movement. Since in the height of the Party's industrial activities, in the late 1930s, Lewis was the head of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) and Green was the head of the AFL, the Party's experiences in the 1920s helped determine its activities a decade later.

Campaign for a Labour Party

After the First World War, important sectors of the labour movement sought a larger role in national politics, at the same time many Progressives, disillusioned with the two established parties, saw the working class as a progressive social force for

³ Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 45-46.

⁴ For contemporary accounts of the Party's work in the unions, see Schneider, *The Workers (Communist) Party and American Trade Unions*, and Beckner, 'The Trade Union Educational League and the American Labor Movement'.

post-war 'reconstruction'.⁵ Although this reflected the growth of the Labour Party in Britain, it ran counter to the AFL's traditional 'non partisan' hostility towards a workers party.⁶

In the early 1920s, according to one historian, 'the AFL was riven by civil war to determine its political policy'.⁷ The major advocate for a labour party was the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) led by John Fitzpatrick, an Irish-American radical who had worked with William Z. Foster, and was sympathetic to the Bolsheviks.⁸ In November 1919, he helped organise the Chicago Labor Party which advocated 'democratic control of industry and commerce for the general good by those who work with hand or brain, and the elimination of autocratic domination of the forces of production and distribution either by selfish private interests or bureaucratic agents of government'.⁹

The electoral showing of the Chicago Labor Party was disappointing, however: although the CFL had more than 300,000 members, Fitzpatrick received only 56,000 votes (8 per cent) when he stood for mayor in 1919, and his campaign for Senator in 1920 received only about 50,000 votes, less than 10 per cent from Cook County itself. This reflected both hostility by the Socialist Party, and the fear of many Progressives towards labour radicalism amidst the industrial unrest of 1919.¹⁰ Thus, by 1920, the Labor Party in a search for new allies had added 'Farmer' to its name,

⁵ On this trend, see Stanley Shapiro, 'Hand and Brain' (PhD), 29-31.

⁶ Dubofsky and Van Tine, *John L. Lewis*, 83.

⁷ Andrew Strouthous, *US Labor and Political Action, 1918-1924* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 2. See also Shapiro, 'Hand and Brain' (PhD), 69-77.

⁸ In fact, the November 1919 New Majority (the CFL's newspaper, briefly edited previously by Foster), published the entire Constitution of the Soviet Republic; see Jon Bekken, 'A Paper for those who Toil: The Chicago Labor Press in Transition', *Journalism History* 23:1 (Spring 1997).

⁹ Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties in the United States*, 382-86. See James Henry Shideler, 'The Neo-Progressives: Reform Politics in the United States, 1920-1925' (PhD thesis, University of California, 1945), 20-41.

¹⁰ In 1920, the SP candidate for governor received almost 40,000 votes (out of 59,000 statewide) from Cook County, i.e. almost 90 per cent more votes than Fitzpatrick. See Jon Bekken, 'A Paper for those who Toil'.

diluting its working-class emphasis, and attempting to court agrarian discontent. That year, they had even attempted to unite forces with Republican progressive senator La Follette who, repelled by the Labor Party's radicalism, refused. He said he was searching for a party with an 'advanced but not socialist' programme.¹¹

At the same time, labour leaders continued to feel dissatisfied by the capitalist Democrats and Republicans. In February 1922, the railway union leadership, traditionally very conservative, supported an independent, vaguely radical, party at a meeting of the Conference for Progressive Political Action (CPPA). The impetus for the CPPA was anger over the defeat of the union-supported 'Plumb plan' for the nationalisation of the railways. Unlike the AFL, whose membership plunged by a third between 1914 and 1920, the railway unions had *grown* almost six and half times. In 1922, the railway unions would also lead one of the most important strikes of the period—only to be met with draconian government measures essentially outlawing support to the strike. By 1922, then, they were looking for a vehicle to pressure the government towards enacting pro-labour bills, or at least defeating anti-labour legislation.¹²

The Socialist Party formed the left wing of the CPPA, while a liberal-dominated 'Committee of Forty Eight' made up the right wing. Between these two poles were some fifty unions, labour leaders, and various liberal organisations. The CPPA was a liberal pressure-group upon mainstream politicians; instead of preparing for a labour party, it endorsed candidates such as Democrat Alfred Smith and

¹¹ Shapiro, 'Hand and Brain' (PhD), 113; idem., 'Hand and Brain: The Farmer-Labor Movement of 1920, *Labor History* 26:3 (Summer 1985), 415-20.

¹² On the railway unions, see Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 398; David L. Waterhouse, *The Progressive Movement of 1924 and the Development of Interest Group Liberalism* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), 17-20. See also Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, 40, 70; Strouthous, *US Labor and Political Action*, 7-8. On the 1922 strike, see Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 212.

Republican La Follette, but along with the more radical CFL-led Farmer Labor Party, it crystallised the restlessness of labour.¹³

The Party and the labour party movement

American Left Wing Socialists had a long history of dismissing such movements. Louis Fraina's left-wing *Revolutionary Age* had already declared in 1918 that 'A characteristic of laborism is that it acts against the broad masses of the industrial proletariat, against the unorganized proletariat of unskilled labor.' Thus, it denounced the growing movement for a labour party: 'The tendency and purposes of the Labor Party, should it eventuate, will express the reactionary tendency and purposes of the A.F. of L. This is hardly anything to jubilate about.'¹⁴ Absent entirely was any perspective of intervening into the labour party movement, much less polarising it and splitting its left-wing supporters from its AFL leadership. In part, this was due to the Communists' belief that revolution was around the corner, and that labour party politics were a diversion. Thus an August 1921 report to the Comintern denounced the Farmer-Labor Party as 'practically an expression of the mildest section of the opposition to Gompers in the American Federation of Labor'.¹⁵

This disdain was the American counterpart to the British Communists' opposition to affiliating with the resurgent Labour Party. Lenin's '*Left-wing*' *Communism* argued against this 'ultra-leftism' and advocated critical support to the Labour Party: to 'take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets in favour of Communism, and, in all constituencies where we have no candidates...urge the electors to vote for the Labour candidate and against the bourgeois candidate'. For

¹³ See David A. Shannon, *Between the Wars: America, 1919-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 60. On the CPPA, see also Kenneth MacKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947), 57-59; Murray B. Seidler, *Norman Thomas: Respectable Radical* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1967), 60-62; Waterhouse, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, 8-10. On the Committee of Forty Eight, see Shapiro, 'Hand and Brain' (PhD), 55-68.

¹⁴ *Revolutionary Age*, 18 December 1918.

Lenin desired not to enhance the power of the Labour leadership, but to expose their loyalty to capitalism, 'to support [Labour politician Arthur] Henderson in the same way as the rope supports a hanged man'.¹⁶

A consequence of Lenin's fight with the British CP was that leading cadre in the American Party began to re-examine the movement for a labour party. Cannon later recalled that 'the initiative for a positive attitude toward a prospective Labor party in the United States came from Moscow'.¹⁷ This originally took the form of an orientation towards the CPPA and the railway unions.

In early 1922, after the CPPA had announced it was going to meet in Chicago, the CEC passed a motion that the Party 'shall make every effort to participate in the Chicago conference thru regular delegates'.¹⁸ In February, the WP issued an open letter to the CPPA's Chicago meeting which, after denouncing the conservatism of the unions, called on them to 'form a united industrial front' and create the movement's 'own representatives, responsible to Labor alone'. The appeal ended by calling on the conference 'to move for a general Labor Congress to be elected by the rank and file'.¹⁹

Not surprisingly, the CPPA failed to heed the Communists' advise.

Nonetheless, the Party reported to the Comintern, the actual 'results...are of little importance' since what was important was that the Party 'took a very serious view' of the CPPA.²⁰ Instead, the CPPA issued an 'Address to the American People' which stressed its goal 'restor[ing] the government of the United States to the noble ends and

¹⁵ George Baldwin, 'Statement of the Communist Party of America to the ECCI', August 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39.

¹⁶ Lenin, *'Left-wing' Communism*, 90-91.

¹⁷ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 59-61.

¹⁸ Undated [early 1922?] CEC minutes, in Comintern archives, 515:1:51:125.

¹⁹ James P. Cannon and Caleb Harrison, 'To the Conference', 20 February 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:146.

²⁰ Undated, unsigned 'Report on the United States of America' [1922], in Comintern archives, 515:1:162:80.

high purposes for which it was conceived'. While praising the 'splendid structure of the visible American government', this statement denounced that the interests of the people had 'been sacrificed on the altar of greed'. It offered the examples of the Federal Reserve System, the poverty of farmers, war profiteering, railway speculation and 'a campaign of ruthless imperialism' in the Caribbean. In the upshot, however, the CPPA promised only 'united political action suited to the peculiar conditions and needs of each section and state' and pledged 'to organize for the coming campaign in every state and congressional district, so that this may become once more in very truth a government of the people, for the people, and by the people.'²¹

Soon afterwards, the Party reassessed its labour party policy. The 'Theses on the United Front of Labor', declared that 'to oppose this tendency toward the formation of a labor party would be folly'. Instead, the Party membership was directed to be active in the campaign and 'to fight to make the labor party a real instrument in the class struggle'.²² In November, the Party reiterated its support for a labour party, arguing that Communists needed to play an active role in the movement in order to fight for 'a class program'.²³

Meanwhile, when the CPPA held a conference in Cleveland in December, the Party sent four delegates to demand that the CPPA 'create a labor party'.²⁴ The conference itself excluded Ruthenberg from sitting as a delegate, out of anti-Communism, and, more importantly, indicated it did not want to form a new party

²¹ 'Address to the American People Adopted by the Conference for Progressive Political Action', 20-21 February 1922, in Hillquit papers, document no. 982, April 1922.

²² 'Theses on the United Front of Labor', undated [May 1922?], in Comintern archives, 515:1:146.

²³ 'The Workers Party and the Labor Party', 2 November 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:147.

²⁴ Press release by C.E. Ruthenberg, 28 November 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:147; see the CEC minutes, 5 December 1922, for the decision to send Dunne, Ruthenberg, Harrison and Lore to the Cleveland convention, in *ibid.*, 515:1:144; see CEC minutes, 31 October 1922, for a motion to endorse the formation of a labour party at the Conference whilst seeking admittance to it, in *ibid.*, 515:1:147.

soon. Fitzpatrick in response withdrew from the convention, and the Communists followed him.²⁵

At this point, Fitzpatrick, already familiar with Foster, viewed the Party as a potential junior partner in his new labour party project. The Party, although it had previously declared 'that a Labor Party without the big unions in it will be a miscarriage',²⁶ saw in Fitzpatrick and his CFL a tool for increasing their influence in the labour movement. Thus the Communists hailed the Cleveland conference, declaring that 'The Workers Party, although barred from the Conference, came out of it a victor' since it had 'made its first appearance in the life of the American workers and farmers as a definite political force'.²⁷ And, this, the Party declared, 'was only the first skirmish in the battle for the Labour Party'.²⁸

The Workers Party's Second National Convention, held in December, 'greet[ed] with joy' the movement towards a labour party, and called on the Party to 'actively participat[e] in this campaign'. It 'condemn[ed] the betrayal' at the Cleveland conference. The trade-union resolution, as well, called for the formation of a labour party based on the trade unions.²⁹ After the Cleveland convention, the *Labor Herald* advocated 'a general Labor Party' and criticised the CPPA for not organising one.³⁰

The TUEL advocated a labour party which 'must be definitely rooted in the economic needs of the workers, it must be a party of the working class, yet it must be broad and inclusive enough to take in all the various political parties of Labor'. It should, above all, be a 'political United Front of Labor against the capitalists'. Since

²⁵ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 62; Draper, *Soviet Russia and American Communism*, 29-37.

²⁶ I.Amter to Comintern, 7 April 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:174.

²⁷ C.E. Ruthenberg, 'The Skirmish in Cleveland', *Liberator*, January 1923.

²⁸ C.E. Ruthenberg, 'Manifesto on the Cleveland Conference by the Central Committee of the Workers Party', nd, in Comintern archives, 515:1:196.

‘it is a *desirable* thing that the Labor Party shall not be a homogeneous mass’, all tendencies within the labour movement should be allowed to operate within it. Its programme, *Labor Herald* continued, ‘should challenge capitalism and hold up the ideal of a workers’ society’ while ‘be[ing], essentially, a party of battle’.

To achieve this task required two things, according to the TUEL. First, a labour party needed to ‘fight and defeat’ the Gompers bureaucracy in the AFL, which resolutely opposed working-class based politics and supported the two capitalist parties. Second, although the new party should support ‘exploited small farmers’, it stressed that ‘actual workers...must dominate the party’ and ‘fight for class independence and be a Labor Party in fact as well as in name’.³¹

Meanwhile, under pressure from Gompers, Fitzpatrick became increasingly ambivalent towards forming a party. On 3 July, the FLP held a convention in Chicago and invited the Workers Party to attend. The invitation said nothing about a political party, but called for ‘devising means for knitting together the many organizations in the country in such a manner that will enable the workers to really function politically’.³² Fitzpatrick wanted to keep a foot in both camps, and neither antagonise Gompers (whose support, or at least neutrality, he needed in order to keep the CFL functioning) nor break with the Workers Party (whose organisers he respected and whose support helped him retain his leftist credentials). The Party was divided: the local Chicago leadership, consisting of Cannon supporter Arne Swabeck and Fosterite Browder, wanted to avoid antagonising Fitzpatrick. Yet the central Party leadership, especially Pepper, viewed the formation of a labour party as a get-rich-quick scheme

²⁹ See resolution on labour party passed at Second National Convention of the Workers Party, and following resolution on trade unions, December 1922, in Comintern archives 515:1:141.

³⁰ *Labor Herald*, December 1922; January 1923.

³¹ *Ibid.*, December 1922.

³² J.G. Brown for the Farmer Labor Party to Workers Party, 9 May 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:211.

and wanted to press the issue. In order to do this, they stacked the July meeting with Party sympathisers and supporters, often under the guise of fraternal organisations.³³

After the Party outmanoeuvred Fitzpatrick at his own meeting, he walked out. Pepper glowed; 'like Zeus the son of Cronos', the Party had defeated Fitzpatrick, who 'had entered the Ashland Auditorium as the future leader of the American working class, and left a politically isolated man'.³⁴ The rump convention formed the Federated Farm-Labor Party (FF-LP: 'Federated' was added to indicate that it was to be built through affiliation with trade unions, not individual membership). Besides angering Fitzpatrick, this split did not accomplish much. The actual political programmes of the FLP and the FF-LP were almost identical.³⁵

The Party bragged to the Comintern that the FF-LP executive committee 'contains a majority of Party members representing various organizations'. The committee had seven members; three were members of the WP and one was a sympathiser. The Executive Secretary, Joseph Manley, was not only a member of the WP but also Foster's son-in-law. Thus, regardless of the politics, the Party could brag that it 'has obtained the contact and direction of a mass organization of workers and farmers'. In a report to the ECCI, Pepper and Ruthenberg described the FF-LP as 'a real mass party' led by the Communists. The Party tried to get left-wing union leaders

³³ See the minutes of the WP Executive Committee in May and June 1923, in Comintern archives 515:1:190, for the ongoing discussion regarding the convention. The estimated number of CP delegates vary. In his 7 April 1923 report, Amter claimed that there were 10 official WP delegates and 160 Communist delegates attending in other capacities (Comintern archives, 515:1:174). At the time, Ruthenberg claimed that of the 539 total delegates, 10 were WP delegates and 180 were WP delegates in other auspices (ibid., 515:1:196:3). Pepper claimed that there were 740 delegates, 10 officially representatives of the WP and 170 non-official representatives ('The First Mass Party of the American Workers and Farmers', 12 July 1923, ibid., 515:1:212). The WP Executive Council of 31 May 1923, passed a motion 'that we send as many delegates—party members whenever possible—from the Trade Unions and fraternal organizations and a party delegate' (ibid., 515:1:190). It is likely, then, that in all the confusion, the Party leadership didn't know exactly how many representatives they had.

³⁴ Pepper, 'The First Mass Party of American Workers and Farmers', 12 July 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:212.

³⁵ Introduction to Cannon, *Early Years*, 23-24; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 48. Cf. MacKay, *Progressive Movement of 1924*, 81-84, for a description of the convention and the aftermath.

to affiliate. For example, the Party asked Radek and Zinoviev to draft a letter to Sidney Hillman urging the ACW to affiliate.³⁶

A report to the Comintern proudly declared, 'The Federated Farmer-Labor Party is a REAL entity.' The Party claimed credit for momentous advance: 'The Workers Party was obliged to take the leadership in the formation of the party, otherwise there would have been no party.'³⁷ And for their part, the Comintern leadership also regarded the formation of the FF-LP as 'an achievement of primary importance' for the Party and the American working class.³⁸

After the hangover, loneliness

Lost in the jubilation was any sense that the FF-LP was an almost entirely Communist-controlled affair. By splitting with Fitzpatrick, the Communists had isolated themselves from their few allies in the labour movement. Foster, felt this isolation keenly. Not only did it break his alliance with Fitzpatrick and CFL, it made his strategy of building a base for Communist work in the unions much more difficult. A year later, Foster told the Comintern that after the split with Fitzpatrick, 'we lost contact with the trade unionists.'³⁹ Other Communists with roots in the trade unions, particularly Cannon and Dunne, had less illusions about the FF-LP than did the Ruthenberg, Pepper and Lovestone. The split with Fitzpatrick not only made the Party pariahs in the labour movement, but it created a deep split within the Party leadership.

Forced to choose, non-communist 'progressives' who disliked Gompers and had supported a working- class party, withdrew from the FF-LP and, with Fitzpatrick, returned to the AFL fold. Yet, other than the fiat of the Workers Party, there was very

³⁶ I.Amter, report to the Comintern, 7 April 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:174; Pepper and Ruthenberg, 'Report on the Creation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party', to Presidium of Comintern, *ibid*, 515:1:199; Minutes of Political and Organizational Committee, 14 July 1923, *ibid.*, 515:1:197. The same meeting, interestingly, expelled former CEC member J.B. Salutsky (Hardman), an official in the ACW.

³⁷ I.Amter, report to the Comintern, 7 April 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:174.

little that politically distinguished the FF-LP from its predecessor, which enabled Fitzpatrick to red bait the Party as only interested in increasing its own power. He refused to work with

any organization which advocates other than legal means to bring about changes or is affiliated with or which accepts the leadership of either national or international political organizations whose propaganda and doctrines advocate the overthrow of the government of the United States other than legal and constitutional methods, such as the Third International.⁴⁰

This hostility left FF-LP and TUEL militants vulnerable to anti-Communist repression by the trade-union bureaucracy; soon the needle-trades unions and the UMW expelled TUEL supporters.⁴¹ In August 1923, Foster was even shot at, in what he claimed was an attempt by the needle-trades bureaucracy to assassinate him.⁴²

The AFL anti-Communist campaign came to a head at the October 1923 AFL convention in Portland. The AFL leadership there expelled Communist leader William F. Dunne—an official delegate representing the Montana Silver Bowl Trades and Labor Council—simply because he was a member of the Workers Party. The AFL leadership denounced him as anti-labour, and amidst what one historian called a ‘lynch mob atmosphere’, almost 28,000 delegates voted to expel him while barely more than 100 defended him. Mineworkers union leader Phil Murray, who several decades later would become famous for purging Communists from the CIO, according to one newspaper account, ‘called upon the convention to eliminate a “traitor”.’ Fellow UMW leader William Green, soon to be Gompers’ successor, then declared that ‘we should purge ourselves of this outspoken agent of the workers’ party and the communists.’ After two hours of red-baiting, the convention not only expelled

³⁸ W.Kolarow for the ECCI to WPA, 7 December 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:164.

³⁹ Dorsey [Foster] to American Commission, 6 May 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:257.

⁴⁰ *Labor Herald*, August 1923.

⁴¹ See the United Mine Workers of America, *Attempt by Communists to Seize the American Labor Movement* (Indianapolis: United Mine Workers of America, 1923).

⁴² Foster, et al, *Trade Unions in America*, 18, 31.

Dunne but overwhelmingly defeated resolutions calling for industrial unionism and independent labour politics.⁴³

In the *American Federationist*, Gompers advocated 'rid[ding] the trade union movement of the last remnants of destructive and revolutionary effort', complained that the AFL had 'been too tolerant' to Communists, and accused Dunne of having purchased his delegate status.⁴⁴ This is why former Workers Party leader J.B.S. Hardman later wrote that 'the revolution of 1919 was liquidated in 1923,' as the Party became more isolated.⁴⁵

The International Ladies Garment Workers (ILGWU) waged war on Party supporters, expelling activists and reorganising entire locals. Under the leadership of John L. Lewis, the UMW attacked the TUEL and the Party. Writing on the bureaucratic repression, David Saposs, then sympathetic to the Party, concluded that 'Never before in the history of the labour movement has there been such a wholesale expulsion of members,' based, moreover, on almost purely ideological grounds.⁴⁶ These battles would have ramifications for the Party in the 1930s when Lewis and Hillman formed the backbone of the CIO.⁴⁷

Factionalism and division

⁴³ *Butte Daily Post*, 8 October 1923 (quotes from Green and Murray; clipping in William F. Dunne papers, Tamiment Library, New York University, box 1, folder 1); Barrett, 'Boring from Within and Without', 323. Cf. *Butte Bulletin*, 19 October 1923 (in Dunne papers); See William F. Dunne, *Wm. F. Dunne's Speech at the A.F. of L. Convention* (Chicago: TUEL, 1923), for Dunne's speech precipitating his expulsion; Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, 433-34 (lynch mob quote on 434). For the UMW, Dunne was an enemy not just because of his Communism, but because of the Party's opposition to the Lewis leadership in the miners union; in fact, Dunne's attacks against Lewis were used by Green to justify the expulsion. Dunne, in his speech, began by noting that he did not 'worship at the shrine of John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, William Green and the rest of hierarchy.' In a 8 November 1923 note to Dunne UMW dissident Alexander Howat praised Dunne's speech as a 'masterpiece' and his actions at the convention as 'splendid' (Dunne papers, box 1, folder 18).

⁴⁴ *American Federationist*, November 1923. The William F. Dunne papers at Tamiment Library, New York University (box 1, folder 18) contains a letter of support, dated 3 November 1923, from the Bonzana Lodge of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers in Missoula, Montana, to Dunne. On Dunne's pre-Communist background in the Montana labour movement, see Wetzel, 'The Making of an American Radical.'

⁴⁵ J.B.S. Hardman, 'Postscripts to Ten Years of Labor Movement', in J.B.S. Hardman, ed., *American Labor Dynamics*, 18.

The Party leadership was divided in its reaction to this hostility. Pepper and Ruthenberg saw this as a positive development, an indication of growing Communist influence. Taking Bela Kun's 'theory of the offensive' to absurdity, Pepper described the expulsion of Dunne as 'a Communist Bunker Hill': the Communists had ultimately lost, but had won the war of propaganda by making Communism a living issue. He called the expulsion of Dunne the 'greatest victory for the cause of Communism'.⁴⁸

Cannon and Foster sensed the Party's disastrous position, surrounded by hostile labour leaders and isolated from the organised working class. In the Party's public press, Cannon echoed Pepper: 'the real victor was the Communist movement' because 'it was raised there as a living issue of the labor movement'.⁴⁹ In an *internal* document, Cannon and Foster noted that after the split, 'the apparent break of the Communists with the progressive wing of the labor movement emboldened the reactionaries for a great counteroffensive against the Communists, which continues to be one of the most pronounced features of the current labor situation'. Communist supporters in the unions, they argued, 'were almost completely isolated'.⁵⁰

Seeking to maintain a toehold in industry, Foster advocated that TUEL supporters 'remain in the union regardless of whether they have to deny League membership or not'. Although leaving open the possibility of forming 'unions of expelled' TUEL members 'if expulsion takes on a mass character', supporters were instructed to fight this at all cost, including subterfuge and denying Leagued membership. The TUEL planned to 'develop a movement of sympathetic elements' to

⁴⁶ Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism: A Study of Radical Policies and Tactics*, 56.

⁴⁷ Cf. Barrett, 'Boring from Within and Without' 323-24.

⁴⁸ Pepper, 'Portland—A Communist Bunker Hill!', in Comintern archives, 515:1:213.

⁴⁹ *Labor Herald*, September 1923, October 1923; Browder, *No Man's Land*, 201; Cannon, 'What Happened at Portland?', *Worker*, 24 November 1923, *Early Years*, 179.

⁵⁰ Foster and Cannon, 'Statement on Our Labor Party Policy', November 1923, in *Early Years*, 159-60.

stand for union office on an anti-expulsion platform. Rather than ‘permit the reactionaries to make the League the main issue’ TUEL supporters were instructed to ‘bring out new issues—of shop, of trade, and union’ to battle the leadership over.⁵¹

Cannon and Foster saw the FF-LP as an albatross that soon had ‘proved itself a failure’, and emboldened the labour bureaucrats’ attacks on the Party. The anti-Communists in the unions and the media had quickly succeeded in ‘branding it before the labor movement as merely another name for the Workers Party’. Even in unions where Communist supporters were active, the FF-LP was unable to gain affiliates.⁵² Against Ruthenberg and Pepper, criticised the ‘old sickness...to get unduly excited, to overestimate the radical development, and plunge into premature actions which bring disastrous defeats and paralysing reactions in our own ranks’. They identified a trend of ‘progressivism’ in the unions, ‘a revolt against Gomperism that has not yet developed a systematic outlook’ and which could be won to Communism—although, needless to say, not through actions like the split with Fitzpatrick. Cannon and Foster decried the split, and insisted that the Party eschew the illusion that the FF-LP was a mass party and instead begin to organise a *real* mass labour party.⁵³

Not surprisingly, Ruthenberg and Pepper, who had developed the Chicago strategy, were more optimistic. Their ‘August Theses’ hailed the formation of the FF-LP and the split with Fitzpatrick as ‘the greatest political advance which our party has been able to make so far’ and ‘a great victory’. They glibly predicted that by the end of the year some 250,000 workers and between 50- and 80,000 farmers would join the new party. The manoeuvre had ‘put the [Workers] Party in a most favorable position’ and made it ‘a political factor’. The task at hand was to organise the FF-LP ‘as a real

⁵¹ Minutes of meeting of National Committee of TUEL, 5 December 1923, in Prometheus Research Library collection.

⁵² Foster and Cannon, ‘Statement’, 161-63.

⁵³ Cannon, *Early Years*, 127-49, 153-78.

party' and to 'transform the Federated to a Communist mass party'. In order to accomplish this transformation, Ruthenberg and Pepper argued, it was necessary to overcome the resistance of those 'party comrades who chiefly concern themselves with trade union problems' and who feared that the deepening split with Fitzpatrick and CFL might cause the Party to 'lose the support of those progressive [labour] leaders who until now supported the amalgamation campaign'.⁵⁴

Soon the FF-LP's few non-Communist supporters deserted it. At the same time, with a national election approaching in 1924, the broader left-wing movement, including Farm-Laborites, trade-unionists and other restive radicals, began to pin their hopes on pressurising discontented bourgeois politicians to oppose the mainstream Democrats and Republicans. During this period, the FLP had essentially liquidated itself into the wider Progressive movement, therefore loosing what specifically working-class character it had in favour of a wider petty-bourgeois politics. Many Progressives saw La Follette, a maverick Republican Senator from Wisconsin, as a possible leader for a third party movement. La Follette sought to build a 'progressive' movement, incorporating support from labour unions, intellectuals, farmers and other groups angry at the dominant Democratic or Republican politicians. Yet he explicitly refused to call for even a third capitalist party, much less a labour party, out of fear of harming progressive Democratic and Republican politicians.⁵⁵

This meant that those few progressive trade-union leaders whom the Party sought to cajole into a new party were now looking elsewhere. Traditionally, the Communists had nothing but contempt for the progressive movement.⁵⁶ Nonetheless,

⁵⁴ John Pepper and C.E. Ruthenberg, 'Thesis on Labor Party Policy', 24 August 1923, PRL collection.

⁵⁵ Bella C. La Follette and Fola La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953), vol. 2, 1111.

⁵⁶ In his study of the Bolshevik Revolution, for example, John Reed had compared the capitalist Constitutional Democrats (cadets), the 'Liberals from the propertied classes', with the American

almost the entire Party leadership, desperate for a chance to regain its lost allies, and having already supported the vague non-working-class progressivism of the FLP, saw opportunities in the La Follette movement. Pepper hailed the 'La Follette revolution', which he said was composed of 'elements of the great French Revolution, and the Russian Kerensky Revolution'. He continued: 'In its ideology it will have elements of Jeffersonianism, Danish cooperatives, Ku Klux Klan and Bolshevism. The proletariat *as a class* will not play an independent role in this revolution.' In a meeting of the Party leadership, Pepper declared that 'we support the La Follette revolution at the same time criticizing and fighting for a Communist mass party.' To explain how this exquisite corpse, in which the working class was not to be a leading factor, would advance the cause of proletarian revolution, Pepper offered his facile 'theory of two splits' in which the nascent Third Party would split the petty-bourgeoisie from the big bourgeoisie and then Communists would split the proletariat from the petty-bourgeoisie.⁵⁷

In December 1923, Pepper pushed a motion through the CEC which committed the FF-LP to 'initiate a campaign to bring about a split of the La Follette forces from the Republican Party', implying that it would be principled to support a non-Republican La Follette.⁵⁸ A pamphlet by Ruthenberg, *The Farmer-Labor United Front*, described the farmer-labour movement as an opportunity to build 'for the first time...a class party on a mass scale fighting against the parties of the capitalist class.' This evidently went to Ruthenberg's head: 'There is probably not a Communist Party in the International except those that are face to face with the proletarian revolution which has the responsibilities and the opportunities of our Party at the present time.'

Progressives; John Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (New York: New American Library, 1967), 20.

⁵⁷ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 83; Political and Organizational Committee Minutes, 19 September 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:197.

Although Ruthenberg claimed that the Communists' 'victory will be over the dead body (politically) of La Follette', he still advocated supporting La Follette since to split from him 'would mean that we would turn over the class Farmer-Labor Party movement to the Third Party movement'. The La Follette movement, Ruthenberg argued, would, despite itself, help to break people from the capitalist parties.⁵⁹

It was not just Pepper and Ruthenberg who advocated the Party's supporting a bourgeois candidate. Almost all the Party leadership, including Cannon and Foster, supported this perspective, if differing on its tactical application. Only M.J. Olgin and Ludwig Lore—of the Jewish and German-language federations respectively—fought this policy. They argued that, 'It is absurd to assume that we can have common campaigns with the third bourgeois party for its bourgeois candidates and at the same time conduct an independent campaign for our program.' But while their criticism of the La Follette manoeuvre came from the left—a defence of the political independence of the working class—it was rooted in their framework of the pre-war Social Democracy. In another context, this attachment could be played out in a rightist fashion as well—such as when Lore sympathised with Serrati in Italy or Paul Levi in Germany. Ruthenberg described Lore and Olgin as 'still strongly under the influence of the socialist traditions' whose 'attitude toward the main tasks of the Party was that the Party should devote itself to propaganda and organizational work.'⁶⁰ Elsewhere, Ruthenberg criticised Cannon and Foster for their 'biased view' which 'overstress[ed] the industrial side of the party work' by 'giv[ing] the greatest weight to the effort of

⁵⁸ Executive Council of the WP minutes, 14 December 1923, in Comintern archives 515:1:190.

⁵⁹ C.E. Ruthenberg, *The Farmer-Labor United Front* (Chicago: Literature Department of the Workers Party of America, [1924?]), 2, 22-26.

⁶⁰ Lore and Olgin quoted in Cannon, *Early Years of American Communism*, 196; Ruthenberg, 'From the Third Through the Fourth Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party', *Workers Monthly*, October 1925.

those policies upon the standing of the party in the trade unions'. Nonetheless, Ruthenberg favoured a bloc with Cannon and Foster against Lore.⁶¹

Cannon and Foster also advocated giving some support to La Follette. They criticised Lore and Olgin for their 'attempt to dump all non-proletarian grouping into one reactionary heap'. That Cannon and Foster believed La Follette's was not a bourgeois politician was spelt out in their criticism of Olgin and Lore's 'propos[al] to treat this movement, which is a revolt against big capital, precisely as we treat the Republican and Democratic parties, which are parties of big capital'. Cannon and Bittleman favourably cited a CEC resolution which argued that 'The third party movement accelerates the development of the class struggle, produces a clearer crystallization of political groupings on the basis of real economic interests, and weakens the united capitalist front against the working class.'

From Moscow in May

The factional alliances did not reflect their leaders' positions on this issue: Cannon and Foster were in a bloc with Lore and Olgin, even though they had more in common on this issue with Ruthenberg and Pepper.⁶² In part this division reflected personal antagonisms, especially towards Pepper, but also the differing political and social origins of the trade unionists such as Cannon and Foster, and intellectuals such as Ruthenberg and Pepper. This helped give rise to the next five years of unprincipled factionalism.

None of the factions saw a way out of this cul-de-sac except by appealing to the Comintern. This was reasonable, since in the recent past the Comintern had helped orient the Party's tactics, and resolve organisational disputes. However, what most of

⁶¹ C.E. Ruthenberg, 'Our Party—Three Tendencies', typescript in C.E. Ruthenberg Papers (Ohio State Historical Society), box 7, folder 2; printed in the *Daily Worker*, magazine supplement, 19 January 1924.

the leadership did not know was that in 1924, the Russian Bolshevik Party itself was already engaged in a fierce struggle over the future of the Revolution and the Comintern. Questions raised by the La Follette campaign, especially the relation of Communists to non-working-class organisations, formed a key part of the dispute. This affected the type of guidance the Comintern provided.

The immediate question was posed by an upcoming Farmer-Labor conference in Minnesota. The Party and the Minnesota farmer labourites, led by William Mahoney, organised a conference for late May 1924 to nominate candidates for the upcoming Presidential election. At the same time the CPPA was building a campaign to stand La Follette for President and called a convention on 4 July, in Cleveland. The Minnesota FLP complained that under both the Democrats and Republicans, 'the condition of the masses of producers, the farmers and industrial workers, has not been benefitted [sic], but in fact has grown steadily worse' and announced that its goal was 'disrupting private monopoly in the United States.'⁶³ While radical, this perspective was standard agrarian radicalism and, one historian noted 'there was very little that had been in the previous political platforms of the past twenty years.'⁶⁴

This caused the Party, after some internal debate, to move the Minnesota convention up to 17 June, but it was clear that this convention was a formality, since a majority of FLP, not having the guidance of the Comintern, still wanted La Follette to stand for President. Even though in 1920 he had refused to have anything to do with the Farmer-Labor Party because he thought it too radical, and, now, he opposed the

⁶² Cannon and Bittelman, 'Reply to the Thesis of Comrades Lore and Olgin', 12 April 1924, in *Early Years of American Communism*, 197, 199-200; Browder, *No Man's Land*, 207.

⁶³ *St. Paul Farmer-Labor Advocate*, 9 February 1923; 12 June 1923.

⁶⁴ See Steven D. Jensen, 'Floyd Olson: The Years Prior to His Governorship, 1891-1931' (PhD thesis, University of Kansas, 1985), 55. See pages 55-86 for a description of the FLP's local campaign in 1924.

FLP as too close to the Communists, the farmer labourites continued to support him.⁶⁵

In early May, Ruthenberg advocated that, if enough industrial workers and poor farmers were represented at the 17 June meeting, the Party should push for a National Farmer-Labor Party based on the FF-LP programme. If there was not enough support for this, 'then we should not make a fight for the organization of a party, but accept a loose coalition for the election campaign' and struggle for a 'clear-cut class program' at the convention. If, however, there was immense support for La Follette—which was expected—the Party would support La Follette 'but stating our Communist attitude toward La Follette'. The CEC unanimously supported this policy, but defeated, along factional lines, an additional strategy supported by Ruthenberg. Nonetheless, the defeated section is interesting. Ruthenberg advocated that the Party nominate a candidate against La Follette, but

We must, however, be careful to see to it that manouever does not defeat La Follette, for to nominate another candidate and to permit La Follette to become the candidate for the July 4th [CPPA] Convention in opposition to our nominee would be to destroy the mass Farmer-Labor Party as a mass organization.⁶⁶ Ruthenberg wanted the Party to appear to oppose La Follette, but not to actually threaten him.

In Moscow, Foster also stressed the need to orient towards La Follette, and asserted that the La Follette campaign 'is much stronger than La Follette' because 'La Follette is not leading it, but being driven by the movement'.⁶⁷ But at the same time, Foster lashed out at Ruthenberg and Pepper for 'neglect[ing] the trade union work and...even sabotaging it', and for 'spending too much energy in trying to organise the

⁶⁵ MacKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, 58; *Where La Follette Stands on Fifty Living Issues* (Los Angeles: La Follette-Wheeler Headquarters, 1924), 7-8; for continued FLP endorsement of La Follette, see *Farmer-Labor Advocate.*, 6 June 1923; Shideler, 'The Neo-Progressives', 223-35.

⁶⁶ CEC minutes, 2 May 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270; cf. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 104.

⁶⁷ Dorsey [Foster] to American Commission of ECCI, 29 April 1924, in Comintern archives 515:1:257.

farmers, and too little energy in trying to organise the workers'. This 'madness' was 'opportunism pure and simple'. Predicting a lack of support at an upcoming farmer-labour convention in Minnesota, Foster predicted that the FF-LP would soon degenerate into 'just a small group of communists and communist sympathisers'. This would 'isolate our movement, not only politically but industrially as well,' causing the Party to 'be discredited throughout the trade union movement of the United States'.⁶⁸ Yet, although he was less infatuated with the farmers than Pepper, Foster saw the non-working-class La Follette movement as a way out of the Party's isolation.

Pepper stubbornly defended the split with Fitzpatrick, and argued for an orientation towards La Follette as well. This prompted Karl Radek to criticise Pepper's inclination to confound American farmers with Russian peasants, and speculate whether the split with Fitzpatrick had been ill conceived. Zinoviev stressed that 'we cannot support La Follette', but that the Party should advocate a independent labour party. Losovsky also criticised supporting La Follette, and argued that it would be better 'to receive three thousand or a hundred thousand' votes as an independent candidate 'instead of getting 2,000,000 for La Follette'.⁶⁹

The debate about La Follette intersected a major struggle in the Bolshevik Party. During this period, Stalin (then allied with Zinoviev) began to solidify his power in the Russian Party, based on the growing Soviet bureaucracy. A corollary to Stalin's theory of building socialism in Russia alone was the resurrection of key components of the Menshevism, especially—in what later evolved into the 'popular front' in the 1930s—the systematic collaboration between Communists and other, non-working-class, parties and forces. In the 1920s, the starkest example was China, where this policy meant the subordination of the young Communist Party of China to

⁶⁸ Dorsey [Foster], to American Commission of ECCI, 6 May 1924, in Comintern archives 515:1:257.

the anti-Communist Koumintang nationalists, but the La Follette alliance was cut of the same cloth. Although the mistakes of the American Party did not threaten the death of thousands of workers as in China, nonetheless it threatened the political health of the Party. Trotsky warned that '[f]or a young and weak Communist Party, lacking in revolutionary temper, to play the role of solicitor and gatherer of "progressive voters" for the Republican Senator La Follette is to head toward the political dissolution of the party in the petty bourgeoisie.'⁷⁰ Unlike Stalin and Zinoviev, Trotsky believed this was a betrayal and fought against it because he saw it as undercutting the independence of the revolutionary working class from the capitalists.⁷¹ Although Stalin and Zinoviev held the upper hand, at the Fifth Congress Trotsky had enough support to force the Comintern to criticise the American Party for tailing La Follette.

The Comintern instructed the Party 'to strive by all means to enter the broad current of the masses in order to assist the masses of petty-bourgeoisie in detaching themselves from the capitalist class'. The Comintern also criticised the Party, asserting that it 'has not only drawn insufficiently the line between itself and the petty-bourgeois elements which endeavour to establish a petty-bourgeois Third Party, but the Workers Party has to a certain degree itself fallen under the influence of petty-bourgeois elements.' Key to this was the upcoming FF-LP convention in St Paul. The Party was instructed to warn against a third, petty-bourgeois, party headed by La Follette, to call for the formation of the F-LP, and to stand candidates.

The actual advice to the CP is worth quoting at length. The Party was to tell those farmer labourites who supported La Follette:

⁶⁹ Report of the American Commission in the Presidium of the ECCI, 20 May 1924, in Lovestone papers, box 210, folder 1.

⁷⁰ Leon Trotsky, 1924 introduction to *First Five Years of the Communist International*, vol. 1, 13.

You have confidence in La Follette or other similar politicians; we have no such confidence in them. But we are ready to support such candidates *if, 1) they will immediately break with the Republican Party after having issued a specific clear declaration; 2) if they will accept a properly worked-out programme of the farmer-labour bloc; 3) if they will come to this conference ready to assume specific obligations to work under the full control of the Farmer-Labour Party, and especially if they will accept the control over their campaign funds.*⁷²

At the same time, the Comintern did not rule out such an class-collaborationism in general. As Ruthenberg reported: 'The decision of the Communist International was not based on opposition to such a maneuver in principle. In fact, the decision of the Communist International was made on the basis of the situation of our Party...but not because the maneuver was incorrect in principle.'⁷³

Sharp observers, such as Pepper, picked up on this tension, as well as the difference among the Bolshevik leaders.⁷⁴ Others, less knowledgeable about the internal politics of the Russians, complained that this ambiguity 'made the Party membership somewhat dizzy' and engendered an 'absence of hope' and 'skepticism and pessimism that are so poisonous to a revolutionary Party'.⁷⁵ Browder, for one, could make no sense of the decision: 'The decision was a heavy shock to me politically, as it was to the whole movement.... I demanded explanation of this unavoidable contradiction. There was none.' Nonetheless, the WP changed its line on the La Follette campaign. Now the *Labor Herald* denounced 'the La Follette effort to destroy the Farmer-Labor movement' and insisted that 'La Follette is against the movement of the workers and farmers' and that he 'is acting today as the protector of the capitalist parties'.⁷⁶ Still, the Party posited that the way to 'break with the

⁷¹ See Trotsky's discussion of the dispute over La Follette in *The Third International After Lenin* (London: New Park Publications, 1974), 91-92.

⁷² ECCI to WPA, no date [20 May 1924], in Comintern archives, 515:1:164.

⁷³ Ruthenberg, 'From the Third to the Fourth Convention'.

⁷⁴ [John Pepper] to 'Dear Comrade', nd [May? 1924], Lovestone papers, box 196, folder 3.

⁷⁵ [Jay Lovestone?] to 'Dear John [Pepper]', 24 August 1924, in Lovestone papers, box 196, folder 3.

⁷⁶ John Dorsey [William Z. Foster], 'Break with the Capitalist Parties', *Labor Herald*, July 1924.

capitalist parties' was to found a genuine Farmer-Labor Party, i.e., it still believed it was possible to have one party represent two classes.

To Minnesota in June

Prior to the convention, the CEC discussed its strategy for this meeting and decided that, based on the Comintern's instructions, the Party would stand candidates 'as a demonstration' but if, as expected, pro-La Follette sympathies ran strong, the Party would conditionally support La Follette. The Party claimed that this offer was to be made only if 'there is a danger of a serious split and [as] a concession to safeguard the unity of the convention'. If, however, the convention rejected the Party's condition, 'we shall split.'⁷⁷

In the upshot, the Communists did not have to split quite yet: the convention nominated UMW official, ex-Socialist and head of the Illinois Federation of Labor Duncan MacDonald for president, and Washington State FF-LP member William Bouck for vice-president. (MacDonald, according to the minutes of the CEC 'had considered joining the Party' in February, and the Party had agreed to this with certain provisions, although there is no evidence that he actually joined.)⁷⁸ The Party press hailed this as 'the biggest issue in the labor movement' which 'means class struggle'.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, although the FLP was willing to work with the Communists, and thus put up with constant red-baiting, their goal was to support La Follette, albeit preferably on a Farmer-Labor ticket. The St. Paul *Farmer-Labor Advocate*, in its coverage of the convention, described how 'it was conceded apparently by all—in fact it was specifically conceded in the adoption of the plan of organization—that any candidates the St. Paul convention might name would be subject to withdrawal if La

⁷⁷ CEC minutes, 8 June 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270.

⁷⁸ See CEC minutes, 15/16 February 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270; on MacDonald and the Labor Party, see Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 380.

Follette should become a candidate.’⁸⁰ When, as expected, on 4 July, the CPPA nominated La Follette for president, the *Advocate* urged ‘complete, vigorous support of La Follette’ and denounced the Communists for attempting to pass themselves off as the true FLP.⁸¹

For his part, La Follette baited the Communists and denounced the St. Paul convention. He called the Communist goal of the dictatorship of the proletariat as ‘absolutely repugnant to democratic ideals and to all American aspirations’, and counselled that ‘all progressives should refuse to participate in any movement which makes common cause with any Communist organization.’⁸² In response, anti-Communists within the Minnesota FLP became more vociferous.⁸³

The 4 July CPPA banned Communist sympathisers or supporters of the earlier FF-LP or the St. Paul convention, and vindictively refused to seat Mahoney.⁸⁴ The CPPA *endorsed* La Follette (not *nominated* him), because he was adamant in his refusal to break organically with the Republican Party and form a new party.⁸⁵ The La Follette campaign, like Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal Coalition’ in the 1930s, was seen by many of its supporters as a tactic to pressure the mainstream parties to make them more responsive to the needs of labour, liberals and farmers.⁸⁶ While the AFL, the Socialist Party, and many labour and agrarian radicals enthusiastically supported La Follette, the Communists alone criticised him from the left.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Cannon, ‘St. Paul—June 17th’, *Labor Herald*, 1924, also reprinted in Cannon, *Early Years of American Communism*, 207-12.

⁸⁰ *Farmer-Labor Advocate*, 30 June 1924.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1924.

⁸² Robert La Follette to Herman Ekern, 26 May 1924, quoted in La Follette and La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette*, vol. 2, 1101-103. See also, MacKay, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, 86-88.

⁸³ Jensen, ‘Floyd Olson’, 63-64, 69-73.

⁸⁴ La Follette and La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette.*, 1111.

⁸⁵ Shideler, ‘The Neo-Progressives’, 236-51.

⁸⁶ This is essentially the argument made by Waterhouse, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*.

⁸⁷ La Follette and La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette*, 1124. For the AFL endorsement, see Fine, *Labor and Farmer Parties*, 411 and ‘A.F. of L. News Budget, October 1923’ (copy in Widener Library, Harvard University, US7124.700); Waterhouse, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, 12, 32-35, 39, 66-68; David Karsner, ‘The Passing of the Socialist Party’ *Current History*, June 1924, reprinted in H.

On 8 July the Party withdrew its support from MacDonald, and stood its own candidates, Foster and Gitlow. The same day, Mahoney's Minnesota Farmer Labor Party endorsed La Follette. The National Committee of the FF-LP, controlled by Party supporters, withdrew its candidates. Cannon, in the *Daily Worker*, argued that since many FLP militants had joined La Follette's movement, the 'Farmer-Labor Party represents in reality nothing but the Communists and a circle of close sympathizers'. Therefore, 'we are duty bound to raise our own revolutionary standard and fight in our own name in order that we may not be hampered in making the most out of the campaign for the Communist Party and the Communist principles.' If the FLP had run candidates, he argued, 'there would have been no one to help us, no united front, no mass movement'. In the end, Foster received some 33,000 votes, compared with La Follette's 4.8 million, Davis' 8.3 million and Coolidge's 15.7 million. One of every six voters cast his ballot for La Follette, the best turnout to date for an independent presidential candidate.⁸⁸

La Follette's defeat dampened liberal and labour support for a third party, and reinvigorated Gompers' traditional non-partisan policy.⁸⁹ In 1925, the CPPA dissolved, its leadership either dead or unable to build a stable political movement. While the CP received many fewer votes than La Follette, its leaders had not expected to win.⁹⁰ Instead, the value of such a 'parliamentary' tactic for Communists was that it provided an opportunity to broadcast its politics nation-wide. At the Fourth National Convention of the WP, Ruthenberg claimed that the Party's open campaign, while attracting little votes, did put the Communist cause before the country. And Joseph

Wayne Morgan, ed., *American Socialism, 1900-1960* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 98; on the SP, see Shideler, 'The Neo-Progressives', 252-53.

⁸⁸ Cannon, *Early Years of American Communism*, 226-27; La Follette and La Follette, *Robert M. La Follette*, 1148. The Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party's decision (wrongly dated 8 June) is in the *Farmer-Labor Advocate*, 12 August 1924; Waterhouse, *The Progressive Movement of 1924*, 1.

Freeman later recalled that ‘the conferences at which the fight for a labor party was carried on brought the Communists into national prominence as a serious party, rather than a mysterious sect.’⁹¹ This was all true—but it would have been true in any case. The Party’s dalliance with La Follette only confused its supporters, and called into question its working-class centrality.

The Party and the garment unions

By 1925, the Party was increasingly isolated in the labour movement. The manoeuvres over the FLP and La Follette had shattered the TUEL’s left-centre bloc with progressive union leaders; Fitzpatrick and the CFL split over the formation of the Federated Farmer-Labor Party. Sydney Hillman—only a few years earlier a valued Communist ally—finally ended his dalliances with the Party in favour of La Follette in 1924.⁹² Capitalising on the La Follette issue, Hillman went on the offensive against Party and TUEL influence in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. The union took steps to expel Benjamin Gitlow, a member of the cutters local, and the organiser of the Party’s needle-trades work as well as its vice presidential candidate. ⁹³ Other members, such as J.B. Salutsky (Hardman) split from the Party to remain in the ACW.⁹⁴ Hillman’s biographer described the situation for Communists at the time:

The party grew ever more isolated. Internally divided and politically excommunicated, the status of the party in the ACW was soon reduced to that of a sectarian clique. Its voice was headed by few as it enunciated the mordant

⁸⁹ See Vaughn Davis Bornet, *Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic: Moderation, Division and Disruption in the Presidential Election of 1928* (Washington: Spartan Books, 1964), 48.

⁹⁰ Seidler, *Norman Thomas*, 66-67.

⁹¹ *The Fourth National Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Co., 1925), 9-10; Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), 342.

⁹² Fraser, *Labor Will Rule*, 194.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 203. Cf. Gitlow, *I Confess*, 337.

⁹⁴ Salutsky, simultaneously a member of the WP leadership and the education director of the ACW, had been suspended over refusal to defend the Party at the Cleveland CPPA convention; he was soon expelled because he refused to subordinate his newspaper, the *American Labor Monthly*, to Party control.

jeremiads of a bygone era and the belligerent platitudes of a revolutionary future not many people though necessary any more.⁹⁵ Or as one Communist active in the ACW recalled, with the expulsion of entire locals as well as individual members, ‘by 1925 the persecution of militants was at its highest point.’⁹⁶ It would be simplistic to blame this dire situation on the Party’s position on the elections. Hillman was ultimately concerned that the Party’s influence would hinder his goal, in Steven Fraser’s words, of ‘transforming the “new unionism” from a set of imaginative possibilities into an organization of more businesslike regularity’.⁹⁷ As the twenties wore on, there was a move to the right in US politics, which Socialists and union leaders reflected. Like union leaders a quarter century later, when forced to chose between their Communist allies and control of their unions, most trade-union tops would chose the latter whatever the strategy the Party pursued. But the unprincipled nature of the Party’s path, and its tactical ineptness, did not improve the matter.

One union which the TUEL and Party, as part of a broader left-wing, still retained influence in was the New York based International Lady Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). Like most of the garment industry’s workforce, the ILGWU membership was largely Eastern European Jewish and sympathetic to socialism. The leadership staunchly supported the SP; until 1924, a member could not stand for political office except as a Socialist.⁹⁸ The Bolshevik Revolution was popular amongst ILGWU members. Among the 100,000 odd workers in the union in the early 1920s, the TUEL—whose New York leader, Charles S. Zimmerman, was a leader of the union—was popular. This was both because of its ties to Soviet Russia and

⁹⁵ Ibid., 201-205 (quote on 205).

⁹⁶ Anthony Bimba, *The History of the American Working Class* (New York: International Publishers, 1936), 341. In the early 1920s, Bimba had been editor of *Darbas*, the ACW’s Lithuanian paper (cf. Fraser, *Labor Shall Rule*, 182).

⁹⁷ Fraser, *Labor Shall Rule*, 202.

because its programme spoke to the daily needs of this oppressed and militant workforce. Zimmerman, years later, recalled how the TUEL had successfully cohered non-Communist supporters and ‘took in all...[and] formed one group’. Ruthenberg was able to speak to the 1922 ILGWU convention, as an open Communist just released from jail. He asserted: ‘the Workers Party is in your unions, part of your unions, fighting with the very members of your unions.... Their purpose is to build a stronger organization of the workers in your industry.’ Additionally, Ruthenberg called for an industry-wide trade union in the needle trades. More important than what he said, however, is that the union leadership felt enough pressure from its base to invite him to speak. Thus, Foster’s perspective appeared to be successful. The Socialist Party-affiliated leadership was quite hostile to the TUEL, however, and in August 1923, they began removing leftist local leaders, and at the 1924 International convention, denied seats to elected delegates who supported the TUEL. Nonetheless, these moves were rebuffed and the TUEL and the Party, by 1924, the Party appeared to be quite strong in the New York City locals, where Communists led several locals.⁹⁹

However, in 1925 and 1926, the Socialist leadership of the unions attacked Communists so savagely to make the earlier Socialist Party purge look benign. The ILGWU leadership, the right-wing Socialist Yiddish daily *Vorwaerts*, the fraternal Arbeiter Ring (Workmen’s Circle) and the SP leadership formed an interconnected anti-Communist network with cultural and political links to the Russian Mensheviks, who saw New York City as their base and wanted to secure it against Communist

⁹⁸ Arthur Liebman, ‘The Ties that Bind: Jewish Support for the Left in the United States’, in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, December 1976, reprinted in Ezra Mendelsohn, ed., *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997), 334.

⁹⁹ Gurowsky, ‘Factional Disputes in the ILGWU’, 103-105, 150; James Robert Prickett, ‘Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement, 1920-1950’ (PhD thesis, University of California at Los Angeles, 1975), 62-65; Ruthenberg’s speech is in the *Worker*, 20 May 1922.

encroachment. In the summer of 1925, the International leadership—the General Executive Board (GEB)—began, in one historian’s words, ‘a policy of unprecedented repression’ against leftist local leaders, suspending them from their positions, and seizing the locals’ assets and property while reorganising the locals themselves. Together, these locals made up nearly 50 per cent of union membership. The pretext for this was that the left-wing had organised a May Day rally which featured Olgin.

With massive rank-and-file support, the left-wingers refused to give up, and in June formed the Joint Action Committee; they strongly denied the charges of dual unionism and fought to be reinstated. The GEB tried to paint the left-wingers as splitters and wreckers, alien to the union, and supported by ‘the entire machinery of the Communist Party...maintained by the funds of the Russian Communist government’. When the union upheld the action against the leftists, the left-wing, in a massive show of strength, rallied 20,000 in a half-day strike. This forced the GEB to retreat; on the advice of the editor of *Vorwaerts*, Abraham Cahan, they allowed the left-wing to maintain control of several New York locals, with the expectation that the left would lose its support through ineptness. The SP right-wing controlled the International GEB while the left-wing controlled the largest locals, in New York.¹⁰⁰

In November 1925, at the ILGWU Convention in Philadelphia, the tensions almost reached a breaking point, as the right and left battled constantly. Through a rotten borough system,¹⁰¹ the right-wing *Vorwaerts menschen* had a majority of delegates but represented a minority of members. Frustrated pro-Communist delegates, led by Zimmerman, stormed out of the convention and appeared to be on the road to forming a dual union. Only intervention by CEC member William F.

¹⁰⁰ Gurowsky, ‘Factional Disputes in the ILGWU’, 161-80; Prickett, ‘Communists and the Communist Issue’, 67-69.

¹⁰¹ Delegates were elected by local. Thus, although the left-wing controlled the largest locals, the right-wing was able to control more, albeit smaller, locals, and hence, more delegates.

Dunne, who was observing the conference for the *Daily Worker*, convinced the leftist delegates to return to the ILGWU. At the end of the Conference, the left-wing still controlled the majority of the membership because of its base in New York, but the right-wing still dominated the GEB.¹⁰²

In 1926, however, this all changed. Ben Gold, a Communist, led a hard-fought furrier strike which won a 40 hour week and a 10 per cent wage increase. This also served to whet the militancy of ILGWU workers, who were being squeezed as the standards of the industry declined. In July 1926, 40,000 workers struck, under the leadership of the left wing. This strike lasted for 28 weeks; at the end, the union accepted a compromise which was in essence what was on offer at the beginning, and the left-wing control of New York was shattered. Although the charges of corruption and ineptness levied at the left by the GEB right-wing were unfair, the left was damaged by the result of the strike. And the union itself, led by the GEB, continued to decline, having lost some 15,000 members in six years. But, for our study, what is important is that the CP was, once again, isolated. Only in the furriers among the New York needle trade unions did it retain influence; the once-promising needle trades section of the TUEL was now frozen out of the ILGWU and ACWU.¹⁰³ 'So effective and widespread has the union ban against communists become', Saposs wrote in 1926, 'that they have become forced, in the main, to operate underground.' The purging of Communist supporters devastated the unions as well; in 1929, the ILGWU's membership had shrunken to 32,000 from 104,000 in 1920.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Gurowsky, 'Factional Disputes in the ILGWU', 195-216; Prickett, 'Communists and the Communist Issue', 74-87. On the importance of *Vorwaerts* in the struggle against Communists in the ILGWU—and, after World War II, internationally—see Seth Lipsky, 'Did Jay Lovestone Win the Cold War?' (review of Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist and Spymaster*), in the *Forward*, 23 April 1999.

¹⁰³ Gurowsky, 'Factional Disputes in the ILGWU', 236-75; Prickett, 'Communists and the Communist Issue', 83-95. On the furrier strike, see Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union*, 179-246, which describes the strike in painstaking detail.

¹⁰⁴ Saposs, *Left Wing Unionism*, 57; Gurowsky, 'Factional Disputes in the ILGWU', vi.

In the mid-1920s, the Party's influence in the working class and the labour movement in general reached a low point. In part, this reflected the conservative nature of the period: a capitalist offensive against unions, and an anti-Communist offensive by the labour leadership. Factionalism within the Party itself, in which every issue became a factional issue, also greatly hindered the Party's ability to grapple with this changing reality. Soon the Party would be presented with the opportunity to recoup its losses in the labour movement, through the International Labor Defender and the Passaic textile strike. Yet, the pointless factionalism would hamstring the Party once again.

However, the Party was not left to its own devices. While in years past, the leadership of the Comintern would have intervened in the Party to ensure its health, the relationship between the Party and the labour movement became intertwined in the ongoing struggle over the course of the Bolshevik Party. This meant that the Comintern's interventions into the Party were less straightforward. The next two chapters explore these changes in the Comintern in more depth.

6. The Double-Edged Sword of 'Bolshevisation'

In July 1924 the Fifth Congress of the Comintern adopted its 'Theses on Tactics' that made 'the bolshevisation of its sections' the 'most important task'. What exactly this meant, however, was anybody's guess. Zinoviev defined Bolshevisation vaguely: it meant 'utilizing the experience of the bolshevik party in the three Russian revolutions (and the experience of the best Comintern sections) in its application to the concrete situation of the given country'. The *Communist International* admitted that 'Any attempts to give Bolshevisation a kind of inclusive formula, embracing all the tasks facing our brother parties of the West, has been of schematic nature.'

Usually, historians describe Bolshevisation as 'Stalinisation'—the domination of national parties by the ECCI central apparatus, itself quickly coming under the power of Stalin. In their history of the Comintern, Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew describe Bolshevisation as 'a trend towards Russian dominance of the Comintern and its member sections', both ideologically and organisationally. It can also be defined, they argue, as 'Russification in an embryonic Stalinist form'.¹

In a general way, Zinoviev's campaign did amount to eliminating political opposition throughout the Comintern, something that figured in his and Stalin's campaign against 'Trotskyism' after Lenin's death. A key aspect of Bolshevisation was the creation of a monolithic party that hewed to Comintern prescriptions. In this sense, the Bolshevik party itself had to be 'Bolshevised' before they could proceed to the rest of the Comintern. But this was not clear at the time to most foreign

¹ 'Theses on Tactics', adopted at the Fifth Comintern Congress, July 1924, in Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 153. Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 42-45. Zinoviev's definition of Bolshevisation is quoted in Degras, *Communist International*, vol. 2, 188; cf. also the theses on Bolshevisation adopted at the Fifth ECCI plenum, April 1925, in *ibid.*, 188-200. For a model for a Bolshevised party's organisational rules, proposed by the ECCI's organisation department in January 1925, cf. *ibid.*, 172-79; D. Manuilsky, 'The Bolshevisation of the Parties', *Communist International*, new series no. 10[1925?], 52.

Communists. In fact, most American Communists preferred a monolithic Party over a pointlessly divided one.

Bolshevisation was more than Stalinisation; most of the Western Communist Parties retained remnants of their social-democratic origins that needed to be removed before they could become genuine Communist Parties. Lenin believed that recruitment to a Communist programme was only the initial step in creating a Communist Party out of a social-democratic one: the entire organisation had to be recast into a party based on Communist principles. The American Party, with roots in federated language groups, isolated from the organised working class, and ignorant of black America, was no exception. Thus, most American Communist leaders advocated Bolshevisation, including those, like Cannon, who later rebelled against Stalin.²

This chapter first examines the political significance of the Fifth Comintern Congress and Bolshevisation, both on the International as a whole and on its American section. Then, it examines some of the problems suffered by the Party—especially the foreign-language federations and factionalism—and the, ultimately illusory, solutions Bolshevisation appeared to offer. The question of the Party's intersection with the larger labour movement—both the trade unions and the reformist left—is dealt with in the following chapter.

According to the Fifth Congress, Bolshevisation consisted of five inter-related tasks. First, a section needed to become 'a real mass party' with 'the closest and strongest contacts with the working masses'. Second, a Communist Party needed to be 'capable of manoeuvre' and 'not sectarian or dogmatic'. Third, it must be 'revolutionary, Marxist, in nature'. Fourth, 'It must be a centralized party, permitting

² James P. Cannon, 'The Bolshevization of the Party', *Workers Monthly*, November 1924.

no factions, tendencies, or groups; it must be based in one mould'. Finally, it must carry out work in the army.³

For the American CP, Bolshevisation had three official purposes: educate the membership in basic Marxism-Leninism; reorganise the Party on the basis of shop nuclei; and end the Party's reliance on foreign-language federations. Given the political backwardness of the American working class, the federal nature of the Party, and internecine factionalism, Bolshevisation seemed attractive to many Communists.

As had become ordinary, each faction sent delegates to the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924. In his memoirs, Browder described how at this time he and other Party leaders were 'caught in a web of factional struggles from which I could see no escape, and which there seemed no end'. For this too the leadership looked to Moscow to 'help break us out of this web'.⁴ He and other Communists hoped this breakthrough would come at the Congress; this desired predisposed them to Bolshevisation.

The importance of the Fifth Comintern Congress

The Fifth Comintern Congress was the first post-Lenin Congress. Following Lenin's death in January 1924, there was a fierce battle within the central leadership of the Bolshevik Party. The leadership of the Party—and also the Comintern—was assumed by a 'troika' of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin (in that order), who formed a bloc against Lenin's assumed heir apparent, Trotsky. Even though Trotsky maintained strong support among the urban working class and the Red Army rank-and-file, the troika conspired to lessen his influence, for example rigging the voting for the Thirteenth Party Congress in January 1924.

³ 'Theses on Tactics', adopted at the Fifth Comintern Congress, July 1924, in Jane Degras, vol. 2, 153-54.

⁴ Earl Browder, *No Man's Land* (unpublished autobiographical MS, Earl Browder Papers, Syracuse University), 207.

The political issues were not clear, especially from afar. Most Communists viewed Zinoviev, then head of the Comintern and better known and respected than Stalin, as a leftist; his main support was within the Leningrad working class. Stalin's base was within the growing Soviet bureaucracy and the Party apparatus. Never considered much of a theoretician, Stalin was far from the obvious choice for leader of the Party. By 1924, however, he was increasingly responsive to the mood among large sections of the bureaucracy and Party which wanted to slow down the revolutionary process after the Civil War, and emphasise constructing socialism at home instead of revolution abroad. This conservatism and pessimism grew after the dashing of revolutionary hopes in Germany in 1923. As Trotsky put it, 'The leaders of the bureaucracy promoted the proletarian defeats; the defeats promoted the rise of the bureaucracy.' In December 1924, Stalin crystallised this in his idea of 'socialism in one country', which he counterposed to Trotsky's orthodox stress on international revolution and 'permanent revolution'. Led by Stalin, in an alliance with Zinoviev and Kamenev, the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Party and the Communist International by 1924 had undergone a severe degeneration. 'Socialism in one country', at first a blind alley of impossible economic autarky and isolationism, became the ideological justification for transforming the foreign Communist parties into bargaining chips in an illusory search for 'peaceful coexistence' with international capitalism.⁵

This process of political counterrevolution, which Trotsky later termed the 'Thermidor', was complex, and its ramifications dispersed throughout the Comintern at various rates. This took even longer throughout the Comintern, especially in distant sections like the American. Trotsky fought to return the Soviet party, and the entire

⁵ Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and Where is it Going?* (New York: Pioneer Publishers, 1937), 90.

Comintern, to what he saw as its Leninist foundations. And, if Trotsky was, in Isaac Deutscher's words, a 'prophet disarmed', he still had considerable support within the Soviet Union and the Comintern; Zinoviev had to take him seriously at the Fifth Congress in a way that was not true at the Sixth Congress four years later. Stalin and Zinoviev launched an international anti-Trotsky and anti-'Trotskyist' campaign to purge the Comintern. Inevitably, this merged with the Bolshevisation campaign. The ECCI's theses on Bolshevisation posed, as the primary task of Bolshevizing the RCP, 'the final liquidation of Trotskyism within the party'. In January 1925, the CC and CCC of the RCP condemned Trotsky's 'attacks on bolshevism', and the April 1925 Fifth ECCI plenum labelled Trotsky's efforts 'an attempt to revise Leninism' which was 'supported by all the forces hostile to bolshevism'.⁶ This of course carried over into the American Party. In February 1925, Lovestone, then in Moscow, counselled his co-factionalists to 'take the initiative on Trotzkyism' as a factional cudgel; at the same time, Max Bedacht, writing in the *Daily Worker* described 'the recent discussion in our International against Trotskyism' as 'a phase in the process of the Bolshevization of the International.'⁷

Bolshevisation and anti-Trotskyism

This campaign did not proceed at the same pace throughout the International. The American Party assimilated this anti-Trotskyist campaign slower than, for example, the German and the Chinese Parties, which experienced revolutionary situations in the 1920s and adopted ritual anti-Trotskyism much more quickly. The Polish Party had to be purged several times to eliminate 'Trotskyism'.⁸

⁶ 'Theses on Bolshevisation', Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 195; 'Resolution on the Discussion in the Russian Communist Party', *ibid.*, 205-6.

⁷ 'Jack' [Lovestone] to 'Dearest Friends', 21 February [1925]; Bedacht in the *Daily Worker*, special magazine supplement, 21 February 1925.

⁸ See Robert J. Alexander, *International Trotskyism: A Documented History* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 647.

The American far left had long respected Trotsky. In 1917, leftists saw Trotsky as the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, and the left-wing of the SP published Trotsky's writings before Lenin's. In his 1921 pamphlet, *The Russian Revolution*, Foster had described Trotsky as 'next to Lenin, the biggest figure of the revolution'. And it was not only Trotsky, but the ideas that would later form the basis of his fight against Stalin, which were widely accepted by all American Communists. In the same pamphlet, Foster noted that 'When they carried out their uprising in 1917 the Russian Communists had been long convinced that in order for a proletarian revolution to be successful it would almost necessarily have to extend over several big countries simultaneously.' In words that would be heresy less than a decade later, Foster stressed 'that the possibility of a working class republic maintaining itself in one country, while the rest remained capitalist, was almost negligible'. It is not that Foster was unique in such views, but rather that they were widely held amongst all Communists, in Russia as well as throughout the Comintern.⁹

Nonetheless, elements of the Party leadership jumped on the anti-Trotsky bandwagon early on, even before its full significance was evident. Leading the charge was Pepper, who nurtured a hatred of Trotsky going back to Hungary. In March 1924, Pepper submitted a motion to the CEC to 'endorse the position taken in the Russian Communist Party Congress on the controversy in the Russian Party'. Foster countered by temporising. Since the dispute in the Russian CP had already been settled, his motion read, 'it is not called upon at this time to take a position on the merits of the controversy.' Instead, the Party press would reprint relevant documents to inform the membership, and 'The CEC will condemn any attempt to make a factional issue of the matter in the American Party.' Predictably, the counterposed motions were voted

⁹ Foster, *The Russian Revolution*, 90, 108.

along factional lines; six members voted for Foster's.¹⁰ Soon, Trotskyism, as with almost all other issues, was used to incriminate one or another faction of disloyalty to the Comintern. Despite the note, the next week Ruthenberg cabled the Comintern in support of the anti-Trotsky 'Old Bolsheviks'. Although Ruthenberg admitted he had no authority to do so, the CEC fell in line with the anti-Trotsky campaign. Foster proposed a motion that the CEC 'endorses the position of the [RCP] majority and supports the leadership of the old guard Bolsheviks and instructs the secretary to immediately convey this decision by cable'. This passed; only Lore voted against it.¹¹ Still, what the debate over Trotsky's ideas meant to the International was not well known. As Browder put it, to probe further 'threatened to unleash a veritable Pandora's box of issues quite beyond our comprehension or control'.¹²

The anti-Trotsky campaign most damaged Lore. His politics were, in essence, social-democratic, having been formed in the German-language socialist movement, although he had long been a maverick within the socialist movement. For example, in 1919, whilst editing *Class Struggle* with Fraina, he had opposed the formation of left wing groupings within the SP, although he later helped found the Party. In 1924, he was censored by the CEC for criticising Zinoviev in the *Volkszeitung*.¹³ More immediately, his main base of support was among the foreign-language federations, which the leadership sought to reduce in power. The Ruthenberg minority put forward a motion at the Fourth Convention which argued that 'the hesitancy and vacillation which the C.E.C. majority [Foster] showed on the question of Trotskyism was an

¹⁰ CEC minutes, 18 May 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270.

¹¹ CEC minutes, 7 June 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270. Both Cannon and Abern voted for Foster's motion.

¹² Browder, *No Man's Land*, 221.

¹³ See Lore to Eugene V. Debs, 3 March 1919, in Debs Collection, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, reprinted in Eugene V. Debs papers, microfilm edition, reel 2; for the CEC's censoring Lore, see minutes of CEC, 17 May 1924, in Comintern archives 515:1:270.

expression of its relation with the chief defender of Trotskyism, Comrade Lore'.¹⁴

Ruthenberg would continue to use Lore as a hammer to bash Foster and Cannon.

The Comintern's American Commission met in Moscow in late April and early May 1924, to discuss the factional situation, including Lore. In addition to leading American comrades, the commission consisted of such Comintern heavyweights as Karl Radek, Klara Zetkin, Otto Kuusinen, Matyas Rakosi and Abraham Losovsky.¹⁵ Radek declared that Lore's 'centristic tendency' represented German social democracy within the American Party, and told the Party that it 'must oppose Lore in the press' and 'must attack him'. Although Radek had, less than a year earlier, infamously eulogised the German fascist Schlageter, he still denounced Lore for advocating 'compromises with petty-bourgeois parties'.¹⁶ Zinoviev, for his part, asserted that 'Lore proves that he is in no case a Communist' and argued that the Party should publicly attack him and remove him from the CEC.

In 1925, the Comintern demanded that Lore be removed from the CEC; dutifully, the August, 1925, Fourth National Convention of the Party expelled him because he had 'embarked upon a course of open opposition and hostility to the party and to the Communist International'.¹⁷ The 'Resolution on Loreism' stated that 'Loreism is opportunism' that 'must be relentlessly combated'. Because both Lore and Trotsky had (for different reasons) opposed the Party's manoeuvres about La Follette and the 'third party' movement, the Party leadership labelled him the American variant of Trotskyism.

¹⁴ *Daily Worker*, 19 May 1925; *The Fourth National Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America*, 66, 93, 96-98. For the tying of the anti-Lore struggle to the Bolshevization of the Party, see Max Bedacht, *The Menace of Opportunism: A Contribution to the Bolshevization of the Workers (Communist) Party* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Company, [1926?]).

¹⁵ See minutes of the American Commission, 30 April 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:257.

¹⁶ 'Excerpt from the Report of the American Commission in the Presidium of the ECCI', 20 May 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:257. See Helmut Gruber, ed., *International Communism in the Era of Lenin* (New York: Fawcett, 1967), 436-37, for the history of the 'Schlageter line'.

Like all else, 'Loreism' became a factional issue. Since Foster and Cannon had depended upon Lore's vote in the divided CEC, Ruthenberg denounced them for having 'secured a majority in the national convention of the Party through the support of the right-wing sectarian elements' and having 'repeatedly refused to adopt proposals of the minority of the Central Executive Committee to expose Lore before the Party and to correct his erroneous policies'. Only 'after after the second decision of the Communist International categorically condemned Lore and directing his removal from the Central Executive Committee' did the Foster-led CEC finally struggle against Lore.¹⁸ Foster and Cannon for their part 'endorse[d] fully and pledge[d] our most active support' for the campaign for 'the liquidation of Loresim in our Party.'¹⁹

With Lore gone, the fight dealt more with the struggles in Russia. In late 1924, Foster joined Ruthenberg in sending anti-Trotsky cables to the Comintern. Cannon, an able factionalist, joined in the campaign, and along with Martin Abern, Browder, Bittelman, William F. Dunne and Foster, wrote a December 1924 *Daily Worker* article that hailed 'the powerful speeches by comrades Kamenev and Stalin against Trotskyism.' These speeches were reprinted in a pamphlet, *Bolshevism or Trotskyism?*, with an introduction by Bittelman. He argued that 'the controversy between Trotskyism and Leninism is not a new thing in the Russian Communist movement,' and added that 'Comrade Trotsky's struggles in the Russian party are a constant danger to the integrity of the Communist movement.'²⁰

¹⁷See *Daily Worker*, 19 May 1925; *The Fourth National Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America*, 66, 93, 96-98

¹⁸ Ruthenberg, 'From the Third to the Fourth Convention'.

¹⁹ *The Fourth National Convention*, 63.

²⁰ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 107-13; James P. Cannon, *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches*, 285; Alexander Bittelman, introduction to G. Zinoviev, J. Stalin and L. Kamenev, *Bolshevism or Trotskyism?* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Company, 1925), 1-2.

Each faction depended upon its own Russian ‘expert’ who scoured the latest papers from Moscow for new arguments against the other faction. Bertram Wolfe fulfilled this role for Ruthenberg’s faction—who were also helped by Pepper’s connections to the Comintern—and Bittleman did it for Foster and Cannon. Yet even Wolfe, then a central leader of the Mexican Communist Party, continued to write pro-Trotsky articles in Mexico. Where they echoed the dominant position in Moscow, the Americans attacked Trotsky as a parvenu against the ‘Old Bolsheviks’ of the troika and for his emphasis on ‘permanent revolution’ and the question of the peasantry. The concept of ‘socialism in one country’ had not yet gained any significant importance.²¹

The tentative nature of this struggle against ‘Comrade Trotsky’ can be seen by the fact that members of both factions continued to write articles favourable to Trotsky, even as the anti-Trotsky campaign increased. Throughout 1924, the *Daily Worker* published several articles by Trotsky, especially on the Red Army. In February 1925, as the anti-Trotsky storm built in Moscow, the Jimmie Higgins Bookshop, a Greenwich Village store affiliated with the Party, began publicising a new book by Trotsky. Even articles harshly critical of Trotsky, could not denounce him entirely. Thus an unfavourable review of Max Eastman’s apologia for Trotsky, *Since Lenin Died*, reprinted from the British Communist Party’s paper, attacked Trotsky’s ‘anti-discipline, anti-Party attitude’ yet concluded: ‘Still, Trotsky has rendered great services to the revolution since 1917, and there is ground for hope that he will still give up this futile policy and buckle to again.’ A *Daily Worker* editorial by Ruthenberg, while denouncing Trotsky’s arguments, also conceded that despite his erroneous course, ‘Comrade Trotsky approaches genius in many ways.’ Not only did International Publishers, the CP’s publishing company, issue Trotsky’s *Literature and*

²¹ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 128; Wolfe quoted in Daniela Spenser, *The Impossible Triangle: Mexico, Soviet Russia and the United States in the 1920s* (Durham and London:

Revolution in 1925, but Moissaye J. Olgin declared Trotsky ‘a rare master’ who was ‘intense with thought and astir with theoretical passion’. (Olgin, who had edited a volume of Trotsky’s writings in 1918, would, of course, go on to publish the classic anti-Trotskyist tract, *Trotskyism: Counter-Revolution in Disguise* in 1935.)²²

However, this feigned praise for Trotsky’s ‘genius’ and ‘greatness’ was a double-edged sword. It subtly painted Trotsky as an arrogant intellectual, who, while gifted intellectually, threatened the honest proletarian core of the Party. This same ‘anti-theoretical and consciously anti-intellectual’ perspective, wielded in the British CP, one historian has noted, ‘appeal[ed] to the more backward elements of the CPGB still at a trade union level of consciousness to contrast the proletarian common sense of Stalin to the instability and divisive methods of the middle-class intellectuals’.²³

In September, accompanying an article celebrating the seventh anniversary of the CP, *Workers Monthly* ran a cartoon that depicted a speaker at a lectern, under pictures labelled Trotsky, Marx and Lenin, with the caption ‘the Platform at the 1919 Convention of the Communist Party’.²⁴ The point is that while in this period the CP dutifully echoed the anti-Trotskyism emanating from Moscow and the troika, this was nonetheless tinged with ambiguity and respect towards the man who was, after, co-founder of the Soviet state and the Comintern as well as leader of the Red Army.

Duke University Press, 1999), 118; see also Wolfe, *Life in Two Centuries*, 307, 323.

²² For examples of Trotsky’s articles in the *Daily Worker*, see 18 October and 15 November 1924; for the Jimmie Higgins bookshop, see Elmer T. Alison to ‘Comrade Editor’, 25 February 1925, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 196, folder 6; C.M. Roebuck, ‘Since Eastman Lied’, *Workers Monthly*, June 1925, review of Max Eastman, *Since Lenin Died* (London: The Labour Publishing Company, 1925); Ruthenberg editorial is in *Daily Worker*, 8 December 1924; M.J. Olgin, ‘World’s in the Making’, *Workers Monthly*, September 1926, review of Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution* (New York: International Publishers, 1925); Leon Trotsky, *Our Revolution: Essays on working-class and International Revolution, 1904-1917*, M.J. Olgin, ed. and tr. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1918); M.J. Olgin, *Trotskyism: Counter-Revolution in Disguise* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1935).

²³ Michael Woodhouse, ‘Marxism and Stalinism in Britain, 1920-1926’, in Michael Woodhouse and Brian Pearce, *Essays on the History of British Communism* (London: New Park, 1975), 74-75; cf. Brian Pearce, ‘Early Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain’, *ibid.*, 174-76. At the same time, it must also be admitted that Trotsky was rather arrogant.

²⁴ *Workers Monthly*, September 1924.

The foreign-language federations and Bolshevisation

In 1924, the Party, even after five years, remained dominated by semi-autonomous foreign-language federations that hindered the centralisation of political leadership and blunted the Party's intersection with the anglophone working class. These federations had their origins in the foreign-language federations of the SP. Between 1904 and 1921, eleven federations joined the SP, although their relationship to the larger movement was always uneasy, and often they were affiliated directly to the national organisation instead of to the local or state branch.²⁵

In 1908, 71 per cent of SP members were native-born Americans and an additional 17.5 per cent were from Northern or Western Europe; by April 1919, 53 per cent of the SP's 108,000 dues-paying membership belonged to one or another language federation. The federations had not always been on the left-wing of the SP, although they were often closer to orthodox Marxism due to their European origins. Along with the right-wing SP leadership, future Communist Party leaders Ella Reeve 'Mother' Bloor and C.E. Ruthenberg attacked the federations for hindering a unified socialist movement. Only the Russian Revolution made the federations solidly left-wing; when the SP split in response to Bolshevism, many of these federations, especially the Eastern European ones, re-affiliated with the nascent Communist movement.²⁶

²⁵ William C. Seyler, 'The Rise and Decline of the Socialist Party in the United States' (PhD thesis, Duke University, 1952), 341-42.

²⁶ *The Worker*, 22 December 1906, quoted in Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor', 164. Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 112; Leinenweber, 'Immigration and the Decline of Internationalism in the American Working Class Movement,' 203-10 (Ruthenberg quote on 205); Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978), 21. See Adolph Germer to NEC, 24 May 1919, enclosed in Germer to Victor Berger, 26 May 1919, in Victor L. Berger papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, reel 15, for a description of the strength of the language federations in the SP; see James Oneal, A. Shiplacoff, Victor L. Berger, George H. Goebel, Dan Hogan, John M. Work, Seymour Stedman and Frederick Krafft, 'Supplementary Report of the National Executive Committee' to the Special 1919 Convention, in the Socialist Party Papers, Duke University, series I, part D, for the justification for the expulsion of the left-wing language federations in 1919.

American leftists such as Ruthenberg, Reed and Cannon only made common cause with the federations in the 1919 split because the federations were amongst the most ardent supporters of the Bolsheviks. Thus the seeds of American Bolshevism were sown by organisations that were neither American in their membership composition nor Bolshevik in their organisational methods. The foreign-language federations essentially demanded what the Yiddish Bund had demanded from the Russian Social Democracy: a monopoly over work amongst their particular ethnic or language group. However, given the realities of the North American left at the time, this was unavoidable. Yet the Comintern, and more far-sighted American leaders, recognised the danger in this situation. In 1921, Bukharin, Radek and Kuusinen noted that ‘As long as the Party does not possess at least one or two legal dailies in the English language, it is still crawling around on all fours.’²⁷ At the time, the Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian federation newspapers had as large or larger circulation than the official English-language journal. In 1922, the Finnish Federation published *three* daily papers. In 1925, there were 6,500 Finnish Communists, of 16,300 total Party members.²⁸ Only in 1924 did the Party create a regular English-language theoretical journal, by merging the *Liberator* with the TUEL’s *Labor Monthly* and *Russia Pictorial* to create the *Workers Monthly*.

In effect, the CP had to face the same question that right-wing Socialist leader Adolph Germer had posed in 1919: whether to ‘remain the organization of the Socialist movement in the United States, including the various nationalities which make up the population of the country, or...be reduced to the tail of certain Foreign

²⁷ ECCI letter, ‘Concerning the next tasks of the CP of A’, nd [1921?] in Comintern archives, 515:1:38; also printed in the CEC’s *Special Bulletin on the Party Situation*, May 1922, a copy of which is in the Comintern archives, 515:1:28.

²⁸ George Baldwin, ‘Statement of the Communist Party of American to the ECCI’, August 1921, in Comintern archives, 515:1:39; Finnish Federation information from ‘Report of Secretary [Ruthenberg]

Federations, engaged in a special form of propaganda made to suit the peculiar conditions of the countries of their origin.’²⁹ The terms of the UCP-CPA merger, discussed in a previous chapter, further institutionalised the language federations to which the majority of the membership belonged to. Thus, because of the federal nature of the Party, as well as the question of language, the Finnish Federation’s thousands of members were able, to borrow Luther’s phrase, be in but not of the Party. One study concluded that before Bolshevisation, ‘Instead of being integrated individually into the WP, the Finns maintained their foreign-language federation status unchanged except in name from the old days’ in the SP. The federation was essentially autonomous, and ignored Comintern or Party directives as it saw fit.³⁰ Since this was essentially the same relationship that the Finnish Federation had maintained towards the Socialist Party,³¹ Communist leaders worried about the Party’s stability. That the Party needed the federations’ dues in order to finance its work was also worrying.³²

This relationship was true for the other federations in the mid 1920s as well. Their insular membership often saw themselves first as members of a particular federation, and only second as members of a common Communist movement, and they resisted attempts to alter their relationship to the Party. In 1920, an underground organiser complained that the Akron German federation ‘want[s] to act for a while as

to CEC’, Fall 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:143; 1925 membership from Glazer, *The Social Background of American Communism*, 39-41.

²⁹ Adolph Germer, Report to the NEC, 24 May 1919, in Socialist Party Collection, Tamiment Library, New York University, IX:9.

³⁰ Michael Gary Kami, ‘Yhteishya—or, for the Common Good: Finnish Radicalism in the Western Great Lake Region, 1900-1940’ (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1975), 225.

³¹ Auvo Kostiainen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism*, 86.

³² Leinenweber, ‘Immigration and the Decline of Internationalism’, 205. As early as 1912, the Finnish federation had substantial financial resources. It had more than 11,000 members in 223 locals, and took in \$200,000 annually as well as owning property worth more than \$500,000 (*ibid.*, 207). In 1929, the Cooperative Central Exchange, run by Finnish Communists, sold more than \$1,750,000 to some eighty member stores who in turn sold more than \$6,000,000 worth of goods, Dyson, *Red Harvest*, 52. Cf. also, Auvo Kostiainen, ‘Radical Ideology vs. Ethnic Social Activities: The Finnish-Americans and the Communist Party of the United States, 1923-1932’, *American Studies in Scandinavia* 21 (1989), 34.

a legal, neutral organization outside of all party activities' and described its leaders as 'stand[ing] between the Schneidermans and Centrists' in the SPD.³³ Even if the federations maintained friendly relations to the Party, they did not see themselves as an integral part of it. A congratulatory motion passed by the CEC in 1924, and sent to the Lawrence, Massachusetts, German branch, captured this by noting that it 'has been in existence as a branch for the past fifty years and functioning as part of the revolutionary movement of this country in its various manifestations in the SLP, SP and Communist Party.'³⁴ Many members centred their political commitments around issues relating to their homelands instead of the work of American Party, and much of their political activities consisted of what Paul Buhle termed 'fraternal style activity at the fringes of the Party'.³⁵

In 1922, only 10 per cent of the organisation were in English-language branches. 'This is the most serious problem which we face', the CEC reported at the Second WP convention: 'It affects all our work.'³⁶ At that convention, there were 16 language federations, many of which published newspapers whose circulation not only rivalled the English-language Party press, but also was disproportionate to the federations' own size. Thus, the thirty branches of the Hungarian Federation, with only 600 members, published both a daily and a weekly paper with a combined circulation of 13,500. The Italian Federation, with the same number of members, published 9000 copies of its weekly paper, and the Greek Federation, with less than 300 members, circulated 2000 issues of its paper. The 1100 Jewish Federation

³³ J.E. Wood to 'Dear Comrade', 1 April 1920, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford University, box 195 folder 10.

³⁴ CEC minutes, 2 May 1924, in Comintern archives, 515:1:270.

³⁵ Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 129-30.

³⁶ 'Report of the CEC to the Second National Convention' December 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:141.

members, organised into 66 branches, distributed 30,000 issues of *Freiheit* daily. At this time, the Party optimistically estimated only 20,000 members in all.³⁷

These numbers highlight both the strength and weaknesses of the federation system. Through the federations the Party reached tens of thousands workers and established itself a major political force in certain immigrant milieux. 'Transnational' socialists were able to draw on experiences in the class struggle internationally, which strengthened the Party. Yet, at the same time, the federated structure hindered the Party's going beyond ethnic enclaves and reaching the English-speaking labour movement. To speak to American workers required consistent English propaganda.³⁸

In 1922, Ruthenberg bemoaned that 'our party is still almost exclusively a federation group membership', and noted that only 2000 members were not in a federation and that '[a]ll these, even, are not American members.'³⁹ The 1922 convention resolved that the Party needed 'a greater centralization of the language sections'. In fact, Cannon complained that the Party's central office didn't even 'have a complete list of all the foreign language papers' owned by or sympathetic to the Workers Party.⁴⁰ In May, 1923, the ECCI again wrote to the Party, criticising its federal composition, and called for a daily English paper to be published by the anniversary of the October Revolution.⁴¹ Another letter from the same time demanded that the Party 'supersede the language structure and...draw immigrants into the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ On the role of Russian workers in the US, see V.I. Lenin, 'Capitalism and Workers' Immigration', 29 October 1913, in *Collected Works*, vol. 19, 456. On 'transnational' radicalism, see Topp, *Men without a Country*).

³⁹ 'Report of Secretary[Ruthenberg]' to CEC, Fall 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:143.

⁴⁰ 'Resolution on Language Sections', in Comintern archives, 515:1:141; Cannon letter to 'all Federation Secretaries', 23 May 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:46.

⁴¹ ECCI letter to 'WPA and all its language federations', undated; German copy dated 19 May 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:164.

general American work', and ordered that Federations have no function other than 'agitation and propaganda'. A similar ECCI directive was sent in late July.⁴²

Although the foreign composition of the Party has been conflated with its supposed 'un-American' nature, in reality the federations were rooted in the multi-ethnic nature of American society. As far back as the nineteenth century, the US section of the First International had been organised into national groups, with the German section the strongest. Engels had observed in 1893 that because of mass immigration to the US, 'to form a single party of these [immigrant groups] requires quite unusually powerful incentives', and that even then 'the dissimilar elements of the working class fall apart again'.⁴³ The IWW, in 1906, had also experimented with foreign-language federations and locals as a way to organise immigrant workers, and these grew through 1912-13 as the IWW organised immigrant textile workers. The IWW took its name seriously, and at various times published propaganda in almost every major European language. But just as in the SP, these federations were attacked for being divisive and creating ethnic, instead of class, identities.⁴⁴ Even the post-split SP depended on Eastern European immigrants for funding, especially the Yiddish *Vorwaerts* and the needle trades union.⁴⁵

The strange career of Finnish-American Communism

The Finnish section alone comprised as much as 40 per cent of the total Party membership, and had its own journals, leaders and distinctive political culture, to which its members were loyal. There was even a term, 'hall socialism', to describe the loyalty that Finnish Communists felt to their federation. In Superior, Wisconsin,

⁴² ECCI letter, 'only for use of C.E.C., not to be published', nd [early 1923]; ECCI letter to CEC of WPA, 23 July 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:64.

⁴³ Friedrich Engels to Friedrich Sorge, 2 December 1893, reprinted in *Science and Society* 2:3 (1938)

⁴⁴ See McEnroe, 'The Industrial Workers of the World', 425-28; Leland Walter Robinson, 'Social Movement Organizations in Decline', 39-42.

⁴⁵ See Seth Lipsky, 'Did Jay Lovestone Win the Cold War?', *Forward*, 23 April 1999.

according to one official Party report, 'the local Finnish Branch with 150 members is the largest single branch in the local, they maintain headquarters and have an orchestra, dramatic club, male choir, brass band and athletic club', as well as a daily newspaper. In contrast, the English-language branch had only 30 members. Finnish Communists built not only strong cultural apparatuses, but also a multi-million dollar co-operative agricultural empire among Finnish farmers.⁴⁶

For a sense of perspective, it is useful to recall that in 1920, some 250,000 people in the continental US had been born in Finland or had at least one Finnish-born parent, out of a total population of almost 106 million people. In contrast, there were 1.7 million German- and 1.6 million Italian-born residents. And, while more than ten million Americans were defined as 'Negro' in the census, the Party's black membership was extremely small.⁴⁷ The influence of Communism amongst Finnish-Americans was entirely disproportionate to the influence of either Finns or Communists in American society as a whole; in 1923, according to one historian, more than 5 per cent of Finns in the US were members of the Workers Party, and an

⁴⁶ 'Report on Administrative Council Meeting [of WPA] of 21 April', 25 April 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:146; on the agricultural strength of Finnish American organisation, see Dyson, *Red Harvest*, chapter 3. As late as the late 1990s, a survey of retired Finns in the Northern Midwest found that 78 per cent considered 'Finish American buildings' an important symbol of Finnish identity, slightly higher than those who considered the church important. Cf. Chris Susag, 'Ethnic Symbols: Their Role in Maintaining and Constructing Finnish American Identity', *Siirtolaisuus/Migration*, 4 (1998). For a description of the New York City Finnish labour hall, built at a cost of \$300,000, see Arne Halonen, 'The Role of Finnish-Americans in the Political Labor Movement' (MA dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1945), 103-105. For a description of the social and cultural apparatus of the Finnish Clubs, see *ibid.*, 118-28.

⁴⁷ The total US population is from the *Fourteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: General Printing Office, 1921), I, 13; national figures are from *ibid.*, II, 690-91, 893. Other Eastern European nationalities were more common: 1.4 million Russian- and 1.1 Polish-born residents, and some 3.75 million people born in Russia or with at least one Russian-born parent. According to the *Fifteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: General Printing Office, 1933), II, 228, 270, the Finnish population was essentially unchanged in 1930. However, from the point of view of Finland, emigration to North America was substantial. From the mid-nineteenth century to today, estimates Dr Olavi Koivukanagas, the director of the Institute for Migration at the University of Turku, some 1.2 million Finns left Finland, largely to Sweden or the US and 'if they had not left the population of Finland today would be 7 million instead of 5.1' million. See Olavi Koivukanagas, 'Finns Abroad', essay on the Institute of Migration's web page, <<http://www.utu.fi/erill/instmigr/art/koivuk.htm>>, viewed 26 February 2002.

equal number could be counted as Communist sympathisers.⁴⁸ While Jews (and, occasionally, West Indians) are often considered the most radical of immigrant groups, in fact the Finns had a much higher proportion of radicalism; some 25 to 30 per cent of Finnish immigrants, according to one study, could be considered radical at this time, active in Socialist, IWW, Communist and Co-operative movements.⁴⁹ But because Finns tended to live in rural areas, or to keep to themselves in ethnic neighbourhoods, their radicalism was less visible to non-Finns.

Studies have indicated that this disproportionate Finnish-American radicalism stemmed from a combination of Finnish and American politics and society. At the time of massive Finnish immigration in the first quarter of the twentieth century, Finnish socialism was developing and many migrants—including leading socialists—brought their radical politics into North America. Thus, earlier immigrants, who left Finland before socialism became strong there, tended to be less radical in their new homeland than their later counterparts. Similarly, immigrants from more left-wing regions of Finland tended to be more radical in North America as well. A related explanation is that the Finland from which earlier—i.e. religious, non-radical—Finns emigrated was marked by pre-capitalist agricultural relations whilst later Finns emigrated from a capitalist Finland and were therefore more prone to labour radicalism. At the same time, the exploitation, brutality and misery at the heart of industrial capitalism radicalised many immigrant Finns. Compounding this was that Finns—because of their unique language, their culture and where they migrated to—tended to stick together and isolated themselves from American society as a whole.

⁴⁸ Kostiainen, *Forging of Finnish-American Communism*, 142-45.

⁴⁹ Karni, 'Yhteishya', 19. One rather improbable study even went so far as to argue that there was a direct correlation between Finnish immigration and an area's radicalism, and that the lack of Finnish immigration to the American South was responsible for the weakness of the left there. See Rodney Stark and Kevin J. Christiano, 'Support for the American Left, 1920-24: The Opiate Thesis Reconsidered', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31.1(March 1992), 62-76.

Consequently, Finnish institutions of all types—from the local church to the cooperative—played an important role in immigrant societies. The Socialist Federation for Finnish immigrants fulfilled many of the same roles for its supporters as did religion for more conservative ‘Church Finns’: not only did it provide a coherent world view, but also recreation, camaraderie, diversion, and education. Finnish-American cultural institutions, whether in the service of religion or socialism, helped cohere a Finnish American identity. Thus leftist Finnish newspapers not only contained political analysis, but community news.⁵⁰

For Finns, political radicalism was integrally connected with ethnic identity to an extent only matched by certain Jewish socialists. Like Jews, who also were represented in large numbers amongst American socialists, Communists and trade-unionists, Finns found in socialism a method of maintaining their ethnic identity against both a hostile American society and right-wing elements within Finnish culture, especially when the Finnish Civil War exacerbated divisions between ‘Red’ and ‘White’ Finns. However, unlike Jewish immigrants, whose leftist *Yidishkeyt* was a method of assimilation into the American working class, leftist Finns remained much more insular, and also used their radicalism as a dike against American culture.

⁵⁰ Reino Kero, ‘The Social Origin of the Left-Wing Radicals and “Church Finns” among Finnish Immigrants in North America’, *Publications of the Institute of General History, University of Turku* 7, (1975), 55-62; idem., ‘The Roots of Finnish-American Left-Wing Radicalism’, *ibid*, 5 (1973), 45-55; P.G. Hummasti, ‘Ethnicity and Radicalism: The Finns of Astoria and the *Toveri*, 1890-1930’, *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 97 (Winter 1996), 362-93; Al Gedicks, ‘The Social Origin of Radicalism Among Finnish Immigrants in Midwest Mining Communities’, *Review of Radical Political Economy* 8:3 (Fall 1976), 28-29; Richard Hudelson, ‘Duluth’s Scandinavian Left, 1880-1950’, *Swedish American Historical Quarterly* 53:3 (July 2002); idem., ‘The Scandinavian Local of the Duluth Socialist Party, 1910-1924’, *Swedish American Historical Quarterly* 44:4 (October 1993); idem., ‘The Ideological and Cultural Roots of Karelian Fever in the Western Lake Superior Region’ available on <frontpage.uwsuper.edu/hudelson/karelianfever.htm>, viewed 9 February 2003. For a short, if somewhat dated, survey of the Finnish immigrant experience, see John I. Kolehmainen, *The Finns in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968).

This also explains why radicalism was not so widespread amongst assimilated Finnish-Americans as amongst their Jewish counterparts.⁵¹

A resolution adopted by the Organisation Department of the Comintern in 1927 about the Bolshevisation of the American Party described the pre-Bolshevised Party as '19 separate federations, each of which constituted, so to speak, a party of its own'. In the Summer of 1923, Otto Kuusinen, a very senior ECCI leader as well as Finnish Communist, wrote specifically to the Finnish Federation urging them to use their considerable resources—especially their co-operative organisations and their printing presses—to help the Party as a whole. He admonished the Finns, 'that your membership from a agitational standpoint does not amount to much', despite the strength of their organisation, because of the Finns' insularity and lack of English-capacity.⁵²

Working-class organisations in other societies with large-scale immigrant working classes had similar situations. The Communist Party of Canada had a *greater* percentage of its membership in such federations. As late as 1929, some 95 per cent of the CPC membership belonged to Eastern European language groups, primarily Yiddish, Ukrainian and Finnish. There as well, the relationship of the anglophone central party leadership to the language federations proved to be tricky and, again, the Finnish federation was loathe to surrender control of its cultural and political apparatus. (In March 1930, the situation was so dire that the ECCI sent Kullervo Manner, former head of the Finnish Communist Party, to investigate the troubles.)⁵³

⁵¹ For an interesting comparison of Finns and Jews in the Communist movement, see Mishler, 'Red Finns, Red Jews', 147-49. On the role of Communism in the 'Americanisation' of Jewish immigrants see Buhle, 'Jews and American Communism; for a view that argues that Communism was a way to construct a distinctive Jewish identity, see Bat-Ami Zucker, 'The "Jewish Bureau": The Organization of American Jewish Communists in the 1930s', in Michael J. Cohen, ed., *Modern History* (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan, 1991), 135.

⁵² O.W. Kuusinen to Finnish Federation of WPA, 3 August 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:164.

⁵³ *International Press Correspondence*, 9 August 1929, cited in Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 35; Markotich, 'International Communism and the Communist Party of Canada', 63,72, 75,

Further South, the Communist Party in Argentina—another country with a large European-derived working class—had a largely Eastern European membership and established nineteen language groups.⁵⁴ To a lesser degree, Communists in Brazil and Uruguay also organised by language or issued propaganda in foreign languages, most often Italian, Yiddish or German. The French Party, between 1924 and 1945, organised fifteen language groups. In the mid-1960s, the Israeli Communist Party published papers in Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, Bulgarian, Romanian and Hungarian.⁵⁵ In these countries, federations were a response to the immigrant composition of the working class and the labour movement. The case of South Africa starkly illustrates the danger that a large immigrant membership could blunt Communists' understanding of social reality: in the early 1920s, the CPSA consisted largely of Jewish émigrés and while it 'had only one black member and did not circulate its publications in African translation, it did publish early leaflets and hold some street meetings in Yiddish'.⁵⁶

108-113. See also Auvo Kostiainen, 'Contacts Between the Finnish Labour Movement in the United States and Canada', in Michael G. Karni, ed., *Finnish Diaspora* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1981), vol. 1, 33-48. Quebecois and other francophone members were also organised into separate federations. In fact, the Montreal CPC faced if anything a more difficult task than their US counterparts: not only was a large basis of Communist support in Quebec Eastern European immigrants, usually Jewish, but the Party had the additional handicap of being isolated from the Quebecois working class by the paucity of francophone members. (See Bernard Dansereau, 'Le Mouvement Ouvrier Montrealais, 1918-1929' [PhD thesis, Université de Montréal, 2000], 260, 351-57.)

⁵⁴ Jorge Abelardo Ramos, *Breve Historia de las Izquierdas en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Claridad, 1990), 45-46; Pedro Roma, 'Informe del Comité Ejecutivo del Partido Comunista de Argentina', November 1925, in Emilio J. Corbiere, *Orígenes del Comunismo Argentino: El Partido Socialista Internacional* (Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1984), 131. The latter cited Lithuanian, Armenian, Yugoslav as well as Italian and Jewish groups. It is unclear the role that these 'agrupaciones de propaganda' played in the CPA as a whole.

⁵⁵ For information on this dimension of Latin American Communism, I am grateful for the assistance of Christine Ehrick, University of Louisville; Adhemar Lourenço da Silva Jr, Universidade Federal de Pelotas; Silvia Schenkolewski Kroll, Bar-Ilan University. Information on the Israeli Party is from Hyman Lumer, *Which Way Israel? An Eye-Witness Account by a Marxist Educator* (New York: New Outlook Publishers, 1966), 3. On France, see Annette Aronwicz, 'Haim Sloves, the Jewish People, and a Jewish Communist's Allegiances', *Jewish Social Studies* 9:1 (Fall 2002), 97.

⁵⁶ Mark Israel and Simon Adams, '“That Spells Trouble”: Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa', *Journal of South African Studies* 26:1 (March 2000).

A 1924 pamphlet on the membership of the Workers Party noted that even by October 1923 the English-speaking membership had comprised 'at least' 50 per cent of the total membership, but even many of these members were organised in the many foreign-language federations. Jack Stachel recalled later that 'so-called English branches included many elements that could hardly speak English.' And this was an improvement from the Autumn of 1922, when only 318 of the Party's 12,394 members were not affiliated to a language federation. Even leaving aside the question of language, so long as the Party was organised along ethnic and neighbourhood lines, its work in the trade-unions was hindered since different members belonging to different federations yet working in the same factory or trade union could not co-ordinate political activity. As one former leader of the Finnish Federation recalled, 'it seemed an impossible task to convince Finnish communists to leave their Finnish halls in convenient meeting places and go to meet in inconvenient meeting places [with] other nationals and use English [that] they did not fully understand [and] in which they were unable to express themselves.'⁵⁷ On a larger scale, since many foreign-language newspapers had a larger (and more loyal) readership than the official English-language central Party organs, the ability of the Party to centralise its activities was hindered. Many Communists who wanted to 'Americanise' the Party would have sympathised with the ECCI's statement that 'The Language federations constituting the Party are a necessity and yet are a hindrance to unification of the membership.'⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John Wiita [Henry Puro], 'The Crisis in the Finnish American Left, 1925-1930', 7, in John Wiita Papers, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, box 1, folder 2.

⁵⁸ *The Second Year of the Workers Party of America* (Chicago: Literature Department of the WPA, 1924), 29-30, 58. Stachel quoted in Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 22. In March 1923, the Party representative to the Comintern complained of the effect of the federated membership upon entering the unions, in I. Amter, 'Report to Comintern', 7 March 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:174.

In the summer of 1925, the ECCI wrote yet another letter to the leadership of the American Party. The Party's weakness 'lies in the defects of the organisational structure of the Workers Party, which are greater than in any other party'. The Party had 'no single guiding Party centre', decisions were made on a federated basis and 'each of its 17 national sections represents almost a separate and independent Party within the Workers Party, enjoying a large degree of independence in isolation to the leading organ, the Central Committee.' However undesirable this situation was, the ECCI stressed, it could not be reversed merely by administrative fiat. The ECCI suggested several practical measures. First, instead of national leadership bodies, there should be pan-national local and district committees not based on proportional representation; dues, instead of going through the national federations and then to the Party, must be collected by the Party and then distributed to the federations; the Party must centralise control of the various papers; membership should be based on factory nuclei and neighbourhood groups instead of language federations. In this way the foreign-language membership could begin to be integrated into the Party as a whole. 'To break...one organisation without creating something in its place would be EXTREMELY DANGEROUS', the letter argued.⁵⁹ This, however, was not how reorganisation proceeded. In part this is because of the fierce resistance by the federations themselves, and also in part because how the reorganisation of the Party intersected factionalism.

Reorganisation also targeted political dissent and opposition, as born out in the fight against Lore, who was able to gain sympathy from his own German-language comrades as well as the Finnish Federation. The Fourth Convention's resolution on Bolshevisation made this connection explicit: 'the Federation form of organization is

⁵⁹ Letter from ECCI to Central Executive Committee of the Workers Party, not dated, date stamped 20 June 1925, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 208, folder 18.

a most fertile soil for factionalism.’ In the mid-1920s, Henry Puro recalled, both factions courted the Finnish leaders in order to gain power in the Party. In February 1925, leaders of the Ruthenberg faction complained to the Comintern that Foster’s supporters in the Russian Federation were unfairly manoeuvring against them.⁶⁰ The switch from a federation-based membership to a factory nuclei membership, in which members who worked together formed a party unit, regardless of whether they could speak to one another, while never so successful as desired, was more than an attempt to focus the Party’s energy on the working class. It also represented an attempt to atomise and disperse the membership, blunting the growth of any political opposition.⁶¹

Reporting to the American Commission of the ECCI after the beginning of Bolshevisaton, Ruthenberg declared that ‘naturally, this reorganization was a great shock to the language federations and particularly so the Finnish section.’⁶² Arne Halonen, a former leader of the Finnish Federation who opposed Bolshevisaton, recalled that, ‘as a rule, the Finnish members scorned the ridiculous ultra-revolutionary doctrine of the Comintern.’ Gitlow, who was responsible for Bolshevizing the New York local, recounted that ‘Bolshevization meant a death-blow to branches and [language] federations.... By securing the Bolshevization task, our faction had the opportunity to build its support among the membership anew from ground up.’ Thus, ironically, if it ended language- or ethnic-based dissent,

⁶⁰ Max Bedacht, Benjamin Gitlow, J. Louis Engdahl to ECCI, 23 February 1925, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 209, folder 1.

⁶¹ On the shop nuclei, see Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 192-93.

⁶² Browder, *No Man’s Land*, 209; *The Fourth Convention*, 87; ‘Resolution on the Results of the Reorganization of the Workers (Communist) Party of American’, adopted at the Seventh Comintern Plenum, *Party Organizer* (Chicago), April 1927; Wiita, ‘Crisis in the Finnish-American Left’, 6; Transcription of the American Commission of the ECCI, 16 February 1926, in Prometheus Research Library. On the Finnish section, see Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 113.

Bolshevisation itself, in Gitlow's words, 'became a factional football'.⁶³ The extent of this is illustrated by an internal Ruthenberg faction letter. Surveying the seventeen federations in 1925, the letter indicates that reorganisation would hit hardest those who supported Foster. Thus in the Finnish Federation, there was a 'decisive majority against us' so it 'will loose almost 50% thru reorg'; yet the Hungarian federation was 'solidly for us....[and] will not lose many thru reorganization'. Similarly the Czechoslovak and Slovak federations had sided with Foster and would lose many members, but the Lithuanian and South Slav federations were largely pro-Ruthenberg strongholds and would be minimally damaged.⁶⁴

The 'Americanisation' of the Party through the dismantling of the language groups met mixed success. While membership turnover was a constant problem, the decline after the 'Americanisation' was drastic. In September 1925 there were 14,037 members, but only 7,215 in October.⁶⁵ Most of the attrition came from Finns, of whom only 1500 individuals out of the Federation's some 6000 members re-enrolled in the Party.⁶⁶ Over the next two years, some three-fourths of the Party's Finnish members quit. By 1931, many leading Finnish cadre had quit or been purged.⁶⁷ Paul Buhle described this process:

Half the Finnish membership disappeared.... Other, smaller groups fared even worse. Hardly a fraction of the syndicalist-minded Italian group survived. Districts rich in mass industry but poor in English-language Communists practically ceased to function, some never to return to their strength of the mid-1920s. In a few cases (notably the aging German group), there was a mass exodus from the Party with former quasi-Party institutions intact. In general,

⁶³ Halonen, 'Role of Finnish-Americans in the Political Labor Movement', 99; Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess*, 229-30.

⁶⁴ [Jay Lovestone?] to John [Pepper], 8 October 1925, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution archives, Stanford University, box 197, folder 1.

⁶⁵ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 187.

⁶⁶ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 22; J.P. Morray, *Project Kuzbas: American Workers in Siberia, 1921-1926* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 39; Ahola, *Finnish-Americans and International Communism*, 34, 81. However, it is also important to note that this membership loss may be exaggerated by a concurrent change in the way membership dues to eliminate the 'dual stamp' process by which both husband and wife would jointly be members.

⁶⁷ Kostiainen, 'Radical Ideology vs. Ethnic Social Activities', 32-33.

individuals left one-by-one, tired of the trouble and disillusioned with the internal life of the left.⁶⁸

Throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, much of the Finnish-American community was torn asunder by internecine fighting over the ability of the Communist leadership to control the resources of the Finnish membership. Much of the once-strong pro-Communist membership of the Central Co-operative Exchange (CCE) deserted the Party when the leadership insisted that the CCE make available its substantial financial resources to the Party. When the CCE leadership, including many Party members, refused, the Party and the CCE began attacking each other. When the dust settled, they found themselves divorced and not on speaking terms. Although the CCE continued, it did so not as a part of an organised political movement.⁶⁹ The Comintern gave enough weight to the Finnish question within the American Party that it dispatched Aino Kuusinen—Otto Kuusinen's—to the US to sort through the wreckage.⁷⁰

Some language groups declined because tens of thousands of ethnic radicals—especially Russians and other Eastern Europeans—returned to their homelands after the Revolution, either through free will or deportation.⁷¹ An American delegate to the Second Comintern Congress may have been exaggerating, but nonetheless captured something in an article he wrote at the time: 'At the present moment a whole million of former Russians would like to come back to Russia; of every 100 Russian workmen in America, 99 wish to return to Russia.'⁷² The CP several times had to pass resolutions condemning unauthorised return, although immigrants with skills were

⁶⁸ Buhle, *Marxism in the USA*, 135.

⁶⁹ See Dyson, *Red Harvest*, chapter 3; Halonen, 'The Role of Finnish-Americans', 111-18; Wiita, 'Crisis in the Finnish-American Left'.

⁷⁰ See Aino Kuusinen, *The Rings of Destiny: Inside Soviet Russia from Lenin to Brezhnev* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1974), 82-102. For a broader view of Aino Kuusinen's role in the Party in the early 1930s, see Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, 176-80.

⁷¹ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 24.

often encouraged to return. Between five and ten thousand North American Finns, encouraged by the American and Canadian Parties, as well as the Soviet government, emigrated to Soviet Russia, especially the Karelian region on the Finnish-Russian frontier, to help develop the Soviet timber industry.⁷³ In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Party also helped co-ordinate Jewish emigration from North America to the eastern Soviet Union to form a Jewish socialist republic in Birobidzhan.⁷⁴

However, many ethnic ex-Communists stayed in the periphery of the Party, usually through the International Workers Order (IWO), a fraternal organisation that began as a left-wing split from the social-democratic Arbeter Ring (Workmen's Circle) Yiddish fraternal society. Although the IWO was led by Communists—including, for many years, Max Bedacht—it was not a typical 'front' group. Amongst its roles was providing low-cost insurance and benefit schemes to workers, including blacks. Like the early CP, however, the IWO was organised into ethnic fraternities, and the immediate precursor to the IWO, the Jewish People's Fraternal Organization, was formed in 1930 during the 'Bolshevisation' campaign. A former Communist leader captured the essence of the IWO when he labelled its members 'those sympathizers who still clung to ethnic allegiances'.⁷⁵ Until New York State revoked

⁷² *Petrograd Pravda*, 18 July 1920, in the US State Department's *The 2nd Congress of the Communist International*, 145.

⁷³ See Ahola, *Finnish-Americans and International Communism*, 175-80; Hudelson, 'Roots of Karelian Fever'; Reino Kero, 'Emigration of Finns from North America to Soviet Karelia in the Early 1930s', in Micheal G Karni, Matti E. Kaups and Douglas J. Ollila, Jr., eds., *The Finnish Experience in the Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives* (Vannala: Institute for Migration, 1975), 212-221. Many of these Finns, however, were to fall afoul of the Stalinist purges in the late 1930s. See Klehr, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, 227-43; Arvo Touminen, *The Bells of the Kremlin: An Experience in Communism* (Hannover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 1983), 70-71.

⁷⁴ Henry Srebrnik, 'Red Star Over Birobidzhan: Canadian Jewish Communists and the "Jewish Autonomous Region" in the Soviet Union', *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 129-47.

⁷⁵ See Zucker, 'The "Jewish Bureau"' for a discussion of the maintenance of a distinct Jewish Communist identity, especially in the 1930s. The case for the IWO's being a repository for Communists disgruntled by 'Bolshevisation' is made by Mishler, *Raising Reds*, 65 and passim. A more extensive study of the IWO's later years by Arthur J. Sabin, *Red Scare in Court: New York versus the International Workers Order* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), does not cover this aspect of the IWO in its first chapter examination of the origins of the IWO. Quote from Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis*, 25.

its charter to sell insurance during the McCarthy period, the IWO was quite successful: its membership had increased from 3300 in 1933 to some 50,000 in 1950, and its members helped finance the publication of the *Daily Worker* and the Yiddish *Freiheit*.⁷⁶

Even the thousands of ex-Communist Finns did not leave the Party's orbit altogether. In 1925, to safeguard their property from Party control, dissident Finns established the Finnish Workers Federation (FWF) as a separate entity. Open to Party members as well as non-members, the Federation, however, offered a refuge for radical Finns who did not, or could not integrate into the American Party.⁷⁷ Henry Puro convinced the Party leadership that since less than a third of members of the former Finnish Federation joined the reorganised Party, the FWF would offer a home for 'the others [who] were still close to the Party and could be kept as Party sympathizers, given leadership by their own central organization'. The FWF was, one author maintained, 'a mass organization of the Communist Party in the truest sense' since it combined Communist and non-Communist members under the general political direction of the Party. The Federation, in fact, affiliated with the IWO in 1941.⁷⁸

Yet, even in the newly 'Americanised' Party, shorn of the language-federations, all was not always well from the point of view of the leadership. Once again, in 1927, the national leadership, needing to secure money for the *Daily Worker*,

⁷⁶ Arthur Liebman, 'The Ties That Bind', 331-32. This success was one reason that New York State attacked the IWO. Cf. Thomas J.E. Walker, 'The International Workers Order: A Unique Fraternal Body' (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1982), 16-27; Roger Keeran, 'National Groups and the Popular Front: The Case of the International Workers Order', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14:3 (1995), 23-25.

⁷⁷ Karni, 'Yhteishya', 239; Kostianen, 'Radical Ideology vs. Ethnic Social Activities', 33; Halonen, 'Role of Finnish-Americans in the Political Labor Movement', 101.

⁷⁸ Wiita, 'Crisis in the Finnish-American Left', 10; Ahola, *Finnish-Americans and International Communism*, 230-32.

attempted to tap into the language federations' coffers.⁷⁹ Given the realities of the American working class in the 1920s, nothing the Party could have done would have made the problem disappear. Jack Stachel, admitted in 1927 that since immigrants made up the bulk of the working class, and since 'the great bulk of them must still be reached thru the propaganda in their own language, and since there is lacking trade union organization in most of these industries they are to be found in the different fraternal organizations.' Yet, Stachel complained, these organisations 'must pay more attention to America' instead of emphasising the 'home country'.⁸⁰

In the spring of 1928, the *Party Organizer* outlined a campaign to increase readership of the *Daily Worker* amongst Party members because 'the greatest majority of our Party members are still filled with the Federation ideology and are supporters of their language papers, while reading the *Daily Worker* is only a secondary matter.' In one New York City sub-district, the article detailed, only 35 per cent of members read the *Daily Worker*, while 70 per cent read the *Freiheit*. The next month, the *Party Organizer* complained that 'there still are Language Federations in our Party' but 'they only carry other names'. In 1930, the same journal again complained that 'in reality most of our language comrades work isolated—more or less—from the general Party work'. 'Their main activity,' the author continued, 'is concentrated in the language field.'⁸¹ Throughout the late 1920s, the Party held English classes for its members.⁸²

The Party, then, remained overwhelmingly a Party of immigrants. In 1929, the membership of five representative districts was 88 per cent foreign-born. In 1935, the

⁷⁹ PC minutes, 22 March 1927, in PRL collection.

⁸⁰ Jack Stachel, 'How Communists Work Among Foreign Born', *Daily Worker*, 2 February 1927.

⁸¹ *Party Organizer*, March/April 1928; May/June 1928; March 1930.

⁸² See for example, the *Daily Worker*, 21 January 1929, for an description of these classes.

Party membership was still more than 60 per cent foreign-born.⁸³ However, how much of this relative decline was due to Bolshevisation and how much was merely a reflection of the changing reality of the American working class is unclear. New immigration law of 1924, which severely restricted immigration, contributed to the diminishing importance of immigrants in the Party, as new recruits through the 1930s often tended to be the assimilated sons and daughters of immigrants. But as late as 2000, the Party was led by a Finn, Arvo Holberg (Gus Hall). But this must be taken in perspective, since a large portion of the American population, especially workers, consists of immigrant or first-generation Americans. Thus even Klehr admitted that ‘As a party of immigrants, the CPUSA was not necessarily unrepresentative of the American working class.’⁸⁴ In fact, when the Party attempted to organise largely immigrant workforces, the language federations proved helpful. For example, Passaic, New Jersey, was almost entirely foreign-born when Albert Weisbord organised a spectacular textile-workers strike there in 1926; he credited the federations for facilitating the Party’s work there and their papers as ‘a power in educating and solidifying the masses’.⁸⁵

Factional gang warfare

Factionalism continued unabated throughout the 1920s, although now the line-ups became more hardened. Increasingly, Cannon and Foster opposed Pepper, Lovestone and Ruthenberg. This factional line-up formed during the dispute about the Farmer-Labor and La Follette movements, which is explained in the previous chapter.

However, by 1925 and 1926, the original political differences underlying the factions

⁸³ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 22 (1928 figures); Alperin, ‘Organization in the Communist Party, U.S.A., 64 (1935 figures; in 1936, the foreign-born comprised only 52.2 per cent of the membership).

⁸⁴ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 35.

⁸⁵ Vera Buch Weisbord, *A Radical Life* (Bloomington and London: University of Indiana Press, 1977), 101, 135. Albert Weisbord quoted in Paul L. Murphy, ed., *The Passaic Textile Strike of 1926* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1974), 143.

had largely been displaced by the desire of each group to gain control of the Party. ‘Upon what principled platforms these groups rested’, Vera Buch Weisbord remembered, ‘never became clear in the Harlem English branch.’⁸⁶ Cannon and Foster accepted the Comintern’s labour party policy while Ruthenberg accepted Foster’s trade-union policy. Important political motions passed unanimously, and factional warfare made no sense. When Wolfe returned from Mexico, he asked each factional leader to explain the root of the problem. He recalled that ‘each explanation, filled with factional bitterness, left me more bewildered than before,’ although this did not stop him from becoming a leader in Lovestone’s faction. Cannon later wrote that despite this unclarity, ‘The factional struggle raged more fiercely than ever before in the history of the party—over the issue of party control.’ For his part, Browder wrote that, ‘As the unity resolution grew in the “parity commission”, the distance between the factions widened in the Party districts and branches. Although the commission produced a completely “unanimous” resolution, the Party membership was completely divided into hostile factions in preparation for a split—with not a single issue defined.’⁸⁷

Browder recalled that ‘over-all political confusion had the consequence to engulf’ any achievement the Party made in this period, and factionalism made Party work a Sisyphean task.⁸⁸ In such a situation, Comintern intervention could have been of great help to focus the Party on its political tasks instead of cannibalistic factionalism. Politics, and not ‘party control’, should have been placed in command—and only the Comintern had the authority to do this. Yet, while the Comintern had no compunction in intervening in the internal life of the Party, it did so not on this basis of political clarity, but to play one faction against another. This reflected the

⁸⁶ Weisbord, *A Radical Life*, 95.

⁸⁷ Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries*, 378; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 134; Browder, *No Man’s Land*, 228.

degeneration—Stalinisation—of the Comintern itself. Increasingly, the Comintern sought not to support a leadership with the authority and programme to guide the Party, but instead wanted a pliant bureaucracy responsive to its changing tactics. Political dissent and independence were rooted out, while within the Party a conservative, pro-Stalin leadership emerged.

In 1925, both the Cannon-Foster group and the Pepper-Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction sent delegates to the Fifth Comintern Congress. The Comintern gave political support to Ruthenberg, labelling La Follette a petty-bourgeois ‘standard bearer against big business’.⁸⁹ Yet, organisationally the Comintern decreed that ‘the new Central Committee is to be so elected at the Party Conference so that the Foster group obtains a majority and the Ruthenberg group is represented proportionately by at least one-third.’⁹⁰

Understandably, Ruthenberg was not satisfied with this configuration. Zinoviev, weakened by Stalin’s ascendancy and having more pressing concerns than the American Party, did not force the issue. The Comintern ordered a ‘firm consolidation of communist forces’, ordered that factionalism ‘must now absolutely cease’ and ‘demand[ed] the unconditional cessation of Party warfare’. It ordered a National Conference ‘at an early date’ and in the interim created a ‘parity commission’ which was divided evenly between minority and majority supporters, ‘under the chairmanship of a neutral comrade’. This effectively dissolved the Party leadership and handed power to the ‘neutral comrade’, one Gusev, an Old Bolshevik and stalwart supporter of Stalin. Cannon, a member of the parity commission, recalled that ‘the elected Central Committee and its Political Bureau, as such, virtually ceased to exist.’ Instead, ‘Questions of policy, organization, convention preparations and

⁸⁸ Browder, *No Man’s Land*, 220.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

everything else were decided by the Parity Commission, with Gusev casting the deciding vote in case of any disagreements'.⁹¹

The Fourth National Convention and the Parity Cable

The Party held its Fourth National Convention in Chicago in late August 1925. With little political differences between the factions, the delegates unanimously passed a general task and perspective document, 'The Present Situation and Immediate Tasks of the Party' along with specific resolutions dealing with work among women, unions and blacks. Nonetheless, the internecine factional strife continued unabated. The Cleveland and Philadelphia locals effectively had already split into two different organisations. At the *Daily Worker* editorial offices, Max Shachtman and other Cannon and Foster supporters had barricaded themselves in their offices, refusing entry to Ruthenberg supporters, including J. Louis Engdahl, the co-editor of the paper.⁹²

Because Foster and Cannon had almost twice as many delegates as Ruthenberg, they maintained control of the Party. Then the Comintern intervened and sent a cable on 27 August declaring that 'it has finally become clear that the Ruthenberg Group is more loyal to decisions of the Communist International and stands closer to its views' and that 'Foster group employs excessively mechanical and ultrafactional methods'. The cable demanded that Ruthenberg and Lovestone supporters comprise no less than 40 per cent of the CEC; Ruthenberg remain Party secretary; Lovestone be co-opted onto the CEC; the Foster-Cannon majority not target the minority for 'removals, replacements, dispersions'; Ruthenberg's faction retain

⁹⁰ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 138; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 132.

⁹¹ *Daily Worker*, 19 May 1925; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 133-34.

⁹² *The Fourth National Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America* (Chicago: Literature Department, Daily Worker Publishing Company, 1925), 72-86; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 143.

co-editorship of the Party's central organ; and mandated the 'maximum application of parity on all executive organs of the Party'. The cable ended on an ominous note:

If majority does not accept these demands then declare that, in view of circumstances of elections, unclear who has real majority and that methods of majority raise danger of split and therefore Communist International proposes that now only a temporary Parity Central Executive Committee be elected with neutral chairman to call new convention after passions have died down. Those who refuse to submit will be expelled.⁹³

In his autobiography, Wolfe recalled that after Gusev showed the Party the cable, 'Gusev sat at the front of the table among [Ruthenberg] caucus leaders as if he were one of them and a member of our group.... He had always seemed more at home in our caucus anyway.'⁹⁴

The Cannon-Foster alliance split over how to respond. Foster argued that the majority should refuse to accept the cable, hand the minority complete control of the CEC and refuse to participate in it. That is to say, he wanted to boycott the Party leadership and appeal directly to the Comintern. Cannon, a self-described 'convinced "Cominternist", wanted to accept the cable and divide the CEC evenly between the factions.'⁹⁵

In the end, the Parity Commission ordered 'that the Central Executive Committee be constructed on the basis of an equal number from each group, with a neutral chairman.' This merely codified the power of the Comintern as a factional player in its own right, or as the Parity Commission spelt it out: 'the representative of the C.I. shall be given power by a resolution of the convention to participate in the

⁹³ The telegram is in the Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 196, folder 11; cf. C.E. Ruthenberg, 'From the Third through the Fourth Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party', *Workers Monthly*, October 1925.

⁹⁴ Wolfe, *A Life in Two Centuries*, 384.

⁹⁵ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 136; see Cannon's speech to the second session of the American Commission of the ECCI, 18 February 1926, 21-24, for his description of the extent of this split within the Cannon-Foster faction.

C.E.C. meeting and to cast a deciding vote and act as chairman.’⁹⁶ At the meeting of the reconstituted CEC, Gusev explained his support to Ruthenberg:

Of course we now have a parity C.E.C. but it is not exactly a parity C.E.C. With the decision of the Communist International on the question of the groups in the American Party there goes parallel instructions to the C.I. representatives to support that group which was the former minority. If the C.I. continues this policy, that will always be the case, that is, the C.I. representative will be supporting that group and therefore altho [sic] we have a nearly parity C.E.C., we have a majority and a minority in the C.E.C.⁹⁷

Although the factionalism had indigenous roots, the Comintern encouraged factional control and not political programme to be the centre of factional disputes, made control dependent on Comintern support, and then doled out support not based on politics but on organisational questions. This accelerated the political degeneration of the American party. The role of the Comintern was recognised by the leadership; in fact there was a joke which captured both the situation and the cynicism of much of the leadership. Why is the Communist Party like the Brooklyn Bridge? It is suspended by cables.⁹⁸

Unlike years past, what was on offer was something new. Comintern intervention could have once again salvaged the Party from the shoals of factionalism. Cannon later wrote that ‘we could have solved our problem had we been able to get the help we needed. That is, the help of more experienced and authoritative people. The problem was too big for us.’⁹⁹ This is why Party leaders like Cannon supported the Bolshevisation campaign: they saw it as a way out of the impasse of endless apolitical factional struggle. The entire leadership respected the Comintern, not because in the Communist world all power emanated from Moscow, but because they saw in the International the only power with the experience and authority to orient the Party correctly.

⁹⁶ *Fourth National Convention*, 165.

⁹⁷ *Daily Worker*, 3 September 1925; Ruthenberg, ‘From the Third to the Fourth Convention’.

⁹⁸ Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 374; Gitlow, *I Confess*, 187.

The Comintern's intervention, far from 'Bolshevizing' the Party, reinforced this situation. In the coming period, the Party, bereft of needed guidance, drifted rudderless. Thus at sea, it was subject to both the tides of Comintern policies and the winds of American politics in the anti-radical 1920s. For its part, the 'Bolshevized' Comintern, increasingly under the sway of Stalin, began to intervene more and more heavily into the Party, disfiguring its politics more and more as the factional battles became less political and more brutal.

⁹⁹ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 33-34.

7. Endless Factionalism

Outwardly, between 1925 and 1927, the Party reoriented itself and tried to regain the ground it had lost following the Farm-Labor and La Follette debacles. In this period, the Party again established itself in the labour movement, including the Passaic, New Jersey, textile strike, and the struggle to free Sacco and Vanzetti. Internally, however, persistent factionalism undercut these advances. This factional struggle, as Cannon later wrote to Theodore Draper, ‘must present far more difficulties for the inquiring student than all the preceding years put together’ since in this period it ‘became bankrupt for lack for real political justification for the existence of factions.’¹ The Party needed to transcend these differences through common political work. Given the rancour between the different leaders, forged in half a decade of bitter animosity, this unity could have been effected only by Comintern intervention. However, while the Comintern did not shy from intervening in the Party, it increasingly did so not to create a healthy Party, but rather to construct a leadership subservient to the increasingly Stalinised Comintern. It did this by playing one faction off against the others, and keeping the factionalism boiling. As the ‘prosperous twenties’ wore on, the factionalism and the apparent strength of American capitalism created a sort of cynicism amongst many cadre. This chapter examines this process over these two years.

Factionalists courted the Comintern by pitching themselves in terms of the current political situation in Moscow. Because Stalin, in an alliance with Bukharin, denounced the ‘left danger’ posed by Zinoviev and Trotsky, both American factions accused each other of being leftists. In his autobiography, Browder recalled how one of his co-factionalists drove this point home:

¹ Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 148.

Bittelman...took up my political re-education, telling me that he and Foster had learned in Moscow that we had made a big mistake in America...when we judged the Pepper-Ruthenberg policy as a 'right-opportunist deviation, marked by leftist phrases'. It had been a natural mistake in America, but we had not realized that this would only strengthen our opponents in Moscow, where 'ultra-leftism' was now being stressed as the main danger. Foster and Bittelman had, therefore, made a right-about-face on this matter, and returned to our 1923 formula...that Pepper and Ruthenberg were authentic ultra-leftists. This judgement, said Bittelman, was proved to be correct by the fact that it would be most favorably considered in Moscow.²

However, the factions were not definite ideological groups: the real issue was which

faction would control the Party. The Comintern encouraged such confused

speculation. This naturally bewildered Party members. One example is Joseph

Manley, Foster's son in law and comrade from his early syndicalist days, who quit the

Party in 1925 dispirited with the never-ending factionalism.³

After the Comintern's 'parity commission' cable, the three factions in the continued intact, but shifted their alliances. Cannon and Dunne broke from Foster and Bittelman, and briefly united with Ruthenberg and Lovestone. This new bloc accepted the Comintern's cable, and described their alliance as 'a unification of all those who follow and fight for the political line of the Communist International'.⁴

Ruthenberg's lieutenant described Cannon as 'the most effective opponent of Fosterism'.⁵ However, while Cannon had not abandoned factionalism, his outlook had changed. Above all, he wanted to abolish the factionalism, not to merely improve his standing in the line-up. As he put it at a Moscow meeting of the American Commission at the Comintern's Sixth plenum in February 1926, 'we must have peace

² Browder, *No Man's Land*, in Browder Papers, part two, 2.

³ There are two statements on Manley at the time of his death in an industrial accident: C.E. Ruthenberg for the Central Committee, *Daily Worker*, 1 September 1926; and a longer obituary by Alex Bittelman in the 'New Magazine' supplement to the *Daily Worker*, 11 September 1926.

⁴ 'Unite the Party!', 16 November 1925, in Cannon, *Early Years*, 363-64.

⁵ Jack Stachel to 'Dear Comrades', nd [1925?] in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution archives, Stanford University, box 288, folder 5.

in the Party; we must have unity in the party—at all cost, we must have unity in the Party and have an end to the faction fight'.⁶

After the Sixth plenum, Cannon and his supporters remained separate from both of the contending factions, and voted with whichever faction they agreed on a particular issue. He began to construct a 'faction to end factions', and recruited two long-time Ruthenberg supporters from the New York apparatus, Jacob 'Jack' Stachel and William Weinstone, and made overtures to Ruthenberg. In the unsigned notes of a meeting between Cannon, Bedacht, Lovestone and Ruthenberg, the stenographer, Henry Puro, noted that Cannon 'Believes that factionalism is played out' and disagreed 'that [the] party is facing the alternative of the Ruthenberg group or the Foster group'. Instead, Cannon advocated 'collective leadership'. Factional divisions in the Political Committee, Cannon noted, had frustrated him since it meant that he 'he must always convince four [members] or loose.' Cannon told the meeting: 'I cannot conceive a party leadership without you three comrades' and advocated 'a fusion of all those qualified for leadership in the party'.⁷ Ruthenberg appeared open to such a perspective, and in his response he set forth 'two roads before the party', either the 'test of power' or the 'group working together'. While he warned that he was prepared to slug it out, he also thought 'it would be good idea to have you, Foster, and myself get together before a Polcom meeting and lay a basis of agreement.'⁸

While Ruthenberg himself may have been sincere, internal Ruthenberg factional correspondence, however, indicates that Lovestone was more interested in consolidating his faction on the bones of the Cannon group. 'The rank and file of our new roommates is far above in intelligence than some of their corporals, colonels,

⁶ Minutes of the First Session of the American Commission of the Communist International, 16 February 1926, in Prometheus Research Library Collection.

⁷ Henry Puro (John Wiita), notes on 7 February 1927 meeting, in Cannon, *Early Years*, 387-91. Cannon did note that Robert Minor and J. Louis Engdahl were 'negative elements' in the Lovestone group.

generals and field rats', Lovestone wrote in January. He wanted to marginalise Cannon and annex his membership in order to prevent Cannon (and his ally, Martin Abern) from establishing an independent base: 'I am working overtime to make it impossible for the development of a sort of puppet-republic called Abernia or Cannonia', Lovestone wrote, and predicted that 'the unity question is no longer a question—it is an objective condition that none of us can get out of.'⁹ Yet, Lovestone could not rest easy; already in March he railed against the possibility of a separate Cannon group as 'the very essence of Charlatanism in its lowest degree'.¹⁰ This attitude contributed to the failure of Cannon's plan. By June, Cannon had become seriously disaffected by what he saw as the continuation of factional antics by the Ruthenberg group within the CEC.¹¹ By September, Lovestone was denouncing Cannon and Dunne's 'policy of destructive factionalism'.¹²

Factionalism and the trade unions

Factional ire seeped into every nook and cranny of Party activity. Perhaps the most contentious arena was trade-union work. Not only was this the bread-and-butter of a Party claiming to lead the working class, but it also had heightened stakes for Foster, whose authority was based on his trade-union expertise. The opening shots were fired into the Party's New York City needle trades work. The leading Communists in the ILGWU, Charles Zimmerman and Rose Wortis, along with Benjamin Gitlow (a member of the ACTWU), supported Ruthenberg's faction. In the summer of 1925, there was a dispute within the Party over how to approach the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ [Jay Lovestone] to 'Dear Boys', 12 February 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 4.

¹⁰ 'J' [Lovestone] to 'Dear Comrades', 22 March 1926, Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 5.

¹¹ See anonymous letter dated 25 June 1926 which contains the minutes of a meeting held the day before between Cannon and Dunne and Ruthenberg and Lovestone; Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 7.

¹² [Jay Lovestone?] to 'Dear John [Pepper]', 8 September 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 9.

upcoming ILGWU conference.¹³ Foster's ally, Jack Johnstone (who was running the TUEL since Foster was in Moscow appealing to the Comintern about the results of the parity commission), advocated a policy of playing portions of the social-democratic Sigman leadership against one another in order to 'negotiate for organizational guarantees, which will completely protect it in the control of its present conditions'. For Cannon and Dunne, this emphasised organisational power instead of political struggle. Accordingly, the CEC issued a 'statement on the needle trades situation' which attacked the TUEL for allowing Communist politics to recede so far that it only had 'secondary importance and is fast becoming a memory'.¹⁴ At the convention, the Party's militants in the ILGWU had all but split from the union, inflaming Foster's fear of dual unionism.

This fear grew in January 1926, when a Ruthenberg supporter, Albert Weisbord, organised a strike of 16,000 textile workers in Passaic, New Jersey, against a threatened wage cut.¹⁵ The almost year-long Passaic strike captured the imagination of liberals and the labour movement. The Party's leadership of the struggle by immigrant, unskilled workers for basic survival against violent police and company officials, placed Communism in the centre of the effort to re-energise the trade union movement amidst the anti-labour 1920s. The strike demonstrated both the ability of Communist organisers, and the failure of AFL craft unionism, to confront new industrial conditions. Cannon recalled that 'the strike really put the party on the labor map' and 'revealed the Communists as the dynamic force in the radical labor movement and the organizing center of the unorganized workers disregarded by the

¹³ See chapter 5, above.

¹⁴ Johnstone quoted in Cannon, *Early Years*, 359-60; CEC quoted in David Gurowsky, 'Factional Disputes in the ILGWU', 176-77.

¹⁵ See Albert Weisbord, *Passaic* (San Francisco: Germinal Press, 1976 [1926]); Cannon, 'The United Front at Passaic', *Labor Defender*, June 1926, in *Early Years*, 375-81. On the Passaic strike in general, see Morton Siegel, 'The Passaic Textile Strike of 1926' (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1952). A

AFL unions'.¹⁶ The Party's isolation from the labour movement, engendered in the split with Fitzpatrick and the AFL's anti-Communist crusade, began to end.

It also complicated the internal factional situation, even though none of the factional leaders could claim credit for the strike, especially since most of their leaders were in Moscow when it began under Weisbord's leadership. While Ruthenberg's faction sought to claim credit for the it,¹⁷ what was most conspicuous was that Foster, the traditional trade-union expert in the Party, played no role in what was becoming the Party's most important labour battle.¹⁸ Foster was particularly upset not by Weisbord's alliance with Ruthenberg, nor by his failure to work with the TUEL, but because Weisbord's success demonstrated the limitations to Foster's strategy of boring from within. Weisbord established 'United Front Committees' (UFC) whose stated purpose was to amalgamate the 16 existing unions and to force them to organise the largely immigrant and female workers instead of just skilled craft workers. Although in early January 1926 the Party decided that the workers should attempt to join the AFL-affiliated United Textile Workers (UTW),¹⁹ the UFC soon, issued membership books and dues stamps—moves, that to Foster, seemed like organising a new union.²⁰ So, even as the AFL made it abundantly clear that it wanted nothing to do with the Passaic strike, Foster increasingly resented Weisbord.

good documentary source is Paul L. Murphy, ed., *The Passaic Textile Strike of 1926* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1974).

¹⁶ Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 142.

¹⁷ 'Dear Comrades' Lovestone circular, 11 June 1927, PRL collection.

¹⁸ Siegel, 'Passaic Textile Strike', 151.

¹⁹ See minutes of District Industrial Committee, 8 January 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 2.

²⁰ Siegel, 'Passaic Textile Strike', 163; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 223-26.

However, according to Vera Buch Weisbord, Albert's wife and assistant in organising the strike, with the exception of Gitlow, none of the factions' leaders visited during the strike, and 'their non-appearance seemed to support Albert's contention that they were indifferent, if not hostile, toward the strike' (Vera Buch Weisbord, *A Radical Life* [Bloomington and London: University of Indiana Press, 1977], 114. Cf. also *ibid.*, 121, for the factional significance of the strike.)

At the same time, Foster felt that his base in the TUEL was under seige. In mid-January 1926, the ECCI sent a cable to the CEC that 'demand[ed] cessation [of] factional struggle'. Specifically, the ECCI sought to counter factional attacks on the TUEL, by telling the party to 'strengthen [the] TUEL and its development into [a] mass movement of [the] left wing in [the] trade unions' and explicitly denying rumours that the ECCI was critical of TUEL.²¹ Although Lovestone and Ruthenberg were disappointed by this cable, because it would, they thought, in the words of Ruthenberg, only 'encourage Foster caucus to intensify destructive factional fight',²² they increased their attacks on the TUEL and Foster. Ruthenberg explicitly advocated dissolving the TUEL, which he attacked as a sectarian group 'made up of our Party members with only a few additional members'. Since the League shared much of its programme, leadership, journal, and even office space, with the Communist Party, the TUEL lacked an independent existence. For Ruthenberg, then, the TUEL had already served its purpose and should be replaced with a 'new broad left-wing organisation' with 'the right programme and the right tactics' to absorb the remnants of the TUEL and win new allies in the labour movement. It was obvious, however, that this new organisation would also need a new leader.²³

Cannon agreed that the 'TUEL is not in any sense of the word a broad Left-Wing movement,' and that 'the National Committee of the TUEL is nothing but a sub-committee of the CEC.' To avoid union bureaucratic repression, the Party should 'legalise' the TUEL by changing the League's name and programme. Furthermore, the 'program of the TUEL should not be a political program; it should bear no party characteristics' because 'the TUEL is a united front organ; its program must therefore

²¹ Cable from Presidium of ECCI to CEC of Workers Party, 15 January 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 3.

²² [Jay Lovestone?] to 'Dear John [Pepper]', 17 January 1926; 'Deferred Cablegram' from Ruthenberg to Pepper, 18 January 1926; both in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 3.

be broad enough for all the left wing elements.' Primarily this meant emphasising class struggle, a labour party, organising the unorganised, and union democracy.²⁴

Foster retorted that the TUEL still had a mass base, and highlighted the inexperience of Ruthenberg's followers in the trade-union field and the

inability of the present Central Executive to conduct any kind of mass struggle. They have no experience with the masses. They do not understand the first thing about mass work.

Foster highlighted the factional basis for the attacks on the League; since 'to destroy

us, they had to destroy the Trade Union Educational League...the policy of the

Central Executive Committee has been to liquidate the TUEL.' He advocated that the

Party 'stick to the basic policy of the Trade Union Educational League'.²⁵

Comintern decision

At first glance, the Comintern's decision on Foster's appeal makes no sense since it solidified the organisational position of Ruthenberg but politically endorsed Foster. This could not but aggravate factionalism and destabilise the Party even more. It was, however, but one of many attempts by the Comintern under Stalin to play one faction against another to increase his authority and power. The Comintern refused to give Foster a majority of the CEC, and declared that 'there can be no question of a change in the composition of the C.C. at its party conference.' Nevertheless, the Comintern kept Foster in the leadership of the TUEL, endorsed his trade-union policy and declared that 'secessionist movements and the formation of parallel trade unions should not be instigated or encouraged in any form.'²⁶

In Passaic, this policy meant that the UFC sued for unity with the UTW. The AFL, already none too happy about having to deal with the entire situation, only

²³ Ruthenberg, speech to American Commission of Comintern, 16 February 1926, in PRL collection.

²⁴ Cannon, *Early Years*, 367.

²⁵ Foster, speech at first session of the American Commission of the Comintern, 16 February 1926, in Comintern archives, PRL.

²⁶ Quoted in Draper, *American Communism*, 228-29.

accepted the textile workers upon the condition that Weisbord end his involvement. Even though Weisbord opposed this, the Party agreed to this condition and forced him to quit the strike.²⁷ The Party labelled this ‘a great victory’, and, publicly, Weisbord claimed that, ‘The union had become so strong that, once it secured settlement or affiliation it would carry on without [Weisbord]. So the United Front Committee declared it was ready to accept even the humiliating conditions laid down to affiliate. This forced the hand of the A.F. of L. bureaucracy. They were compelled to take in the strikers.’ For the strikers, this meant that their struggle was now in the hands of a leadership that had opposed it from the beginning. Within four months, the AFL had strangled the strike, and in 1928, the UTW expelled the Passaic local, thus leaving the workers little better off than two years earlier.²⁸

For the Passaic workers, this strike was a failure. For the Party and the labour movement at large, it demonstrated the power of unskilled, immigrants workers struggling under Communist leadership.²⁹ Shortly after the Passaic struggle, Party organisers in the Furriers, and then the ILGWU, led bitter strikes in New York City. Lovestone wrote in September 1926 that ‘We have broken quite well the isolation we were in’ and ‘the trade union movement looks with increasing favor upon us and is steadily loosing its suspicion of us.’³⁰ Although only the furrier strike was successful, the CP had once again become a factor in the American labour movement. More negatively, the outcome demonstrated the damaging nature of factionalism. When the entire factional leadership was in Moscow arguing amongst themselves, the strike

²⁷ Siegel, ‘Passaic Textile Strike’, 250.

²⁸ Weisbord, *Passaic*, 58; Draper, *American Communism*, 231. On the humiliating end of the strike at the hands of the UTW, see Siegel, ‘Passaic Textile Strike’, chapter nine. Joseph Zack also opposed this policy; see his statement attached to the 8 May 1927 PC minutes, in PRL.

²⁹ See Vera Buch Weisbord, *A Radical Life*, 135.

³⁰ [Jay Lovestone?] to ‘Dear John [Pepper]’, 8 September 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 9.

began well; when the leaders returned to the US, and fought over control of the work, the strike went poorly.

The International Labor Defense

Equally important for reinvigorating the Party's ties with the labour movement was the International Labor Defense (ILD). Under Cannon's leadership, the ILD defended 'class war prisoners'--victimised workers and socialists who had been targeted by the state for persecution, including scores of former wobblies and other militants still behind bars from the Red Scare. Besides demonstrating Communist solidarity with other radicals, and therefore establishing the Party's legitimacy as part of American radicalism, the ILD also demonstrated how a Comintern perspective, when developed by American Communists, helped Americanise the Party.

The ILD was an extension of the Comintern's International Red Aid (IRA), founded in 1922 to aid victims of counterrevolution internationally. The Comintern desired the IRA to be, in one historian's words, 'a world-wide organization with branches or sections in various sections under the leadership of a central apparatus', and by 1928 Sixth Congress, the IRA had sections in 43 countries.³¹

In late 1923, the Central European Bureau for International Red Aid, in Berlin, wrote to their American comrades:

We deem it desirable, if in any way possible, to create there a Bureau for International Red Aid, on which will sit representatives not only from the Workers Party, but from all the left-Socialist and radical organizations that are willing to form a united front on the question of International Relief to Class War Prisoners, and whose combined actions may reach a wider public and larger funds than a purely party organization could achieve.³²

³¹ For a history of the International Red Aid, see James Martin Ryle, 'International Red Aid, 1922-1928: The Founding of a Communist Front Organization' (PhD thesis, Emory University, 1967). Quote is on page 8; on the early disputes over the purpose of the IRA, see especially page 14; for a list of countries with member organisations, see pages 262-63. Many of these were founded late in the 1920s, and there is no indication of how large any was.

³² L. Wilhelm to Executive Committee of WPA, 4 November 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:164.

The ILD itself, however, did not get underway for more than a year. While in Moscow in 1925, Cannon and Haywood—who understood intimately the question of state repression of labour radicals—came up with the idea of the ILD.³³ They saw it also as an extension of the old IWW slogan that ‘an injury to one is an injury to all.’ According to Cannon, the early ILD was ‘a non-partisan body which could defend any member of the working class movement, regardless of his opinion or affiliation, if he came under persecution by capitalist law’.³⁴ Upon returning to the US, Cannon discovered that the Party had already started to organise an affiliate of the IRA, one which was, in his words, ‘a very quiet, inoffensive organization’. Cannon, however, sought to involve non-Party activists, especially former wobblies such as Ralph Chaplin. Soon, the ILD also subsumed another Party-organised group, the Friends of Soviet Russia, whose original purpose had been to raise money during the Soviet famine of 1921.³⁵

The ILD also built upon the foundation of the Workers Defense Union (WDU). In 1918, at the urging of the National Civil Liberties Bureau (a precursor the American Civil Liberties Union), ex-Wobbly Elizabeth Gurley Flynn organised the WDU to build support in the labour movement for victims of the Red Scare. In the WDU’s words, its objective was ‘to work for an amnesty for all industrial and political prisoners convicted during the war’ by ‘emphasizing the class struggle as the cause of this oppression, and recognizing that, if other means fail, it will be necessary for the workers to use their organized power in industry to bring about the release of their comrades and fellow workers’. The WDU had the support of hundreds of local

³³ In 1925 a similar organisation, the Canadian Labour Defence League, was organised by the Canadian CP. See Ivan Avakumovic, 34; Bernard Dansereau, ‘Le Mouvement Ouvrier Montrealais’, 359-60.

³⁴ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 163.

³⁵ Syd Stapleton interview with James P. Cannon, 29 October 1973, in *James P. Cannon: A Political Tribute* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974), 24-26; Chaplin, *Wobbly*, 333.

and national unions (including the ILGWU, the ACWU and sections of the IWW), as well as left-wing organisations.³⁶

Out of an office in the Rand School, Flynn worked with another future Communist, Ella Reeve Bloor, and others including Eugene Lyons to garner support for Russian radicals slated for deportation, jailed wobblies and others victimised for their politics, including Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian anarchists convicted of murder in Boston because of their politics and ethnicity. During the Passaic strike in 1926, Flynn drew closer to the CP—and had a short-lived affair with Albert Weisbord—and, in the fall of that year, became the titular head of the ILD. She soon joined the CP as well, although illness prevented her from playing a major role in the Party until the 1930s.³⁷

The ILD was a good example of the united front: through it, the party joined with non-Communists to defend the common interests of the working class. In fact, of the 106 militants whom the ILD defended, none was a Communist. They included famous prisoners such as Sacco and Vanzetti, Mooney and Billings, McNamara and Schmidt, the Centralia IWW prisoners, as well as more obscure labour organisers throughout the US. The ILD organised a monthly stipend programme, publicised their cases, and helped provide legal defence.

The ILD was not merely a radical public defender's office. In fact, that niche was already taken by what would become the ACLU, and on the international level, by the International Committee for Political Prisoners. Both of these organisations,

³⁶ See the pamphlet, *Workers Defense Union* (New York: Workers Defense Union, 1919?), a copy of which is in the Ella Reeve Bloor papers (Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Library), box 10, folder 19. According to the notation by Bloor's son, Communist Carl Reeve, the founding secretary, Fred Biedenkapp, also was an early Communist.

³⁷ See Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, chapter four; Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor', 221-222. For Flynn's account of her moving closer to the Party via the ILD, see her 11 September 1926 letter to Mary Heaton Vorse, reprinted in Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall, ed., *Words on Fire: The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 143-45. Flynn of course would

built largely through the efforts of Roger N. Baldwin (and with the support of Flynn), publicised political persecution.³⁸ What distinguished the ILD was its Marxist belief that the state was the repressive apparatus that the capitalist class used to repress the workers. While willing to work with non-Marxists, the ILD sought to bring to bear the power of the organised working class on behalf of class-war prisoners. They had no illusions that the US justice system could be made 'fair' for the workers and oppressed; Cannon described this 'policy of the class struggle' that, 'while favoring all possible legal proceedings...calls for agitation, publicity, demonstrations—organized protest on a national and international scale.'³⁹

The ILD's first breakthrough was the campaign to free Sacco and Vanzetti. The ILD built an international campaign, bringing their struggle beyond the Italian radicals who first took it up. Although the ILD failed in preventing their execution in August 1927, it made the names Sacco and Vanzetti synonymous with American capitalist injustice, and the names of the ILD and American Communism synonymous with the struggle for the rights of the entire working class. In time, the ILD would be one of the more popular CP organisations, taking a leading role not only in Sacco and Vanzetti's struggle, but also the Scottsboro campaign to defend black youths accused of rape, as well as other causes which resonated throughout the labour movement.⁴⁰

later go on to be a high-level CP leader, including as head of the Party after Foster's death in 1961. Bloor would become important in the ILD as well, especially after Cannon was expelled.

³⁸ A description of the ICPP can be found in Roger N. Baldwin and Eleonore von Eltz to W.E.B. Du Bois, 23 March 1925, in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (W.E.B. Du Bois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst), reel 15, file 749. See the ensuing correspondence for a dispute between the CP and the ICPP over the question of prisoners in Russia which would abort its collaboration with the Party (and Du Bois as well).

³⁹ James P. Cannon, *Notebook of an Agitator* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1993), 5.

⁴⁰ For a description of how the ILD carried out this work, see the New York City edition of the *Daily Worker*, from June to 11 August 1927, which describes the interaction of the ILD's work within the broader labour movement, including the SP and other anti-Communist currents. On the ILD more generally, see Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 180-82; Charles H. Martin, 'The International Labor Defense and Black America', *Labor History* 26 (1985), 165-97.

The ILD illustrates how the Comintern forced the American Party to build upon its roots in American radicalism, and deepen its connection to the American labour movement. Cannon provided the early ILD the benefit of his previous work within the radical labour movement, especially the IWW. Several ex-wobblies, including Flynn, served on its executive board. Without these roots, and this non-sectarian approach—both of which the Comintern had forced the Party to nurture—the ILD would have been stillborn, or at least much weaker.⁴¹ The ILD indicated the counterpart to the factionalism of the Party: a potential to powerfully intervene in the labour movement and win workers to struggle behind the Party's leadership. Not only was the idea of the ILD developed by the Comintern, the Party would have been unable to grasp its basic premise had not the Comintern intervened in the early 1920s to make the Party appreciate the necessity of defending its rights to organise legally.

The ILD also illustrated the dangers of factionalism. Although, Cannon sought refuge from factionalism by building the ILD, it, like Foster's TUEL, soon became embroiled in infighting which nearly destroyed it. Since at the ILD's inception, Cannon was still allied with Foster, Ruthenberg opposed Cannon's leading it.⁴² Yet, after Cannon split with Foster and temporarily aligned his faction with Ruthenberg, this alliance shielded the ILD from attack. In 1926, Lovestone defended the ILD from Foster's supporters who were 'trying to make a factional issue of the defense society' in order 'to kill Cannon'. He promised, however, to 'go out of my way to defend the general line of the ILD at the same time working for its improvement.'⁴³ By the time Cannon was again independent, the ILD was sufficiently well-established to survive, despite criticism of factionalism. Even amidst the Sacco and Vanzetti campaign, the

⁴¹ Cf. the introduction to Cannon, *Early Years*, 41.

⁴² Minutes of Political Committee, 26 June 1926, in Cannon, *Early Years*, 330.

⁴³ 'J' [Lovestone] to 'Dear Comrades', 3 February 1926, Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 4.

ILD became a factional football.⁴⁴ But by then, it had begun to flourish. For example, the ILD's *Labor Defender* reached a circulation of 22,000 by mid-1928. Not only was it read by more people than many other Communist journals, it was more typographically pleasing, since it pioneered the use of graphics and photographs.⁴⁵

The death of Ruthenberg and the ascension of Lovestone

On 2 March 1927, Ruthenberg suddenly died of acute appendicitis, at the age of forty four. Ruthenberg had been a respected leader: he had been a leader in the SP's left wing, and a founder of the Party, as well as its perennial head. His death left a void, disrupted what factional equilibrium had existed, and created an even stronger factional whirlpool.⁴⁶ It undid the progress that Cannon had made towards collective leadership, and pushed Lovestone to the leadership of the former Ruthenberg faction. For Lovestone, Ruthenberg's death was convenient, and he seized upon the opportunity it offered. First, he helped create a cult-of-personality around Ruthenberg, and then, similar to Stalin and Lenin, depicted himself as the natural heir to Ruthenberg's legacy.⁴⁷

When the majority of the CEC, made up of Cannon, Foster and Weinstone, advocated that Weinstone assume power temporarily, and that the CEC meet within a week to prevent a 'disastrous' prolonged factional battle,⁴⁸ Lovestone's right-hand-man Gitlow immediately nominated Lovestone for Party leadership. Lovestone

⁴⁴ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 160; statement by Max Bedacht attached to 11 July PolCom meeting, in Comintern archives, PRL; see 'Dear Comrades' Lovestone factional circular, 11 June 1927, in PRL collection.

⁴⁵ Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey through the 'American Century'* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1994), 27.

⁴⁶ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 166.

⁴⁷ See the Ruthenberg papers, box 8, folders 1 and 2, for examples of this. In 1928, Lovestone wrote a biography, *Ruthenberg: Communist Fighter and Leader* (New York: Workers Library, 1928) and edited a collection of Ruthenberg's writings, C.E. Ruthenberg, *Voices of Revolt: Speeches and Writings of Charles E. Ruthenberg* (New York: International Publishers, 1928). The nature of the adulation can be determined by examining a list of other 'voices of revolt' pamphlets: Robespierre, Marat, Lasalle, Karl and Wilhem Liebknecht, Danton, Bebel, Lenin and Debs.

⁴⁸ Weinstone's statement in Political Committee Minutes, 23 March 1927, in PRL.

advocated a later CC plenum, followed by national convention, in order to allow himself time to consolidate his power. The Comintern supported Lovestone, opposed an American delegation to Moscow, and ordered the upcoming plenum not to debate who would follow Ruthenberg. Lovestone's supporters positively crowed. Gitlow demanded: 'Comrades: Close your ranks! We must have full faith in the C.I. The Comintern will guide us well in our difficult moments.'⁴⁹ Thus Lovestone's power came only because he was anointed by the Comintern.

Lovestone's rise was not due to his personality. Like Stalin, Lovestone saw in the Communist movement a chance to advance his own career, and was at the same time extremely ambitious and manipulative. Gitlow recalled that Lovestone 'was a veritable Tammany chieftain among us Communists' and that even his followers 'did not trust him and did not like him'. He regularly manipulated and blackmailed both supporters and enemies.⁵⁰ His letters to supporters are full of invective not only against his opponents, but his own allies. 'Altogether too many of our boys are lazy, irresponsible and stupid' he wrote in 1926. Several months later he bragged how, after becoming angry with one of his supporters for not coming into the office when she was ill, 'I bawled her out to the weeping point'.⁵¹

Lovestone's origins were not unique. He was a product of the radical Jewish milieu in New York City, and became radical during the war while he was at City College, where he joined the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, along with Weinstone. He split from the SP in 1919, joining Ruthenberg's UCP, and followed Ruthenberg up

⁴⁹ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 255.

⁵⁰ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 320-25.

⁵¹ [Lovestone] to 'Dear Boys', 6 March 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 5; Lovestone to CE [Ruthenberg], 26 October 1926, in Lovestone papers, box 197, folder 9. He seemed to particularly dislike Robert Minor and John Ballam.

to the leadership of the Party.⁵² Because of this trajectory from university to Party leadership, factional opponents with more working-class roots derisively labelled Lovestone and his followers 'City College boys'.

Weinstone had been prescient: the frenzied factionalism did nothing but stir up ill will amongst the leadership of the Party, obstructing collective leadership. The tactics of the factions were not particularly honourable, either: in April, Jack Johnstone complained to the Political Committee that his personal factional files—in his locked office in Party headquarters—had been riffled. The factionalism also seems to have angered the Comintern. In early April, the Comintern sent a curt cable to the Party denying the factions' request to once again send delegates to Moscow, pointing to 'the urgent necessity' of opposing US imperialism in China and Nicaragua, as well as fighting against attacks by the AFL and government.⁵³ The Party had real work to do; factionalism only hindered constructive activity.

The Party held a CEC plenum in May. Cannon (then allied with Weinstone and Ballam) argued that the capitalist offensive on the unions, and the union leaderships' attacks on leftists, marked 'a turning point in the American labor movement, and consequently a turning point in our party work in the unions'. He criticised those communists who pessimistically assumed that right-wing labour leaders such as John L. Lewis would be able to stabilise their relationship with the employers, and argued instead that 'some of the bureaucrats, under the pressure of the masses, will be compelled to take part in the fight against the bosses to maintain the unions and even to help us organize the unorganized,' and thereby 'create new alignments, new problems for our work, and new possibilities'.

⁵² On Lovestone, see Morgan, *A Covert Life*; the first chapter deals with his early political history. Cf. also, Robert J. Alexander, *The Right Opposition: The Lovestoneites and the International Communist Opposition of the 1930s* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1981) 14-16.

While in some aspects Cannon was prescient since Lewis would eventually do this, his main point was that with this turmoil in the labour movement, the Party 'did not have sufficient orientation on these new tasks'. The reason, Cannon argued, was that 'the unstable situation in the party and the unstable leadership...cannot provide normal processes of discussion' due to the 'factional situation in the party'.

He warned of 'factional bankruptcy' and 'factional corruption and unprincipledness' inherent in 'the heterogeneous composition of the factions and the stubborn maintenance of permanent factional organization': 'It is anomalous' Cannon stressed, 'for a Bolshevik Party to have factional groupings within which there are political divisions on issues of prime importance, while the groups cross each other in support of major political questions, and yet these groups retain their separate factional identity, cohesion and discipline.' For Cannon, however, the solution was not that one faction gain hegemony over the others, or that two factions combine to subdue the other, but rather 'the liquidation of factions' and true unity of the Party. Again and again, arguing that 'Party leadership must replace factional leadership' Cannon proposed several measures to dismantle them, but in essence he believed that the leadership of all the factions should be drawn into the Party leadership in a constructive way.

Cannon spoke at length about the TUEL. He argued that 'the TUEL is too narrow from the standpoint of the labor movement at present' but also 'too narrow from the standpoint of the party'. That is, factionalism hurt the TUEL because, on the one hand, some comrades had 'a monopolistic attitude' towards the TUEL, while others maintained 'factional passivity'. Instead of being destroyed by factionalism,

⁵³ Both Johnstone's statement and Comintern cable included in Political Committee minutes, 8 April 1927, in collection of Prometheus Research Library.

‘the TUEL and its apparatus, as well as the trade union apparatus of the party, must become more the concern of the party as a whole’.⁵⁴

Both Foster and Lovestone reacted angrily, and sought factional victory at the other’s expense. Foster railed against the ‘insincerity, double dealing, campaigns of personal vilification and downright treachery’ by Lovestone and his followers, but also attacked Cannon’s ‘total political bankruptcy’. Foster claimed to support ‘collective leadership’, too...on the basis of the Foster faction. For Foster, the main danger facing the Party was isolation from the working class, and his opponents either had no experience in mass work (Lovestone) or had ‘an appreciation for mass work but exhibit[ed] rightist deviations’ (Cannon).⁵⁵ Wolfe dismissed Cannon’s proposals as ‘empty speech absolutely devoid of content’ and as nothing more than ‘goody, goody “sugar and spice and everything nice”,’ because Cannon had emphasised unity and not the triumph of one faction over the others.

When Lovestone’s aims were frustrated at the plenum, he sneaked away in the middle of night to go to Moscow. While Lovestone was probably justified in his decision to leave for the immediately upcoming Comintern plenum—after all, he was a member of the ECCI—his histrionics seemed designed only to enrage his opponents, who hastily followed him to Moscow.⁵⁶

In Moscow, again

The Eighth Comintern plenum, held in May 1927, focused on questions more pressing than the US section. In China, the popular front between the CPC and the Koumintang had been destroyed when nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek massacred

⁵⁴ James P. Cannon, ‘For the Liquidation of Factionalism’, 6 May 1927, in Cannon, *Early Years*, 392-426.

⁵⁵ William Z. Foster, ‘Analysis of the last plenum of the CEC and the conclusions we must draw from it’, 12 May 1927, in Bertram David Wolfe papers, New York Public Library, box 4.

⁵⁶For the Lovestoneite view of the plenum, see Wolfe’s speech on factionalism, 14 May 1927, in the Wolfe papers, folder 4; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 255. To be fair, Wolfe was

tens of thousands of Communist workers. In Britain, police had raided the Soviet trading company and the government had broken diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Internally, the Comintern leadership was finishing up the purge of Trotsky and his followers from its ranks. Trotsky made his last speech, before being expelled, at this plenum.

Amidst this, the American Party was far from the top of the agenda, especially since the Comintern had already told the leadership to stay home. In a letter to supporters in New York, one Lovestoneite in Moscow complained that ‘up to this point it has been absolutely impossible to see the biggest fellow or even to talk at length with Bookman’, and that the ‘main office was totally uniformed’ about the American Party. Still, the author advised his co-factionalists back home what positions to take on debates in the Comintern to gain favour with the Moscow leadership.⁵⁷

Throughout May and June, each faction’s leaders remained in Moscow, discussing their positions with various Comintern officials, and reporting their progress to their supporters in the US. Each faction seemed to think it had the wind in its sails. When Stalin granted Lovestone and several followers a private Kremlin meeting, they took this as an indication of his approval.⁵⁸ Lovestone, however, was especially taken by Stalin’s co-factionalist, Bukharin, who had recently succeeded Zinoviev as leader of the Comintern, and was second-in-command of the Russian Party.⁵⁹ A Lovestoneite letter reported a ‘talk with Steelman’ who ‘said after long session with him that even with his eyes closed one can see the political weaknesses

merely reciprocating Cannon’s denunciation of Wolfe’s plenum speech as ‘one of the worst speeches I have listened to since the foundation of our party’ (Cannon, *Early Years*, 407).

⁵⁷ Jacko [Lovestone?] to ‘Dear Boys’, 22 May 1927, in Wolfe papers, box 4. The ‘biggest fellow’ and ‘Bookman’ probably refer to Stalin and Bukharin, respectively.

⁵⁸ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 431.

⁵⁹ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 259.

of Zigzag.’⁶⁰ The Cannon-Weinstone group’s letters reported that Kuusinen ‘said Lovestone could not take the place of Ruthenberg and that collective leadership must now be established’ and that in general there was ‘much sentiment here for a bloc’ with Foster in order to form a majority and take over the Party.⁶¹

The factional circulars represent the aims of the factions. Cannon and Weinstone’s told of their efforts to lobby for a ‘3-3-3’ leadership (i.e., inclusive of all three factions’ leaderships). Lovestone’s circulars were much more scurrilous, with titillating titles promising inside scandals and gossip.⁶²

The Weinstone-Cannon bloc and the Foster faction began to come closer together in Moscow.⁶³ Both opposed Lovestone’s plans to bring John Pepper back into the Party’s leadership. In late June, the Political Committee voted to recall Robert Minor to the US ‘for Party work’ and voted that Pepper ‘act as representative of the American Party to the ECCI’.⁶⁴ Foster and Cannon saw this attempt to ‘inject Comrade Pepper actively into the American situation’ as ‘a clear declaration of uncompromising war against all the opposition groups’ because he has ‘persistently kept alive factionalism’.⁶⁵

In mid-June, Cannon, Weinstone and Foster submitted a document to the American Commission that responded to criticisms of the TUEL, especially in light of the Passaic strike. The letter criticised the lack of attention paid to ‘the task of giving organised form to the left wing in the TUEL’. It called for a broadening of the TUEL

⁶⁰ Jacko to ‘Dear Boys’, 13 June 1927, Wolfe papers. Steelman is probably Stalin (man of steel in Russian) and Zigzag is most likely Foster.

⁶¹ Cannon-Weinstone circular to ‘Dear Boys’, 26 June 1927, in Prometheus Research Library collection, reprinted in Cannon, *Early Years*, 452. See also ‘Dear Comrades’ Cannon faction circular, quoting from a Moscow-based supporter’s 28 June 1927 letter, in PRL collection.

⁶² For example, see Lovestone circular, ‘Very Latest!!! Most Important!!!’, 7 July 1927, Prometheus Research Library.

⁶³ See Lovestoneite letter to ‘Dear Comrade’, 21 June 1927 in Wolfe papers, NYPL, box 4, ‘position papers’; and untitled 23 June 1927 Fosterite document, in box 5, ‘Pepper document’.

⁶⁴ PolCom minutes, 20 June 1927, in PRL collection. At this time, Pepper was working in the Comintern apparatus in Moscow.

beyond 'Party members and close sympathisers' to embrace 'all honest elements willing to fight and preserve the unions as organs of struggle' to organise the unorganised, democratise the unions, amalgamate the craft unions, form a labour party and struggle against capitalism. Interestingly enough, given Foster's signature, the letter advocated a flexible approach to forming new unions. It warned against lightmindedly forming such unions in light of bureaucratic expulsions, and advocated that expelled militants and locals should struggle for unity with their unions. Yet it also warned against illusions in the existing unions and concluded that 'The actual formation of independent organisation in such cases has to be determined according to concrete circumstances.' It ended by calling for a 'collective leadership...which includes the strongest forces of the three groups', concretely in the form of a nine member political bureau evenly divided amongst the three factions. Lovestone's followers, the document concluded, were the biggest obstacle to Party unity.⁶⁶

At this point, the Comintern, had it been the same as during Lenin's time, would have sought to clarify the political issues at hand. Instead, while it did try to lessen the factionalism wracking the Party, it did so only on the basis of loyalty to the increasingly Stalinised Comintern.

On 1 July 1927, the American Commission issued its resolution on the American question, which was divided into four sections. The first, 'the struggle against imperialism and the war danger', noted that the 'task of the Workers (Communist) Party is to form a broad united front to intensify the struggle against American imperialism', which was 'the mightiest imperialist power' in existence. The second section, 'the development of the revolutionary movement in America', attempted to explain why this process was proceeding so slowly. It cautioned that 'a

⁶⁶ Unsigned 'Pepper document', 23 June 1927, in Bertram David Wolfe papers, NYPL, box 5.

great rise [in class struggle] is not to be expected in the nearest future. However strikes and mass struggles of a predominantly economic character are occurring.’ Although the existence of the Soviet Union was a counterbalance to American imperialism, US capitalism still provided workers ‘a comparatively higher standard of living’ than the rest of the world, and was ‘still on the upward grade of development’. This posed the danger of the ‘bourgeoisification’ of sectors of the working class, which must be fought through a struggle against the AFL bureaucracy. The document noted, however, that it was impossible for even the American bourgeoisie to corrupt the entire working class. Ultimately, this period only marked time before a world crisis that would hurt US capitalism as well as its international counterparts. Given the relative stabilisation of capitalism reduced the chances of an immediate revolution, the main task of the Party was to ‘create the basis for a Communist mass Party.’

The third section declared that trade union work—which was Foster’s speciality—as ‘the most important work of the Party’. Much of the final resolution seems to have been taken from Cannon, Foster and Weinstone’s letter: ‘The Party must support the Trade Union Educational League to a much greater extent than hitherto. The Party should do everything in its power to help build up the Trade Union Educational League.’ Instead of discarding the TUEL, the Party should broaden it, and attract all ‘Left Wing and genuine progressive movements’. The resolution declared that ‘The Party should not limit itself only to the work in the existing trade unions’, while noting that ‘every effort must be made to link these [independent unions] up with the existing trade unions and the at the same time to insist on the right

⁶⁶ J.P. Cannon, Wm. Z. Foster, William W. Weinstone, ‘Letter to the American Commission’, 16 June 1927; in Lovestone papers, box 211, folder 1.

of the workers themselves to administer the unions'. This decision thus shored up Foster's power, since it reiterated the importance of his work and the TUEL.⁶⁷

The fourth section dealt with 'the inner Party situation', marked above all by factionalism, 'the existence and intensity of which we seek in vain to explain through serious differences of principle'. It ordered that '[t]he opposition must cease their factional methods' and instead 'facilitate unity with the majority of the Political Committee before and at the Party Convention.' The resolution ordered: 1) an August convention; 2) a 'commission for the preparation the Party convention' comprising three members of both factions as well as a 'neutral comrade', of which Foster and Lovestone were to be co-chairmen; 3) the election of a 'broad Party executive' with 'important representation' for Foster; 4) naming Lovestone and Foster as co-secretaries and Gitlow and Foster as co-heads of the trade-union work; and 5) that the headquarters be returned to New York, Lovestone's base, from Chicago where Foster was strong.⁶⁸

Attached to the resolution, but not publicly circulated, was an agreement signed by the leadership of all the factions. This declared unity 'now more than ever a imperative necessity' that could only be got through 'liquidation' of factions, 'cessation' of factionalism, 'and the amalgamation of the Party into one unified whole'. The agreement provided for a convention soon, and proportional representation in the Party's leadership.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Draper argues (*American Communism and Soviet Russia*, page 260) that the openness to new unions was meant as criticism to Foster. While Foster was known to emphasise the AFL, it should be noted that in the above cited letter to the American Commission, he had already capitulated on this question, at least abstractly, in principle, for certain situations.

⁶⁸ *Daily Worker*, 3 August 1927. Copies also in Wolfe papers, box 4.

⁶⁹ 'Agreement for the carrying out of the resolution on the American Question adopted by the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Comintern', signed by A. Braun [Arthur Ewert, head of the American Commission], Jay Lovestone, Benjamin Gitlow, John Pepper, James P. Cannon, William Z. Foster, William Weinstone, Wolfe papers, box 4.

All three factions supported the decision, at least on paper, although they were still incapable of passing a common motion to this effect in the political committee. The Lovestone majority voted its 'complete acceptance' of the ECCI resolution, and asserted that it 'does not hold the decision of the Communist International to be a victory of any group or combination of groups', which conveniently ignored the trade-union section of the decision.⁷⁰ The Cannon-Foster-Weinstone minority's motion also endorsed the ECCI decision 'without any reservations', and denounced the Lovestoneite's 'ultrafactional practice' aimed at 'permanently maintain[ing] itself as a closed faction and...exercis[ing] "hegemony" over the Party.'⁷¹

This did not bode well for achieving Party unity. Even worse, on the same day that the decision came out, Foster and Cannon's supporters began to organise 'the National Opposition Bloc' (NOB). Its leaders, Fosterites such as Bittelman and Johnstone, and Cannonites such as Abern, Shachtman and Swabeck, viewed the ECCI decision as a mandate not to dismantle the factions, but to wrestle control from Lovestone.⁷² Forming the NOB was a particularly ill-advised manoeuvre since at the same time the Bukharin-Stalin leadership in the Russian Party were battling Trotsky and Zinoviev's opposition.

Needless to say, the Lovestoneites seized upon this as an opportunity to paint themselves as the Comintern's loyal followers. In a cable to the Comintern, they claimed that the Opposition was trying to split the Party and requested the ECCI intervene against the NOB.⁷³ It tipped the Comintern towards support of Lovestone,

⁷⁰ 'Declaration of the Political Committee on the American Question Adopted by the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International', [July 1927], in Wolfe papers, NYPL, box 5. See also *Daily Worker*, 3 August 1927.

⁷¹ 'Statement of the Minority of the Political Committee on the Resolution of the ECCI and the Question of Party Unity', [July 1927], in Lovestone papers, box 211, folder 5.

⁷² Alex [Bittelman] and Jack [Johnstone] to 'Dear Comrade', [1 July 1927], in Lovestone papers, box 211, folder 5; see also statement by 'National Committee of the Opposition Bloc', 1 July 1927, in Wolfe papers, NYPL, box 4, 'position papers'.

⁷³ Max Bedacht cable to Comintern, 5 July 1927, in Wolfe papers, NYPL, box f, 'position papers'.

and provided Lovestone a pretext to seize power. On 7 July, the ECCI Presidium once again cabled the Party:

The Comintern is categorically against the sharpening of the fractional [sic] struggle....The Comintern recognizes that in many political questions the Ruthenberg group followed a more correct line in the past than the Foster group. On the other hand the executive [of the Comintern] is of the opinion that Ruthenberg group had not understood how to estimate sufficiently the full significance of the trade union forces in the party and that Foster at the time was more correct on trade union question....

In general, however, the CI had supported the Ruthenberg faction, provided it corrected its trade-union errors and moved to include Foster in the leadership. But, it continued:

Now the previous political and trade-union differences have almost disappeared. The Comintern condemns most categorically every attempt towards the sharpening of the situation as exemplified by the formation of a national committee of the opposition bloc. The Comintern considers factions without political differences as the worst offence against the party.

To avoid any misunderstanding, the ECCI ordered the Party press to reprint this.⁷⁴

Yet the factional bitterness only increased. The CEC majority 'call[ed] upon the membership of our Party to support the decision of the Communist International to close the ranks of our Party.' This statement closed by appealing to Ruthenberg's last words: 'Tell the comrades to close ranks, to build the Party. The American workers under the leadership of our Party and the Comintern will win. Let's fight on.'⁷⁵

Privately, Lovestone's followers greeted the decision as 'a complete POLITICAL and ORGANIZATIONAL VICTORY FOR THE RUTHENBERG GROUP'.⁷⁶

At a 11 July Political Committee meeting, Bedacht warned that 'our Party has never been nearer a split than it is at present'. He claimed that Foster and Cannon 'deliberately lie[d] to the C.I. and deliberately misrepresent[ed] C.I. decisions to the

⁷⁴ Cable from ECCI presidium, 7 July 1927, attached to PolCom minutes, 7 July 1927, in Comintern archives, [2A]; also in Wolfe papers, NYPL, box 4, 'position papers'; reprinted in *Daily Worker*, 8 July 1927.

⁷⁵ *Daily Worker*, New York City Edition, 9 July 1927.

⁷⁶ Lovestone factional circular, 21 July 1927, in PRL collection.

membership.⁷⁷ The Comintern tried to prevent such a split and sent another cable announcing that ‘Our cable of July 7th did not aim to support the hegemony of one group in the Workers Party but the merging of all groups.’ It reminded the Party that the leaders of the three factions had agreed in Moscow that ‘the opposition shall also have the right to express and to defend in a non-factional comradely way its opinion in all meetings of the party units.’⁷⁸

The Foster and Cannon groups claimed that they had dissolved the opposition bloc, and that the ‘Lovegroup is only party section which maintained hidebound faction since convention... We reaffirm uncompromising stand for unity and collective leadership.’⁷⁹ Foster’s supporters complained, cabling the Comintern: ‘With an arrogance only explainable by the petty-bourgeois intellectual composition of its leadership, [the Lovestone group] seeks to give the impression that it has been selected by the Comintern as the permanent leadership of our Party.’ Lovestone in turn cabled Moscow, livid over being attacked as a petty-bourgeois intellectual. Finally, the ECCI resorted to another telegram:

ECCI considers such methods as opposition group uses in state impermissible factional. Such expressions styling majority of Polcom ‘petty bourgeois intellectuals’ as ‘clique leadership’ are opposed resolution of ECCI. ECCI most decisively opposes these faction methods. On the other hand ECCI declares against any disciplinary measures against opposition.⁸⁰

The *Daily Worker* dutifully published this cable on its front page, without even turning it into literate English.⁸¹ The opposition responded by formally agreeing with the Comintern’s decision to place Lovestone in power and claimed that ‘our views are in full accord with the line of the resolution. We accept it without any reservation and

⁷⁷ Statement by Max Bedacht, attached to 11 July 1927 motion on factionalism, in Comintern archives, [2A].

⁷⁸ ECCI cable, in PolCom minutes, 11 July 1927 in Comintern archives, PRL; printed in *Daily Worker*, New York City Edition, 12 July 1927.

⁷⁹ Aaronberg, Abern, Bittleman, Dunne, Johnstone, Krumberlin, Reynolds, Swabeck statement, in PolCom minutes, 11 July 1927, in PRL.

⁸⁰ PC minutes, 27 July 1927, in PRL.

⁸¹ *Daily Worker*, New York City edition, 20 July 1927.

urge the entire party to do likewise.’ It continued, however, to paint Lovestone as the real anti-Comintern force in the Party: ‘the main obstacle to the unification of the party on the basis of collective leadership has been the theory of hegemony’ though which ‘the Lovestone group has claimed the right to permanently maintain itself as a closed faction and to exercise “hegemony” over the party.’⁸²

The next round was over the cables themselves. Johnstone argued that both chairmen, Foster and Lovestone, must sign cables; Lovestone asserted that only one signature was necessary, ‘especially the signature of comrade Lovestone, who is named first in the order of the secretaries by the C.I.’ This motion passed, but only with a vote split along factional lines. Lovestone thus anointed himself ‘first secretary’.⁸³

Even with Lovestone in place, the Party still needed to go through the formality of a National Convention. According to Draper, since Lovestone’s grip on the apparatus was firm, and most importantly, the Comintern’s preference for Lovestone was now known, this Convention was one of the most democratic in the history of the Party.⁸⁴ The ‘Committee for Preparation of the Party Convention’ established strict guidelines for open discussion in the *Daily Worker*, as well as set-up full membership meetings in ten major cities that allowed each faction to freely present its case. The Committee also created a fair way of voting.⁸⁵ Lovestone’s message was that a vote for him was a vote for the Comintern, and a vote for the minority was a vote against it.⁸⁶ According to a Foster-Cannon caucus memorandum, in August 1927, Lovestone received some 59 per cent of votes cast, while the opposition claimed 41 per cent. Yet, out of 3015 eligible voters in several large locals,

⁸² *Daily Worker*, New York City edition, 6 August 1927.

⁸³ PC minutes, 28 July 1927, in PRL.

⁸⁴ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 265.

⁸⁵ *Daily Worker*, 5 August 1927; New York City edition, 11 August 1927.

some 400 members (13 per cent) did not vote or abstained. The caucus circular claimed that these were votes of no confidence in Lovestone's leadership, although more likely they were more a vote of no confidence in *either* faction, and a desire to end factionalism itself.⁸⁷

American Exceptionalism

The political character of Lovestone's reign was marked by what was later termed 'American exceptionalism'. Like observers going back to the early Republic, socialists have argued over how much American society has conformed to European models. Among industrialised countries, the US has a weaker trade-union movement, and no working-class political party which reflects, even in a distorted way, the division of society into hostile classes. Historians have long debated why this is so; socialists have argued about what this implies for the viability of socialism in America. In periods like the 1920s, when the US economy prospers in comparison to the rest of the world, there is a tendency to claim that the general laws of capitalist society do not apply to the United States, a position that has come to be known as 'American exceptionalism'.

Lovestone developed his theory of exceptionalism, adding to his own impressionism a liberal mix of ideas from his international patron, Bukharin. He asserted that American capitalism was different, more vibrant and youthful, than international capitalism in general. Ever since Lenin's *Imperialism: The Ultimate Stage of Capitalism*, Communists have held that capitalism was moribund, and if not replaced by socialism, could only lead to misery, poverty, war and death. Capitalism could not be reformed, but had to be uprooted and smashed through socialist revolution. In 1919, the Comintern had predicted that capitalism was in its death

⁸⁶ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 173-74.

⁸⁷ 'Dear Comrade' minority circular, 8 August 1927, in PRL collection.

throes, exhausted and bled white from the war.⁸⁸ However, in the mid-1920s, through American aid and investment such as the Dawes plan, US capital bailed out European capitalism, providing a partial stabilisation. This made US imperialism hegemonic, and increased tensions between European (especially British) and American imperialism. The Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924 had analysed this development, even if, at the same time, the Comintern predicted economic collapse almost annually from 1922 till 1929.⁸⁹

The idea that American, unlike European capitalism, was still growing was not Lovestone's own concoction, but came from the Comintern. It was also not entirely unrealistic: compared to Europe, in the 1920s, American capitalism was doing well. One historian described how Americans at this time 'achieved the highest standard of living any people had ever known'.⁹⁰ With hindsight it is easy to point out the weakness in the economy—for blacks, workers and farmers—but this was harder to see at the time.

As early as 1925, Soviet economist Eugene Varga, in surveying the condition of international capitalism, wrote that capitalist Europe was in decline, but that 'America is still rising upon a capitalist basis'. Arguing that the US, and not Britain, 'was the counter pole of Soviet Russia in the capitalist world', he observed that American capitalism 'finds itself—like Soviet Russia—in an economic and world-political ascent, but on a capitalist basis'. Therefore, he predicted, 'in the future the final struggle between [the] bourgeoisie and the proletariat on an international scale will be carried out under the leadership of the United States and the Union of Soviet

⁸⁸ Cf. Trotsky's 'Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World', 6 March 1919, in Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. 1, 38-48.

⁸⁹ Robert H.L. Wheeler, 'American Communists: Their Ideology and their Interpretation of American Life, 1917-1939' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1953), 75-80. However, in dismissing as absurd the Communists' predictions, Wheeler paints a much too rosy picture of American capitalism in the 1920s.

⁹⁰ See Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity*, chapter ten.

Republics.’⁹¹ Already, in 1926, Ruthenberg had to argue against ‘party members who are making excuses for lack of progress on the grounds of the existing economic conditions and the refusal of the workers to carry on fights’ as ‘trying to excuse their own pessimism and lack energy in the struggle by a theory which has no basis in fact’.⁹²

Lovestone went beyond recognising the momentary strength of American capitalism and generalised it, in the process justifying the weakness of American Communism. While agreeing that capitalism internationally was headed towards another inter-imperialist conflagration, he argued that ‘American capitalism is still on the upward grade—still in the ascendancy.’ He continued: ‘American capitalism much more than any other capitalism in the world, is on the upward trend.’ Because of the ability of American capitalism to ‘exploit its colonial resources’ and ‘arm itself for a military struggle with other imperialist powers’, Lovestone added, ‘the peak of American capitalism—of American imperialist development—has not yet been reached.’⁹³ This explained the lack of appeal of socialism amongst US workers. Several years earlier, Lovestone had written that the strength of US imperialism—‘a world unto itself’—laid the basis for the ‘great influence and power of the bourgeoisified strata of the American working class’ having ‘infiltrated the ranks of and manifested itself in countless ways in the activities of nearly every section of the American working class’.⁹⁴ With such a situation, it was no wonder that the CP remained a party of thousands in a country of hundreds of millions.

⁹¹ E. Varga, ‘Ways and Obstacles to the World Revolution’, *Communist International*, nos. 18/19 (1925), 77-9. Cf. Harvey Klehr, ‘The Theory of American Exceptionalism’ (PhD thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1971), 97-100.

⁹² C.E. Ruthenberg, ‘Do We Believe in the Theory of Misery?’, *Daily Worker*, 3 September 1926.

⁹³ Jay Lovestone, ‘Perspectives for Our Party’, *Communist*, June 1927.

⁹⁴ Jay Lovestone, ‘American Imperialism To-Day’, *Communist International*, no. 14 (1925), 4, 12. Harvey Klehr, ‘Leninism and Lovestoneism’ *Studies in Comparative Communism* 7:1/2 (Spring/Summer 1974), argues that ‘behind the theory of American exceptionalism...stood the theoretical bulwark of orthodox Leninism, the theory of imperialism’ (7) because Lovestone based his

American exceptionalism represented an impressionistic acceptance of the might of American imperialism by the Lovestone leadership. Given the political backwardness of American workers and the strength of American capitalism, the Party needed to patiently maintain its revolutionary programme, without being either unduly pessimistic or naïve about the immediacy of revolution. This was Lenin's attitude in 1908, when revolution appeared quite distant in Russia. Lovestone's ultimate conclusions were social democratic, pessimistic, and anti-revolutionary.⁹⁵ Instead of redoubling the efforts to position the Party favourably for the inevitable crisis, Lovestone made excuses for the Party's weaknesses.

Lovestone's perspective was the American counterpart to Bukharin's general prognosis for international capitalism. Reacting to the apparent distance of international revolution in the 1920s, Bukharin had moved from the extreme left of the Bolsheviks to the far right. His growing conservatism based itself on his belief that revolution in the west was increasingly unlikely, and that therefore within Soviet Russia the task was to build socialism 'at a snails pace'. Against Trotsky and other left-wing Bolsheviks such as Preobrazhensky, who advocated a rapid industrialisation of Russia, Bukharin asserted that the peasantry was the basis for the development of socialism. Thus he urged the peasants to 'enrich' themselves. This gave flesh to the concept of building 'socialism in one country'; domestically, it meant the increase of power for the 'kulak' or rich peasants, and the increase of counterrevolutionary pressures.⁹⁶ Abroad, this conservatism played out in a disarming of the foreign parties since their role was undercut if they were to be unable to lead revolutions in the near

view on the strength and vitality of US imperialism; however, a key point of Lenin's theory is, as his title indicates, that imperialism is the final, unstable, stage of capitalist development and whilst an imperialist society may immediately gain from imperialism, the internal contradictions of capitalism are not removed.

⁹⁵ See Klehr, 'Leninism and Loreism', 10-12.

⁹⁶ Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, chapter 6.

future. Cannon captured the relationship between this in Soviet Russia and its US counterpart: 'The party became receptive to the ideas of Stalinism, which were saturated with conservatism, because the party cadres were unconsciously yielding to their own conservative environment.'⁹⁷

Entering 1928, then, the Party found itself in a quandary. Its external work—to free Sacco and Vanzetti, to lead massive working class struggle—seemed to be going well. While the future was not all rosy, there was the promise of increasing influence in the labour movement. However, this was hamstrung by factionalism that was beginning to disillusion even leaders in the Party. The way out—unifying the leadership, and increased attention on meeting the challenges the period posed—could not be achieved by the Party leaders themselves. Instead, they needed help from the Comintern. However, given the degeneration of the Comintern, such assistance was not on offer.

⁹⁷ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 25.

8. The Elimination of Opposition and the Third Period

The Sixth Comintern Congress, held in 1928, heralded the leftist 'Third Period' perspective of imminent world-wide capitalist collapse and revolutionary upsurge.¹ It denounced traditional social-democratic and trade-union labour leaders not just for being props of the bourgeoisie, active 'social fascists', often worse than outright fascists. Given the urgency of revolution, Communist compromise with the bourgeoisie or their social-fascist allies was out of the question; instead, Communists should prepare the final conflict under the rubric 'class against class'. In practice, Communists split from established trade unions to form 'red' unions. In some places this policy would have disastrous results: in Germany it meant refusing to form united fronts with Social Democracy against the Nazis, and in China it led to adventurist tactics that further decimated the weakened Communist movement.

While Bukharin (since 1926, the head of the ECCI) remained an important Communist leader, this left turn, and the Russian initiative towards forced collectivisation and rapid industrialisation, both led by Stalin, undercut his base within both the Russian and Comintern leaderships.² Now, throughout the Comintern, official pronouncements warned against the 'right danger', and most Communists saw Bukharin as the pre-eminent rightist. In the early summer of 1928, Bukharin, along with allies Rykov and Tomsky, unsuccessfully opposed this left turn. At the same time, Stalin skilfully adopted certain aspects of the left opposition's programme in order to co-opt certain leftists, and marginalise the others, most importantly Trotsky.

¹ The first period, according to this view, was immediately after the October Revolution when there was an upsurge in the labour movement internationally; then, the second period, around the time of the Third Congress, when the Russian Revolution was isolated and imperialism had temporarily stabilised. For Bukharin's periodisation, see the 'Theses of the Sixth Comintern Congress on the International Situation and the tasks of the Communist International', in Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 455-56; for the programme passed at the Congress, see, *ibid.*, 471-525.

² Eric D. Weitz, 'Bukharin and "Bukharinism" in the Comintern, 1919-1929', in Nicholas N. Kozlov and Eric D. Weitz, eds., *Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin: A Centenary Appraisal* (New York: Praeger,

While Stalin's power within Russia and the Comintern surged, it did so only on the back of eliminating any internal democracy within the Communist Party and creating chaos within Soviet agriculture that damaged the USSR for decades afterwards.³

The Congress came at a moment when Stalin was consolidating his power but could not openly break with Bukharin, still officially the leader of the Comintern. While it denied Trotsky's appeal to reverse his expulsion from the Communist movement⁴, it also subtly undercut Bukharin's power. Since most foreign Communists were ignorant of these Russian disputes, one historian labelled the Congress 'in reality the occasion of two congresses'.⁵ Speculation over the falling out between Stalin and Bukharin reached such heights that the Russian Politbureau, which included Stalin and Bukharin, issued a statement to 'protest most vigorously against the circulation of rumours to the effect that there are divergences of opinion among the members of the Polit Bureau of the CPSU.'⁶ Although this debate was not open, it was the last time that there was such a major struggle within the Soviet leadership; after defeating Bukharin in 1929, Stalin felt free to hold only one more congress in the fifteen years before he dissolved the Comintern altogether

The Sixth Congress and its aftermath completed the early history of the American Party. Only in 1928-29 did the CP leadership fully assimilate the lessons of the Russian 'Thermidor' four years earlier. This Stalinism provided the ideology upon

1990) argues, instead, that Bukharin's role in the Comintern has been both misrepresented and underestimated.

³ On the power struggle within the Soviet Party, see Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates from Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press, 1974), chapter one. On the effect of this on undercutting the left, see for example M.M. Gorinov and S.V. Tsakunov, 'Life and Works of Evgenii Alekseevich Preobrazhenskii', *Slavic Review* 50:2 (Summer 1991), 292-93.

⁴ See the 'Resolution of the Sixth Comintern Congress on the appeal of Trotsky, Saprnov, and Others' in Degras, vol. 2, 549.

⁵ On the Sixth Congress and Stalin's struggle against Bukharin, see Cohen, *Bukharin*, 292-93.

⁶ 'To the Standing Committee of the VI Congress', signed by J. Stalin, N. Bukharin, K. Voroshilov, Y. Rudzutak, V. Molotov, A. Pykov, M. Tomsky, I. Kalinin and V. Kuibysov, 30 July 1928, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 213, folder 18.

which the Comintern finally consolidated a stable, non-factional American leadership. After the Congress, the Party expelled Cannon, for supporting Trotsky, and Lovestone, for supporting Bukharin, and replaced the quarrelsome leadership with a ideological and personnel configuration that would last until the end of the second world war. This chapter examines this process.

While the rise of Stalin sapped the Party of its original revolutionary vitality, the Third Period at the same time appeared to many Communists to strengthen the Party. The elimination of factionalism allowed the Party to turn outward and intervene into the black, labour and unemployed movements. While they may appear daft today, Third Period revolutionary pronouncements rang true to many at the time. This, and the prestige the Party claimed from the Russian Revolution, helped root the Party more deeply in the American working class than ever before. From 1930 to 1933, the Party doubled its membership from 7500 to almost 15000.⁷

The birth of American Trotskyism

Until 1928, the Party had remained aloof from the factionalism ravishing the Russian and other sections of the Comintern, only using it as fodder in its own less political, if no less bloody, American wrangling.⁸ Thus, in early 1928, despite the factional hyperbole, the only significant US supporter of Trotsky was Max Eastman, a rather marginal fellow traveller.⁹ The former *Masses* editor had only joined the Party, in 1923, before attending the Twelfth Bolshevik Party conference. In Moscow he begun a biography of Trotsky and became convinced of the correctness of Trotsky's struggle, making him persona non grata in Communist circles. Trotsky had used him

⁷ Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 91.

⁸ See 'The Situation in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', *Daily Worker*, 6 October 1926, for examples of the anti-Trotsky mood in the Party, including an official statement by Ruthenberg, for the CC against Trotsky and Zinoviev.

⁹ For an example of Communist attacks on Eastman, see the *Daily Worker*, 19 October 1926; *ibid.*, 20 October 1926.

to transmit Lenin's suppressed Testament to the Western press, and then denounced him.¹⁰

American Communist leaders saw the struggle amongst the Bolshevik leaders not so much a vital question for the international Communist movement, but as an opportunity to curry favour with Moscow. The Lovestoneites, friendly with Bukharin internationally and dependent on the good graces of the Comintern for their power, led the anti-Trotsky campaign. Their pessimism regarding the struggle for socialism in the US dovetailed with Bukharin's right-wing prognosis for constructing socialism in Soviet Russia, as Max Bedacht spelt out in an article in the *Workers Monthly*: 'The difficulties of socialist construction in Russia are naturally closely connected with the relative stability of capitalism in the rest of the world. The partial stabilization puts the whole burden of the socialist construction in Russia upon the shoulders of the Russian revolution.'

And not, Bedacht implied, on the shoulders of the International, including its American section. Echoing Bukharin and Stalin, Bedacht claimed that the primary responsibility for this construction within Russia fell on the working class, but that Trotsky erred in his placing it on the peasantry. This confusion, along with 'the inability of the revolution to solve its problems in a short time creates doubts as to its ability to solve them at all. The opposition in the C.P.S.U. makes itself the spokesman of these doubts. It develops a theory about them and systematizes them.' Thus, Trotsky, and not Bukharin and his Lovestoneite allies, who was pessimistic, according to Bedacht: Trotsky 'loses hope in the possibility of success, for the Russian

¹⁰ See Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 359-62; Frank A. Stricker, 'Socialism, Feminism and the New Morality: The Separate Freedoms of Max Eastman, William English Walling, and Floyd Dell, 1910-1930' (PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1974), 108-109; John P. Diggins, *Up From Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), chapter 1.

revolution.... Under imperialism the theory of permanent revolution becomes the theory of hopelessness.’¹¹

After constructing this theoretical edifice, polemicists such as Wolfe fitted the American ‘opposition’ into it. Resurrecting the Farmer-Labor corpse, he wrote that ‘In the matter of the farmer, our party is still filled with the American form of “Trotskyism” which consists in the underestimation of the farmer and even ignorance of the importance of rural conditions and class divisions’.¹² In other words, the American ‘Trotskyists’ underestimated American farmers just as their Russian leader underestimated Russian peasants. That this facile analogy was built on a triple distortion—Trotsky did not underestimate the peasantry, there were no American ‘Trotskyists’, and Lovestone’s opponents were not guilty as charged regarding the farmers—did not undermine its effectiveness as a factional weapon.

Pepper played a special role, since his position in the Comintern apparatus allowed him to inform his factional comrades of the latest developments in Moscow.¹³ In September, Pepper, then the Comintern representative to the CP, sent a letter to the American leadership criticising the lack of an anti-Trotsky motion from the CEC or Party Convention.¹⁴ Less than a fortnight later, the ECCI presidium expelled Trotsky from the ECCI.¹⁵ A political committee meeting in October 1927 passed unanimously a motion by Wolfe favouring ‘a strengthening of the criticism of the opposition of the CPSU’ by Americans in Moscow. Wolfe’s other ‘resolution on the opposition in the CPSU and Comintern’, ‘approve[d] wholeheartedly the recent actions of the ECCI in removing Comrades Trotsky and Vuyovitch from the Executive Committee of the

¹¹ *Workers Monthly*, January 1927.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ In the fall of 1926, for example, articles and statements from Pepper, then chief of the Agitprop (Agitation and Propaganda) department of the Comintern appeared in the *Daily Worker*.

¹⁴ Letter from Pepper to CEC, 26 September 1927, attached to PC minutes, 16 November 1927, in Comintern archives, 515:1:981.

Comintern' and denounced Trotsky's supposed moves to split the Comintern and form a 'fourth international'.¹⁶

Lovestone moved to issue a bulletin against the Russian opposition. Foster responded with a motion to print Stalin's speeches against Trotsky. Wolfe then moved that the Political Committee issue a signed anti-Trotsky article. The CEC passed all three motions and 'welcome[d]' the expulsion of Zinoviev and Trotsky from the Soviet Party. A fortnight later, the Political Committee sent a letter to the Fifteenth Soviet Party Congress calling for this.¹⁷

Even though they did not fully understand the issues, both factions used Anti-Trotskyism to gain support in Moscow while denouncing the other faction for being soft on the Russian opposition. The fate of the 'Trotskyist' Lore induced all to play along, including Cannon who voted for both the PC motions described above, although his anti-Trotskyism was passive. The combination of anti-Trotskyism and such incessant factionalism began to disillusion and cause him to withdraw from hyperactive factionalism. He recalled later that 'I felt great dissatisfaction. I was never enthusiastic about the fight in the Russian party. I could not understand it.'¹⁸ As he withdrew from this fight, he focused more on the ILD.

The Central Committee held a plenum in February 1928 to discuss the expulsions of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Russian Party. Wolfe, for two hours, attacked Trotsky; then, one-by-one, the Party's leaders, Fosterite and Lovestoneite alike, denounced Trotsky. Cannon however, remained silent, although he had voted in November to call for the Bolshevik leaders' expulsion. He later stressed that this 'was

¹⁵ See ECCI presidium motion, 28 September 1927, in Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 403.

¹⁶ PC minutes, 7 October 1927, in Comintern archives, 515:1:981. Trotsky, of course, did not advocate a Fourth International until 1933 (when the Comintern did nothing to stop the rise of Hitler), and in the interim oriented towards the Comintern's various sections and appealed his expulsion.

not an anticipation of the future at all. It was simply a mood, a stubborn personal feeling that I had on the question. We didn't have any real information. We didn't really know what the truth was.'¹⁹ Yet Cannon's bemusement did prepare the ground—if not map out the path—for his future development, since it meant that he had not already been sealed off from Trotskyism.

When the American delegates travelled to Moscow for the Sixth Congress, they did so not to participate in an international meeting of revolutionaries, but to argue their factional grievances. Cannon, by this time already less than enthusiastic about factionalism, and who had to be convinced by his co-factionalists to attend in the first place, did not look forward to his assignment to the programme commission.²⁰ However, it was in this capacity that Cannon first appreciated Trotsky's struggle when the commission distributed his 'Draft Programme of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals'. Later published as *The Third International after Lenin*, this document appealed his expulsion, criticised Stalin and Bukharin's concept of 'socialism in one country', and the degeneration of the Revolution.

Trotsky outlined a view of the Comintern that was new to Cannon. The Bolsheviks had organised the Comintern, Trotsky argued, out of the recognition of the necessity of extending the Revolution abroad. Since Lenin's death, however, the programme of building socialism in one country had vitiated this purpose. This was in response to the rise of a conservative bureaucratic caste that arose out of the backwardness and isolation of Soviet Russia. Now it sabotaged the world revolution

¹⁷ PC minutes, 16 November 1927, and PC minutes, 30 November 1927, in Comintern archives, 515:1:981.

¹⁸ James P. Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 42.

¹⁹ James P. Cannon, *Notebook of an Agitator*, 45.

²⁰ See minutes of Political Committee, 13 June 1928, reprinted in Cannon, *Early Years of American Communism*, 506.

needed to sustain the October Revolution. To Cannon, this explained the schizophrenia that marked the Comintern's intervention into the American Party, and which rendered it unable to end the factionalism. Cannon, therefore, found himself agreeing with Trotsky's call for a struggle to return the Comintern to its Leninist fundamentals.

While Trotsky had little hope of converting Stalin or Bukharin, he did not write off the possibility of winning members of the Comintern in Russian or abroad, such as Cannon and his Canadian comrade, Maurice Spector. Cannon recalled that 'It was clear that as daylight that Marxist truth was on the side of Trotsky. We made a compact there and then—Spector and I—that we would come back home and begin a struggle under the banner of Trotskyism.'²¹ Unlike Cannon, Spector, a leading member of the Canadian Party, had already had misgivings about the rise of Stalin.²²

That Cannon, a veteran of the Party's warfare, became Trotsky's first significant American supporter, may appear strange. However, by 1928, Cannon believed that endless factionalism, and the Comintern's failure to end it, had led to a dead end. Trotsky's document explained the Comintern's behaviour, which was so unlike its role in the early 1920s, in the context of political developments in the Russian Party. Cannon was especially impressed with the section that denounced the Farmer-Labor Party as opportunist and anti-Marxist.²³ At bottom, Cannon believed that remaining true to what he saw as the programme of revolutionary Bolshevism was more important than securing a position in the Comintern leadership.

²¹ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 50.

²² Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 144. The basis for Alexander's discussion is a 1958 interview he carried out with Spector, who had by then quit the Trotskyist movement. For a (biased) description of the rise of Trotskyism in Canada under Spector's leadership, see Tim Buck, *Yours in Struggle: The Reminiscences of Tim Buck* (Toronto: New Canada, 1977), 131. Cf. Avakumovic, *Communist Party in Canada*, 54-55.

²³ Introduction to *'Dog Days': James P. Cannon vs. Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931-1933* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 2002), 38.

Although Cannon later remembered that after reading Trotsky's document, he considered himself, 'without a single wavering doubt thereafter, a disciple of Trotsky', this choice could not have been easy. To fight under Trotsky's banner not only risked expulsion from the Party, his political home for almost a decade, but it also meant abandoning the chance at factional power just when this appeared imminent. Neither Lovestone nor Foster could lead the Party in the wake of the Sixth Congress. Lovestone was weakened because of his support to Bukharin, and Foster's position was weakened by his opposition to the new revolutionary unions. Already, Foster's supporters had jettisoned him in preference to Browder, Bittelman and Johnstone. Since none of these could lead the Party, Cannon seemed well positioned to assume power within the Party.²⁴ Foster had approached Cannon to form an alliance, and Cannon's own supporters, worried at his aloofness during the Congress, urged him to position himself to take over once Lovestone was deposed.²⁵ Spector also faced similar considerations: already the editor of the CPC's *Worker*, he joined the ECCI during the Congress.²⁶ Yet to achieve this power, they needed to firmly support Stalin against Trotsky. Both chose their principals, their support to Trotsky, over their political careers with the Party, knowing they would soon face expulsion.

Upon returning to the US, Cannon carefully showed Trotsky's draft to select comrades. After convincing his wife, Rose Karsner, Cannon recruited a small number of his co-factionalists, especially Arne Swabeck, Max Shachtman and Martin Abern. Soon rumours circulated amongst the Party leadership. Lovestone sought to use these to undermine Cannon's factional ally, Foster.²⁷ For his part, Foster, already burnt by

²⁴ Cannon, *First Ten Years of American Communism*, 213.

²⁵ Ibid, 211; Charles Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution: Memoirs of an American Radical* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 173.

²⁶ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 367.

²⁷ According to Gitlow, Bukharin had informed Lovestone in Moscow of G.P.U. evidence of Cannon's Trotskyist sympathies, yet had counselled Lovestone to use this for his own factional advantages;

his previous alliance with Lore, downplayed these rumours. Lovestone, however, had a strong reason to uncover the truth in order to vanquish his enemies.

After Lovestone obtained proof of Cannon's sympathies, Foster's supporters could no longer temporise. As a pre-emptive strike, they expelled Cannon and his supporters from the joint caucus and raised charges of Trotskyism against Cannon, Abern and Shachtman in the Political Committee. The Lovestoneites, however, gleefully called a 'trial' at which they allowed Cannon to speak freely in the hope he would discredit Foster. At this point, Cannon and his supporters openly announced their support for Trotsky and the Left Opposition.²⁸ In response, on 27 October, the Party leadership expelled Cannon and his supporters, and convened national branch meetings to denounce them. The leaderships gave them a week to prove their innocence, then and then expelled them summarily if they objected. Unlike previous political fights, Cannon was unable to explain his politics to the rank and file, and many members learnt of his expulsion through a notice in the *Daily Worker*.²⁹ In total, some hundred members were expelled, for either supporting Cannon, or merely questioning his expulsion.³⁰

North of the border, Spector too fell under suspicion. Already suspect for a public speech he had made that criticised the Soviet leadership, Spector refused to endorse Cannon's expulsion at a 5 November Canadian Political Committee meeting; the next day he openly declared his support for the Left Opposition, and, on 11 November, he was expelled. From the beginning, Spector—whose support was

Gitlow, *I Confess*, 558. (However, several pages earlier [page 491], Gitlow claimed that 'Cannon's conversion to Trotskyism was a complete surprise to us.')

²⁸ See James P. Cannon, *The Left Opposition in the U.S., 1928-31* (New York: Pathfinder, 1985), 31.

²⁹ Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution*, 174.

³⁰ For a description of the expulsions, see statement by Arne Swabeck and Albert Glotzer (two Cannon supporters in the YCL who themselves were soon to be expelled) on expulsion of Cannon, Abern and Shachtman and in solidarity with Trotsky, 22 November 1928, in Albert Glotzer papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 1. A month later, Cannon, writing to Glotzer (20 December 1928),

weaker in part because he did not have Cannon's factional apparatus—linked Canadian Trotskyism to the Opposition in the US.³¹

Immediately after their expulsion, the American Trotskyists, isolated from Trotsky's supporters elsewhere, began to organise.³² On 15 November, they published the first copy of the *Militant*, put out on credit and financed in part by Max Eastman.³³ Like Trotsky, they first targeted the Communist Party. Seeking to recruit Communists disaffected by Lovestone, they pledged 'that our struggle, like the struggle of the Russian Opposition, will be conducted solely on a party basis' and appealed their expulsion.³⁴ At a Central Committee plenum on 17 December 1928, Lovestone, again for factional reasons, allowed Cannon about two hours to speak, and then, as expected, denied his appeal.³⁵

Then, with some expelled Boston Communists led by Antoinette Konikow, and in alliance with Italian-American sympathisers of Bordiga, they organised an American Left Opposition. In May 1929, the Communist League of America (Opposition), representing some 100 members determined to regain entry into the official Party, held its first convention.³⁶

Not surprisingly, the Party reacted with fury, fearing both a growth of American Trotskyism and the wrath of Stalin. Gitlow recalled that:

The leaders of the Communist party had promised that under no circumstances would they permit the Trotskyites to get a foothold in the United States. They

claimed that some 70 members had been expelled from the US and about a dozen from Canada; in Glotzer papers, box 1.

³¹ William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto: 1968), 142-44.

³² Only in 1930, when Shachtman travelled to Prinkipio, did Cannon's group meet with Trotsky; Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 771.

³³ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 54-58. Despite Trotsky's denouncing Eastman over the publication of Lenin's Testament, Eastman still sympathised with Trotsky enough to help finance Cannon; eventually, however, Eastman would break with Marxism altogether, becoming the editor of *Readers Digest*. Eastman also proved one of the better translators of Trotsky's writings, including his *History of the Russian Revolution*

³⁴ Cannon, *Left Opposition in the U.S.*, 37.

³⁵ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 67.

³⁶ Alexander, *International Trotskyism*, 766.

swore that they would treat the Trotskyites like rats and traitors. They did just that, turning many a Trotsky public meeting into a bloody battleground.³⁷ The Party leadership slandered Cannon, and forbade members from even talking with ‘Trotskyites’. Almost all Cannon’s friends—including his best, William F. Dunne—abandoned him. ‘A wall of ostracism separated us from the party members’, he recalled. ‘People whom we had known and worked with for years became strangers to us overnight.’³⁸ The *Daily Worker* ran articles denouncing the Cannon ‘renegades’.³⁹

But the ‘cold shoulder’ was the mildest of the Party’s anti-Cannon activities. Gitlow later recalled the anti-Cannon ‘campaign of violence’ which ‘repeated the stupidest errors of the most provincial police department’.⁴⁰ In December, Party loyalists attacked an all-female sales-team outside the Party headquarters in Union Square.⁴¹ In Cleveland, district organiser Amter (a Lovestone supporter) led an attempt to prevent Cannon from holding a meeting.⁴² Charles Shipman, a former supporter of Cannon (under the name Manuel Gomez), described how shortly after his former comrades’ expulsion he attended a Cannon meeting at Irving Plaza to ‘break it up’.⁴³

Jacob Stachel, a powerful Lovestone lieutenant and organisational secretary of the New York branch, directed this campaign. He organised a burglary of Cannon’s flat, which stole the Opposition’s correspondence and subscription records. He

³⁷ Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives: Communism in America—A Personal History and Intimate Portrayal of its Leaders* (Boston: Western Islands, 1965[1948]), 238.

³⁸ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 63-64. When he later broke with Manuel Gomez, another comrade and close friend who was growing further from the Party, Dunne wrote that ‘In that sector of the barricades where I command you will be shot on sight’ (Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution*, 203-204). Dunne’s younger brothers, however, remained close to Cannon and the Trotskyist movement for decades.

³⁹ See, for example, Ella Reeve Bloor, ‘Close the Ranks against the Cannon Renegades’, *Daily Worker*, 11 January 1929.

⁴⁰ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 491-92.

⁴¹ *Militant*, 15 December 1928.

⁴² Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 70.

⁴³ Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution*, 174.

bragged about this raid to the Political Committee, which later used the stolen information to expel Cannon supporters within the Party.⁴⁴

The sensational coverage of Cannon's expulsion in the international Communist press, including in Russia, meant that, for the Left Opposition, 'overnight, the whole picture, the whole perspective of the struggle changed'. The Russian Opposition, worn down after five years of Stalinist attacks, and with its leaders in prison or exile, greeted the news joyfully. 'I have always thought of this as one of the most gratifying aspects of the historic fight we undertook in 1928', Cannon boasted " 'the news of our fight reached the Russian comrades in all corners of the prisons and exile camps inspiring them with new hope and new energy to persevere in the struggle.'⁴⁵

Cannon and his followers bolstered the ranks of the international Left Opposition. For example, Cannon's contact with members of the Argentine Communist Party laid the basis for Trotskyism in Argentina, where it would grow.⁴⁶ When Trotsky organised the Fourth International in 1938, Cannon and his followers played an important role, which they continued until the Fourth International was destroyed in the aftermath of World War II. Until his assassination by agents of Stalin in 1940, Trotsky also nurtured the American Trotskyists, and while he was alive, his supporters in the US were the largest part of the international Left Opposition.⁴⁷ Peng Shu-tse, an early Chinese Communist who sided with Trotsky, recalled that '*The*

⁴⁴ Stachel's report is reprinted in Cannon, *The Early Years of American Communism*, 562-63. On the burglary of Cannon's flat, cf. 'Papers Stolen 70 Years Ago Tell Story of Communist Movement in United States', *Militant*, 26 May 1997.

⁴⁵ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 61-62.

⁴⁶ Osvaldo Coggiola, *Historia del Trotskyismo Argentino*, 13. Cannon had at one time been scheduled to tour Latin America for the US CP; the Argentine Communists (actually, British immigrants) whom Cannon corresponded with had split from the official Party in 1927. Argentina was the first Latin American country to have a Trotskyist organisation.

⁴⁷ Barry Lee Woolley, *Adherents of Permanent Revolution: A History of the Fourth (Trotskyist) International* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 22. Of course, other sections were relatively stronger.

Militant and other publications of the American Trotskyists were the educators and organizers of Trotskyists around the world,' and Ted Grant recalled that for dissidents within the South African CP in the 1920s, the *Militant* 'was a revelation that changed our lives completely'.⁴⁸ Even in Britain, where Cannon has been particularly reviled, his followers were largely responsible for providing literary and other assistance to British Trotskyism.⁴⁹

At first, Cannon was optimistic. Ironically, one strength of American Trotskyism was the weakness of the official CP. Although the CP brought its full weight to bear against Cannon, who suddenly became persona non grata in many radical circles, the Party did not have so much weight to throw around as in other countries.⁵⁰ Also, Cannon left the Party with an organised group of supporters, unlike other countries, such as China, where equally important Communists were expelled but who lacked Cannon's organisation.⁵¹

Furthermore, many Party members were disgruntled with Lovestone—especially as he moved further to the right—and Cannon painted his struggle as a continuation of the fight against him. Thus the early *Militant* serialised the Foster-Cannon document, 'The Right Danger in the American Party'.⁵² Since most of Cannon's supporters were already against Lovestone, this limited the chances of any

⁴⁸ 'Tribute to Cannon from Peng-tse and Chen Pi-Lan', in *James P. Cannon: A Political Tribute*, 11; Ted Grant, *History of British Trotskyism* (London: Wellred Publications, 2002), 32.

⁴⁹ For a sense of both the revulsion felt by British Trotskyists towards Cannon (because of his role in the international Trotskyist movement after the Second World War) and their debt to him, see for example, Jim Higgins, review of George Breitman, et. al., *Trotskyism in the United States*, in *Revolutionary History* 6:4 (1997), 259; Martin Richard Upham, 'The History of British Trotskyism to 1949' (PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1980), chapter 2.

⁵⁰ See interview with James P. Cannon by Sidney Lens, 16 July 1974, in *James P. Cannon: A Political Tribute*, 38.

⁵¹ On the early years of Chinese Trotskyism, see Gregor Benton, *China's Urban Revolutionaries: Explorations in the History of Chinese Trotskyism, 1921-1952* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996), 33ff.

⁵² This was serialised in the *Militant* between 15 November 1928 and 15 January 1929.

alliance between the Right and Left Opposition, something that led to the disintegration of opposition groups in Europe.⁵³

Cannon optimistically expected support to come from Foster's supporters or former Cannonites like Dunne. In November 1928, Shachtman wrote to a comrade 'that we have established fairly good contacts with some of the best New York comrades, formerly in our group, upon whom we are exercising a growing influence.'⁵⁴ In the autumn, Cannon described 'a new group of supporters working within the party', including Hugo Oehler, one of the leaders of the 1929 Gastonia textile strike.⁵⁵ In late September 1929, the National Committee (NC) of the expelled Opposition spelt out its policy for Oehler 'to remain in [the Communist] party; to endeavor to build a fraction therein; to establish contacts with certain comrades in the Gastonia field; to try to build his way up into party ranks'. A month later, the NC reported that Oehler 'stated that the party was demoralized' under Lovestone and that it 'was ripe for our work'.⁵⁶

Trotsky also was optimistic. In October 1929, a year after Cannon was expelled, he predicted that although in most countries 'the communist left opposition represents a fraction that struggles for influence over the proletarian core of the official party', his American followers, like their Belgian comrades, 'can exist independently and their struggle primarily consists not of a struggle for the proletarian core of the CP, but of the Social Democracy' because 'the official party is all but insignificant'. Although most sections of the left opposition in the west were largely propaganda organisations that oriented towards the official Communists, Trotsky

⁵³ See introduction to *'Dog Days'*, 52.

⁵⁴ Max Shachtman to Al [Glutzer], 24 November 1928, in Glutzer papers, box 1, Shachtman file.

⁵⁵ See Cannon to Young [Hugo Oehler], 13 August 1929, in *The Left Opposition in the U.S.*, 201. Other letters reprinted in this volume during this time also express Cannon's view towards the Party.

⁵⁶ Minutes of Communist League of America National Committee, 24 September 1929 and 28 October 1929, in Albert Glutzer Papers, box 1.

believed that ‘the Communist League of America has all the necessary elements to develop into an independent party’.⁵⁷ However, these early predictions were much too optimistic: until the mid-1930s, the American Trotskyists remained, in essence, a small propaganda organisation, isolated from the labour movement, and torn by internal factionalism.⁵⁸

Lovestone becomes a Lovestoneite

American Trotskyism’s weaknesses originated in changes in the official Communist Party begun after Cannon’s expulsion. Ironically, Lovestone initiated a process which would devour himself and his sympathisers. As Stalin moved against Bukharin in 1928-29, Foster sought to exploit Lovestone’s well known pro-Bukharin sympathies and paint him as part of the ‘right danger’ haunting the Comintern. Cannon and Foster’s document, ‘The Right Danger and the American Party’, criticised Lovestone for ‘overestimation of the reserve powers of American imperialism’; an ‘underestimation of the leftward drift of the masses’; a ‘lack of perspective of struggle’; opportunism in many fields of work, and finally, a ‘denial of the right danger and militant attack against left’ as well as a ‘right wing internal factional regime’.⁵⁹

At this point, Lovestone, a consummate factionalist, stumbled: he mounted an offensive against Stalin. He criticised Losovsky—a key Stalinist ally and Foster’s patron in the Profintern—as ‘making a muddle of everything he touches’.⁶⁰ Perhaps this was merely a case of Freudian projection, since Lovestone succeeded, not in defending Bukharin, but undermining his own position in the Comintern. Making the

⁵⁷ Trotsky to *Militant*, 19 October 1929, in ‘Exile Papers of Lev Trotskii’, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bms Rus 13.1 9068-72. Original in French; author’s translation.

⁵⁸ See *Dog Days* for a documentary record of early American Trotskyism.

⁵⁹ This resolution was presented at the Sixth Congress, and signed by Cannon, Foster, Dunne, Bittelman, Johnstone, Manuel Gomez and George Siskin.

⁶⁰ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 309.

mistake of assuming he was the equal of Stalin and the Russian leadership, he demanded a meeting of the Comintern's 'Senioren Konven', consisting of the heads of the delegations, in order to berate Stalin and defend Bukharin.

Stalin and the Comintern leadership responded in January 1929 with a draft 'Open Letter' that signalled their growing dislike of Lovestone. The original draft, by Bolshevik Sergei I. Gusev, was ostensibly directed to the Party leadership to help prepare the for the Party's Sixth Convention. Reflecting the Third Period, it foresaw 'a growth of a leftward trend in the masses of the American proletariat' and 'great class conflicts' in the near future. It criticised the fact that the Party was 'still inadequately prepared' to deal with the oncoming radicalisation, because it was consumed by factionalism that was 'devoid of any political class content' and had become 'a struggle without principles and at times unprincipled'. The letter concluded that 'the existing leading groups must be SMASHED, SMASHED AND BROKEN AT ALL COSTS.' It called for the 'most determined breaking of both groups' to create a 'mass Communist Party of the American working class'. Although the letter did not single either faction out for special criticism, and reiterated the Sixth Congress' conclusion that the Party's right-wing errors 'cannot be ascribed to the majority leadership alone', it indicated that the Comintern had lost faith in Lovestone's leadership.⁶¹

The final version was much more detailed. It judged both factions guilty of 'an utter depreciation of the leftward trend of the working masses in other capitalist countries' and of right-wing deviations rooted in an inability to gauge the 'relations between the American and world economic systems', as well as a tendency to overestimate the autonomy of American imperialism. The letter singled out the Foster

⁶¹ Comrade Gussiev, draft of 'Open Letter to the Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America' nd [February 1929 written on pencil atop draft] in Jay Lovestone papers, box 198, folder 11.

minority for 'under-estim[ing] the Trotskyist danger' and forming factional alliances with 'openly right wing elements'. Nonetheless, because Lovestone had been at the helm during the Party's drift to the right, the letter damaged his faction more. They had 'shown a tendency to underestimate the radicalization as well the process of differentiation in the ranks of the working class' and had 'entirely ignore[d]' the Sixth Congress' resolution on the advent of the Third Period, and 'great[ly] overestim[ed] the economic might and the powerful technical development of the United States'.⁶²

Upon discovering the draft letter, Wolfe, a Lovestone leader who was representing the American Party in Moscow, made such a nuisance that the Comintern leadership convened an extra-ordinary one hour presidium meeting.⁶³ This meeting only highlighted his faction's impotency. Wolfe denounced, in English, the Open Letter. After a quarter hour, he paused to be translated into German. 'I was shocked to discover', he wrote in his memoirs, 'that the translator was making no attempt to translate me accurately, indeed, he was making a joke out of what I had just said.'⁶⁴ Wolfe continued in German, which he had studied at City College but which was not his first language.⁶⁵ Suffering from a fever of more than 40 degrees, he denounced the Open Letter as ultra-left and sectarian. His description is worth quoting at length:

Though I tottered uncertainly, out of illness and weariness, I looked at the faces of those who had been my auditors. Some seemed to me to look puzzled, some shocked, some contemptuous. No one looked at me with sympathy or a smile. People whom I had known for years looked as if they feared contact with me. Perhaps this is why they didn't step out into the aisles. I fixed my eyes on Ercoli (Togliatti), who had been a devoted admirer of Bukharin and one whom I had known, it seemed to me intimately, since the Fifth Congress of 1924. I could see him shrink back from his place on the aisle, as if he feared

⁶² ECCI 'Open Letter to the Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America', 7 February 1929, in Jay Lovestone papers, box 217, folder 1. For published versions, see Helmut Gruber, ed., *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern: International Communism in the Era of Stalin's Ascendancy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1974), 226 and Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 3, 9-16. For contemporary analysis, see also the *Communist International*, vol. 6 no. 8 (1929), 236-38.

⁶³ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 392.

⁶⁴ Wolfe, *Two Centuries*, 451-52.

⁶⁵ Since the Wolfe papers contain letters written in Yiddish, it is likely that he was fluent in that language.

that I might grasp his hand and ask something like, 'What did you think of my talk?'⁶⁶

Based on Wolfe's reports, Lovestone and his allies became increasingly worried. They especially disliked the proposal that Bittleman and Lovestone both be dispatched to Moscow in order to decapitate the factions. The Comintern again recalled Pepper to Moscow, who soon went into hiding in order continue assisting Lovestone in the upcoming convention.⁶⁷

Ninety per cent of the delegates to the upcoming Party conference supported Lovestone, a fact that he hoped would buffer him from Stalin. Although Gitlow later claimed to have urged Lovestone at this juncture to anticipate a split from the Comintern, Lovestone attempted to 'reach a satisfactory understanding with Stalin'.⁶⁸ Publicly the Lovestone majority wielded the Open Letter against the Foster minority.

The Lovestone faction attacked Foster's supporters for 'speculating from the very beginning on the differences real or imaginary existing between the Bookman [Bukharin] and the Steelman [Stalin]'.⁶⁹ In fact, both sides played the same game of Russian roulette, even postponing their national convention for four months, one delegated recalled, to 'see how the power struggle in Russia would end'.⁷⁰ Finally, on 1 March 1929 the Party—now simply the 'Communist Party, U.S.A.'—held its Sixth Convention. Gitlow later described this convention as 'one of the most riotous which I had ever participated in', with delegates at time even resorting to fisticuffs.

At the Convention, two ECCI representatives, Henry Pollitt from Britain and Philip Dengel from Germany, officially presented the Open Letter. Although Lovestone's supporters accepted the 'political line' of the Open Letter, and even

⁶⁶ Ibid., 345.

⁶⁷ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 512-22.

⁶⁸ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 398-99; Gitlow, *I Confess*, 516.

⁶⁹ Unsigned Lovestoneite letter to 'Dear Comrades', 7 February 1929, in Lovestone papers, box 198, folder 11.

⁷⁰ Shipman, *It Had to Be Revolution*, 174.

hailed it as ‘obviously a repudiation of the Opposition platform’,⁷¹ they could not stomach its proposal on Lovestone and Bittelman. Max Bedacht, a Lovestone supporter, moved that the Convention appeal to the ECCI ‘against some of the organizational proposals’ as ‘not in harmony and not conducive toward’ ending factionalism; it passed, although Browder put forward a defeated motion to accept both the letter and its organisational demands.⁷² The convention, disobeying the Letter, refused to elect Foster as its head, and instead installed Gitlow.⁷³

Foster’s supporters denounced the majority’s ‘open struggle against the Comintern’ and demanded ‘complete and unreserved acceptance of the [Open Letter and organisational proposals] as one individual whole’. They noted that the Majority’s opposition ‘puts the Party in the camp of all those within the CI, the open Right wing and the conciliators, who are today waging a struggle against the CI and the line of the Sixth World Congress’ and ‘who base themselves upon Comrade Bucharin’s’ positions in Russia, as well as expelled right-wingers such as Brandler and Thalheimer. ‘Loyalty to the CI today, the Minority declared, ‘demands unqualified support for the line of its leading Party, the C.P.S.U. and its Central Committee led by Comrade Stalin.’⁷⁴

In response, the Lovestoneites caucused, and, in accordance with the changed climate in Moscow, Lovestone and Gitlow introduced a motion advocating the end of Bukharin’s leadership of the Comintern, and accepting, ‘without reservations’, the

⁷¹ Unsigned Lovestoneite letter to ‘Dear Comrades’, 7 February 1929, in Lovestone papers, box 198, folder 11.

⁷² VI W(C)P Convention minutes, 5 March 1929, in Jay Lovestone papers, box 217, folder 3.

⁷³ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 400-404. See also Gitlow’s account of the Convention in *The Whole of their Lives*, 159-61.

⁷⁴ ‘Statement to the Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America’, signed by 67 minority supporters including Bittelman, Browder, Dunne and Foster, in Jay Lovestone papers, box 217, folder 4. The 67 signatories is significant because the Lovestoneites mustered 67 votes in the Convention to denounce the Open Letter.

Open Letter.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, Lovestone still disputed the letter's organisational demands. Lovestone appealed to Stalin on this point, who personally intervened by granting the Americans the right to pick their own leadership, but nonetheless ordered Pepper, Bittelman and Lovestone come to Moscow. The convention elected Gitlow as its leader, maintaining Lovestoneite domination, but also establishing the precedent of direct Moscow control of the leadership.⁷⁶

To bolster their image, the Lovestoneites arranged a 'proletarian' delegation to Moscow; it consisted largely of trade-union supporters.⁷⁷ Anticipating the worst, sensing the danger of having himself and his chief lieutenants Bedacht and Wolfe out of the country at once, Lovestone left the Party in the hands of his firm supporters Stachel and Minor, with instructions to take over the Party's assets should the trip go poorly. The Party's lawyer, Joseph Brodsky, arranged to transfer the Party's assets to Lovestone's supporters.⁷⁸

In Moscow, according to Gitlow, Stalin wielded 'the entire weight of the Communist world superstructure' against Lovestone.⁷⁹ At first glance, it appears odd that Stalin gave this factional fight his personal attention: while, by 1929, the Comintern increasingly arranged the internal affairs of its sections, Stalin himself rarely intervened in the Comintern personally, and usually left the 'dirty work' to his lieutenants, especially in regards to smaller Parties. Lovestone, however, had incredibly bad timing since his defiance of Stalin occurred at the same time Stalin waged war against Bukharin. Between January and July 1929, Stalin purged Bukharin

⁷⁵ VI W(C)P Convention minutes, in Jay Lovestone papers.

⁷⁶ See Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 401-402.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 22. The delegation was: Bedacht, Ella Reeve Bloor, Gitlow, Otto Huiswoud, Lovestone, William Miller, Tom Myerscough, Alex Noral, Edward Welsh, W.J. White (Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 404); Wolfe, already in Moscow, rounded out the Lovestone team.

⁷⁸ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 522.

⁷⁹ Gitlow, *Whole of their Lives*, 162.

from the leadership of the Russian Party and the Comintern, and oversaw the purge of his supporters from the foreign parties.⁸⁰

Lovestone was the weakest link in this pro-Bukharin chain, which explains why the American Commission was filled with important Russian and Comintern leaders: Stalin, Manuilsky, Gusev, Khitarov, Moireva, Losovsky, Bela Kun, Tom Bell, Walter Ulbricht and Kuusinen, Molotov and Mikhailov.⁸¹ Stalin wished to make an example of Lovestone: those foreign leaders who sided against him were enemies of the Comintern.

Historians know what happened at the Commission because several contemporaries took notes, sensing its importance.⁸² In general, the Commission stuck to the script of the Open Letter and dealt blow upon blow to the entire Party leadership. Dengel denounced the last Party convention as the ‘worst convention in history of CI’ and proposed that the Comintern place its American section in receivership since none of the factions was capable of running it.⁸³ He proposed a ‘new open letter characterizing [the] convention’; and argued that since ‘there is no group which can fully carry out line of CI’ that ‘there must be a new Party convention’. He ended by declaring, ‘No part of the party can be the leadership of the future’ and that ‘all caucuses must be destroyed.’⁸⁴ Gusev declared that six years of unprincipled factional struggle had rendered both factions incapable of leadership, and

⁸⁰ See Cohen, *Bukharin*, chapter 9, for a description of the triumph of Stalin over Bukharin; for the interrelationship of the Lovestoneite struggle and the anti-Bukharin campaign, see Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 24.

⁸¹ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 406.

⁸² These include a 15 April 1929 resume by an unnamed American, most likely a Lovestone supporter, in the Jay Lovestone papers, box 211, folder 8 (hereafter account A); a letter by Henry Wicks to ‘Dear Louis’, from Finland, 9 May 1929, in the Theodore Draper papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, box 29 (hereafter Wicks); an ‘Outline for Discussion on the Comintern Address’, undated, but shortly after the Commission ended, in Lovestone papers, box 214, folder 10. Finally, portions of the official transcript are available in the Lovestone papers, box 211, folder 8. Draper discusses the Commission in *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 406-23.

⁸³ Account A.

⁸⁴ Wicks account.

declared that there needed to be a 'new cadre' of leaders.⁸⁵ The Americans seemed oblivious: the Lovestone delegation attacked not only Foster, but the Comintern leadership as well. Foster and his supporters continued to paint Lovestone as rightists, obviously hoping to be handed power.

Finally, on 6 May, Stalin spoke, 'as if he were the angel of purity', Gitlow recalled.⁸⁶ He criticised both factions for 'right deviations', declaring that 'when the leaders of the majority and the minority accuse each other of elements of a Right deviation, it is obviously not without some measure of truth.'⁸⁷ Both factions—but 'particularly the majority'—were, according to Stalin, 'guided by motives of unprincipled factionalism' that 'place the interests of their faction higher than the interests of the Party'. Both factions 'base their relations with the Comintern, not on the principle of confidence, but on a policy of rotten diplomacy, a policy of diplomatic intrigue'. 'Instead of a fight on principles you get the most unprincipled speculation on the differences within the C.P.S.U.' American Communism had descended into 'Another game of rivalry—who can spit further.' Stalin characterised this attitude as 'Let them know over there in Moscow that we Americans know how to play the stock market.' 'But', exclaimed Stalin:

Comrades, the Comintern is not a stock market. The Comintern is the holy of holies of the working class. The Comintern, therefore, must not be confused with the stock market. Either we are Leninists, and our relations with one another, as well as the relations of the sections with the Comintern, and vice versa, must be built upon mutual confidence, must be as clean and pure as crystal—in which case there should be no room in our ranks for rotten diplomatic intrigue; or we are not Leninists—in which case rotten diplomacy and unprincipled factional struggle will have full scope in our relations. One of the other. We must choose, comrades.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Account A.

⁸⁶ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 553.

⁸⁷ Joseph Stalin, *Stalin's Speeches on the American Communist Party* (New York: Central Committee of the CPUSA, 1929), 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

Stalin again urged that Lovestone and Bittelman stay in Moscow 'for a time' in order to behead the leadership of both factions, although he directed more fire at Lovestone, declaring that 'the actions of the leaders of the majority at the [Sixth] Convention of the Communist Party of America...must be condemned.'⁸⁹ Wicks, writing before the end of the Commission's deliberation, described its goal as 'the overthrow of the majority leadership and the establishment of a new leadership' whose nucleus 'will not be the minority, but must be selected from the best elements in both groups.'⁹⁰ Dengel spoke of the need to change the leadership, in the notes of one observer, to ensure that 'no group to take up leadership. CI itself to lead the Party'.⁹¹ The Comintern, following Stalin's lead, seemed intent upon implementing its Open Letter, dismantling the factionalism by removing the guilty parties, and in its place constructing a stable, pro-Comintern leadership.

In the eight days between meetings, Gitlow drafted a statement that asserted the majority's independence from the Comintern: 'the Executive Committee of the Communist International desires to destroy the [American] Central Committee and therefore follows the policy of legalizing the past factionalism of the opposition and inviting its continuation the future'.⁹² On 12 May, the ECCI issued an address to the Party membership which criticised the Sixth Convention for not eliminating factionalism. It singled out Lovestone and his supporters for 'methods and intrigues which cannot be tolerated in any section of the Comintern and which clearly bear the imprint of petty bourgeois politiciandom':

for making use of the convention for factional purposes, for misleading honest proletarian members who uphold the line of the Comintern, for playing an unprincipled game with the question of the struggle against the right danger in the Comintern and in the communist party of the Soviet Union, for

⁸⁹ Ibid., 17-19.

⁹⁰ Wicks account.

⁹¹ Account A.

⁹² Quoted in Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 413.

inadmissible personal hounding of the delegation of the Comintern at the convention, for the organization of caucus meetings of the delegates of the majority in direct contradiction with the Open Letter of the ECCI and in spite of the verbal acceptance of that letter, for hounding those comrades who departed from the majority faction and unconditionally accepted the line of the ECCI, for a campaign against certain responsible comrades of the minority who were carrying out the line of the ECCI.⁹³

The address called for the immediate cessation of factionalism; the removal of both Bittelman and Lovestone from the American Party; reorganisation of the Secretariat; rejection of the Fosterite proposal for a special Party convention; and that the Comintern Control Commission decide Pepper's case.⁹⁴

The ECCI had circulated its address a day in advance in order to compel Lovestone to accept it. Instead, it triggered him to enact his plan to take over the Party's assets. Lovestone and Gitlow cabled Stachel and Minor. However, according to Gitlow, by this time Stachel had already broken with Lovestone and notified Stalin of Lovestone's perfidy. Lovestone's only leverage—his control of the American Party—was quickly dissipating.⁹⁵

At the 12 May meeting,⁹⁶ Kuusinen denounced Lovestone's threats, comparing it to previous declarations by 'open oppositionists on eve of a split'. Addressing both Foster and Lovestone, he ended: 'We demand statements as to whether you will carry out decision without reservations?' At this point, the Americans had to genuflect to Stalin, or rebel. While dickering with the section about Bittelman,⁹⁷ Foster supported the address. So did Weinstone and Bittelman. Gitlow, however, temporised: on the pretext of not having had sufficient time to study the address, he 'ask[ed] for a little more time to draw up a statement of views on the letter.' Molotov dismissed Gitlow's answer and Kuusinen denounced Gitlow's

⁹³ 'Address by the ECCI to All Members of the CP of the United States', 12 May 1929, in Gruber, ed., *Soviet Russia Masters the Comintern*, 230-34.

⁹⁴ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 415.

⁹⁵ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 555-57.

⁹⁶ The description of this meeting comes from Account A.

‘factional method’, and called for a vote on the letter. The Lovestoneites refused to vote. After Wolfe asked for more time, Stalin replied that:

I think the statement of Wolfe is shameful. The leadership of the faction is so illiterate, so backward, that they don’t understand the significance of the letter. You are asked in different words: Do you recognize the discipline of the CI? Do you believe the part should obey the whole? There are statutes of the CI. If it is necessary for you to think over this, then who are you?

Bela Kun then asked each Majority delegates if he would ‘carry out the discipline of the CI without reservations’. One after another, the ten delegates refused to answer the question. Instead, they attempted to balance a rhetorical loyalty to the Comintern with a rejection of its dictates.

Their declaration announced: ‘While still maintaining our disagreement with the Open Letter and its Organization instructions, and our conviction that they will not prove helpful to our Party, we...hereby categorically repudiate all charges of resistance in the Comintern decisions.’⁹⁸ A more substantial ‘Appeal to the Comintern’ criticised the Open Letter once again, claiming it had repudiated the decision of the Sixth Comintern Congress.⁹⁹ During Lenin’s time, it was possible to accept Comintern discipline but disagree with a particular decision, as John Reed had over the question of working within the AFL. Now, in the Stalinised Comintern, this was not so. Also, during Lenin’s time, disputes, and even splits from the Comintern, involved principled issues, not questions of organisational loyalty and control.

On 14 May, the Presidium, the highest body of the ECCI, met. It became clear in this meeting that the ten Majority delegates, represented by Gitlow, were isolated. By this time, the emphasis of the ECCI had shifted from trying to dismantle both

⁹⁷ ‘We accept the decision in regard to Bittelman, but do not subscribe to the formulation.’

⁹⁸ Memo to the Presidium of the ECCI, undated, signed by the Majority delegation. In Jay Lovestone papers, box 198, folder 12.

⁹⁹ ‘Appeal to the Comintern’, 14 May 1929, signed by the Majority delegation and Wolfe, issued in mimeographed form, 10 July 1929. In Lovestone papers, box 209, folder 16.

factions to destroying Lovestone's power. Stalin spoke again. Enraged at Lovestone's increasing disloyalty, Stalin labelled Lovestone's faction as traitors:

The fundamental feature of this declaration is that it proclaims the thesis of *non-submission* to the decisions of the Presidium of the E.C.C.I. That means that the extreme factionalism of the leaders of the majority has driven them into the path of insubordination, and hence of warfare against the Comintern. The crux of the issue, Stalin argued, was if 'the members of the American delegation, as Communists, as Leninists, consider themselves entitled not to submit to the decision of the E.C.C.I. on the American question?'. He continued:

You had a majority because the American Communist Party until now regarded you as the determined supporters of the Communist International. And it was only because the Party regarded you as the friends of the Comintern that you had a majority in the ranks of the American Communist Party. But what will happen if the American workers learn that you intend to break the unity of the ranks of the Comintern and are thinking of conducting a fight against its executive bodies—that is the question, dear comrades.¹⁰⁰ Stalin was more explicit: 'It is said that the Communist Party of America cannot get along without Comrade Lovestone, that the removal of Comrade Lovestone may ruin the Party. That is not true, comrades.' Later: 'I doubt it very much that at this stage Comrade Lovestone can be a Party leader.'¹⁰¹

At the end of the six hour meeting, early in the morning, the Presidium voted: only Gitlow opposed the address. Stalin proposed that each individual American delegate declare his position on the decision. Most declared that they opposed the ruling, but would nonetheless uphold it as a matter of discipline. However, three delegates broke ranks. Bedacht, a leading Lovestoneite, and Noral, capitulated to the Comintern.¹⁰² Gitlow, however, declared that he would not only oppose, but resist the decision. This enraged Stalin even more, and he thundered:

Who do you think you are? Trotsky defied me. Where is he? Zinoviev defied me? Where is he? Bukharin defied me. Where is he? And you? When you get back to America, nobody will stay with you except for your wives.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Stalin, *Speeches on the American Communist Party.*, 22, 32-33.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰² Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 420-22.

¹⁰³ Wolfe to Draper, quoted in *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 422.

Stalin, in fact, attempted to prevent even this: he tried to induce Wolfe's wife to desert her husband, and tried to prevent the Lovestoneites from even returning to the US through both the carrot and the stick.¹⁰⁴ By the end of May, a defeated Lovestone realised that Stalin was not going to let him return to the US, and that remaining in Moscow would further hinder his power. In a letter to the Comintern, he 'strongly insist[ed] to the ECCI that he 'be given work in some other country—outside Moscow and outside the United States'. In order of preference, he requested England, France, Germany, Argentina or the Far East.¹⁰⁵ The next day, the Comintern approved a personal trip for a fortnight to the US, but then the new American leadership opposed this. Finally, on 22 July, Lovestone sneaked out of Moscow.¹⁰⁶ Upon arriving in the US, Lovestone discovered that his 90 per cent majority was illusory, and like Icarus he fell to the earth. As one veteran militant put it, 'I went along with the decision [to expel him] on the grounds that the international leadership was more likely to be right than Lovestone.'¹⁰⁷ On the pretext that Lovestone left Moscow without Comintern permission, the CP expelled him.

Key Lovestone allies such as Minor and Stachel joined Bedacht, who had capitulated to Stalin in Moscow, and abandoned Lovestone once his fate was clear. Bedacht became temporary Party leader, as part of a Secretariat including Minor, Weinstone and Foster, as well as G. Williams, a Comintern representative. In response, Lovestone denounced these 'degenerated elements from the former

¹⁰⁴ On Wolfe's wife, see Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 425; on the difficulty of returning to the US, see Gitlow, *I Confess*, 565-67.

¹⁰⁵ Jay Lovestone to Political Secretariat, 30 May 1929, in Lovestone papers, box 198, folder 13.

¹⁰⁶ The details surrounding Lovestone's flight from Moscow are told in Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 425-29.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 64.

Majority' for deserting him.¹⁰⁸ Just as Stachel and others had purged the Party of Cannon and Trotsky supporters for Lovestone a year earlier, they now lent their services to purge the Party of Lovestone sympathizers. In mid-August, 1929, the Political Committee put an ultimatum to remaining Lovestone supporters such as Wolfe and Gitlow to 'dissociate themselves from this renegade to Communism' within forty eight hours or be expelled.¹⁰⁹

The furore against the former Party leadership was so complete that both Lovestone and Gitlow were even prevented from removing their personal possessions from Party headquarters. The anti-Lovestone purge affected more people than the earlier anti-Cannon purge: eleven full Central Committee, five candidate Central Committee, and two Control Committee members, along with two hundred others; in addition, and some two thousand members voluntarily quit. The Lovestoneites themselves claimed that some 350 members were expelled, and that 'practically all of these comrades are functionaries'. Others included Charles Zimmerman, a leader in the New York City ILGWU.¹¹⁰

Lovestone and his remaining followers organised the 'Communist Party of the U.S.A. (Majority Group)' and began publishing a journal, *Revolutionary Age*, a reference to the original American Communist paper edited by Fraina. This criticised the 'Party-splitting and mass expulsion campaign, outrageous violation of the most elementary rights of Party democracy, [and] illegal expulsion' of Lovestone and his supporters.¹¹¹ Unwilling to attack the Comintern's 'Third Period', *Revolutionary Age* argued that the original concept of the period, as articulated by Bukharin, had been

¹⁰⁸ 'Appeal to the Comintern on the last Comintern Address and the Expulsions Now Taking Place in the Party', signed by Gitlow, Lovestone, Miller, Myerscough, Welsh, White and Wolfe, 10 July 1929; in Jay Lovestone papers, box 209, folder 16.

¹⁰⁹ Max Bedacht for the Secretariat to Benjamin Gitlow, et. al., 14 August 1929, in Benjamin Gitlow papers, box 8, folder 6; cf. Gitlow, *I Confess*, 567-68.

¹¹⁰ Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 28; on Gitlow's clothes, see *I Confess*, 569.

perverted in an absurd caricature by Stalin positing that revolution was around the corner.¹¹²

Cannon and Lovestone's oppositions

In late 1930, the Lovestoneites joined forces with other expelled right-wing Communists from around the world, including Germans August Thalheimer and Heinrich Brandler and the Indian M.N. Roy, to form the International Communist Opposition (ICO). Unlike the International Left Opposition, the ICO lacked a central unifying leader with Trotsky's stature, especially after Bukharin capitulated to Stalin.¹¹³ Like Cannon, Lovestone's chief orientation was to recruit out of the official Party.¹¹⁴

It is interesting to compare Lovestone's to Cannon's supporters. The key difference is that Lovestone's organisation, unlike Cannon's, had been forged not on a clear political basis, but to regain leadership of the Party. Lovestone began his new organisation with both more members and a more auspicious political climate. Cannon had hoped to capitalise on wide-spread disgruntlement within the Party against the right-wing drift of the Lovestone leadership and the Bukharin Comintern. Shortly after expelling Cannon, the Party abruptly swung to the left as part of the Third Period. Just as in Russia, this shift undercut support for Trotsky.¹¹⁵ When the Party expelled Lovestone, many potential Trotskyists decided to remain the larger, official Party. The Third Period, like Bolshevisation, although concocted for Stalin's factional needs, seemed to answer the concerns that many rank and file members had

¹¹¹ *Revolutionary Age*, 1 November 1929.

¹¹² The first five issues of *Revolutionary Age* serialised an article by Will Herberg on the Tenth ECCI plenum which elaborated this perspective; see also Bertram D. Wolfe, 'Is the VI Congress Being Revised?', *ibid.*, 15 November 1929; Jay Lovestone, 'The Crisis in the Communist International', *ibid.*, 1 December 1929. On the TUUL, see Ben Gitlow's running commentary.

¹¹³ Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 278-79; Wheeler, 'American Communists', 133.

¹¹⁴ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 571-73; *Revolutionary Age*, 15 December 1929.

¹¹⁵ The Lovestoneites recognised this, and used it to accuse Stalin of aping Trotsky. Cf. Will Herberg, 'The Decay of Trotskyism', *Revolutionary Age*, 1 December 1929.

and confirmed their political impulses.¹¹⁶ This, along with the popularity of the Soviet Union and the onset of the Depression, helped the Party grow dramatically, and isolated Trotsky's followers, who entered what Cannon described as the 'dog days of the Left Opposition'.¹¹⁷ Many former Cannon supporters, such as William F. Dunne took Stalin's turn to the left as good coin, and remained within the Party, even though Cannon believed that they should have been recruited to the Left Opposition.¹¹⁸

The Third Period was good for Lovestone, since his group offered a home to Communists disaffected by it. As Gitlow put it, 'Our program at the time was certainly more sensible and had more reference to American conditions than the official Party's adventurist and ultra-Leftist "Third Period" nonsense.'¹¹⁹ The Lovestoneites stressed their opposition to the new Communist unions, their support to 'American exceptionalism', and their disagreements with the CP internal regime.¹²⁰ The lack of a defined political basis for the Lovestoneites—which Gitlow summarised as the 'ridiculous position of both trying to reform the Communist International and declaring that Stalin's policies are one hundred percent correct'¹²¹—contributed to many Lovestone followers' descent into cynicism and ultimate abandonment of socialism altogether. Changing its name several times, the Lovestone organisation eventually ceased to have any pretext of socialism. Thus Lovestone himself, while denouncing Stalin, tried to hedge his bets by working with Soviet intelligence until

¹¹⁶ Mathew Worley, 'Class Against Class: The Communist Party of Great Britain in the Third Period, 1927-1932' (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 1998), chapter 3, notes that in Britain, too, the new line in 1928 'correspond[ed] to developments in Britain as perceived by the Communist Party' even though 'the impetus to realign Party policy undoubtedly came from the Comintern.' See also Mathew Worley, 'The Communist International, The Communist Party of Great Britain, and the "Third Period", 1928-1932', *European History Quarterly*, 30:2 (2000).

¹¹⁷ Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, 90-91.

¹¹⁸ See for example, Cannon to Albert Glotzer, 24 August 1929, in Cannon, *The Left Opposition in the U.S.*, 218-19.

¹¹⁹ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 571.

¹²⁰ Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 85-86.

¹²¹ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 327; Klehr, 'Theory of American Exceptionalism', 121.

1936.¹²² Later, Lovestone continued spying, only for the US, including by directing the AFL's anti-Communist activities amongst the international labour movement on behalf of the CIA. Wolfe became an anti-Communist historian and chief ideological advisor of the International Broadcasting Office of the State Department, and Gitlow became a witness for the Congressional witchhunt against the CP, and wrote two books justifying his anti-Communism. Other Lovestoneites, such as Zimmerman and Israel Breslow, merely became conservative trade-union bureaucrats. Will Herberg, oddly enough, became an important Jewish philosopher.¹²³

Cannon's opposition, on the other hand, eventually grew into a small but real workers organisation, and one of the largest Trotskyist groups in the world. In 1934, Cannon and his supporters led a teamster strike in Minnesota, paving the way for the development of the Teamsters Union and the growth of the CIO in the late 1930s.¹²⁴

The mendacity of mediocrity: the rise of Browder

The deposition of Lovestone was part of an international trend in the Comintern, starting at the top. Since Stalin no longer wanted socialist revolution abroad, and, in fact, opposed it under the rubric of socialism in one country, he had no need for an independent, critical, Comintern leadership. Thus he replaced Bukharin with V.M. Molotov. Isaac Deutscher described Molotov during this period:

Molotov was almost a perfect example of the revolutionary turned official; and he owed his promotion to the completion of his conversion. He possessed a few peculiar virtues which helped him along: infinite patience, imperturbable endurance, meekness towards superiors, and a tireless, almost mechanical industrial which in the eyes of his superiors compensated for his mediocrity and incompetence.¹²⁵

¹²² Elena Davison, 'A Fierce, Freedom-Loving Man', *Hoover Digest* 1999 (1).

¹²³ Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 133-34; Morgan, *A Covert Life*, 141ff; Klehr, 'Theory of American Exceptionalism', 176-78; on Herberg, cf. Diggins, *Up From Communism*, especially 138-59; cf. Seth Lipsky, 'Did Jay Lovestone Win the Cold War?' (review of Morgan), *Forward*, 23 April 1999 one the close relationship between Lovestone, the ILGWU right wing and *Vorwaerts*.

¹²⁴ See Cannon, *History of American Trotskyism*, for an account of the development of American Trotskyism.

¹²⁵ Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 86.

Stalin chose his national leaders along the same lines. While the Secretariat was useful because it cemented the former Lovestoneites to the post-Lovestone organisation at the same time it co-opted Foster, it was not a durable solution to the question of Party leadership.

The American Molotov turned out to be, surprisingly, Foster's lieutenant, Earl Browder. In the summer of 1929, Browder attended the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat's conference in Vladivostok. Upon his return in October, the International reshuffled the Secretariat, dropping Foster and Weinstone and adding Browder. In 1932, Bedacht became head of the International Workers Order, the successor the foreign language federations. With Browder, Minor and Stachel, the American leadership consisted of three rather unimpressive, if competent, apparatchiki whose training was as assistants to more independent leaders whom they had been willing to betray to improve their standing with the Comintern. In the next couple of years Browder became the head of the American Party, leading it until he fell afoul of Stalin at the end of World War II.¹²⁶

Like Molotov, Browder represented the triumph of mediocrity in the CP; not just personally, but politically.¹²⁷ Although he had been a founder of the Party, he was not an original thinker: even if he was not the only early Communist trained as a white collar office worker, he alone spent his time in prison during the Great War writing an accounting manual.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 430-35; James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American*, 37-38.

¹²⁷ A contemporary description of Browder's writings, in *Current History* (October 1936) captures this quality: 'With him, the style is peculiarly the man: more plodding than profound, more competent than brilliant, more staid and steady than original of imaginative. He seems utterly devoid of humor and chockful of cliches worn thin and dull from duty since 1848'. Quoted in Roger E. Rosenberg, 'Guardian of the Fortress: A Biography of Earl Russell Browder, US Communist Party General Secretary from 1920-1944' (PhD thesis, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1982), 52.

¹²⁸ Ryan, *Earl Browder*, 14. To be fair, when he was later incarcerated in Leavenworth, he did make use of the time to study politics (pp. 15-16). See also, Rosenberg, 'Guardian of the Fortress', 42.

Despite his reputation as a rightist, Browder's rise to power began during the leftist Third Period. One key aspect of the American Third Period was the creation of new unions. In the autumn of 1929, the Party scrapped the TUEL—which Foster had organised to act as a 'militant minority' *within* the conservative trade unions—at a Cleveland convention and inaugurated the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). Reversing eight years of work in the unions, the CP saw the TUUL as a vehicle for creating independent unions under Communist leadership. The full history of the TUUL—which was dissolved in 1934—is beyond the scope of this study.¹²⁹

Like its Third Period sibling, the theory of self-determination for the black belt, the TUUL originated out of the exigencies of Stalin's Comintern. Although there had been some impulse for new unions several years earlier, as discussed in the last chapter, the TUUL's genesis came during the Ninth ECCI Plenum in early 1928. There Losovsky, touting the need for new German trade unions, used the AFL—with one of the most right-wing labour leaderships in the industrialised world—as an example of 'social fascism' and advocated 'the organisation of the unorganised...the creation of new unions, because the majority of the working class was unorganised, because in the main spheres of industry the workers were unorganised'.¹³⁰ At roughly the same time, the Comintern pressured the Communist Party of Canada to establish the Workers Unity League, an organisation parallel to the TUUL.¹³¹

Unlike the black belt theory, Communists did not universally deride the new unions. As the experience with Reed and the IWW illustrates, there always had been

¹²⁹ For a history of the TUUL, see Theodore Draper, 'Communists and Miners, 1928-1933', *Dissent* 19 (Spring 1972); Edward Johanningsmeier, 'The Trade Union Unity League'; Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party and the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 21ff. For one of the few sympathetic accounts of the Third Period, see James Green, 'Working Class Militancy in the Depression', *Radical America* 16:6 (November-December 1972).

¹³⁰ *Communist International*, vol 6, no 17 (1929), 658.

¹³¹ John Manley, 'Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism and the "Third Period": The Workers Unity League, 1929-35', *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 5 (1994), 172.

latent tendencies towards dual unionism in American Communism, and the situation in Passaic and the New York needle trades made clear that the AFL was not interested in organising immigrant, unskilled, mass production workers, and that Communists were not welcome in the unions. Whatever its failings, the TUUL partially anticipated the formation of the CIO in the 1930s. The chief difference was that the CIO was formed by powerful sections of the AFL bureaucracy—specifically John L. Lewis and Sidney Hillman—while the Communist TUUL simply lacked the social weight to carry out its ‘main task’, ‘the organization of the unorganized into industrial unions independent of the A.F. of L.’¹³² The CIO appropriated this goal, and often former TUUL organisers themselves, in order to build the mass industrial union movement in the 1930s.¹³³ In the process, of course, the revolutionary politics of the TUUL was dropped in favour of working within the capitalist ‘New Deal Coalition’ of Democratic president Roosevelt.

The TUUL’s National Miners Union led several strikes amongst disaffected miners whom the UMW would not touch, including most famously in Harlan County, Kentucky.¹³⁴ In 1928, after the Passaic strike, Communist textile organisers led the mill workers of New Bedford, Massachusetts, on strike. When that strike ended in defeat, they organised the National Textile Workers Union, which, in 1929, organised the famous Gastonia, North Carolina, textile strike.¹³⁵ It is true that none of these

¹³² Quoted in Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union*, 78.

¹³³ Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 133.

¹³⁴ Draper, ‘Communists and Miners’, 380-87; Walter Howard, ‘The National Miners Union: Communists and Miners in the Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1928-1931’, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of Biography and History* 125 (January/April 2001).

¹³⁵ Bernstein, *The Lean Years*, 2-44. On Gastonia, see John A. Salmond, *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946). On the New Bedford strike, see Michael W. Santos, ‘Community and Communism: The 1928 New Bedford Strike’, *Labor History* 26 (1985) and Daniel Georgianna and Roberta Hazen Aaronson, *The Strike of '28* (New Bedford: Spinner Publications, 1993). The memoirs of Fred Beal, a Communist organiser prominent in both strikes is also instructive: Fred E. Beal, *Proletarian Journey: New England, Gastonia, Moscow* (New York: Hillman-Curl, 1937). For other Communist work amongst textile workers, see also, Walter Howard, ‘

strikes was successful and often faced tremendous violence. But like Passaic, both strikes established the credentials of Communist organisers, and helped discredit the AFL.

And not all TUUL unions failed so completely. For example, the Transport Workers Union not only survived but flourished, becoming the union of New York City's public transport workers, which it remains today.¹³⁶ Even when they did fail, TUUL organisers, motivated by the Third Period concept of 'class against class', fought militantly and bravely for workers rights, racial equality and industrial unionism. Although Draper may be right that 'they were too few, and they tried to do too much', these Communists helped lay the basis for the growth of the CIO in the 1930s.¹³⁷ But the main difference between the CIO and TUUL, besides their leaders' politics--despite Communist assistance, 'social fascists' such as Lewis and Hillman would lead the new labour movement—was that they had a mass base for a new union, whilst the CP did not.

The TUUL also played a small role in the automobile industry. At the time of the Party's formation in 1919, the main union was the Automobile Workers Union (AWU), led by right-wing socialists, which the AFL had expelled in 1918 for refusing to abide by craft divisions and steer clear of the auto industry. By 1923, however, the union was a shell of its former self and the Party began paying attention to it; in exchange for being allowed to work within the union, the Party supplied organisers. In 1926 the Party established various newspapers aimed at workers, and accrued a cadre of some 350 car workers a year later. Communists also entered the union leadership.

"Radicals Not Wanted": Communists and the 1929 Wilkes-Barre Silk Mill Strikes', *Pennsylvania History* 69 (Summer 2002).

¹³⁶ See Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 51.

¹³⁷ The TUUL's Canadian counterpart, the Workers Unity League, played a similar role in Canada by laying the basis for industrial unionisation later in the 1930s; see Manley, 'Canadian Communists,

‘By the early 1930s’, Roger Keeran writes, ‘all of the key union leaders either belonged to the Communist Party or had close connections with the Party.’¹³⁸ Under the Communists’ guidance, the AWU would affiliate with the TUUL in 1929. Although it never managed to organise the industry, the AWU did help lay the basis for the success of the UAW later in the 1930s. Several UAW leaders, from Walter Reuther to Wyndham Mortimer, had belonged to the AWU.¹³⁹

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Communists proved themselves competent fighters for the working class, unemployed, and blacks, and as a result recruited. Between December 1929 and July 1930, more than 7100 members joined the Party.¹⁴⁰ This allowed the Party to become a real, if small, mass Party, and in the 1930s, a junior partner in the CIO.

Unfortunately, by 1929 the American Party had become Stalinised. While its members had, especially during the Third Period, joined because they saw in socialism a solution to the apparent collapse of capitalism, the leadership was no longer dedicated to fighting for working class power.

Revolutionary Unionism and the “Third Period”,’ 191; Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarsborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1977), 133-38.

¹³⁸ Keeran, ‘Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry’, quote on pages 208-209. See also the first chapter of his *Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union*.

¹³⁹ Keeran, *Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union*, 77. On the CP activities in the car industry, besides Keeran, see Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 62-75. On Reuther and the CP’s AWU, see Nelson Lichenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 31.

¹⁴⁰ Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 92.

9. The American Communist Party, the Comintern, and the 'Negro Question'

The development of the Communist Party's position on the fight for black liberation in the United States illustrates very clearly the complexity of the interaction between the Comintern and the American Party. The peculiar racial topography of the US helps make it unique. Yet, the early CP neglected this issue; only after the Comintern prodded it did the Party begin to grapple with racism, racial oppression, and the fight for black freedom.

This chapter first examines how different historians, including both Theodore Draper and newer 'revisionists' have treated the development of the American Communist Party's position on what was called the 'Negro Question'. Neither framework is adequate to understand this relationship, because both maintain a Chinese Wall between Comintern intervention and understanding American society. In fact, the early (white) leadership of the CP ignored black Americans a small number of black Communists, dissatisfied with their white comrades' neglect of the Negro Question, brought it to the attention of the leadership of the Communist International which then forced the Party to pay attention to black America. Thus, far from making the CP 'alien' to American reality, Comintern intervention actually spurred the Party to 'Americanise'.

Historians have long studied the American Communist Party's work among blacks. Among the earliest were 'consensus' historians, who asserted that American society is marked by ideological and political 'consensus' instead of dissent. They cited the problems the Party had in recruiting blacks—those least likely to accept American capitalism--to illustrate the general failure of Communism.¹ By the 1970s

¹ Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964), 1-2. Other prominent example of 'consensus' treatment of the CP and

and 1980s, historians had begun to re-evaluate the relationship between blacks and Communists, emphasising its positive aspects.²

Nonetheless, historians often overlook that for most of the first decade of its existence the Communist Party all but *ignored* the Negro Question.³ How early American Communists came to appreciate the importance of the struggle for black rights not only fleshes out our knowledge of this vital chapter in the history of American Communism, but also serves as a clear example of the interplay between the Communist International and the American CP.

This chapter is divided into two portions. First, it analyses the early development of the Negro Question by the CP and its antecedents on the American left, until the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922. When the Comintern forcefully urged the Party to pay more attention to blacks. Special attention is paid to the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) in Harlem, which provided the first black Communist cadre. This chapter then traces the changing contours of the Party's work among blacks up through the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Comintern, which adopted the programme of 'self-determination for the black belt'.

While it is impossible to avoid examining the changes in the CP's 'line', the Party's formal position did not change very much until the Sixth Congress. Nonetheless, the *weight* the CP assigned to fighting racial oppression did change. Throughout this history of the CP and the Negro Question, it will become clear that the relationship between the CP and the Comintern was not the impediment to 'Americanisation' that some historians have argued, nor was it more or less secondary

blacks include, Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951); William Nolan, *Communism Versus the Negro* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951); Herbert Hill, 'The Communist Party—Enemy of Negro Equality', *Crisis*, June-July 1951.

² Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.

³ In fact, by most accounts, there are probably more pages in this chapter than blacks in the early Party.

as newer historians have described it. Instead, the Comintern's intervention was at the centre of the CP's changing activities towards the Negro Question.

In looking at the early years of the Party's position on the Negro Question, I explore a 'trinity'—the interrelationship among (1) the founders of American Communism, who were almost entirely white; (2) the Communist International; and (3) the early black American Communists.⁴ Understanding this allows the student of the CP to begin to reconceptualise the relationship among the Comintern, the CP, and how the party attempted to grapple and understand the United States.

The Comintern's important role in this regard, furthermore, stemmed from the very 'evil' characteristic identified by many historians: its 'Leninist' perspective on the 'party question' which stressed the importance of understanding and fighting against all forms of social oppression, especially those not narrowly based on class. In trying to forge the American Communist movement on the model that Lenin moulded, the early Comintern attempted to make the party become more attuned to conditions in the United States, including black oppression. Robert Minor was not altogether wrong when he described this process, then, as a 'development towards Bolshevization as indicated by the thermometer of the Negro question'.⁵

The importance of the Negro Question for American labour

From its inception American society has been based upon the exploitation of black labour.⁶ The Civil War ended slavery and created a unified capitalist economy. After the failure of Radical Reconstruction, blacks were no longer subjected to

⁴ As William Maxwell's recent study indicates, while traditional views of Communist-black interaction tend to depict it as one-way, this was not the case since black Communists shaped the Party as much as they were shaped by it; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁵ Undated, untitled manuscript on development of the Negro Question in Robert Minor papers, Columbia University Library, Box 12, folder labelled 'New York Negro 1-3'. This was written shortly after the founding of the Trade Union Unity League, which occurred in 1929.

⁶ See Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1997).

slavery, but neither were they free, since they were economically, socially and often legally oppressed. Yet almost since its founding, the labour movement maintained a 'blind spot' in regards to black oppression. The American Federation of Labor (AFL), formed by Samuel Gompers in the 1880s, after a brief and partial attempt at biracialism, excluded almost all black workers, with the exception of a few unions such as the United Mine Workers had a considerable black membership.⁷

After the Civil War most blacks worked in agriculture in the South rather than industry. But as blacks moved away from the rural South in the early twentieth century, they were integrated in large numbers into strategic sectors of the American urban economy such as meatpacking or steel production—albeit at the bottom, while being discriminated against as the 'last hired and the first fired'. Employers consciously fomented racial divisions among the working class to obscure class divisions within capitalist society, making the fight against black oppression strategic for the working class as a whole.

The immediate post-war period ushered in a strike wave that provoked an anti-working-class and anti-radical offensive by the government and employers who aimed the most ominous repression not directly at labour, but at blacks. There were 25 race riots during what National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leader James Weldon Johnson called the 'Red Summer' of 1919, and lynching increased dramatically in the South.⁸ The anti-working-class nature of the

⁷On the AFL and blacks, see William D. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 42-45; David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994), 141.

⁸See Colin Palmer, *Passageways: An Interpretative History*, (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1998) vol. 2, chapter 16, for a synthetic view of the post-war riots and blacks' responses; David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 9-10, 17-20. On the Chicago riots, see Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 65-69; Allen H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 214-219, *passim*; William M. Tuttle Jr, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer*

twin offensives of 1919's 'Red Scare' and 'Red Summer' was clear in the case of the Klan, which besides being virulently anti-black, was also strongly against immigrants, Catholics and Jews—i.e., virtually most of the American working class.⁹

The defeated strike wave and the race riots starkly illustrated that black rights and union rights would either advance together or fall back separately. Even though the development of American capitalism and the integration of both blacks and whites into the working class laid the basis for integrated class struggle, this objective possibility has remained elusive. Many white workers, following the cues emanating from the trade-union bureaucracy, as well as the society at large, remained infused with racial prejudice that prevented unified struggle or the understanding of the significance of black liberation. Although racism thus damaged the working class, many white workers, as David Roediger has illustrated, made their whiteness central to their self-identity.¹⁰ Consequently, in reaction to this hostility from the leaders of the organised labour movement, most blacks saw no reason to unite with white workers.

This Negro Question—a distinguishing characteristic of the American labour movement—is an example of the question of working-class consciousness under capitalism in general. According to Lenin, the working class under capitalism usually has a bourgeois or 'false' consciousness, i.e., its ideas are not congruent with its class interests. The question, then, for radicals in the labour movement in the US has been how to mobilise the working class in its own historic class interests despite its long-standing racial divisions. To this question, the Comintern's Bolshevik perspective

of 1919 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996). On the East St. Louis riot, see Elliott M Rudwick, *Race Riot at East St. Louis* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1966). On the Tulsa race riot of 1921, see James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

⁹ See David A. Shannon, *Between the Wars: America, 1919-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1979), 89-90.

provided a framework which the American Communists could not have developed themselves.

The American Negro Question in the early 20th Century

In the early 20th Century, three areas were central to black life in capitalist America: the South, the Northeast and the industrial Midwest. In 1920, some 85 per cent of the more than ten million American blacks lived in the South; in 1930, despite the 'Great Migration' to the North, almost 78 per cent still did.¹¹ Since the South was both predominantly rural and non-industrial, and because the immigrant and radical milieux from which the CP developed were weak below the Mason-Dixon line, the CP had little presence in the South until the late 1920s. Early in the decade, the Party did manage to recruit the Georgia SP organiser, Mary Raoul Millis, but she quickly returned to the SP fold.¹² Similarly, even though the Party did on occasion have other members in the South,¹³ Robert Minor was essentially correct when he wrote in the mid 1920s that 'In all of the eleven southern states...it is doubtful whether we could find one Communist Party member for one state.' Even at the end of the decade, a report on the Party's 'Negro work' noted that efforts 'to make effective contacts have not met with any considerable success'.¹⁴ And while the Party did carry out work among farmers, this was never a central CP arena. As a Political Committee directive

¹⁰ David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1991), 8-11, passim.

¹¹ *Fourteenth Census of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), II, 691; M. N. Work, ed., *The Negro Year Book, 1937-1938*, cited in Henry Williams, *Black Response to the American Left, 1917-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University History Department, 1973), 30.

¹² On Mary Raoul Millis, see Brad A. Paul, 'Rebels of the New South: The Socialist Party in Dixie, 1892-1920', (PhD thesis, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, 1999), 181, 192, 193, 201. A circular by Ruthenberg, 4 August 1922, notes that she had been nominated as delegate-at-large for the upcoming conference and contains a brief biography, in Comintern archives, 515:1:146.

¹³ For example, the minutes of the Central Executive Committee, 7 October 1922, indicate that a supporter of the Workers Party stood for election as sheriff (!) in Birmingham, Alabama, as a member of the Social Democratic League, Comintern archives, 515:1:143. A year later, the CEC approved hiring an organiser in Birmingham, CEC minutes, 3 January 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:148.

¹⁴ Untitled, undated manuscript, in Robert Minor Papers, Box 12, folder marked 'Negro 1924-25'; *The Communist International Between the Fifth and Sixth World Congresses, 1924-8* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1928), 348; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 13-14.

put it in 1927, 'work in the south generally, particularly among the farmers, was sadly neglected.'¹⁵

The CP was, however, active in the large Northern urban industrial centres in both the Midwest and Northeast with a significant black working class. Harlem was the centre of both the 'New Negro' movement and the Harlem Renaissance, and it was amongst politicised black intellectuals that the CP found its earliest black recruits. This 'Negro Mecca', was, as Harold Cruse noted, 'the pivot of the black world's quest for identity and salvation'.¹⁶ Harlem was a destination for migrants from the South, as well as from all corners of the African diaspora, especially the British West Indies. Between 1910 and 1920, the number of black New Yorkers increased 66 per cent. In the 1920s, a quarter of Harlem's population had been born abroad—almost 40,000 people.¹⁷ As Alain Locke noted in the *New Negro* (1925): 'Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life' which contributed to artistic, intellectual and political cross-fertilisation.¹⁸

Although in the North blacks were not subjected to the South's Jim Crow segregation, racism and economic hardship still marked life in Harlem. Cheryl Greenberg described life in Harlem in the 1920s as 'depression in the age of

¹⁵ 'Directions for the Party Fractions in the National Executive Committee of the American Negro Labor Congress', attached to the minutes of the Polcom, 21 May 1927, Comintern archives, 515:1:981. On the CP's agricultural work, see Dyson, *Red Harvest* and Kathleen Brown, 'Ella Reeve Bloor', 306-15.

¹⁶ Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to Its Present* (New York: William and Morrow, 1967), 12. On Harlem, see Cheryl L. Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode: Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1991), chapter 1; Lewis, *When Harlem Was In Vogue*; Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of A Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890-1930*, second edition, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Seth Scheiner, 'Negro Mecca': *The Negro in New York, 1865-1930* (New York: New York University Press, 1963);

¹⁷ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 358; Osofsky, *Harlem*, 128-31; *Fourteenth Census*, II, 691.

¹⁸ Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 6.

prosperity'¹⁹, since residents had to survive expensive, inferior and segregated housing, poor and low-paying jobs.²⁰

The Party Question and the Negro Question

The Comintern leadership knew very little about the conditions of blacks in the US, but their Leninist perspective provided a framework to analyse 'special oppression', i.e., oppression intertwined with but separate from class exploitation. Lenin—for instance, in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917)—had long argued that the structural development of capitalism created deep divisions—racial, political, ethnic, religious—*within* the working class. By not recognising these, and attempting to be the 'party of the whole class', pre-war European social democracy reflected the political perspective of the upper echelons of the working class—the older, more skilled workers—which Lenin termed the 'labour aristocracy'.²¹ As the Comintern argued at its Second Congress in 1920:

A sharp distinction must be made between the conception of 'party' and 'class'....Owing to certain historical conditions, the working class has numerous reactionary groups and strata. The task of Communism is not to adapt itself to such retrograde specimens of the working class, but to raise the whole of it to the level of the Communist advance guard.²²

Like the trade unions, social-democratic parties embraced all workers regardless of political ideology. They saw sexual, racial, ethnic or national oppression as a diversion from 'pure' economic issues. This is one of the reasons that Lenin had insisted on a 'vanguard party' composed of dedicated cadre instead of the all-encompassing social-democratic 'party of the whole class' that Kautsky and the Mensheviks had argued for. Lenin insisted that a Bolshevik militant would not 'be the

¹⁹ Greenberg, *Or Does It Explode*, chapter 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹ Lenin's classic statements on the 'labour aristocracy' are contained in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916). *What Is To Be Done?* (1903) also emphasises the importance of the divisions *within* the working class.

²² 'Theses on the Role of the Communist Party in Workers Revolution', in *Theses Presented to the Second World Congress of the Communist International* (Petrograd: Editions of the Communist International, 1920), 5-6.

trade-union secretary, but the tribune of the people' who would 'react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears' and 'generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation' in order 'clarify for all and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat'.²³ Thus the Bolsheviks denounced anti-Semitism and 'Great Russian' chauvinism, instead of focusing entirely on the class struggle. This approach was why the Comintern forced the early American CP to address the Negro Question.

American Social Democracy and the Negro Question

Like most social-democratic parties, the two traditional socialist parties in the US ignored special oppression. There is little evidence that either Daniel De Leon or his SLP applied his famed theoretical acumen to analysing—much less attempting to change—the condition of blacks in American society. In 1879, the SLP nominated Peter H. Clark, a black man from Cincinnati, as their first congressional candidate; but after that, it is rather slim pickings. Although the SLP—and De Leon particularly—regularly voted against anti-immigrant and social chauvinist motions at meetings of the Second International, they cannot be said to have been militant anti-racists.²⁴ Only in 1896, when *Plessy v. Ferguson* codified 'separate but equal' segregation, did the SLP demand 'universal and equal right of suffrage without regard to color, creed, or sex'. But then, between 1900 and 1916, blacks did not enter into the SLP's platforms.²⁵ It was not that De Leon was racist; in fact he had criticised racism within

²³ Lenin, *What Is To Be Done?*, 423.

²⁴ Oakley C. Johnson, *Marxism in United States History before the Russian Revolution, 1876-1917* (New York: Humanities Press, 1974), 71; Reeve, *The Life and Times of Daniel De Leon*, 130-34.

²⁵ K.H. Porter and D.B. Johnson, eds., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961). The 1896 statement is on page 111.

the Socialist Party (SP),²⁶ but SLP never saw fighting racial oppression as a strategic task.²⁷

The Socialist Party was not much better. The platform of the Social Democratic Party—the forerunner of the SP—in 1900 called ‘upon wage-workers of the United States, without distinction of color, race, sex, or creed’ to join in the fight for socialism. Only in 1920 did the Socialist platform mention blacks again, this time to demand the enforcement of the Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution.²⁸ According to Morris Hillquit, a founder of the SP, there were three blacks at the founding convention of the party who were ‘by no means the least intelligent and earnest of the delegates’. Perhaps because of this presence, that conference recognised that blacks ‘occupy a peculiar position in the working class’ because of the legacy of slavery. Yet even with this singular statement of a specific Negro Question, the early SP offered nothing more to blacks than membership. One recent study of race and American socialism concluded that ‘had no African-American been present, it is entirely plausible that no mention of black Americans would have been made’. And, in fact, neither Hillquit nor history provides much evidence of any important role played by blacks in the early SP.²⁹

An indication of the low importance the SP placed on the Negro Question can be seen in the book *Class Struggles in America*, published in 1906 by the editor of *International Socialist Review*, A.M. Simons, which purported to be a history of the US ‘written from the point of view of the working class’. On Reconstruction, it

²⁶ Coleman, *Daniel De Leon*, 59; Cf. also Seretan, *Daniel De Leon*, 252n76.

²⁷ Johnson, *Marxism in United States History Before the Russian Revolution*, 72.

²⁸ *National Party Platforms*, 240. In contrast, the SP did consistently call for votes for women.

²⁹ Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965 [1909], fifth edition), 309; Johnson, *Marxism in United States History before the Russian Revolution*, 73; Sally M. Miller, ed., *Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Early Twentieth-Century American Socialism* (New York and London: Garland Press, 1996), 6. The discussion at the 1901 convention, in the Socialist Party Papers, Duke University, series I, part D, provides a fascinating debate over the question, although this remained a rather dead letter in the Party.

favourably cites future president Woodrow Wilson, and decries that ‘the South was plundered as though by a horde of Goths and Vandals’. Thaddeus Stevens ‘best incarnated the theory of plutocracy’ and the Radical-dominated Reconstruction Congress was merely ‘a series of violent illegal subversions of fundamental institutions, such as the French designate as coup d’etats’. Since Radical Reconstruction was the one period in American history when black people were allowed, briefly, the rights of citizenship, and a racially egalitarian society seemed within reach, this position would be more attractive to white racists than to blacks.³⁰

When it split from the SLP in 1901, the SP, which soon surpassed the SLP in membership, emphasised mass appeal rather than doctrinal intransigence. According to one estimate, there were between two and three hundred blacks in the pre-war SP although at best it paid attention to the Negro question ‘in a rather absent-minded fashion’. Only in 1903, prodded by the Socialist International, did the SP oppose lynching.³¹

At the same time, many Socialists supported restrictions against ‘Mongolian hordes’ and the ‘yellow peril’, as the pre-eminent *Appeal to Reason* labelled immigrants from Asia. Victor Berger wrote in 1902 that ‘there can be no doubt that the negroes and mulattoes constitute a lower race.’³² Berger also advocated immigration controls in 1907, lest the US ‘become a black and yellow country within

³⁰ A.M. Simons, *Class Struggles in America* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1906), 83, 84, 87; cf. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 282, on Stevens. Simons had an interesting career in the SP, moving from the left to the right wing and eventually quitting the party during the Great War because of its anti-war stance. Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, discusses Simon’s trajectory throughout. Cf also Robert Huston, ‘A.M. Simons and the American Socialist Movement’ (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1965).

³¹ Miller, *Race, Ethnicity and Gender in Early Twentieth-Century American Socialism*, 8, 37; Seyler, ‘The Rise and Decline of the Socialist Party in the United States’, 97-98.

³² Milwaukee *Social Democratic Herald*, 31 May 1902, cited in Seyler, ‘The Rise and Decline of the Socialist Party’, 98.

a few generations'. At one debate, Ernest Untermann bellowed that 'I am determined that my race shall be in supreme in this country and the world.'³³

On the Negro Question, as well, there were divergent perspectives.³⁴ One historian notes that for the early SP, blacks 'were not important in the party, the party made no special effort to attract Negro members, and the party was generally disinterested in, if not actually hostile to, the efforts of the Negroes to improve their position in American capitalist society'.³⁵ Some of the SP's right wing, exemplified by Berger, could fairly be termed 'separate but equal' socialists. An article in the *Appeal to Reason* asked:

What will Socialism mean for the negro? It will mean a house to live in, work with the product of his labor in his own hands, and separate territory in the United States to live in, where he can work out his own destiny, undisturbed by the presence of the white man.³⁶

Where the party had black members in the South, they were either organised in segregated locals or as 'members-at-large'.³⁷ A study of the SP in Mississippi, where in the early twentieth century the party was the only organised opposition to the Democrats, makes no mention of black members but notes a 'general trend of "white" counties being stronger for the socialists' since this allowed them to avoid altogether the question of race.³⁸ One historian wrote that 'southern socialists believed in white

³³ Johnson, *Marxism in United States History before the Russian Revolution*, 46-50. Reeve, *Life and Times of Daniel De Leon*, 134. On the debate within the SP over immigration, see Charles Robert Leinenweber, 'Immigration and the Decline of Internationalism in the American Working Class Movement', 167-77; Ira Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 130.

³⁴ See Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 130-34, and Sally Miller, 'Socialism and Race', in John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1984), 218-231.

³⁵ Shannon, *The Socialist Party of America*, 52.

³⁶ *Appeal to Reason*, 12 September 1903, quoted in John Graham, ed., *'Yours for the Revolution': The Appeal to Reason, 1895-1922* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 53. On Victor Berger's racism, see also John R. Martin Jr, 'American Class and Race Relations: An Intellectual History of the American Left' (PhD thesis, Rutgers University, 1995), 53.

³⁷ Shannon, *Socialist Party*, 52.

³⁸ Steven Cressnell, 'Grassroots Radicalism in the Magnolia State: Mississippi's Socialist Movement at the Local Level, 1910-1919', *Labor History* 33 (Winter 1992) 1:85.

supremacy as much as their opponents in the major parties.’³⁹ Another study of the Southern SP describes an ‘internal racist opposition approximating a Jim Crow socialism’, especially for white politicians who entered the SP because they rejected the hegemonic Democracy. And, although some SP organisers did take a stand against racism, this cannot be seen as a central theme of the party’s work.⁴⁰ When Rose Pastor Stokes, a future Communist leader, toured the South for the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, she was angered to find that the organisation was segregated.⁴¹ In this accommodation to Jim Crow, the SP leadership shared the perspective of Gompers and his fellow AFL leaders.

This is not to say that the entirety—or even most—of the SP was racist. There was, in fact, a left wing, led by Eugene Debs, which favoured racial equality.

Although Debs himself bore the marks of his origins as a Indiana rail way union leader—for instance, enjoying dialect jokes—he opposed racism when the issue came up. Thus, as the leader of the American Railway Union, in 1894 he unsuccessfully fought to abolish the union’s colour bar.⁴² Nonetheless, operating within a social-democratic economist framework prevented the left wing from paying much attention to the Negro Question. At bottom, they conceived of the Negro Question—and consequently the struggle to alleviate black oppression—as a *diversion* from combating class oppression.⁴³

Based on this social-democratic model, the American SP was confined by the concept that a party should embrace *all* workers regardless of their views on such

³⁹ Bassett, ‘The Socialist Party of America’, 20.

⁴⁰ Brad Paul, ‘Rebels of the New South’, 77-78, 81, 88, 89, 153.

⁴¹ Rose Pastor Stokes, *I Belong to the Working Class: The Unfinished Autobiography of Rose Pastor Stokes*, Herbert Shapiro and David L. Sterling, eds. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 114; see A. Sharp, ‘Rose Pastor Stokes’, 67-68.

⁴² On the contradictory nature of Debs’ attitude towards race and blacks, see Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 104-7, 226-28.

⁴³ John Martin’s recent study of the Left Wing argues the opposite, but does not demonstrate left-wing appreciation of the Negro Question beyond showing that Debs and other leftists were against racism;

issues as race or other forms of special oppression. In fact, in Debs' view, the concept of non-class oppression did not exist. Debs was by no means a racist.⁴⁴ But he also argued 'the real issue...is not *social equality*, BUT ECONOMIC FREEDOM', and that therefore 'there is no Negro question outside of the labor question'

Our position as socialists and as a party is perfectly plain. We have simply to say: 'The class struggle is colorless.' The capitalists, white, black, and other shades, are on one side and the workers, white, black, and all other colors, on the other side.⁴⁵

Debs did not his abstract declarations of support for black equality with any action for achieving it, because, since blacks were just workers, the SP focused on economic struggle, not fighting racial oppression. Thus he argued in 1903 that the SP had 'nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make separate appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the whole working class regardless of color—the whole working class of the whole world.'⁴⁶

Not only did open racists such as Berger share the same party as anti-racists like Debs, but there were also a small, yet significant, number of black Socialists. In 1917, 25 per cent of blacks who voted in the New York City mayoral election cast their ballots for a (white) Socialist candidate, Hillquit. Black New Yorkers voted for the SP, however, precisely because it offered a 'special appeal', articulated by black Socialist cadre who worked to win black support. Since only 3 per cent of New York City blacks voted for Debs in 1920, this would seem to indicate that it was in fact this special appeal that attracted black support, and not the abstract ideals of Marxism.⁴⁷

The most notable, and least noted, black socialist was Hubert Harrison, whom A.

Martin, 'American Class and Race Relations', chapter 2, esp. pages 64-80.

⁴⁴ Eugene V. Debs, 'The Negro: His Present Status and Outlook', *The Intercollegiate Socialist*, April-May 1918.

⁴⁵ E.V. Debs, 'The Negro in the Class Struggle', *International Socialist Review*, November 1903, excerpted in Morgan, ed., *American Socialism*, 71-72.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Ginger, *The Bending Cross*, 277.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Black Response*, 35. That one election was for a local office, where a protest vote might have been perceived as having more of an effect and the other for a national office, may account for some of the decline (a possibility Williams does not explore), but nonetheless such a drop is notable,

Philip Randolph once called the 'Father of Negro Radicalism'.⁴⁸ Born in St Croix, Virgin Islands, on 27 April 1883, Harrison migrated to New York in 1900. In 1909, he joined the SP, became a full-time functionary, and, in James' words, 'one of their most effective orators and writers'.⁴⁹ He was best known for setting up on street corners and, in Claude McKay's words, lecturing about 'free-thought, socialism and racialism'.⁵⁰ The *Amsterdam News* called him the 'philosopher of Harlem'.⁵¹

His writings emphasised the importance of the Negro question to American socialism. In 1912 he observed that 'the exploitation of the Negro worker is keener than that of any group of white workers in America' and that 'the ten million Negroes of America form a group that is more essentially proletarian than any other American group.' He complained that 'no particular effort has been made to carry the message of Socialism to these people,' and urged his comrades to redress this problem.⁵²

Unlike most Socialists, Harrison recognised the need for 'special' appeals to blacks, based on the struggle against racism.⁵³ Yet despite Harrison's path-breaking work, the SP evidently did not value him, and 'his articles had fallen on deaf ears', according to his biographer. He resigned in 1914 and briefly joined the IWW, in part because of its egalitarianism.⁵⁴ Harrison exemplified the contradictions within New

especially since there were five black SP candidates on the 1920 ticket.

⁴⁸ Quoted in James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 123.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 123-24. For biographic information on Harrison, cf. Clifton C. Hawkins, ' "Race First versus Class First": An Intellectual History of Afro-American Radicalism, 1911-1928' (PhD thesis, University of California at Davis, 2000), chapter 1; Wilfred D. Samuels, *Five Afro-Caribbean Voices in American Culture, 1917-1929* (Boulder, Colorado: Belmont Books, 1977), chapter 3; Jeffrey Babcock Perry, 'Hubert Henry Harrison: "The Father of Harlem Radicalism": The Early Years, 1883 through the Foundation of the Liberty League and the *Voice* in 1917' (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1986). There is also a collection of Harrison's writing, Jeffrey B. Perry, ed., *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2001).

⁵⁰ Claude McKay, *A Long Way From Home* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 41.

⁵¹ *Amsterdam News*, 7 February 1923.

⁵² Hubert Harrison, 'Socialism and the Negro', *International Socialist Review*, July 1912.

⁵³ Hawkins, ' "Race First versus Class First", ' 5, 36-48.

⁵⁴ On Harrison's struggles within the SP, see Perry, 'Hubert Henry Harrison', 221-22, 240 (deaf ears quote). James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 125-26, argues that Harrison's leaving the SP and joining the IWW was because of the fact that the former was worse on the Negro Question than the latter. Hawkins, "

Negro radicalism: if he was the father of black socialism, he was also the father of a reinvigorated black nationalism, after having been spurned by the SP. Thus, black nationalists like Garvey as well as Communists like could equally claim his heritage as their own.⁵⁵ The social-democratic nature of the SP stifled those like Harrison who were sensitive to the Negro Question; further, unlike in the Communist Party a decade later, there was no international force in the Socialist movement to compel the leadership to head its visionaries like Harrison who emphasised the need to fight racial oppression: while the International Socialist Bureau did feel question their American comrades about their position on lynching, the Second International was neither willing nor able to compel the SP to take up the struggle for black liberation.⁵⁶

Two of Harrison's Socialist progeny were Chandler Owen and Randolph, the editors of the *Messenger*. They met as students in New York City and collaborated on the famous socialist newspaper.⁵⁷ A taste of the radicalism of the early *Messenger* can be had from a 1919 'Thanksgiving Homily to Revolution' which began, 'we are especially thankful for the Russian Revolution—the greatest achievement of the twentieth century.' Linked to this was the 'New Crowd Negro', whom the editors celebrated as having 'made his influence in every field—economic, political, social, educational and physical force. The Negro has been in the front ranks of strikes. He has taken his place in Socialist politics.'⁵⁸ They ruthlessly criticised black leaders,

'Race First versus Class First', 50-52, argues that Harrison's departure was related to the broader fall-out between syndicalists and socialists, and the Harrison supported Haywood.

⁵⁵ James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 128. Cf. also, Johnson, *Marxism in United States History before the Russian Revolution*, 68-69. According to the *Daily Worker* (27 September 1926), Communist Richard B. Moore held an event in conjunction with Harrison in 1926.

⁵⁶ Kipnis, *The American Socialist Movement*, 132; see note 31, above.

⁵⁷ On Randolph's Socialist years, see Manning Marable, 'A. Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism', *Radical America*, May-June 1980, reprinted in James Green, ed., *Workers' Struggles, Past and Present: A Radical America Reader* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983). Cf. also Theodore Kornweibel, 'The *Messenger* Magazine, 1917-1928' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1971); Rod Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem: Black Nationalism and Class Struggle in the American Century* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1999), 91.

⁵⁸ *Messenger*, December 1919; this is also reprinted in Theodore G. Vincent, ed., *Voices of a Black Nation: Political Journalism in the Harlem Renaissance* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1973), 46-7.

even leftists such as W.E.B Du Bois as ‘old crowd Negroes’, and called for ‘a new leadership—a leadership of intelligent and manly courage’.⁵⁹ ‘The new crowd’, wrote Randolph, ‘must be composed of young men who are educated, radical and fearless.’ The early *Messenger* carried columns by future Communists Ottow Huiswood and Lovett Fort-Whiteman, as well as radical leftist W.A. Domingo, supported the Bolsheviks strongly. In January 1918 it hailed Lenin and Trotsky as ‘sagacious, statesmanlike and courageous leaders’—the equivalent of the Russian new crowd—and, in July, hailed the Soviet republic because it ‘has the lead the world in making a concrete application of the principle of self-determination of smaller countries’. Perhaps most famously, in May 1919, it editorialised: ‘Soviet government proceeds apace. It bids fair to sweep over the whole world. The sooner the better. On with the dance!’⁶⁰

According to Rod Bush, ‘during this period Randolph and Owen were known as the Lenin and Trotsky of Harlem.’⁶¹ In 1918, both editors became the only blacks to be arrested and tried for violating the Espionage Act during the war, and in 1919, J. Edgar Hoover argued that they were two of the most dangerous radicals in America while the postmaster banned their paper.⁶² In addition to their pro-Bolshevik positions and their criticism of more mainstream black leaders, Randolph and Owen provided leftist commentary on contemporary events. They endorsed Morris Hillquitt and other Socialist campaigns, and occasionally carried articles from the *Call*. They ran articles like ‘Lynching: Capitalism its cause; Socialism its cure’, ‘Why Negroes should join

⁵⁹ *Messenger*, May/June 1919.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, January 1918, July 1918, May/June 1919.

⁶¹ Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem*, 92.

⁶² See Theodore Kornweibel Jr., ‘*Seeing Red*’, chapter 5 for the government’s repression against the *Messenger*. Cf also Lewis, *When Harlem was in Vogue*, 17. On Hoover’s obsession with black radicalism in general, in addition to Kornweibel, cf. Mark Ellis, ‘J. Edgar Hoover and the “Red Summer” of 1919’, in *Journal of American Studies* 28:1 (January 1994).

the I.W.W.', and 'Socialism: The Negroes' hope'. They also denounced anti-Semitism as well as called for independence for India and Ireland.⁶³

Despite this enthusiasm about the debut of black socialists, the *Messenger* 'had an extremely modest impact in the Afro-American community', according to David Levering Lewis.⁶⁴ Although many of the *Messenger's* articles put the paper on the left-wing of the SP, and several of its writers later became leading Communists, Randolph and Owen remained in the SP. In May 1919, they analysed the factionalism in the SP, and although they supported some of the left's programme, criticised its 'amateur enthusiasm' and put party unity at a higher premium than all else.⁶⁵ In fact, it appears that by 1919 the SP, at least in New York City, was emphasising fighting against black oppression in its practical work, if not in its theory. In 1918, the NEC had voted to make special attempts to organise Southern blacks, and also began to recruit Northern blacks. That year, one New York local recruited 100 black members and the SP nominated three blacks for political office. A locus of black Socialists was the 21st Assembly District Branch of the SP in Harlem, formed in July 1918. The black SP cadre, however, had very little interaction with the SP's headquarters several miles downtown.⁶⁶ The SP was still 'colour blind', but it was beginning to try to organise blacks.⁶⁷

Only years later did the new Communist Party reach a similar level. Thus, during the faction fight, W.A. Domingo, a former Garvey supporter, prepared a report

⁶³ On the SP and its election campaign, see *Messenger*, November 1917, July 1918; for Randolph's article on lynching, see *ibid.*, March 1918; on I.W.W., see *ibid.*, July 1919; W.A. Domingo's article on socialism is in the same issue, as are the articles on India and anti-Semitism; cf. *ibid.*, November 1917, for article on Ireland.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *Vogue*, 9.

⁶⁵ *Messenger*, May/June 1919.

⁶⁶ Joyce Moore Turner, 'Richard B. Moore and His Works', in W. Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner, ed., *Richard B. Moore: Caribbean Militant in Harlem* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), 29.

⁶⁷ Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America*, 73.

to the SP discussing the factions and the Negro Question. He criticised the Left Wing for not paying more attention to black Americans.

In order to accomplish world revolution the Bolsheviki have not hesitated to encouch in their platform statements that are calculated to attract and gain for them the support of all the oppressed peoples of the world.... Since it is the avowed object of the Left Wing to establish Socialism through the medium of the dictatorship of the proletariat, how can they expect to accomplish it with a large portion of the American proletariat untouched by revolutionary propaganda?⁶⁸

Of course, this approach was the standard social-democratic 'colour blind' perspective of the SP, not just the left.

As the anti-union 1920s dragged on, and the trade-union leadership became more right-wing and hostile to blacks, Owen eventually drifted away from radical politics altogether and Randolph focused on organising blacks into the AFL, abandoning revolution in favour of a more reformist brand of socialism. From 1919 till 1923, the paper, although it still carried articles by Domingo and Fort-Whiteman, all but ignored the CP while praising the SP. Owen and Randolph stood for office in 1920 on the SP ticket, and endorsed Debs' presidential campaign. The *Messenger* continued its radical coverage through the early 1920s, but, by 1923, had become much less radical. In 1923, it simultaneously began a concentrated campaign against Garvey, and also began heavily criticising the CP. Domingo (but not the American-born Fort-Whiteman) stopped contributing to the paper because of its anti-West Indian edge in going after Garvey.⁶⁹ Although the paper did not become outright anti-Soviet (they urged recognition for the Soviets and eulogised Lenin as 'one of the truly great figures of human history'), the editors began to make barbed attacks on the

⁶⁸ Excerpted in Daniel Mason and Jessica Smith, eds., *Lenin's Impact on the United States* (New York: New World Review, 1970), 170-71.

⁶⁹ See the *Amsterdam News*, 28 February 1923, for coverage of a talk given by Owen on West Indian and American blacks as well as Domingo's negative response. See Daryl Scott, ' "Immigrant Indigestion": A. Philip Randolph, Radical and Restrictionist', on the web page of the Center for Immigration Studies (www.cis.org/articles/1999/background699/back699.html), for a (favourable) account of Randolph's anti-immigration views.

ABB, the CP, Zinoviev, and the Federated Farmer-Labor Party, among other Communist efforts. In April 1924, they declared themselves 'in hearty disagreement with the Workers' Party of the Communist faith, which has been industriously attempting to wreck the American Trade Union Movement, that it holds a solution to the much discussed Negro Problem'. Meanwhile, the paper became more mainstream, even running articles by Samuel Gompers and, in its 'Negro Business Achievement Number', declaring that 'it is perfectly clear to us that the employer and the employee have much in common.'⁷⁰

The Industrial Workers of the World

Of the three organisational components of early American Communism, the Industrial Workers of the World came closest to racial egalitarianism. It was one of the few labour unions that never excluded or discriminated against black workers.⁷¹ At the IWW's founding convention, Haywood denounced those 'organizations affiliated with the A.F. of L. which in their constitution and by-laws prohibit the initiation of, or the conferring the obligation of membership on a colored man.' The IWW advocated, instead, 'An open union and a closed shop.'⁷² The IWW's interracialism was integral to their industrial unionism which—as opposed to the AFL's exclusive craft-union approach—was inclusive of all workers in any industry, regardless of skill, language, ethnicity or race.

The IWW bravely fought against racism and segregation within the labour movement. In the South, the IWW organised unskilled black workers in the timber

⁷⁰ In the September 1922 *Messenger*, Owen had called for the deportation of Garvey; the argument between Domingo and Owen, over West Indians, is in the *Messenger*, March 1923; the obituary to Lenin is in the March 1924 issue; for various anti-Communist editorials, see for example the *Messenger*, May 1923 (on the SP and the CP), August 1923 (against the Federated Farmer-Labor Party and 'the menace of Negro Communism'), October 1923 (on the Sanhedrin), March 1924 (on the KPD's relationship to the Nazis) and April 1924 (quoted above); the September 1923 issue has an article by Gompers; the November 1923 issue is the business issue. Cf. Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem*, 92-93.

⁷¹ Myland Rudolph Brown, 'The I.W.W. and the Negro Worker' (D.Ed thesis, Ball State University, 1968)

industry, despite segregation laws forbidding biracial meetings, white hostility and black distrust. The IWW also organised black dockers in Philadelphia and elsewhere.⁷³ On a theoretical level, the IWW had the same 'colour blind' refusal to see racial oppression as something distinct from class oppression, much less as the cornerstone of American capitalism. As one historian put it, 'To the I.W.W. there was not a race problem. The economic interests of all workers, black, white, or yellow, were the same to the I.W.W.'⁷⁴ Nonetheless, on the ground during their organising, wobblies bravely took on segregation and racism, and this made them attractive to black radicals.

The wobblies' most important interracial campaign was the Brotherhood of Timber Workers' organising drive in Louisiana and East Texas. They actively recruited black workers, confronted racism, and refused to segregate its meetings. Out of the IWW's estimated one million members at its height, 10 per cent were black.⁷⁵ For the IWW, racism was not rooted in the special oppression of blacks, but constituted nothing more than bourgeois subterfuge and it only saw the Negro Question as extreme class exploitation, and not as an issue that transcended mere economics.

The IWW's position on the Negro Question compared favourably to the rest of the labour movement's left wing, such as William Z. Foster. His strategy of 'boring from within' already existing unions, many of which had racist policies, meant not directly confronting the racism of the Gompers bureaucracy. Thus, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (1920), contained a chapter called 'National and Racial

⁷² *The Founding Convention of the IWW* (New York: New York Labor News, 1905), 1, 7.

⁷³ For a general overview of the IWW's organising of black workers, see Brown, 'The I.W.W. and the Negro Worker' 38-72. For the IWW's efforts to organise black dockers in Philadelphia, see Kimmeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, 21-48.

⁷⁴ Brown, 'The I.W.W. and the Negro Worker', 87.

⁷⁵ Sterling D. Spiro and Abraham L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*

Elements' which hailed the solidarity and militancy of immigrant workers, but decried the supposed 'indifference, verging often into open hostility, with which negroes generally viewed Organized Labor'. Black workers, he wrote, 'made a wretched showing' by either not striking with white workers, or because they 'allowed themselves to be used freely as strikebreakers'. In fact, he continued, 'Most of them seemed to take a keen delight in stealing the white men's jobs and crushing their strike.' During the strike, black strikebreakers were recruited in large numbers from the South, and, after the strike, Foster dutifully criticised the union leaderships for excluding blacks, demanding that the unions 'must open their ranks to negroes, make an earnest effort to organize them, and give them a square deal when they join'. Yet, in part stemming from his notorious desire to not offend the official AFL trade-union bureaucracy, he also argued that in ending the racial situation among the unions, 'the negro has the most difficult part to play', since he must not only withstand racism but also stand up to black middle-class leaders who urged him to scab. He seems to have not even conceived of the possibility that the labour movement, especially is left wing, should fight against the racism of the union leadership. During the strike, Foster went even further than his book, asserting that the 'colored worker is not very responsive to trade unionism.... He acts as a scab at all times.' But, in the Chicago packinghouse strike led by Foster even more so than the steel strike, fighting to win a strike necessarily meant confronting the Negro Question headfirst.⁷⁶

The early Communist Party's neglect of the Negro Question

None of the CP's antecedents had much of an appreciation of the Negro question. William Weinstone, an early Communist, admitted half a century later that 'There was a serious omission in the Left-Wing Manifesto [of 1919] with regards to

(New York: Atheneum, 1972), 331.

⁷⁶ Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons*, 204-12; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American*

the Negro question.’⁷⁷ The report on conditions in the United States at the founding conference of the Comintern—held in Moscow in March 1919—is illustrative. The report, given by Boris Reinstein, a member of the SLP, made no mention of blacks.⁷⁸ This neglect was, in the first instance, an inheritance of the pre-Communist social democracy.

One of the questions that preoccupied the early CP was the question of ‘Americanisation’. The ‘foreignness’ of American Communism was one of the chief obstacles that the early CP had to overcome. In a party with such a small indigenous base, and in which only 50 per cent of the membership spoke English, it is not surprising that few blacks rushed to join.⁷⁹

Insofar as it noticed the Negro question, it maintained a Debsian position. According to the programme adopted at the Communist Party of America’s founding convention: ‘The Negro problem is a political and economic problem. The racial oppression of the Negro is simply the expression of his economic bondage and oppression, each intensifying the other. This complicates the Negro problem, but does not alter its proletarian character. The Communist Party will carry on agitation among the Negro workers to unite them with all class conscious workers.’⁸⁰

There is no evidence that—even with this ‘colour blind’ approach—the CP did ‘carry on agitation’ on a regular basis. After the 1919 race-riot in Chicago the Chicago-based Communist Labor Party published a front page article on the rioting.

Communism, 144.

⁷⁷ William Weinstone, ‘Formative Period of the CPUSA’, in *Political Affairs*, September-October 1969, 11.

⁷⁸ John Ridell, ed., *Founding the Communist International: Proceedings and Documents of the First Congress, March 1919* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1987), 74-79.

⁷⁹ *The Second Year of the Workers Party of the United States*, 31. See *The 4th National Conference of the Workers (Communist) Party of America*, 27-37 for the figures of membership in the foreign language federations from 1922-1925. See also, Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*.

⁸⁰ *Communist (CPA)*, 27 September 1919, in Philip S. Foner and James Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919-1929*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 3. Hereafter ACBA.

Although it decried the violence, it offered no programme to combat the racism pervasive in Chicago; nor did it register that the question of racism went beyond pure economics. Here is the meat of its argument:

The workers, both negro and Caucasian, must realize the fact that their misery is not due to race antagonisms, but to CLASS Antagonisms; and the reason conditions of employment are becoming worse is because the capitalist class owns the means of production. The capitalist class--not the workers who belong to another race--is the only enemy of all the workers and the workers' problems can only be solved through the elimination of the capitalist.⁸¹

The CPA journal, *Revolutionary Age*, edited by Louis Fraina, for its part wrote that

'The Negro...constitutes a vital problem of our revolutionary movement. The race

problem is simply a phase of the general social problem, which the Communist

revolution alone can solve.'⁸² Fraina's *Class Struggle* (edited by Debs and Ludwig

Lore as well) in an article titled 'The Negro Problem—A Labor Problem' declared

that 'the white man must understand that there is but one alternative—either

competition to the utmost or a common fight of all workers, without regard to color,

race or creed, against the common enemy, the capitalist class.'⁸³ Although these were

inspiring words in the midst of the 'Red Summer', they still reduced the question of

fighting against racial oppression entirely to 'class antagonisms' or 'the general social

problem' and offered only a 'common fight of all workers'.

Not until the Second Comintern Congress, in 1920, did the Party pay real attention to the Negro Question. There, John Reed gave a short presentation on the condition of American blacks. Lenin had prompted Reed to give this presentation, responding to Reed's question if he should make it with a hand-written note: 'Yes, absolutely necessary.' Reed argued: 'As an oppressed and downtrodden people, the Negro offers to us a double or twofold opportunity: first, a strong race and social movement; second, a strong proletarian labor movement.' He criticised the SP for

⁸¹*Communist (CLP)*, 9 August 1919.

⁸²*Revolutionary Age*, 9 August 1919. Cf. also *ibid*, 2 August and 23 August 1919.

having ‘never seriously endeavored to organize the Negroes’, and attacked black nationalism, noting the lack of support for ‘national independence’ amongst blacks. In his notes for the presentation he wrote ‘not a trace of nationalist movement’ and that blacks ‘feel [they] are Americans’. Reed reverted to the old Debsian formula: ‘The only proper policy for the American Communist to follow is to consider the Negro first of all as a laborer.’ Nonetheless, he had done what no American Communist had done before—he argued that the Party should at least pay attention to blacks, that it ‘must not...stand aloof from the Negro movement’. Thus the Negro question at least had achieved some *rhetorical* importance.⁸⁴ The next speaker, Louis Fraina, argued implicitly that immigrant workers were equally as important as blacks—thus returning to the standard leftist view.⁸⁵

After Reed’s death in 1921, his interest was not matched by any of his successors. The Party programme of that year did pledge to ‘support the Negroes in their struggle for liberation’, including for ‘economic, political, and social equality’. It also strove to unite the struggles of black and white workers. This led Philip Foner and James Allen, two scholars sympathetic to the Party, to argue that this programme ‘marks an important step forward’.⁸⁶ But in fact, despite its verbal concession, in practice the Party still did not think that the Negro Question was very important.

On occasion, the Party was able to verbally argue that, as one 1921 article put it, ‘The efforts of the Negroes to throw off the yoke of the white capitalist imperialists cannot fail to react favorable on our fight against the same enemy’:

⁸³ *Class Struggle*, August 1919.

⁸⁴ *Pravda*, 8 August 1920, in ACBA, 7-8. See also *The Second Congress of the Communist International: Minutes of the Proceedings* (London: New Park, 1977), vol. I, 120-24; John Reed, ‘Notes on Negro Problem’, July 1920, John S. Reed papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University, bms AM 1091:1228; Reed’s note to Lenin, with Lenin’s hand-written reply, *ibid.*, fms Am 1091:533.

⁸⁵ *Second Congress*, vol. 1, 124-26.

⁸⁶ *Program and Constitution, Workers Party of America* (1921), ACBA, 9; commentary by Foner and Allen on page 8.

Every blow struck for Negro liberation will be a blow struck for the world Proletariat, since whether the Negroes consciously will it or not, the effects will be the weakening of the capitalist foe of both the 'subject peoples' and the exploited white workers.⁸⁷

But in terms of concrete action, there was no understanding that the CP itself should attempt to strike some of these blows.

R.M. Whitney's classic anti-Communist *Reds in America* (1924), based on documents seized at the August 1922 Michigan underground Communist convention, argues that the 'Communists' earliest program in the United States included the use of the Negro masses in its campaign to bring about the overthrow of the government of this country by violence.' Yet despite his contention that 'During the first year of organized activity by the Communists in the United States a great deal of attention was paid to the Negro question,' Whitney was unable to produce any documents proving his point beyond some articles from the *Messenger* and the *Crusader*, neither of which was a Communist paper.⁸⁸ As if to reinforce this point, the chapter's *piece de resistance* is a rather long (11-page) letter to the early CP signed by Comintern leaders Bukharin, Radek and Kuusinen, which, among other criticisms, urged the CP to pay attention to 'the Negro mass movement for racial betterment' since it 'must include great masses of toilers'. Three pages later, the letter also suggested as a demand for the CP to use in its work, '[t]he liquidation of the Ku Klux Klan'.⁸⁹ That such an intrepid red-hunter as Whitney was reduced to such 'proof' speaks for itself. Similarly, J. Edgar Hoover, newly employed by the Justice Department to sniff out subversion, maintained an almost pathological obsession with the supposed radical roots of the race riots in 1919, arguing that communism was 'the cause of much of the racial trouble in the United States at the present time'. Yet, Hoover's own extensive

⁸⁷ *Toiler*, 10 December 1921, in ACBA, 15.

⁸⁸ Whitney, *Reds in America*, 197.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 205, 208. The bulk of the letter concerns itself with the tactics of the CP, including towards the question of creating a legal party organisation. The original letter can be found in the Comintern

network of agents were telling him the exact opposite.⁹⁰ This paranoia, however fanciful, of a red-black conspiracy indicate the potential power of a Communist struggle for black liberation.

Black politics in the 1920s

The World War greatly changed American race relations. A combination of a labour shortage and a crisis in Southern agriculture propelled more than 300,000 black farmers, unskilled labourers and domestic workers to flee the South before 1920 alone.⁹¹ Despite the poverty and discrimination in most urban ghettos, blacks in the North still had more opportunities than in the Jim Crow South.

Thousands of blacks had served in the military, in segregated units. Those who served far from home, especially in France where they were treated better than in the South, learnt that segregation and oppression were not inevitable. The war also created a sense of entitlement to black veterans, who returned less willing to accept the American racial system.⁹² Furthermore, many black intellectuals felt betrayed when they realised that Wilson's post-war talk of 'self-determination' and 'democracy' excluded black people throughout the world.⁹³ Thus, when Haywood Hall returned to Chicago from military service in France, he began to search for answers to the problems facing American blacks at that time. As he wrote later, on the national level there were not many avenues for politicised blacks since 'the political scene in the United States in the early 20's offered three alternatives: The National

archives, 515:1:38.

⁹⁰Ellis, 'J. Edgar Hoover and the "Red Summer" of 1919', (quote on 54); Kornweibel, '*Seeing Red*', passim. Ellis argues that Hoover's later obsession with the Civil Rights movement and the Black Panther Party—which resulted in numerous assassinations against black radicals—must be seen in the context of his role in 1919.

⁹¹ Lewis, *Harlem*, 20-21.

⁹² See Steven Reich, 'Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1920', *Journal of American History* 82 (March 1986); Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 13.

⁹³ See Michelle Ann Stephens, 'Black Empire: The Making of Black Transnationalism by West Indians in the United States, 1914 to 1962' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1999), 53ff.

Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Garvey's Back to Africa Movement (UNIA), and the Communist Party.'⁹⁴

Founded in 1910 largely by liberal whites, the NAACP was led at this time by W.E.B. Du Bois, the editor of its newspaper, the *Crisis*. Despite his reputation as a radical alternative to Booker T. Washington's 'accommodationism' to racial oppression, in the early 1920s Du Bois and the NAACP were relatively moderate. He argued for increased black political power, an end to discrimination and segregation, and the creation of a black professional class through increased education of black youth.⁹⁵ Du Bois's gradual approach had led him to support the war, and to see it as an opportunity for black Americans to finally prove their suitability for freedom.⁹⁶

After the war, the *Crisis* was optimistic about an improvement of the conditions of black people across the world, including in the US.⁹⁷ As with any national organisation, there were tensions between the local NAACP branches and the national leadership.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, in the face of the 1919 'Red Summer', the Northern NAACP's gradual, legal strategy for gaining black rights seemed, to young blacks like Haywood Hall, to be predicated upon a 'reliance on [the] white rulers'. Thus he recalled that it had 'let us down'.⁹⁹

Against the 'old Negroes' such as Du Bois, radical black intellectuals formed a new, militant 'New Negro' movement, refusing to idly accept American racial

⁹⁴ Harry Haywood dictation, 16 March 1970, in Harry Haywood Papers, Schomburg Center, New York Public Library. For a general overview of black politics in the 1920s, see Adam Lively, 'Continuity and Radicalism in American Black Nationalist Thought, 1914-1929' in *Journal of American Studies*, 18:2 (1984), 207-35.

⁹⁵ See David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

⁹⁶ His famous editorial is in the *Crisis*, July 1918. On Du Bois and this editorial, Lewis, *Biography of a Race*, 556-58; Mark Ellis, ' "Closing Ranks" and "Seeking Honors": W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I', *Journal of American History* 79:1 (June 1992).

⁹⁷ See the *Crisis*, April 1919, for the purest expression of this optimism in the United States. By May, Du Bois proclaimed: 'Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reasons why.'

⁹⁸ Reich, 'Soldiers of Democracy'; Mark Robert Schneider, *'We Return Fighting': The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

oppression. Many supported the much more militant Universal Negro Improvement League (UNIA) led by Marcus Garvey. This was a contradictory movement, drawing upon several traditions. One of the strongest was Pan-Africanism, an appeal to the entire black diaspora—from Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa, as well as the US—for black liberation. Founded in 1914 in Jamaica, the UNIA was a truly international movement, having branches throughout the black diaspora. In part, this internationalism was rooted in Garvey's own history; before founding UNIA, Garvey was active in almost a dozen countries on three continents, and many of his followers had similar experiences. According to one historian, 'their broad experience helped dispel racial myths and prepared them to developed original ideas and programs.' Thus UNIA was more attractive to the masses of Northern blacks instead of the more elite NAACP.¹⁰⁰

By August 1921, the UNIA had 859 branches.¹⁰¹ While Garvey's rhetoric appealed to black workers, his actual programme—especially the creation of a 'Black Star' steamship line based on investment—suited the same professional class which made up the NAACP's base. As Judith Stein put it, 'Garvey attempted to enlist the masses behind the elite model of progress' since whatever 'Garvey's self-promotion, novel methods, and genuine charisma, his underlying social philosophy and goals were shared by the leaders of the Urban League and the NAACP. All acted upon (even if they did not acknowledge) the theory that an expanding capitalism provided blacks with opportunities for bourgeois achievement, which was to them the prerequisite for black liberation.'¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Haywood dictation, 16 March 1970, Haywood papers.

¹⁰⁰ Theodore G. Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1972), 91, 103-4.

¹⁰¹ Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem*, 96.

¹⁰² Judith Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey: Race and Class in Modern Society* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana University Press, 1986), 5, 169-70; Bush, on the other hand, argues almost the exact

Similarly, Garvey accepted the existence of white supremacy because he viewed the US as a 'white man's country', and therefore was willing to appease the most reactionary elements of white supremacy. In this regard, Garveyism was similar to Washington's perspective of accommodationism—except, while Washington advocated blacks to 'cast down your buckets where you are', Garvey believed that it was in Africa where fresh water flowed. In the South, Garvey praised Jim Crow, attacked social equality and even attempted to achieve détente with the Klan.¹⁰³ Garvey's ideology essentially accepted 'separate but equal' and the continued oppression of blacks.¹⁰⁴ For these reasons, Haywood Hall recollected that he considered Garveyism 'totally at odds with world reality, but definitely dangerous' for blacks because it placed the locus of struggle away from the US.

Garveyism must not be viewed simply as a conservative nationalism. While locating the centre of black struggle in the fight for self-determination in Africa, Garvey also demanded power for blacks throughout the diaspora as well. And certainly, rank-and-file Garveyites did not join an organisation to further 'separate but equal'. By politicising masses of blacks during the reactionary post-Reconstruction period, UNIA served as a bridge to more left-wing politics of the mid-1900s. Several early black Communists had been friendly towards Garvey, and much of the early work of the CP in Harlem later consisted of trying to win over this base from Garvey to Communism.

opposite, that 'Garveyism was a complete break with the vision of (future) social and economic equality advocated by the NAACP and the Urban League,' as well as with these groups' white supporters. Bush continues: 'Whether or not the white supporters of the NAACP were sincere (which Garvey strongly denied) in their belief in the social equality of African Americans, the UNIA's argument was posed on an entirely different plane. For these emergent African American or African nationalists, developing a separate and powerful Black society was more important than winning the right to participate in white American society.' Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem*, 98.

¹⁰³ Stein, *World of Marcus Garvey*, chapter 8.

¹⁰⁴ Lively, 'Continuity and Radicalism in American Black Nationalist Thought', 211-12.

For Haywood Hall, since these alternatives were not promising, Communism was 'where the action was'.¹⁰⁵ However, he was unique since very few blacks noticed, much less supported, the Party. Whatever the Party's positions on racial oppression, its status as a persecuted, small, sect-like group populated by non-English-speaking white immigrants would have made it an unlikely candidate for all but the most determined (or foolish) black militants. And since the early Party ignored them, most black militants tended to ignore it as well.

Probably only three blacks joined the early CP, and these had been Socialists. Otto E. Huiswoud, an immigrant from Dutch Guyana, had been on the editorial board of the *Messenger* and the Harlem branch of the SP before he was the only black delegate to the 1919 New York left-wing conference. He was a delegate from the CP to the 1922 Fourth Comintern Congress and served as the chairman of its Negro Commission. Another black Caribbean, Arthur Hendriks from British Guiana, was also an early supporter of the left wing, although he died before the CP's founding. The third black member, Lovett Fort-Whiteman, also joined the party in the early 1920s from the left wing of the SP.¹⁰⁶

Another early black Communist was Claude McKay. Born in Jamaica, McKay was primarily a poet who was active in both the Harlem and Greenwich Village bohemian literary milieux and wrote for the *Masses*. McKay's journey to Communism (and away again) illustrates the CP's inability to grapple with the Negro Question. Although McKay was familiar with socialism while in Harlem, it was only after moving to London in the early 1920s that he actively joined the Communist movement. Reacting against the racism of the official British Labour Party leadership, McKay became a staff writer of Sylvia Pankhurst's *Workers' Dreadnought*, the

¹⁰⁵ Haywood dictation, Haywood papers, 16 March 1970.

¹⁰⁶ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 320, 326; James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 88; Turner,

newspaper of one of the most left-wing organisations competing to become the Comintern-sanctioned British Communist Party. In London, McKay also met future Communist leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Ho Chi Minh.¹⁰⁷

At this time McKay believed that ‘socialism should step in to bridge the gulf that has been created between the white and coloured workers by Capitalism and its servant, Christianity.’ While McKay’s conversion to Communism illustrates the power of the Comintern’s programme to speak to blacks, his circuitous ‘road to Damascus’ indicates the weakness of the early American CP on the Negro Question. McKay’s years in London fell in the middle of the post-war radicalisation, but the fact that his conversion occurred there reflects the existence of a Communist movement that explicitly opposed the dominant English social-democratic Labour movement. Thus, one of the most famous early American black Communists was not actually recruited by the Party, and consistently was at odds with the official leadership.¹⁰⁸

Blacks and the early CP:

The African Blood Brotherhood

Beyond these early socialists, the CP recruited its first black cadre through the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB). The ABB’s founder-leader was Cyril Valentine Briggs, a Caribbean immigrant, and former editor of the influential *Amsterdam News*. As a writer for several black newspapers, he consistently expressed radical politics. Although prevented from explicitly opposing the war because of censorship restrictions, Briggs’ *Amsterdam News* had, according to one censor, ‘a peculiar talent for saying the most fervently patriotic things in the most irritating unpatriotic

‘Richard B. Moore and His Works’, 46. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 11.

¹⁰⁷Wayne F. Cooper, *Claude McKay: A Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 109.

¹⁰⁸Cooper, *Claude McKay*, especially chapter four (quote is on page 116). Pankhurst’s group was actually considered ‘ultra-left’ by Lenin for its refusal to do work within the Labour Party. See Lenin, ‘Left-Wing’ Communism—An Infantile Disorder (1920), in *Collected Works* vol. 31, especially section

manner'.¹⁰⁹ He opposed the war not out of pacifism, but from a black nationalist hatred of Western (especially British) imperialism, and his belief that black Americans should be guaranteed the same 'self-determination' Wilson promised Europe. Finally, however, the paper's publishers, upset at his antiwar stance, fired him.

Briggs' next project was a new paper, the *Crusader*, which first appeared in September 1918, and allowed Briggs to continue where he left off, mixing black nationalism with community news. The early *Crusader* had much in common with the *Messenger*; in fact, the two shared contributors for several years, and they offered a joint subscription.¹¹⁰ The frontispiece declared: 'Onward for democracy. Upward with the race,' and the paper called for 'Africa for the Africans'. Briggs continued to combine feigned patriotic calls for allied victory with a subtle undercurrent of antiwar themes. Thus an early editorial declared: 'Victory for the allies must usher in Democracy for the people-regardless of race, creed or color.... We therefore look for a free Africa, as well as a free Poland, Serbia and Belgium as one of the guaranteed results of the Allied victory.' Free Africa meant 'Africa will no longer be exploited by a ruling caste of European overlords.'¹¹¹ While not calling for the defeat of the Americans, French or British in the war—and even at times pushing Liberty Bonds¹¹²—Briggs did not call on blacks to put aside their grievances during the war as had Du Bois.

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¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Richard A. Hill, 'Racial and Radical: Cyril V. Briggs, *The Crusader Magazine*, and the African Blood Brotherhood, 1918-1922', introduction, in Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Crusader: A Facsimile of the Periodical*, 3 vols (New York and London: Garland Press, 1987), 1:xvi.

¹¹⁰ In a December 1919 editorial, the *Messenger* wrote that 'with a few notable exceptions we agree on the whole with the policy of the *Crusader*' while the Thanksgiving editorial already quoted equated both journals as expressions of the 'New Crowd Negro'. For the joint subscription offer, along with the *Emancipator*, see the April/May 1920 issue.

¹¹¹ *Crusader*, September 1918.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, October 1918.

Briggs' politics can best be described as radical black nationalism or pan-Africanism. The *Crusader* was very internationalist, and not only printed articles about blacks in New York and the South, but also in Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. Briggs saw the struggle for black liberation as part of an international struggle against imperialism and colonial domination. As a British subject coming from the black Caribbean—whose population one writer dubbed 'anglicized Afro-Caribbeans' and whose entire identity was integrally connected with the British Empire¹¹³—Briggs identified with the fight against British colonialism. In the period after the Easter Uprising, that meant Ireland's struggle against British colonialism. Ironically, then, the Irish struggle and not the Russian Revolution first galvanised these future 'Black Bolsheviks'.

An early *Crusader* editorial declared: 'There is little doubt that the Irish principle of "when you fight, FIGHT!" is soon to be vindicated and Irish sacrifices for liberty crowned with great and important, if not complete, success.' This editorial justified the 'strikes, riots, rebellions and other forceful means' that the Irish had 'forced the world to take cognizance of British misrule and oppression' and forced Britain to realise that 'Irish people have rights which the English are bound to respect.' That last phrase, of course, was a reference to the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled that blacks had no rights that a white man was bound to respect. The lesson from the Irish struggle, implied the *Crusader*, was that blacks should adopt the Republicans' methods since 'There is no middle course when dealing with the oppressor.'¹¹⁴

¹¹³See Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (London: Paladin, 1991), chapter 2. Cf. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 73-74 for the paradoxes of 'Britishness' on black Caribbeans.

¹¹⁴*Crusader*, August 1919.

Briggs explained his position on the Irish struggle against England: 'It should be easily possible for Negroes to sympathize with the Irish fight against tyranny and oppression, and vice-versa, since both are in the same boat and both victims of the same Anglo-Saxon race.'¹¹⁵ Another early *Crusader* editorial similarly attacked 'British "law and order" in black men's countries from Cairo to the Cape and from the Indian Ocean eastwards to the Atlantic swell' for 'civilizing—off the face of the earth—millions of Black and Brown men in different parts of the world.'¹¹⁶ According to Robert Hill, Briggs was 'representative of a black Fenianism inside the New Negro movement' and modelled the ABB on Sinn Féin.¹¹⁷

The first issue of the *Crusader* ran a 'Race Catechism' which argued that 'the Negro Race is of all races the most favored' in creativity and courage and advocated what it called 'Race Patriotism'. It answered the question, 'What are one's duties to the Race?' 'To love one's Race above one's self and to further the common interests of all above the private interests of one.'¹¹⁸ Locating Harlem within the black diaspora, Briggs also raised the banner 'Africa for the Africans'. He sought 'to awaken the American Negro to the splendid strategic position of the Race in the South American and West Indian Republics,' in this fight, as well as

'carry on' here an uncompromising fight for Negro rights to the end that it may be known once and for all time whether the nation stands with the Negro for an equitable solution of the Race problem that shall be fair alike for both races, or with the South for the intolerable, unjust, inhuman and humiliating solution.'¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *Crusader*, February 1921. See also, March 1921; Claude McKay also viewed Irish independence as the first step in 'the dissolution of the British Empire and the ushering in of an era of proletarian states [which] will give England her proper proportional place in the political affairs of the world.' Quoted in Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 154.

¹¹⁶ *Crusader*, June 1919.

¹¹⁷ Hill, 'Racial and Radical', xxxii-xxxiii; Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 11. See Matthew Pratt Guterl, 'The New Race Consciousness: Race, Nation and Empire in American Culture, 1910-1925' *Journal of World History* 10:2 (1999) for an exploration of the relationship between black militancy and Irish nationalism.

¹¹⁸ *Crusader*, September 1918.

¹¹⁹ *Crusader*, September 1918.

Two issues after this declaration, the 'Aims of the Crusader' 'dedicated [itself] to the honorable solution of the "Negro Problem", and to a renaissance of Negro power and culture throughout the world.'¹²⁰ What this entailed was not exactly clear, although it evidently contained elements of radical pan-Africanism and black nationalism.

Declaring as the *Crusader's* goal 'to achieve for Ethiopia a place among the nations', Briggs argued that the only two choices for blacks in America were 'complete equality or complete annihilation'. Short of acquiescing to oppression, blacks' only answer was 'the creation and existence of an independent Negro Nation'.¹²¹ At various times the *Crusader* focused on blacks in Brazil, Central America, the Caribbean as well as Africa and the US.

Similarly, Briggs asserted that blacks could find no justice in a white-dominated US and that the 'solution of the race problem' was 'in "government of the Negro, by the Negro and for the Negro".... And that government can best be attained and secured in our sunny motherland: *Africa!*'¹²²

A casual reader of the November 1919 *Crusader* could be excused for overlooking the inaugural announcement of the formation of the ABB. Sandwiched between advertisements for a tailor and the *Messenger*, it read:

Mr. Cyril V. Briggs, Editor of The Crusader announces the organization of The African Blood Brotherhood for African Liberation and Redemption. Membership by enlistment. No dues, fees or assessments. Those only need apply who are willing to go to the limit.¹²³

Despite this small beginning,¹²⁴ the next several issues of the *Crusader* contained correspondence by people who, unclear of the exact nature of the ABB, were nonetheless 'willing to go to the limit'. These included writers from Washington, DC,

¹²⁰ *Crusader*, November 1918.

¹²¹ *Crusader*, April 1919.

¹²² *Crusader*, August 1919.

¹²³ *Crusader*, November 1919.

¹²⁴ Carl Offord, in a Federal Writers Project manuscript, claimed on the basis of a 1939 interview with Briggs that the ABB was founded in the fall of 1917; however, there is no evidence of this; manuscript

Atlanta, Chicago and Panama. While this small notice was repeated, it was four months before a full page advertisement announced that ‘over a thousand red-blooded negro patriots’ of both sexes had joined. The advertisement, in addition to asking people to join, announced that ‘Ethiopia Expects That Every Negro This Day Will Do His Duty,’ including donating money.¹²⁵ By the end of 1920, the *Crusader* was claiming a distribution of ‘(on average) 33,000 copies per issue’, a figure that, although probably exaggerated, is still impressive nonetheless.¹²⁶

Several early ABB members had roots in the SP, including W.A. Domingo, Richard B. Moore and Grace P. Campbell. Moore had been a supporter of the *Messenger* and of the Harlem Socialist Party, and Campbell (one of the few women in the masculine movement for ‘New Negro Manhood’) had stood as an SP candidate for State Assembly in 1919 and 1920. Domingo had been editor of Garvey’s *Negro World*, before being purged for his Marxist sympathies, after which he wrote for the *Messenger* and edited the *Emancipator* and lectured at the SP’s Rand School.¹²⁷ Briggs later wrote that the ABB began with ‘less than a score’ of members, all in Harlem, and never attained even three thousand at its peak. Nonetheless, because of its talented cadre and its branches in the North, the South, and the Caribbean, its influence extended beyond its membership.¹²⁸

in the Theodore Draper Papers, Hoover Institution archives, Stanford University, box 31, folder ‘Negro—Briggs’; the original is in the Schomburg Center.

¹²⁵ *Crusader*, February 1920.

¹²⁶ *Crusader*, December 1920. In a 17 March 1958 letter to Theodore Draper, Briggs claimed some 36,000 subscribers; Draper papers, box 31, folder marked ‘Negro-Briggs’.

¹²⁷ Oscar Berland, ‘The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the “Negro Question” in America, 1919-1931’, part one, *Science and Society* 63:4 (Winter 1999-2000), 414; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 326; James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 174-75, 270-71; Joyce Moore Turner, ‘Richard B. Moore and His Works’; see also Linden Lewis, ‘Richard B. Moore: The Making of a Caribbean Organic Intellectual’, *Journal of Black Studies* 25:5 (May 1995).

¹²⁸ James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 156. On SPers in the early leadership of the ABB, see Cyril Briggs to Theodore Draper, 14 April 1958 and 4 June 1958, Theodore Draper papers, box 31, folder ‘Negro-Briggs’.

One catalyst for forming the ABB was the 1919 Red Summer. Reflecting the 'New Negro' attitude, the ABB advocated self-defence, and even claimed credit when blacks resisted attack during the Tulsa Race Riot. The core of the ABB's early perspectives was a litany of ' "suggestions" [that] have been issued for the guidance of members and for the race in general'.¹²⁹ These confirm Winston James' argument that the ABB during its brief existence always operated in the New Negro continuum between black nationalism and socialism, steadily moving towards socialism.¹³⁰ The 'suggestions' included, among encouragement to patronise black businesses and learn African history, the following:

Affiliate yourself with the liberal, radical and labor movements. Don't mind being called 'Bolsheviki' by the same people who call you 'nigger.' Such affiliation in itself won't solve our problems, but it will help immensely. Another 'suggestion' was to 'Encourage the Universal Negro Improvement Association movement as the biggest thing so far effected in surface movements.' But perhaps, the eighth 'suggestion' best summed up the early ABB's perspective: 'Adopt the policy of race first, without, however, ignoring the useful alliances with other groups.'¹³¹

Despite the mention of 'Bolsheviki', the early *Crusader* was more interested in the Socialist Party than Bolshevism, either in New York or Russia. The *Crusader* regularly carried advertisements from the Rand School,¹³² reprinted articles from the New York Socialist press, and endorsed Socialist candidates. When the *Crusader* endorsed the SP, it did so usually not from loyalty to the SP (although it often expressed sympathy) but because the New York SP did not ignore Harlem and also represented an alternative to the two main political parties. The *Crusader's* first issue declared that 'while this magazine is neither pro-Socialist, pro-Republican nor, least

¹²⁹ *Crusader*, June 1920.

¹³⁰ James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 157.

¹³¹ *Crusader*, June 1920.

of all, pro-Democratic, it is distinctly pro-Negro! The Party that gives the Negro a square deal is the Party that the *Crusader* is going to support.' Since the SP stood three black candidates that year, the *Crusader* 'advocate[d] the support by the Race of the entire Socialist ticket'.¹³³ A year later, the *Crusader* was more explicit: 'Just as, by joining the I.W.W. in large numbers, we forced the A.F. of L. to open its doors to us, so by joining the Socialist Party, we can force belated justice and consideration from the Republicans.'¹³⁴

However, a series of editorials showed that the *Crusader*'s interest in Socialism was not merely to pressurise the Republicans. They emphasised 'that no color line is drawn in the class struggle,' and that 'there is no power on earth that can keep permanently apart these two sections of the world proletariat for after all is said and done the interests are preeminently the interests of the Negro and vice versa.'¹³⁵ Increasingly, the *Crusader* began to write of the world in socialist terms, with the important addition of including racial oppression within its analysis.

The African Blood Brotherhood and the Communist Party

Historians dispute the relationship between the ABB and the CP. Draper argued that the ABB was 'organized in 1919 in complete independence of the Communist party'.¹³⁶ Hill, on the other hand, explicitly disagreed, stating that 'By keeping these two processes mutually separate, historians have failed to comprehend the unfolding of what was, in reality, a simultaneous and organic process of political radicalization, even if the phenomenon appeared to express itself as two different processes.'¹³⁷ Hill largely based this conclusion on Briggs' recollections some forty

¹³² See for example, the *Crusader*, October 1919.

¹³³ *Crusader*, September 1918.

¹³⁴ *Crusader*, October 1919.

¹³⁵ *Crusader*, April 1919, June 1919.

¹³⁶ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 326.

¹³⁷ Hill, 'Racial and Radicalism', xxiv.

years later—recollections which, furthermore, he had already shown to be inaccurate in several ways.¹³⁸ In the end, while the scenario advocated by Hill is not impossible, neither is it very likely.

The dispute is less arcane than it appears at first. The recruitment of key ABB cadre—which consisted of a large portion of the SP's black leadership in New York—illustrates the importance of the Comintern in the Party's gaining black members. There are several indications that Hill is wrong. The simplest is that there is no evidence of an organisational link between the ABB and the early CP. Indeed, most of Briggs' partners were around the SP, which was much more influential among black Harlemites than the CP. If the ABB was a secret 'front group' of the CP, why then did the *Crusader* carry advertisements for the despised SP, reprints from its various papers, and notices about the Rand School? Why did the *Crusader* endorse SP candidates? Furthermore, there were few *political* links between the *Crusader* and the CP. Instead, the ABB's founders saw themselves as part of the developing international movement for black liberation, not a part of the international Communist movement. When the early *Crusader* did look to white revolutionaries, it was to the Easter Uprising and not the Bolshevik Revolution.¹³⁹

The most important to reasons to doubt Hill is the Communists' demonstrated incapacity to understand the importance of the Negro Question. To have set up the ABB to attract militant blacks would have been far beyond the political capabilities of

¹³⁸ In a 14 April 1958 letter to Draper, Briggs typed that he had joined the CP 'prior to 1919...before the Palmer raids of 1919'. In both cases, '1919' was crossed out and somebody, presumably Briggs, wrote '21'. (Theodore Draper papers, box 31, folder marked 'Negro-Briggs')

¹³⁹ Cf. Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 181. One recent study concludes that the ABB was an ideological hybrid of socialism and black nationalism, and links the black protest movement in the nineteenth century with black radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s. See Ronald A. Kuykendall, 'African Blood Brotherhood, Independent Marxists During the Harlem Renaissance', *Western Journal of Black Studies* 26:1 (Spring 2002).

the Party—and probably too taxing on its organising abilities as well.¹⁴⁰ Instead, Rod Bush was correct when he argued that the ABB ‘developed organically out of the New Negro or manhood rights movement’. Bush however continued that the ABB ‘developed this thought to its logical “conclusion”.’ While the inverted commas are somewhat confusing, the transformation of the early ABB leadership into Communists was not ‘logical’ so much as *one* possibility that was consummated only because of Comintern intervention.¹⁴¹ In fact, according to Briggs, only Northern ABB members, in Chicago and New York, joined the CP; in the South they did not. The West Virginia branch continued to exist for a time, independent of the Party.¹⁴²

By mid-1921, Briggs had joined the Party, and increasingly made the ABB available to the CP to carry out propaganda amongst blacks. The minutes of the Central Executive Committee reveal that in August 1921, the Party established a ‘Negro Committee’ consisting of Briggs, Billings (Huiswood), Kelly (Ashkenudzie) and Griffith (Zack), and also agreed to subsidise the *Crusader*. Although the CP finally officially absorbed the ABB in late 1923, it is incorrect to argue that the CP ‘bought’ the cash-starved ABB. The reason that the ABB leadership moved close to the Party was, ultimately, political agreement. But, it is logical to ask, if the CP in 1923 still largely ignored blacks and the Negro Question, what common political ground would Briggs and the other ABB leaders share with the Party? Briggs and the other ABB recruits did not want to join the American CP, but saw themselves enlisting in the American branch of Communist International.¹⁴³ In this regard, they

¹⁴⁰ Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 10.

¹⁴¹ Bush, *We Are Not What We Seem*, 103. To suggest otherwise is to come dangerously close to a leftist version of the ‘Whig theory’ of history, in which groups like the ABB existed only to inexorably form part of the Communist Party.

¹⁴² Briggs to Draper, 17 March 1958, Draper papers, box 31, folder marked ‘Negro-Briggs’.

¹⁴³ James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 178-81; Solomon, *Unity*, 9, 10 (quote); CEC minutes, 2 August 1921, Comintern archives, 515:1:51. The original motion put forward at the meeting was to advance \$200 to the *Crusader*; the agreed upon sum was \$100. Griffith was voted onto the committee at the CEC meeting of 15 August 1921. At that meeting, the financial report indicated that the Party had an income

were similar to William Z. Foster's Trade Union Educational League which joined the CP at the same time because of the power of the Russian Revolution.

Later, Briggs explained that he had not been 'interested in socialism per se'. Instead, 'My sympathies were derived from the enlightened attitude of the Russian Bolsheviks toward national minorities.'¹⁴⁴ He wrote to Draper that 'I was at the time more interested...in the national liberation revolution than the social revolution.'¹⁴⁵ W.A. Domingo, in an early piece in the *Messenger*, approvingly noted that 'When Czardom was overthrown and Bolshevism was established the first thing done by the new government was to proclaim the absolute equality of all the races that occupied that vast territory.'¹⁴⁶ In 1922, the ABB praised 'the marked policy of friendship Moscow has shown, under Soviet rule, toward the colored peoples of the world'.¹⁴⁷ Lenin had long stressed that Russian Empire was a 'prison house of peoples' forcibly subjugated by the tsar. In 1915, he wrote that of 'the 170 million inhabitants of Russia, *about 100 million* are oppressed and denied their rights.' Securing these rights—including language rights and even independence—figured centrally in the Bolshevik programme.¹⁴⁸

The Third International, unlike the Second, uncompromisingly opposed imperialism and colonisation. The right wing of the Second International—already anticipating entering the government in European countries where they enjoyed strength—had argued for a 'socialist' colonial policy as far back as 1907.¹⁴⁹ Amidst

during July of \$26,421 but was still \$15,000 in debt. George Baldwin, 'Statement of the Communist Party of America to the ECCI', August 1921, Comintern archives, 515:1:39, also notes that 'the entire executive committee' of an unnamed 'Negro society of resistance to lynching and peonage' had joined the CP.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Vincent, *Black Power*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ Briggs to Draper, 17 March 1958, in Draper papers, box 31, folder marked 'Negro-Briggs'.

¹⁴⁶ *Messenger*, September 1919.

¹⁴⁷ Crusader/ABB press release, 11 December 1922, Comintern archives, 515:1:91.

¹⁴⁸ Lenin, *Socialism and War* (1915), in *Collected Works*, vol. 31, 306.

¹⁴⁹ See the debate at the Stuttgart Congress of 1907 reprinted in John Riddell, ed., *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International: Documents: 1907-1916, The Preparatory Years* (New York: Pathfinder

the World War, while most of the international labour movement had fallen behind their 'own' national war aims, Lenin had opposed the war, declaring:

the Social-Democratic parties of the *oppressor* countries...should recognise and champion the *oppressed* nation's right to self-determination, in the specifically political sense of the term, i.e., the right to political secession. The socialist of a ruling or a colonial nation who does not stand for that right is a chauvinist.¹⁵⁰

After founding the Comintern in March 1919, the Bolsheviks stressed anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. The Comintern's 'Manifesto' declared that 'the colonial question in its fullest extent has been placed on the agenda' and that 'small peoples can be assured of a free existence only by the proletarian revolution', which would end national oppression and create an international socialist economy and 'afford even the smallest and weakest people the opportunity of conducting their national cultural affairs freely and independently, without detriment to the unified and centralized European and world economy.' It proclaimed: 'Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your own liberation!'¹⁵¹ This was attractive to the ABB, whose 1921 'Program' declared:

the important thing about Soviet Russia...is not the merits or demerits of the Soviet form of government, but the outstanding fact that Soviet Russia is opposing the imperialist robbers who have partitioned our motherland and subjugated our kindred, and that Soviet Russia is feared by those imperialist nations and by the plunder-bunds of the earth from whose covetousness and murderous inhumanity we suffer in many lands.

For this reason, the Program further explained, this 'element is led and represented by the Third Internationale [sic] which has its sections in all countries. We should immediately establish contact with the Third Internationale and its millions of followers in all countries of the world.'¹⁵² Briggs recalled his interest in Communism 'was sparked by its hostility to imperialism and specifically by the Soviet solution to

Press, 1984), 1-53.

¹⁵⁰ Lenin, *Socialism and War*, 316.

¹⁵¹ [L.Trotsky], 'Manifesto of the Communist International to the Proletariat of the Entire World', in Gruber, *International Communism in the Era of London*, 95-96.

¹⁵² *Crusader*, October 1921.

the national question, its recognition...of the right of self determination of nations formerly oppressed by Tsarist Russia.’¹⁵³ Although the situation of blacks in America was not synonymous to Jews or Georgians in Russia, the changes made by the Bolsheviks were appealing nonetheless. A *Crusader* advertisement written by Briggs urged readers to ‘STAND BY SOVIET RUSSIA and thereby stand by your own cause and make it possible for her to give further aid to the LIBERATION STRUGGLE of the darker peoples. Ask the Persians who gave them freedom! Ask the Afghans, ask the Egyptians, the Indians how Soviet Russia has helped them and let them tell you what they think of Soviet Russia.’¹⁵⁴

The ABB and UNIA

An important of the early activity of the ABB, now linked to the CP, was to attempt to win Garvey supporters to Communism. In August 1921, Briggs invited Garvey to ‘a conference on those major questions in the work for African liberation in which both yourself and I, and our respective organizations[,] are intensely interested’. The cordial tone is notable: Briggs claims ‘we both of us give each other credit for being in deadly earnest in the work of African liberation’. Even if the ABB and UNIA ‘are moving in different spheres’ they had ‘the same aims and ideals’ and approached ‘our object by somewhat different, though always parallel roads’ which made them ‘bound to help each other—and that whether we consciously co-operate or not’.¹⁵⁵

Yet this approach soon came to nought when, within the month, the ABB attempted to intervene at a UNIA ‘Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World’. Rose Pastor Stokes, a white Communist spoke, and was warmly, if somewhat

¹⁵³ Quoted in Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 9.

¹⁵⁴ *Crusader*, December 1921.

¹⁵⁵ Briggs to Garvey, 15 August 1921, in *Crusader*, November 1921; also reprinted in Richard A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley, Los

patronisingly, received—perhaps because her speech did not criticise UNIA but only spoke against racial oppression and imperialist subjugation of Africa. Nonetheless, the conference tabled the motions the ABB had prepared, and Garvey and Briggs had a very bitter falling out. Briggs soon sued Garvey for libel (for having called Briggs white), and encouraged the government to look into Garvey's finances, which fed into a campaign eventually leading to his deportation. By 1922, the ABB programme called for 'solid foundations' in the fight for black liberation, not Garvey's 'titled and decorated tomfoolery'.¹⁵⁶

In 1922, the government indicted Garvey for fraud, although the prosecution was politically motivated.¹⁵⁷ By 1923, Garvey had polarised the radical intelligentsia in Harlem. The *Messenger*, quickly moving to the right, led a campaign against him. W.A. Domingo resigned from that journal in protest, and Du Bois also opposed this anti-immigrant crusade.¹⁵⁸ While Briggs and the other immigrant ABB leaders avoided such scurrilous attacks, they increased their polemics against Garvey.¹⁵⁹ In August 1924, the Party once again focused on UNIA's convention in New York. There, a Communist, Olivia Whiteman, attempted to speak against UNIA's refusal to support social equality. The chairmen ruled her out of order.¹⁶⁰ Then, when the same convention refused to take a hard line against the Klan, the Workers Party sent a letter

Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986), vol. 3, 667-668.

¹⁵⁶ Stoke's speech is in Garvey's *Negro World*, 27 August 1921, and reprinted in Hill, ed., *Marcus Garvey Papers*, vol. 3, 675-81. See Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 8; Arthur Zipser and Pearl Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes*, 227-28. See also, Stephens, 'Black Empire', 71-87. The quote is from 'Program of the African Blood Brotherhood', in Foner and Allen, *ACBA*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ On Garvey's legal travails, see Stein, *The World of Marcus Garvey*, chapter 10.

¹⁵⁸ See the *Amsterdam News*, 28 February 1923, for coverage of a talk given by Owen on West Indian and American blacks as well as Domingo's negative response. See also W.A. Domingo to W.E.B. Du Bois, 17 January 1923 and Du Bois' next-day reply, in W.E.B. Du Bois Papers (University of Massachusetts, Amherst), microfilm edition, reel 11, file 836. On Randolph's anti-immigration views, see Scott, 'Immigrant Indigestion'.

¹⁵⁹ The ABB did, however, align themselves with the conservative publisher of the *New York Age* in denouncing Garvey; see Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 192-94.

¹⁶⁰ See Robert Minor's coverage in the *Daily Worker*, 18 August 1924; reprinted in Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 754. Of course, Minor neglected to mention that only two years earlier the Party had itself refused to call for 'social equality', as Claude McKay angrily pointed out in *Negroes in America*.

protesting. In receiving the letter, Garvey was polite, but argued that it was white workers, and not the Klan, who were responsible for most racist atrocities and that blacks' allegiance should be with their race, and not white workers. He predicted that 'when the Communists shall have come into power and destroyed the democrats and republicans and the socialists, I think their attitude will be the same toward the black man' as the other parties. 'We have sympathy for the Workers Party', Garvey declared, 'but we belong to the Negro party, first last and all the time.'¹⁶¹

Interestingly, in the next few years, as Garvey moved closer to imprisonment and deportation, his relations with the Communist movement thawed. In January 1924, upon Lenin's death, Garvey called him 'one of the Russia's greatest men, one of the world's greatest characters and probably the greatest man in the world between 1917 and the hour of 1924 when he breathed his last and took his flight from this world'. As with other blacks, his support was not based on Lenin's American followers, but Soviet achievements. 'We as Negroes, mourn for Lenin', he told a New York crowd, 'because Russia promised great hope not only to Negroes but to the weaker people of the world.'¹⁶² In 1925, the CEC of the Party protested the prosecution of Garvey, and called upon 'all class conscious workers, both white workers and the Negro workers everywhere, to join together in protests and demonstrations against the persecution of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and against the imprisonment of Marcus Garvey'. Of course, the statement neglected to mention Briggs' own support of persecution.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ See Robert Minor, *Daily Worker*, 23 August 1924; reprinted in Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. 5. 768-72. Interestingly, the 12 February 1924 *Daily Worker* carries a short piece on a speech by Cannon about the Klan; while correctly attacking 'anti-foreign-born and anti-union activities of the Ku Klux Klan', there is no indication that Cannon even mentioned the anti-black activities of the Klan.

¹⁶² Marcus Garvey in New York City, 27 January 1924, in Hill, ed., *Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 549, 551.

¹⁶³ This statement is to be found in the *Daily Worker*, 23 April 1925; the *Negro World*, 9 May 1925; and in Hill, ed., *Garvey Papers*, vol. 6, 141-43.

The importance of the ABB

The handful of ABB cadre, along with Claude McKay, became the main black Communist leaders.¹⁶⁴ These early recruits provided the leadership that opened the road to black recruitment in the 1930s, even though there were at most 75 blacks members of the Communist Party throughout most of the 1920s.¹⁶⁵ This recruitment of even such a small layer of blacks gave expression to black concerns within the party. Now, there was somebody to consistently bring up the issue of racial oppression—and take the Party leadership to task for its neglect of the issue. Haywood Hall once again can serve as an example. In 1922, Hall told his brother Otto, who was already in the Party, that he wanted to join the CP. While Otto was pleased, he advised his brother to not join the Party directly but instead sign up with the local ABB because of ‘an unpleasant situation’ in the Southside CP branch. Recent black recruits had quit because ‘[t]hey resented the paternalistic attitude displayed toward them by some of the white comrades who’ according to Otto Hall, ‘treated Blacks like children and seemed to think that the whites had all the answers.’¹⁶⁶

Briggs, in a 1963 letter to Haywood Hall (then known as Harry Haywood) was still attempting to figure out, ‘aside from the factors of white chauvinism, why was there such a big turnover in our Negro membership larger than that of others’.¹⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the former ABB cadre acted to make sure that the Party as a whole did not ignore the Negro Question and thus kept turnover lower.¹⁶⁸ Briggs later claimed

¹⁶⁴ Williams, *Black Response*, 36.

¹⁶⁵ Keith P. Griffler, *What Price Alliance? Black Radicals Confront White Labor, 1918-1938* (London, Garland Press, 1995), 44.

¹⁶⁶ Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 121. According to an ABB/Crusader press release, 11 December 1922 (in Comintern archives, 515:1:91), McKay was a member of the ABB, although it must be noted that he took a different route than did other members.

¹⁶⁷ Briggs to Haywood, 10 June 1963, correspondence files of Haywood papers.

¹⁶⁸ Although Haywood claims in his autobiography to have joined the ABB explicitly as a way of

that the ABB's 'main weakness' was that it was not independent enough and speculated that 'had the ABB been better organized, had a truly mass base, things would have been different'¹⁶⁹ Still, that the ABB cadre became an integral part of American Communism allowed them to force the Party leadership to address the Negro Question. Harry Haywood recalled a discussion with his brother about the problems in the Chicago Party branch. According to Otto, 'It was only a temporary situation.' The disaffected black comrades could appeal all the way up to the Party's central leadership. But when asked by Haywood what would happen if such an appeal failed, Otto answered: 'Well, then there's the Communist International! It's as much our Party as it is theirs.'¹⁷⁰

Comintern intervention

For the early international Communist movement, the Comintern represented the highest authority. Its Congresses heatedly debated Communist theory and tactics. While certain parties received more attention than others, the Comintern sought to transform all its members into Leninist parties in their own national terrain, capable of leading proletarian revolutions. This attention made the early CP address the Negro Question. James P. Cannon, an early leader in the American Party later recalled that 'CP policy on the Negro question got its initial impulse from Moscow, and also that all further elaborations of this policy...came from Moscow.'¹⁷¹

Unlike American Communists, as early as 1919, the Comintern had a greater appreciation of the importance black people in the struggle against capitalism. After describing the anti-black pogroms engulfing the US that year, the *Communist*

entering the CP, in an 1970 interview with Bill Strickland, he argued 'I didn't know at that time that it [the ABB] was influenced by the Communist Party, which didn't matter a damn anyway. In Haywood papers, Haywood/Strickland file, transcript of 10 January 1970 interview, p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ Briggs to Haywood, 22 July 1962, in Correspondence files of Haywood papers.

¹⁷⁰ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 120.

¹⁷¹ Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, 229.

International noted ‘that the coloured population of the U.S. is estimated at 2,000,000 and that two of the revolutionary watchwords: “Equality before the Law” and “Humane Treatment” are greatly appreciated by these oppressed millions.’¹⁷²

In his ‘Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions’, written on 28 July 1920 for the Second Comintern Congress, Lenin solicited information on a number of national and colonial experiences. ‘Negroes in America’ was between ‘Turkestan, its experience’ and ‘Colonies’.¹⁷³ Not much happened on this score—although this brief mention was later to be a cornerstone of the ‘black belt’ support to black nationalism—and the American Commission of the Conference concerned itself with uniting the Americans’ several factions. Also at the Second Congress, in 1920, at Lenin’s urging, John Reed argued for the Party to pay attention to the American blacks. Huiswoud also was a delegate, and argued that the CP did not pay enough attention to the Negro Question. After meeting with Huiswoud, Lenin himself insisted that the CPs in the imperialist centres owed assistance to the peoples and nations oppressed by their ‘own’ imperialism. Lenin included American blacks in this category of oppressed peoples.¹⁷⁴

At its Third Congress, held over the summer of 1921, the Comintern established a Negro Commission to deal with the Negro Question in the US and elsewhere. The South African CP had proposed the commission as a way of deflecting criticism from its own, much more malign, neglect of the Negro Question.¹⁷⁵ The

¹⁷² *Communist International*, old series no. 5, no date [September 1919?].

¹⁷³ *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, 76. These are also reprinted in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31: 152ff.

¹⁷⁴ Griffler, *What Price Alliance?*, 42.

¹⁷⁵ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 326-27; Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 40. The SACP was primarily made up of European (i.e., unionised) workers who all but ignored the African majority of South Africa. See Luli Callinicos, *Working Life, 1886-1940: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 106-15, 166-68; A. Lerumo, *Fifty Fighting Years: The South African Communist Party, 1921-1971* (London: Inkululeko Publications, 1971), esp. chaps. 2 and 3; Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man’s Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1948), 133, 156, 206.

problems of the CPSA illustrate the pitfalls of only emphasising class, and of a labour movement consisting largely of European immigrants. In pandering to the fears of striking white miners afraid of being replaced by lower-paid black workers, the South African CP urged white workers to be ‘for the workers as workers, white, brown, yellow, black and all—and against the capitalists as capitalists—the *only real black man*’. An article in the CP’s paper concluded with the grotesque statement that: ‘Communism alone can make South Africa a white man’s country’¹⁷⁶ South Africa was not the US, and the American Party leadership were not nearly so bad as their South African comrades, but nonetheless they maintained a similar distance and lack of interest in American blacks as the South Africans did to South African ‘natives’.

The most substantive discussion of the Negro Question occurred at the Fourth Congress, held in 1922, in which Claude McKay played a pivotal role. The importance of the Comintern soliciting McKay’s views on American race relations can be seen by the fact that the *Amsterdam News* ran a front-page article called ‘Negroes’ Wrongs Aired at Moscow.’¹⁷⁷ The story of how he came to attend, once again, illustrated the CP’s neglect towards the Negro Question. After returning to New York from London in 1921, McKay had started writing for the *Liberator*, founded by Max Eastman—by then, very close to the Communist Party—after the *Masses* failed. When Eastman resigned to pursue his own literary career, McKay became co-editor along with Michael Gold, the future Communist literary ‘star’, although they did not get along very well. Primarily, the trouble centred on their differences over the relationship of art to politics. Gold, who had just joined the

¹⁷⁶ Quote from *International*, 27 January 1922, in Baruch Hirson and Gwyn A Williams, *The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924* (London: Core Publications, 1995), 228-29; 235; Cf. also Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, 156. Thus, the early CPSA, while not translating its propaganda into African languages, did do so into Yiddish: see Israel and Simon Adams, ‘“That Spells Trouble”: Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa’.

¹⁷⁷ *Amsterdam News*, 6 December 1922. The article, reprinted from the Crusader Service, also

Communist Party, argued for a 'proletarian art' which was a weapon in the class struggle. McKay on the other hand 'preferred to think that there were bad and mediocre, and good and great, literature and art, and that the class labels were incidental'.¹⁷⁸ But beyond this soon to be classic left-wing aesthetic debate lay McKay's belief that the *Liberator's* editorial staff—composed largely of Communists—did not assign the proper significance to the Negro Question.¹⁷⁹

Upon leaving the *Liberator* in 1922, McKay decided to attend the upcoming Fourth Comintern Congress in Moscow. He received no help from the American CP, and after finally making his way to Moscow, received a cold shoulder from the American delegation. He had taken the 'wrong' position—later endorsed by Lenin and Trotsky themselves—that the CP should emerge from the underground. In any case, the CP already had a black representative, Huiswoud.¹⁸⁰ Refused a franchise by the official American delegation, McKay was seated by the Comintern as a special fraternal delegate after the intervention of Japanese Communist Sen Katayama.¹⁸¹

Besides becoming quite popular among ordinary Russians, most of whom had never met a black person, McKay participated in the Negro Commission along with

mentioned Huiswoud as speaking, but not by name.

¹⁷⁸ McKay, *A Long Way From Home*, 139; Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 160-64.

¹⁷⁹ Cooper, *Claude McKay*, 162. In 1929, after McKay had already renounced Communism, Gold, according to Foley, 'asserted that McKay's *Banjo*, while praiseworthy for its gritty depiction of Marseilles street life and its repudiation of the culture of the "educated fringe", evinced too much "racial patriotism" and dwelt too little on proletarian themes': Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 187. On McKay's tenure at the *Liberator*, see Antoinette Galotola, 'From Bohemianism to Radicalism: The Art and Political Context of the *Liberator*, 1918-1924' (PhD thesis, City University of New York Graduate Center, 2000), 15, 44. Cartoonist Robert Minor, who was a CP expert on the 'Negro Question' was also an editor at the *Liberator*.

¹⁸⁰ Tellingly, McKay never mentions Huiswoud by name in his autobiography, instead despairingly calling Huiswoud (whose name McKay would not have forgotten) as 'the mulatto' since the his skin was lighter than McKay's.

¹⁸¹ See, in addition to McKay's own memoir, the Crusader/ABB press release of 11 December 1922, in Comintern archives, 515:1:91. Cf. Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 41. Katayama had attended university in the American South, and had developed a sensitivity to racial oppression; cf. Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary*, 56.

comrades ‘Billings’ (Huiswood) and ‘Sasha’ (Rose Pastor Stokes).¹⁸² Huiswood articulated the Party’s position, that ‘Although the Negro Problem as such is fundamentally an economic problem, it is aggravated and intensified by the friction which exists between the black and the white races.’ He criticised the exclusionist AFL and noted the ‘rebel rank and file element’ of UNIA, but retained the traditional colour blind approach.¹⁸³

In contrast, McKay, asserted that ‘the negro race in the economic life of the world to-day occupies a very peculiar position.’ Race relations in the US were very ugly—worse, even, than that of Jews in tsarist Russia—but the left had not done anything to address this:

The Socialists and Communists have fought very shy of it because there is a great element of prejudice among the Socialists and Communists of America. They are not willing to face the negro question.¹⁸⁴

McKay put forward an ‘internationalist’ approach to black liberation, placing it within the context of the international struggle against imperialist domination. While this approach had the benefit of emphasising the international significance of the black struggle, it confounded the struggles of blacks in Africa, North American, the Caribbean and Latin America. While these struggles resonated with each other, they were quite different.¹⁸⁵

At this time, Trotsky commissioned McKay to study the Negro Question, after he received a letter from McKay asking how Communists should agitate against France’s use of black colonial troops in its occupation of Germany. While Trotsky

¹⁸² See ‘The Communist International and the Negro’, the *Worker*, 10 March 1923, in Foner and Allen, *ACBA*, 30-32; McKay, *A Long Way from Home*, 160-61; Zipser and Zipser, *Fire and Grace*, 237. Pastor Stokes had been an important liaison between the ABB and the CP in the early 1920s.

¹⁸³ *Fourth Congress of the Communist International* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, [1923?]), session 22.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Griffier, *What Price Alliance*, 33-34. On McKay’s literary writings’ attempt to ‘internationalize the American race question’, see Madhuri Deshmukh, ‘Modernism and the Black Diaspora: The International Contours of the Harlem Renaissance’ (PhD thesis, Loyola University Chicago, 1999), chapter 2.

believed that ‘The Negroes themselves must offer resistance to being so employed,’ he assigned to the ‘working class of Europe, and particularly of France and Germany’ the task of ‘enlightening the colored peoples’. In terms that could have been written about the American Party, Trotsky noted that:

The day of general resolutions on the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples, on the equality of all human beings regardless of color, is over. The time has come for direct and practical action.... A Communist Party confining itself to mere platonic resolutions in this matter, without exerting its utmost energies towards winning the largest possible number of enlightened Negroes for its ideas, within the shortest possible time, would not be worthy of the name of Communist Party.¹⁸⁶

Unfortunately, the original English version of McKay’s study, *The Negroes in America*, no longer exists. But even after being retranslated from the Russian, McKay’s eloquence—and his anger at his white comrades’ neglect of the Negro question—is clear.¹⁸⁷ He argued that ‘the whole white American nation’, which pointedly included white workers, ‘is, in a strange way, possessed by a Negro neurosis’.¹⁸⁸ McKay pointed out to Trotsky the importance of the Negro question—an importance that white Communists could not highlight since they understood it so little themselves:

Labor, tragically, is divided itself. It conducts a shameful, half-hearted struggle against capitalism, since it does not extend a fraternal hand to the black working class, historically the most exploited class in American life. Capitalism knows this perfectly well and successfully exploits it in the struggle against organized labor.¹⁸⁹

The pamphlet is a skilfully written history of blacks in America, and their contributions to labour, politics, sport and art. Throughout, McKay did not pull any punches in his polemics against the Communist Party leadership. Quoting a *New York Times* article that claimed that, at the Workers Party’s second convention, ‘Efforts by

¹⁸⁶ Trotsky to Claude McKay, 13 March 1923, in Trotsky, *The First Five Years of the Communist International*, 354.

¹⁸⁷ Claude McKay, *The Negroes in America*, Alan McLeod, ed., and Robert J. Winter, tr. (Port Washington, NY and London: Kennikat Press, 1979). The Russian edition was originally published in 1924 by the State Publishing House in Moscow.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

some delegates to make a fight for the social equality of the negro were overwhelmingly defeated', McKay wrote: 'If that report is accurate, then it only indicates once more the inability on the part of vast majority of American revolutionaries to fully understand the Negro question.'¹⁹⁰ Again and again, McKay explained to the Bolshevik leadership that 'With the birth of American democracy in 1776, the Negro question became the main question' in the US. The Party would never recruit blacks if it continues to ignore them, since, as 'every Negro worker knows...whatever the party, when it refuses to take a stand on social equality, to that extent it also refuses to approach the Negro question.'¹⁹¹ More damning than any of McKay's polemics against the Party, however, was that Trotsky, and not the American Party had commissioned this study, and that the Party never translated, distributed or published it.

If nothing else, the Negro Commission at the Fourth Congress made clear that the Negro Question was of decisive importance for the American CP. But more than that, 'The Negro problem has become a vital question of the world revolution.' The resolution passed at the Fourth Congress declared that 'The history of the Negroes in America qualifies them to play an important part in the liberation struggle for the entire African race.' Finally, the Comintern had spoken:

1. The fourth congress recognizes the necessity of supporting every form of the Negro movement which undermines or weakens capitalism, or hampers its further penetration.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 23.

¹⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 26 December 1922; McKay, *Negroes in America*, 37. The 'Program of the Second Convention of the Workers Party', published before the convention, declared that 'The Workers Party will help them [blacks] in their fight for economic, political and educational equality' (*Worker*, 2 December 1922, in *ACBA*, 28). The previous WP programme, in 1921, however declared 'The Workers Party will support the negroes in their struggle for liberation, and will help them in their fight for economic, political and social equality', in *Socialist Party Papers*, Duke University, series IV, part J, section 5. In 1924, a Communist denounced UNIA for refusing to support social equality: ' "Social Equality"? Well, what is social inequality? That means Jim Crow!', in *Daily Worker*, 19 August 1924, reprinted in Hill, *Garvey Papers*, vol. 5, 754.

¹⁹¹ McKay, *Negroes in America*, 38, 41.

2. The Communist International will fight for the equality of the white and black races, for equal wages and equal political and social rights. In addition, the resolution called for blacks to unionise (and for unions to accept blacks) and for 'a world Negro congress or conference'.¹⁹²

After the Congress, the French Communists, whom the Comintern also criticised for lackadaisical work amongst colonial and immigrant workers, began to attack French imperialism more systematically, and began publishing a newspaper aimed at the colonies and immigrants.¹⁹³ But the American Party was not so responsive: in March 1923, its representative to the ECCI, Israel Amter, reported little headway amongst blacks. The 'small number of Negro comrades in the Party', he complained, 'make this work difficult.'¹⁹⁴ In his next report, Amter declared that the 'Workers Party has started work among the Irish and Negroes', without providing details or recognising that Irish immigrants were different than blacks. He also spelt out that 'the Party does not agree with the thesis adopted by the Fourth Congress on the Negro Problem.' At the same time, three leading Communists wrote to the ECCI that the 'resolution of the Fourth Congress does not give a satisfactory solution of this problem, especially from the trade union standpoint.' Max Bedacht, in his report to the leadership of the Party, complained that the resolution 'gives no analysis, contains only general phrases and ends with the proposal for a world negro congress.'¹⁹⁵

The leadership also seems to have opposed this congress. Shortly after the Fourth Congress, the ECCI sent a letter to the Central Committee of the CP which indicated that the Comintern Presidium believed that 'the question yet is too

¹⁹² 'Theses of the Fourth Comintern Congress on the Negro Question', 30 November 1922, in Degras, ed., *Communist International*, vol. I, 399-401.

¹⁹³ Cf. Ian Birchall, '“Le Paria”: The French Communist Party, Migrant Workers and Anti-Imperialism, 1920-24', unpublished paper presented to 'Workers Unity in a World Economy' conference, University of London, 12 May 2001.

¹⁹⁴ Report by I. Amter to Comintern, 7 March 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:174.

¹⁹⁵ I. Amter, 'Report on the United States to 20 March 1923', in Comintern archives, 515:1:174; Pogany, Ruthenberg and Jakira to ECCI, 9 March 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:201; Max Bedacht report to Executive Committee of WP, 30 November 1923, 515:1:201.

unprepared' for the scheduled conference and it would be discussed at a meeting about the British CP, to be held in Moscow that April. However, the ECCI made the American CP responsible to 'take care of the propaganda' and to 'prepare the ground' for a Negro congress. Later, the CP leadership passed a motion requesting the congress be held in London, as if to wash their hands of it. They later passed another motion, asking the Comintern to postpone the conference altogether until the Fifth Congress; by his August 1923 report on the Fourth Congress, Amter blithely mentioned that the conference would take place at the Fifth Congress, without mentioning the dispute.¹⁹⁶ At the same time, Tom Bell of the British Party continued to pass the buck, this time suggesting that the conference be held in Paris.¹⁹⁷ Finally, the International Conference of Negro Workers was held in Hamburg, in June 1930, prior to the Fifth Congress of the RILU.¹⁹⁸

While the evidence is scattered, it also appears as if leading members of the Party, especially followers of Ruthenberg and Pepper, resented the ABB. Thus, at one point, Ruthenberg accused the ABB of supporting emigration from the South, touting blacks' scabbing against white strikers, and advocating 'race hatred of whites'.¹⁹⁹ A month later, Briggs wrote to the leadership complaining of rumours of his being a spy; the Political and Organization Committee took no action, it claimed, because it did not have enough information.²⁰⁰ In December 1923, after hearing from Gitlow, the

¹⁹⁶ O.W. Kuusinen to WPA CC, 23 February 1923, in Comintern archives 515:1:164; Minutes of Political and Organization Committee, 14 August 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:197; Minutes of Organization Committee, 29 March 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:204; I.Amter, 'The Communist International: The Emancipator of the Whole People', 1 August 1923 press release, in Comintern archives 515:1:212.

¹⁹⁷ Tom Bell to Israel Amter, in Comintern archives 495:155:27, cited in Marika Sherwood, 'The Comintern, The CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920-1938', *Science & Society* 60:2(Summer 1996), 140.

¹⁹⁸ Susan Campbell, ' "Black Bolsheviks" and Recognition of African-America's Right to Self-Determination by the Communist Party USA', *Science & Society* 58:4(Winter 1994-95), 456. Cf. James R. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary: George Padmore's Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 17-18.

¹⁹⁹ Minutes of Political and Organization Committee, 24 July 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:197.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1923.

Executive Council passed a motion that 'we will not in the future carry on any work among the Negroes thru Briggs and Huiswood'. In March, Huiswood was deemed competent enough to be put in charge of a 6-week-long course to train black propagandists, but the Organization Committee deemed it extravagant to allocate a part-time stenographer for Briggs.²⁰¹ In April, Huiswood was obviously disturbed enough to write a document, distributed via the Workers Party press service, called 'The Negro Problem is Important'.²⁰² Haywood, who joined the CP in 1925, recalled in his autobiography that at that time there were no black members of the Central Committee (Minor was in charge of work amongst blacks), and that when Lovett Fort-Whiteman was selected to replace Minor, 'his selection was the cause for some disgruntlement among the Black comrades' such as Briggs, Moore and Huiswood.²⁰³

Even without a Negro congress, the period between the Fourth and the Fifth Comintern Congresses saw increased CP activity amongst blacks. To begin with, the Second National Conference of the Workers Party, held at the end of 1922, passed a motion that recognised the special quality of black oppression: 'The Negro workers of this country are exploited and oppressed more ruthlessly than any other group.'²⁰⁴ A year later, the Third National Conference reiterated that blacks were 'an oppressed race, and as such they require and demand special attention'.²⁰⁵ A CP pamphlet stressed that the Party fought for full social equality for blacks while noting that the

²⁰¹ Minutes of Executive Council, 14 December 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:190; Organization Committee minutes, 29 March 1923, Comintern archives, 515:1:204.

²⁰² Huiswood, 'Negro Problem is Important', 30 April 1923 press release, Comintern archives, 515:1:211.

²⁰³ Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 139.

²⁰⁴ Program passed at Second National Convention of Workers Party, 24-26 December 1922, Comintern archives, 515:1:141.

²⁰⁵ Resolution on Negro Question, passed at Third National Convention of Workers Party of America, 30-31 December 1923 and 1 January 1924, Comintern archives 515:1:188. The final form of this resolution is also in *The Program and Constitution of the Workers Party of America* (Chicago: Literature Department of the Workers Party of America, 1924), 9.

Negro question was more than an economic question.²⁰⁶ By the Fourth National Convention, the CEC had organised a commission to supervise work among blacks.²⁰⁷

All this would have remained a dead letter, except that they marked one of the few attempts by the early CP to actively intervene in the fight for black rights, the All-Race, or Sanhedrin conference. In 1922, William Monroe Trotter, editor of the Boston *Guardian* and a co-founder of the Niagara movement in 1905, advocated a council of black leaders. A supporter of the conference, writing in the *Amsterdam News*, recalled similar meetings held by European Jews and by Indians under the British, and noted that 'the Negro needs most of all the stimulation of a race conscientiousness and the formulation of a race ideal' in order to 'furnish inspiration to every' black.²⁰⁸

In April 1923, the Workers Party supported such a conference because 'An all-race conference will stimulate the confidence and powers of the Negro people and with that stimulation will come the greater awakening of class consciousness.'²⁰⁹ Accordingly, the CP sought to take part in this conference, which finally took place in Chicago, on 11-15 February 1924. The leadership of the conference was firmly dominated by middle-class organisations, ranging from churches to professional, fraternal and social organisations, but the CP still presented a number of resolutions against segregation, miscegenation laws, and 'real estate sharks'.²¹⁰ In general, the CP advocated a labour-centred perspective, which the conference's largely middle-class leadership did not appreciate.²¹¹ In the end, the Party was edged out of the movement,

²⁰⁶ C.E. Ruthenberg, *The Workers (Communist) Party: What it Stands for, Why Workers Should Join* (Chicago: Workers Party, [1923?]), 13.

²⁰⁷ *The Fourth National Convention of the Workers (Communist) Party of America* (Chicago: Daily Worker Publishing Co., 1925), 17-18.

²⁰⁸ *Amsterdam News*, 31 January 1923.

²⁰⁹ Jeanette D. Pearl, 'Negro Organizations Present United Front', WP press release, 27 April 1923, in Comintern archives, 515:1:210.

²¹⁰ For a list of participating organisations, see the 13 February 1924 *Daily Worker*, reprinted in *ACBA*, 56. The WP published a mimeographed pamphlet containing the resolutions its delegates raised. See Minor papers, Box 13, folder 'Negro Sanhedrin, 1924'.

²¹¹ The *Daily Worker* carried daily reports on the conference, which described the Party's intervention

but only after it made clear to the conference that they thought that Communism offered the only solution to the Negro Question. But it is significant that even this modest debut was possible only because of the Party's handful of black cadre.²¹²

The Fifth Congress, held in the summer of 1924, discussed the Negro Question as part of the 'National and Colonial Question'. The American Party had three representatives: the untiring Pepper, who was the Comintern representative to the CP; 'Jackson' (probably Fort-Whiteman, then a student in Moscow); and Amter. Pepper, speaking about the 'National and Colonial Question' in general, agreed with the main reporter who had 'emphasis[ed] the revolutionary significance of the self-determination slogan' but stressed that in the US, where blacks intermingled with many other ethnic groups, 'the other slogan which we need is the slogan of complete equality between nations and even [!] races.'²¹³ The only other notable intervention was by Jackson, who stressed, 'The negroes are not discriminated against as a class but as a race.... The same newspapers do not satisfy the needs of the negro worker which suit the needs of the white. The same speeches, propaganda, literature will not suffice.' He argued that 'The ideas of Marx have spread only slowly among the negroes, because the Socialists and even the Communists have not realised that the problem must be dealt with in a specialised way.' This explicitly contradicted the standard Debsian 'colour-blind' approach. Jackson criticised the CP for not carrying out the necessary work to win blacks to the Party: 'The Negroes are destined to be the most revolutionary class in America. But Communist propaganda among the Negroes is hampered by the lack of publicity carrying a special appeal.'²¹⁴

and their hostile reception by the conference organisers; see *ibid.*, 53-65.

²¹² Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 29-33.

²¹³ Foner and Allen, *ACBA*, 69.

²¹⁴ *Fifth Congress of the Communist International (Abridged)* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, [1924?]), 200-201. Cf. I. Amter, 'The Black Victims of Imperialism', *Communist International* nos. 26/27 [1924?]: 'The Communist International is the only international of workers that has squarely

In November 1924, Jackson published an article in the ECCI's monthly journal, the *Communist International*, which criticised the CP in the same vein. He noted that the achievements of the Party amongst blacks 'are but slight', because 'the Communists have not recognized and accepted as a starting basis the peculiar social disabilities imposed upon the race.' Jackson ended with a warning: 'the Communist Movement cannot afford to overlook the Negro in America.' The editors added a note, calling Jackson's article 'a testimony that our American comrades of the ruling race have not yet been able to approach the Negro question in a right and proper manner' in their work among either blacks or whites. In light of the later Comintern-inspired line-change, it is worth noting that while the editorial explicitly supported self-determination for the black masses in Africa, it said nothing about self-determination for American blacks.²¹⁵

The one concrete step that the CP took towards rectifying its neglect of the Negro Question was its convocation of the American Negro Labor Conference (ANLC). Assimilating the remnants of the ABB, the ANLC aimed 'to bring together the most potent elements of the Negro race for deliberation and action upon those most irritating and oppressive social problems affecting the life of the race in general and the Negro working class in particular'. Its 'Call', written in the spring of 1925, was signed by 17 people including at least six Party members.²¹⁶ The ANLC sought to attract important black leaders such as Du Bois to the conference which opened on 25 October 1925 with forty delegates. Although he was guardedly positive towards the CP, Du Bois did not attend the conference, which was severely criticised by William

faced the issue of the coloured races and sought a solution. The Second International has always evaded the question since it has been an international of the white workers alone and has not succeeded even in uniting them in international action.'

²¹⁵ Foner and Allen, *ACBA*, 86-89

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 109; Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 50.

Green as a Communist plot.²¹⁷ Despite the cheering in the *Daily Worker* for the ANLC's convention, the Communist leadership itself was less sanguine. A circular designed for CP spokesmen reminded them that this meeting 'did not have a wide mass representation' and 'had for us significance only as a good beginning'.²¹⁸

Despite Party and TUEL efforts,²¹⁹ the ANLC never fulfilled the hopes its founders invested in it. It issued a paper, *Negro Champion*, but never sold more than 400 subscriptions at one time. Until 1927, Lovett Fort-Whiteman headed the ANLC. That year, amid disappointment among the CP's central leadership, he was replaced by Richard B. Moore because of his supposed 'leftist sectarian policies and incompetent direction' in leading the ANLC. According to the minutes of the Political Committee, the ANLC had been guilty of a 'failure to initiate and develop concrete struggles of negro masses on the basis of immediate political issues' such as lynching, segregation or the plight of Southern farmers. The crux of the 'left-sectarian' errors of the ANLC appeared to be that it 'was operating on too narrow a basis' and failing 'to draw in non-party left-wingers and progressives'. Alexander Bittelman, the secretary of the CEC's 'subcommittee on Negro work', in explaining why Fort-Whiteman was being replaced, described the state of the ANLC as 'very bad':

Its organization is vague and indefinite. Its membership is negligible. There are barely more than about half a dozen local branches functioning and the membership is difficult to define, being not more than about 300.

And even though Bittelman deemed Fort-Whiteman unsatisfactory, he recommended that a 'Negro comrade be placed on incoming CEC' and that more black Communists be sent for training in Moscow. (After serving as a delegate at the Sixth Comintern

²¹⁷ Foner and Allen, *ACBA*, 116. On Du Bois, see Lovett Fort-Whiteman to W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, 25 September 1925, and Du Bois' reply, 8 October 1925, in the Du Bois Papers, reel 14, files 1237-38. Cf. David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), 196.

²¹⁸ 'Outline for Party Speakers on Subject: The American Negro Labor Congress and Its Background', no date and no author, in Robert Minor papers, box 12, folder 'Negro, 1924-25'.

²¹⁹ On these attempts to gain support from trade unions, especially black trade unions such as the Chicago Negro Painters, see the minutes of the TUEL National Committee, 20 May 1925, in the

Congress, Fort-Whiteman stayed in Moscow and died in the late 1930s, most likely in the Stalinist purges.)²²⁰

In the late 1920s, the ANLC focused on struggling against attacks on blacks. In 1928, for example, it organised the Harlem Tenants League which militantly fought against poor housing conditions and high rents; and which had some 500 members by June 1929.²²¹ It is notable that the core cadre of the ANLC were the Communists who had been recruited from the ABB earlier in the decade. However, the ANLC did recruit two future leading black Communists. These were James Ford, future spokesman for the Party during the late 1930s 'Popular Front', and George Padmore, who became known as first a Comintern leader in the anti-colonial struggle and later, an anti-Communist Pan-Africanist.²²² The ANLC's letterhead featured a strong black worker breaking the chains binding Africa and the US, and, in fact, the organisation sought 'to aid the general liberation of the darker races and the working people throughout all countries' and participated in the international struggle against imperialism, especially, in the Caribbean.²²³

At the Sixth Congress, James Ford denounced the ANLC as a 'pitiful parody' of a mass working-class organisation.²²⁴ In March 1929, there were only five active

collection of the PRL.

²²⁰ 'Directions to the Party Fraction in the National Executive Committee of the American Negro Labor Congress', attached to PolCom minutes, 26 May 1927; Alexander Bittelman, 'Report and Recommendations on the Conference of the Party Fraction in the General Executive Board of the American Negro Labor Congress', attached to PolCom minutes, 26 May 1927, Comintern archives, 515:1:981; Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 57-59. Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism*, 218-27, argue that Fort-Whiteman was sent to a Stalinist gulag in the mid-1930s for his alleged Trotskyist sympathies, where he died in 1939. They cite 'Minutes of the Sub-Committee CPUSA Meeting on Organisational Question', 25 August 1935, Comintern archives 495:14:1 and a copy of his death certificate.

²²¹ See Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 19-23.

²²² See Solomon, *Cry was Unity*, 177-83, for the career of Padmore in and out of the Communist movement. Cf. Hooker, *Black Revolutionary*.

²²³ See Joyce Turner Moore, 'Richard B. Moore and His Works', in *Richard B. Moore: Caribbean Militant in Harlem*, 54-55; Christine Lutz, 'The Horn of Africa and the American Left', paper presented at the Southeastern Regional Seminar in African Studies Conference, March 2002, Georgia State University (www.ecu.edu/african/sersas/papers/lutzchrispring2002.htm).

²²⁴ Statement by Comrade Ford at the Negro Commission, 3 August 1928, in Jay Lovestone papers,

ANLC chapters with at most 180 members. In the aftermath of the Sixth Congress, it was disbanded and the CP replaced it with the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR). Thus, entering the Sixth Congress in the summer of 1928, the CP's record on work among blacks was less than sterling. At the same time, it had recruited a core of black leaders and had at least dipped its big toe into the struggle against black oppression.²²⁵ The Bolsheviks were also becoming popular amongst black intellectuals. In 1926, Du Bois travelled to the Soviet Union and, while admitting that he might be 'partially deceived and half informed' declared that 'if what I have seen with my eyes and heard with my years is Bolshevism, I am a Bolshevik.' Shortly after Du Bois visited Russia, NAACP field organiser William Pickens also travelled there and, if more guarded than Du Bois, was impressed. Yet both men remained aloof from the CP (although Du Bois would join the Communist Party in the 1960s), demonstrating, as did Debs earlier, that it was possible to sympathise with the Bolsheviks while steering clear of their American comrades.²²⁶

The Sixth Congress, held in 1928, was the penultimate Comintern Congress and was one of the more important Congresses for the American Party. In its aftermath, the Stalinist leadership of the Party was consolidated over the destruction of the previous factions. The Sixth Congress also qualitatively changed its line on the Negro question for the first time since the Party's inception. Like much else, the discussion on the Negro Question was subsumed by the factional battles. Black Communists tended to support Lovestone, but this was not absolute. In their document submitted to the ECCI at the Sixth Congress, 'The Right Danger in the American Party', Foster and Cannon argued that 'The Lovestone majority has

Hoover Institution archives, Stanford University, box 224 folder 29.

²²⁵ Moore, 'Moore and His Works', 66.

²²⁶ Lewis, *The Fight for Equality*, 194-203; Schneider, 'We Return Fighting', 387-88. Cf. the front-page article in the 20 January 1927 *Daily Worker* about Du Bois' favourable impressions in Russia.

systematically and continuously neglected work among the Negro masses.' It claimed, 'For two and a half years the Negro work of our Party has been bankrupt.'²²⁷

However, Foster's emphasis on working almost exclusively within AFL unions, many of which discriminated against blacks, alienated many black cadre.

In preparation for the Congress, Communist Parties produced reports that summarised their work.²²⁸ The section detailing 'Negro work in America' contained the self-criticism that 'The Party has made a number of attempts to develop this work, but has not always met with any significant success.' Looking for successful 'Negro work', the report rather absurdly lauded the 'Save the Union' campaign among the United Mine Workers, while a weakness was the fact the party had 'shown little initiative' in the Brotherhood of Pullman Porters, and had garnered little support in the South. The section ended with the critical yet optimistic assessment:

The Party has established a national Negro department and has also committees for work among Negroes in all districts. Work among Negroes remains one of the most important tasks of the Party. The experience of the past shows that new ways and new methods must be found to approach the Negro masses and to carry on among them a more campaign than hitherto.²²⁹ What is most striking, however, is the lack of any programmatic, i.e., ideological analysis, of the importance of 'Negro work', or any real reasons for the previous failings in this fields. The report read in many ways like criticism/self-criticism, without any real understanding. Also striking was that it did not mention the ANLC.

Self-determination for the Negro nation

At the Sixth Congress, the CP bowed to Comintern pressure and accepted the policy that blacks in the American South formed a nation and therefore had the right

²²⁷ 'The Right Danger in the American Party', by James P. Cannon, William Z. Foster, William F. Dunne, Alex Bittelman, J.W. Johnstone, Manuel Gomez and George Siskin. The document was serialised in the *Militant*, 15 November, 1 December 1928, 1 January 1929 and 15 January 1929. The section on the Negro Question appears in the 1 January 1929 issue.

²²⁸ *The Communist International Between the Fifth and Sixth World Congress, 1924-1928* (London: Communist Party of Great Britain, 1928).

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 348. On the 'Save the Union' campaign see Johanningsmeir, *Forging American Communism*, 236-42.

to self-determination, just as Ireland or India had from British imperialism. The story of how the Party adopted this new line has been told by several historians.²³⁰

Therefore what follows is less a 'blow-by-blow' description of this process, than an attempt to analyse and place this change in political context.

It is notable how unexpected the change was. In an issue of the *Communist International* prior to the Congress, an article on 'The Comintern programme and the race problem' criticised the Fourth Congress' resolution on the Negro question, noting that 'it is clear that it is impermissible simply to identify racial oppression and exploitation with national-colonial oppression, that it is impermissible to deal with the racial [sic] under a clause on the national question.' Later, the author, A. Shiek, affirmed Reed's statement against separatism at the Second Congress and argued that the Comintern

should put forward demands on behalf the oppressed American negroes not as a nation but as a race...and they should demand not the right to national self-determination (self-determination has no practical meaning here!) but complete political and social activity.²³¹

Yet this is exactly what the Comintern did *not* do. The resolution adopted at the Sixth Congress insisted that the CP fight for self-determination for Southern blacks. Or, as the Comintern resolution put it: 'The various forms of oppression of the Negro masses, who are concentrated mainly in the so-called "Black Belt", provide the necessary conditions for a national revolutionary movement among the Negroes.'²³²

This idea did not come from the Party itself, but from the Comintern.

According to Browder, the CP 'could not have arrived at our program only upon the

²³⁰ See, for example, Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, chapter 15; Harvey Klehr and William Thompson, 'Self-Determination in the Black Belt: Origins of a Communist Policy', *Labor History* 30 (Fall 1989), 354-366; Oscar Berland, 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective on the "Negro Question" in America: 1919-1931', part two, *Science & Society* 64:2(Summer 2000); Hill, 'The Communist Party--Enemy of Negro Equality', 365. Solomon, *The Cry was Unity*, chapter 5, presents a more accurate description, based in part on Comintern archives.

²³¹ *Communist International*, 15 August 1928. On this article and its author, the Hungarian Communist Andre Shick, see Berland, 'The Emergence of the Communist Perspective', part two, 198.

²³² Resolution of the ECCI on the Negro Question, 26 October 1928, in Degras, ed., *The Communist*

basis of our American experience'.²³³ Briggs told Draper that while the ABB had at one point advocated self determination for American blacks, nobody had raised such a proposition within the Party, in part out of fear of not being taken seriously.²³⁴

The immediate inspiration for this change in line was one N 'Charlie' Nasanov, a Comintern official who had previously been a representative of the Young Communist International in the US.²³⁵ In Moscow, Nasanov floated the idea of 'self-determination' and eventually won Harry Haywood, then a student at the Lenin School, to it. Haywood would become the firmest advocate of the theory.²³⁶ In June 1928, Haywood argued that 'the Negro movement, which is nationalistic in character and based upon the peasantry, is a vital factor for the American [Communist] revolution and that this movement must be supported, utilised and directed by the American Communist Party particularly since potentially revolutionary it is yet easily liable to be directed into reactionary channels.'²³⁷ Interestingly, however, Haywood did not claim that blacks were a nation since 'they do not comply fully in the requisites set forth in the above [Stalin] definition, nevertheless there are present among them many features in common with a nation.' Indeed, Haywood spent several pages proving that 'the Negroes in the United States are not a national but a racial minority which through historical development in the peculiar American environment has inevitably taken on certain nationalistic features.' Seizing upon the strength of Garvey's UNIA, Haywood argued that there was an impulse towards nationalism amongst blacks, but that the Party must intervene to turn this in a revolution direction,

International, vol. 2, 554.

²³³ Quoted in Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 325.

²³⁴ Cyril Briggs to Theodore Draper, 24 March 1958, Theodore Draper papers, box 31, folder 'Negro-Briggs'.

²³⁵ Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 70.

²³⁶ See Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, chapter 8.

²³⁷ Harry Heywood, 'The Basis for Nationalist Movements among Negroes in the United States, and What Should be the Attitude of Our Party towards Them', 10 June 1928, in Jay Lovestone papers, Hoover archives, box 214, folder 3.

towards socialism, instead of towards a reactionary direction, towards 'back to Africa' nationalism.²³⁸ Haywood, however, was unique in his acceptance of the theory, since almost all other CP representatives in Moscow, black and white, opposed it.²³⁹ James Ford, a Foster supporter, argued that the debate, while about important issues, was 'a waste of time' because the Party had no 'serious contact with the Negro masses [or] any influence upon them'.²⁴⁰ The Lovestone leadership, in addition, perceived it as an attack on them.²⁴¹

Some complained that the new line brought Southern 'separate but equal' politics into the Communist movement. The resolution stated:

While continuing and intensifying the struggle under the slogan of full social and political equality for the Negroes, which much remain the central slogan of our Party for work among the masses, the Party must come out unreservedly for the right of Negroes to national self-determination in the Southern States.²⁴²

Since Reconstruction, blacks had striven for equality and integration into American society, not separation. Minor, a white Communist from Texas who later became a sort of expert on the Negro Question, exemplifies this unease. In his prior career as an editorial cartoonist, Minor had acquired skills which he put to use by doodling notes, many of which are still extant. One read, ' "National" Question—as a question of "Self-Determination [sic] for Slave States.' Another posited that if this theory was correct, 'Then Marx and Engels would have been wrong. Jef. Davis, then, would have

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ See Carl Jones, 'Is there a Basis for a Nationalist or Separatist Movement in the United States?', 14 June 1928, and his 'Against the Slogan for Self-Determination among American Negroes', 22 June 1928, in Lovestone papers, box 214, folders 7 and 11, respectively.

²⁴⁰ 'Statement by comrade Ford at the Negro Commission', 3 August 1928, in Lovestone papers, box 224, folder 29.

²⁴¹ Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity*, 73. For the complex factional wrangling over this question, see the minutes of the American Delegation meeting, Thursday 23 August 1928, in Lovestone papers, box 213, folder 19.

²⁴² ECCI resolution on the Negro Question, Degras, *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 554.

been right.’²⁴³ Nonetheless, despite this disgruntlement, the new programme was pushed through by the Comintern, with the assistance of Haywood.

The first thing to note about the concept of a ‘Negro Nation’ is that it is false, at least as Marxist-Leninists understand the concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘self-determination’. For Lenin, a nation was a people which could be viable as a independent political economic unit. Thus, each oppressed group within society is not a ‘nation’—for example, youth and religious minorities. Lenin insisted that all nations have the right to self-determination, i.e., national independence. Lenin never saw this as an end-in-itself, but a means of moving national antagonisms ‘off the agenda’. In the post-Reconstruction US, blacks became more and more integrated into American capitalism, albeit at the bottom economically and socially segregated. Certainly, by 1928, blacks formed an integral party of the American nation, especially in the Northern working class. To speak of separation—self-determination—for blacks was historically impossible, just as it would be for women, another oppressed group. Even according to Stalin’s own earlier definitions, blacks in the US could not be considered a nation. In his *Marxism and the National Question*, written under Lenin’s tutelage in 1913, Stalin began, in his rather ponderous style, by asking ‘What is a nation?’ He answered that a nation ‘is not racial or tribal, but a historical constituted community of people...formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.’²⁴⁴

Even though it is far from evident that American blacks fulfilled Stalin’s definition of a nation, he—basing himself on Lenin’s off-hand comments in the 1920 ‘Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions’—nonetheless

²⁴³ Robert Minor papers, Box 12, folder ‘Negro New York, no. 7-9’. By this point Minor, once the most famous American political cartoonists, had given up art in favour of politics; for a discussion of Minor’s artistic background, see Galotola, ‘From Bohemianism to Radicalism’, 88-91, 119-31.

²⁴⁴ J. Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, in *Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing

designated them such. Thus, at the behest of the Comintern, black Americans in the Southern 'black belt' should fight for 'self determination' from the United States.²⁴⁵ The change, however, did have a certain appeal. It was the first decisive theoretical break in the Party from the Debsian colour-blind perspective.²⁴⁶ Also, although the concept of a 'black nation' was, in a Marxist sense, absurd, the idea of a democratic South with a largely black government was not, especially for those who recalled Radical Reconstruction.²⁴⁷

Origins of the 'black belt'?

The reason that the Comintern developed this theory is a mystery that Draper labelled 'the most obscure and puzzling chapter in the story of American Communism'.²⁴⁸ Strangely, historians tend to view this change in isolation from developments in the Comintern as a whole. This change was part of an international shift on the national and colonial question throughout the Comintern. Also at the Sixth Congress, the Comintern forced the CPSA against the opinions of its leadership to adopt the slogan 'an independent native South African republic as a step towards a workers and peasants republic with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white'.²⁴⁹ During the 'Third Period', the Brazilian Party demanded 'the rights of Indians and Negroes to have full autonomy, even to form separate nations'. Noting

House, 1953), vol. 2, 303, 307.

²⁴⁵ See Nick Dicken and Leon Day's position paper distributed at the 1969 convention of SDS for an attempt to analyse the 'black belt' theory from a Marxist perspective, making use of Stalin's work. ('Mike Klonsky versus Brother Stalin', reprinted in *Spartacist* 13 (August-September 1969).

²⁴⁶ Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1986), 109.

²⁴⁷ Thus one standard anti-Reconstruction work described South Carolina as 'thoroughly Africanized': William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1962 [1907]), 216

²⁴⁸ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 315.

²⁴⁹ Baruch Hirson, 'Bukharin, Bunting and the "Native Republic" Slogan', *Searchlight South Africa* 3 (July 1989), 60. For the opposition of the CPSA's representative to the Sixth Congress, S.P. Bunting, see 'S.P. Bunting at the 6th Congress of the Comintern, 1928', *ibid.*, 67-83. Cf. also Brian Bunting's forward to Edward Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography* (Bellville, South Africa: Mayibuya Books, 1993), 6-19; Hirson explored this theme in greater depth in 'Trotsky and Black Nationalism', in Terry Brotherstone and Paul Dukes, eds., *The Trotsky Reappraisal* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University

that there were 12 million blacks in the Americas, a Mexican delegate to the Congress argued that the Negro Commission should provide ‘una programa de accion para la conquista de este ejercito de seres desventurados’. Other Latin American sections of the Comintern also advocated independent states of indigenous regions. At the same time, one author noted, within Canada, ‘the reference to self-determination [for the Quebecois] began appearing in Communist documents in 1929 and the early 1930s.’ While the Quebecois, American blacks, South Africans and blacks throughout Latin America all experienced different forms of oppression, various Communist Parties began stressing the right to self determination—no matter if it fit the particular situation—during this period.²⁵⁰

In discussing the change in South Africa, Baruch Hirson—who was quite hostile to the Comintern and the Soviet Union—argued that the shift in line must be viewed as part of the attacks on Trotsky and the Soviet Left Opposition. Certainly, having this line successfully adopted allowed Stalin to strengthen his ideological grip on the Comintern, as well as bolster his credentials as a Marxist theoretician against Bukharin. More importantly, by emphasising what were, in Marxist terms, ‘bourgeois-democratic’ tasks, Stalin was able to have adopted the pre-October Revolution theory of the ‘democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry’, which argued that socialists should struggle first for ‘democracy’, and then for

Press, 1992), 177-190.

²⁵⁰ PCB theses of April 1931, quoted in John W.F. Dulles, *Anarchists and Communists in Brazil* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1973), 473. It is unclear how central this slogan was for the PCB. A statement of the PCB political bureau on 19 July 1930, i.e., after the beginning of the ‘Third Period’, in between sections dealing with soldiers and sailors and Indian declared only: ‘Trabalhadores negros!—a vossa escravidao continua! Lutai em conjunto com os demais tralhadores contra a exploracao feudal, por vossa libertacao definitiva!’ *A Classe Operaria*, excerpted in Edgard Carone, ed., *O P.C.B, 1922-1943* (Sao Paulo: Difusau Editorial, 1982). It is also unclear how or when this theory was adopted by the PCB. The quote from the Mexican delegate is taken from *VI Congreso de la Internacional Comunista* (Mexico City: Pasado y Presente, 1978), vol. 2, 372. On the Comintern and the ‘Indian Question’ in Latin America, see Marc Becker, ‘Ethnicity, The Indian Question, and the Communist International in South America’, research outline on Internet, (<http://www.yachana.org/research/comintern.html>). On Canada, see Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 254; Penner, *The Canadian Left*, 91-112.

socialism. Since Lenin's return to the Finland Station in 1917, and his advocacy of the 'April Theses', the Bolsheviks had essentially adopted Trotsky's theory of 'permanent revolution'—i.e., that the bourgeois-democratic tasks of the revolution could only be achieved through the working class taking power as part of an international revolution. Stalin disputed this as in his anti-Trotsky campaign to implement the theory of 'socialism in one country'. By creating a 'national question', Stalin was thus able to insist that this needed to be answered before socialism was on the agenda. In fact, the call for self-determination for blacks in the South was spelt out in the Sixth Congress resolution dealing with this new programme for the 'revolutionary movement in the colonial and semi-colonial world'.²⁵¹ This explanation is at best imperfect, however, especially since at least during the 1930s Stalin's main adversary, Trotsky, accepted both 'self-determination' for Southern US blacks and South African blacks.²⁵² What Trotsky objected to was the idea that these democratic tasks could be separated from the struggle for socialism.

One student of American Communism has warned that, when discussing the 'black belt', 'it is important not to dismiss out of hand a doctrine that may strike many as chimerical at best and segregationist at worst.'²⁵³ It would be wrong to blithely assert, as does Klehr, that 'Despite accepting the theory of self-determination, Communists never got many benefits from it.'²⁵⁴ Instead, its effects were paradoxical. Although it did not make very much sense on its face, it did spur the CP into

²⁵¹ See section thirty nine of the 'Theses for the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonial and Semi-Colonial World'. These theses are excerpted in Degras, ed., *The Communist International*, vol. 2, 530-48. However, the passages dealing with blacks in the US has been edited out; cf. *VI Congresso de La Internacional Comunista*, vol. 1, 236-38 for the entire resolution.

²⁵² Theodore Draper's *The Rediscovery of Black Nationalism* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971) describes Trotsky as 'the most tenacious advocate of Negro "self-determination"' (66). For Trotsky's position towards US blacks, see Leon Trotsky, *Leon Trotsky on Black Nationalism* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973); on South Africa, see his 'Letter to South African Revolutionaries', 20 April 1935, reprinted in *The Fight for a Revolutionary Vanguard Party: Polemics on the South African Left* (New York: Spartacist Publishing Company, 1997), 7-9.

²⁵³ Foley, *Radical Representations*, 181.

addressing black oppression. As Haywood put it, 'The new theory was to sensitize the Party to the revolutionary significance of the Black liberation struggle.'²⁵⁵ But this positive effect was *despite* its official programmatic content.

Not only was black national self-determination empirically inaccurate, it was also rejected by most black Americans. As Klehr argued, 'Almost from the day it had been promulgated by the Comintern, the self-determination doctrine had been an albatross isolating the Party from virtually every Negro organization.'²⁵⁶ Naison, ironically, used similar language, calling the policy 'an albatross' which 'would be a singularly poor mobilizing device in the North or the South'.²⁵⁷ Consequently, the CP tended to downplay the self-determination slogan. In the *Daily Worker*, Earl Browder described the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys as a 'magnificent success for the Party' while decrying 'the weakness with which we have carried out the popularization...of the slogan of self-determination'.²⁵⁸ This is the paradox of the self-determination theory: the theory itself was, as has been amply documented by anti-Communist historians, 'made in Moscow', and did not correspond with American reality. Yet, at the same time, it helped ground the Party in the 'American question' par excellence, the struggle for black freedom, as Robin Kelley and Mark Naison's research illustrates.²⁵⁹

By placing the Negro Question in the context of fighting against colonialism and imperialism, the Comintern made it important.²⁶⁰ As in South Africa, the concept

²⁵⁴ Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 327.

²⁵⁵ Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 234.

²⁵⁶ Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 343.

²⁵⁷ Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 18.

²⁵⁸ Quoted in Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 337.

²⁵⁹ Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 350; See also: Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 324-25; Klehr and Thompson, 'Self-Determination in the Black Belt: Origins of a Communist Policy'; Hill, 'The Communist Party--Enemy of Negro Equality', 365. Both Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, and Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, document the contradiction between the Party's official position of separatism, and its activities on the ground, which tended towards integration.

²⁶⁰ Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 18-19.

of 'self-determination' for blacks coupled with the theory that the immediate task of socialists was to fight for national liberation prevented Communists from ignoring racial oppression by subsuming it into class in a colour-blind manner. This change internationalised the fight against black oppression, making it more than just a provincial problem in the American South. After all, the programme of the Third International, adopted at the Sixth Congress in 1928, stressed that, as against the Second International, the Comintern struggled for 'wide and determined struggle against the imposition of any kind of limitation and restriction upon any nationality, nation or race. Complete equality for all nations and races.'²⁶¹ Later, the programme emphasised that 'Colonial revolutions and movements for national liberation play an extremely important part in the struggle for the conquest of power by the working class.'²⁶² While, as we have seen, the struggle for black liberation in North America was different from struggles against colonialism and national oppression, the Comintern's attention did force the Party to address the issue by taking it out of the exclusive realm of the American comrades.

Stalin himself—even in 1928 virtually the voice of Communism itself—stressed that 'the point is that the programme of the Comintern cannot be the programme of any one national party, or, say, a programme for only the "civilised" nations. The programme must cover all the Communist Parties of the world, all nations, all peoples, both black and white.'²⁶³ Making the Negro Question a national question also internationalised the fight for black rights, placing it on the same plain as the Irish or Jewish Questions.

²⁶¹ *The Programme of the Communist International, together with the Statutes of the Communist International* (London: Modern Books, 1929), 29.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶³ J.V. Stalin, speech on 5 July 1928, in *The Program of the Communist International: With Introductory Notes and Speech on Amendments by JV Stalin* (Calcutta: Radical Book Club, 1944), 77.

Finally, even if the 'black belt' did not reflect American reality, it did recognise that black people would play a key role in any struggle for socialism—or even just basic democratic rights. Thus the new theory forced the CP to place the Negro Question at the centre of its work. Robin Kelley remarked that even though the self-determination theory met opposition, 'for many black Communists, particularly those in the urban North' the new line 'indirectly confirmed what they had long believed: African Americans had their own unique revolutionary tradition'.²⁶⁴ It was during this period that Communists courageously fought for black rights. On the ground, Communists often downplayed 'self-determination' in favour of fighting racist oppression.²⁶⁵ Thus, in the winter of 1929, Party militants campaigned against a Manhattan restaurant's racist practices. Six Party supporters—three black, three white—and, briefly, Briggs, were arrested for, in the *Daily Worker's* words, 'carrying placards denouncing the Jim Crow policy of the Tip Toe Inn and calling for full racial equality, economic, political, social, for the Negro'. The *Daily Worker's* coverage did not mention the concept of 'self-determination' for blacks.²⁶⁶

As Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe* documents, in the Third Period the Party began extensive work in the American South. But by March 1929, the minutes of the Negro Commission note that Southern comrades had requested a full-time organiser to help organise black farmers.²⁶⁷ By 1929, Huiswood claimed, the Party had increased its black membership to between 150 and 300 members; still very small, but more than double the 75 black members the Party claimed throughout the decade.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 109.

²⁶⁵ In Minor papers, folder 'Notes by Minor', box 13.

²⁶⁶ See the *Daily Worker*, 2 February 1929 for the initial story, and 5 February for the conclusion. Briggs was briefly arrested while taking pictures of the demonstration, but then released; the six other demonstrators received suspended sentences.

²⁶⁷ Minutes of meeting of the Negro Commission, 26 March 1929, in Lovestone papers, box 224, folder 29.

²⁶⁸ H.M. Wicks to 'Dear Louis', 9 May 1929, in Draper papers, Hoover Institution, box 29. This letter

It was in the early 1930s that the Party dramatically increased its base among American blacks, largely because of their Third Period stance. The Party championed the case of the Scottsboro Boys, black youths framed-up on bogus rape charges in Alabama, who without the Communist-led campaign would have certainly have been quickly executed. Communists organised textile workers in Gastonia, including racial equality in their demands. And in the North, they fought for jobs, relief and against evictions.²⁶⁹ Perhaps most important, they refused to support the Democratic Party, historically the party of slavery and white supremacy—indeed, the party of the Klan itself. While many historians view the Third Period as a disaster, many black ‘fellow travellers’ remember it much more fondly. David Montgomery, a labour historian and former Communist militant, recalled that:

every place where I ever worked, there was a number of older black workers who had never joined the Party, or if they did, were only in it for a short time, but had a considerable respect for it, and would for the most part think of the Third Period--the very one that most of us think of as the most outrageous--as the one in which these guys proved themselves, in the unemployed movement, and in the Scottsboro campaign. This was the period in which the generation of older Blacks looked upon with greatest respect.²⁷⁰

Internationally, the Third Period was marked, above all, by the German Communists’ inability to organise against Hitler, their declaring the Social Democrats ‘social fascists’, and Ernest Thaelmann’s idiotic slogan, ‘After Hitler, Us.’ But closer to home, for American blacks, it meant the last time Communists employed the rhetoric of ‘class against class’ militancy regularly, the last time the Party strenuously opposed the Democratic Party—which in the South, *did* have close links to the fascists—and, above all, the only time when Communists made black liberation their central

is a report of the American Commission meeting in the Spring of 1929, and reports Huiswood’s remarks. According to this note, Losovsky severely criticised the Party for such a small number.

²⁶⁹ On the Party’s campaign to defend the Scottsboro boys, and more generally black rights in general, see. Martin, ‘The International Labor Defense and Black America’, 169-79. On the Scottsboro case, see Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979). The best description of the CP’s activities amongst blacks in the South during the third period is Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.

²⁷⁰ Interview with David Montgomery by Mark Naison and Paul Buhle, *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring

message. Although many historians and (white) ex-Communists often fondly recall the Popular Fronts of the late 1930s and World War II, for many blacks these meant rapprochement with the racist, capitalist Democratic Party, and class-collaboration became the norm.²⁷¹ While it is true that this eventually led to a realignment within the Democratic Party, with the Southern 'Dixiecrat' wing eventually defecting to Republicans,²⁷² the 1930s, when the Party supported Roosevelt, the racist South remained integral to the Democratic Party, and the Party often subordinated the interests of both black and workers in order to maintain this, often inharmonious, alliance. During the Second World War, the Party did the same, in the name of supporting the war effort.²⁷³

These aspects of the Third Period, not its official line of 'self-determination', made the CP attractive to blacks. Thus, for example, in 1931, almost a quarter of the Chicago Party was black, even though blacks made up less than 7 per cent of Chicago's total population.²⁷⁴ The Party local in Baltimore fought for black rights, one historian concluded, becoming 'a major catalyst for the revival of the local Black freedom movement' while making 'racism a central issue within the re-emerging working-class movements of the region' precisely because of the Third Period.²⁷⁵ This

1980), 41

²⁷¹ For one of the few sympathetic accounts of the Third Period, see James Green, 'Working Class Militancy in the Depression'. Both Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, and Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics*, sympathise with this period because of the Party's role in the fight for black rights.

²⁷² See Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²⁷³ Thus one historian who is sympathetic to the CP, wrote of the Party during the Second World War: 'Determined Communist opposition to civil-rights militancy—at a time when the NAACP was increasing its membership five-fold and Blacks were struggling aggressively for equal treatment in the military and in the defense industries—bred hostilities that would compromise postwar Communist appeals to the Negroes' (Norman D. Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century: Henry A. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948* [London: Collier-Macmillan Publishers, 1973], 206-207).

²⁷⁴ Randi Jill Storch, 'Shades of Red', 45; on the perception of the third period amongst blacks, especially in the black media, see Christopher E. Linsin, 'Not by Words, but by Deeds: Communists and African Americans During the Depression Era' (MA dissertation, Florida Atlantic University, 1993), 29-31.

²⁷⁵ Andor Skotnes, 'The Communist Party, Anti-Racism, and the Freedom Movement in Baltimore,

is why many early black Communists were disappointed when the Party abandoned the Third Period in favour of the Popular Front.²⁷⁶ Although the Party deepened its roots in Chicago and other heavily black areas by building a 'Negro People's Front' as an 'auxiliary to the Popular Front meant to promote a synthesis of communism and black cultural and political work', it did so on an explicit non-revolutionary basis in order 'to attract a reform-minded constituency eager for participation in a liberal democratic capitalism'.²⁷⁷

Another example of the new emphasis on black liberation for the Party was the 1931 'white chauvinism' trial of August Yokinen. While the actual facts are buried beneath Party propaganda, several black youth were mistreated at a dance at the Party-owned Finnish Workers Temple in Harlem in December 1930. Although most implicated Party members recanted their white-chauvinism, Yokinen, a janitor at the club, did not, arguing that he did not wish to bathe with blacks. In response, the Party staged a spectacular trial to highlight its determination to root out chauvinists from within its own ranks. Yokinen, who spoke only Finnish, and his 'defence counsel', Richard Moore, argued for leniency and denounced white chauvinism; in the end, the 'court'—consisting of seven white and seven black comrades—expelled Yokinen, but allowed him to reapply for membership if he vigorously struggled against white chauvinism. By itself, the trial was largely a cynical stunt, and it spawned a series similar trials.²⁷⁸ Although Yokinen was allowed to rejoin the Party, the story had an unhappy since the Immigration Department, aroused by the Party's propaganda,

1930-34', *Science & Society* 60:2 (Summer 1996), 166.

²⁷⁶ Vincent, *Black Power and the Garvey Movement*, 233n

²⁷⁷ Bill Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 4, 26.

²⁷⁸ Richard Fraser, a long-time Trotskyist critic of the Communist Party, observed in 1955 that 'The hectic internal life around the race question, is caused primarily by the fact that the basic theory of the Stalinists on the Negro struggle does nothing to liberate white workers from prejudice, but on the other hand corresponds to their backwardness and tends to confirm them in it'; R.S. Fraser, 'For a Materialist Conception of the Negro Question', in *Marxist Bulletin* 5 (New York: Spartacist Publishing Company,

deported him to Finland within a year. But, as with the black belt theory, actual facts of the case were less important than symbolism. The Party gained the reputation amongst blacks as seriously and honestly fighting for black rights, within and without its own organisation. Equally important, however, the 'trial', by finding for black Americans and against a Finnish immigrant, highlighted the ongoing 'Americanisation' of the Party²⁷⁹

Conclusion

The 1920s were important in the Party's increasing appreciation of the Negro Question. Even if the Party itself did not see mammoth organisational gains among blacks, its influence extended far beyond its actual membership. A striking example of this is Paul Robeson, long a favourite of the Communist left, who never actually joined. Many activists in the post-war struggle for black rights had been influenced by the Party. In his study of the civil rights movement in the 1920s, Mark Schneider concluded that by the end of the decade, the CP had displaced the NAACP as the dominant national, militant interracial organisation. The Party, he wrote, 'fundamentally and forever changed the attitude of white radicals toward African-American rights' by making it impossible to ignore the struggle for black freedom.

1994), 16.

²⁷⁹ The campaign is covered in the Party pamphlet, *Race Hatred on Trial* (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1931), which is reprinted in Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro, *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1930-1934* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), along with responses by black newspapers. See also Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 353-58; Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 328-30; Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 46-49; Solomon, *Cry Was Unity*, 139-42. On the support the trial had amongst blacks, see Dawson, *Black Visions*, 190. The Yokinen affair certainly was not the first of its kind; the minutes of the Political Committee, 14 June 1928, contain a reference to a very similar situation at a meeting of the Detroit Miners' Relief Dance 'where our comrades permitted the manager of the hall in which the Dance was held, to put the Negro workers who were present out of the hall, and refuse entrance to other Negroes, because the manager feared some of the regular dancing crowd would start a fight if Negroes were permitted to remain in the hall'. The Central Committee endorsed the local leadership's censure of those in charge and declared that 'the proper tactics would have been to that immediately upon the attempted enforcement of the exclusion of the Negro workers from the Dance, [Communists] should have at once marched out en masse in protest and forcibly demonstrated their solidarity with the Negro workers against race discrimination' (in PRL collection).

Inversely, black America's struggle for freedom profoundly affected the Party as well, becoming important both in the public view of the Party and its own self-definition.²⁸⁰

In the mid-1960s, Robert F. Williams, then in exile in Cuba for his insistence on the right of black self-defence, wrote to Haywood that although he had become disillusioned with the Party, he 'once...had great sympathy for them and I considered their cause to be the cause of the Negro also'. He was not alone: other, more moderate, black leaders such as Bayard Rustin had also once been linked to the Party. Stokely Carmichael, in his youth in New York City, had been on friendly terms with several Communists, and Angela Davis, whose parents had been around the Communists in Alabama in her youth, remained a supporter of the Party until the early 1990s. The Civil Rights movement was, obviously, not a Communist creation (much less 'plot'), and by the time they assumed leading roles in the movement, many former Communists or sympathisers had broken their ties with the Party. Yet often it was the Party which had articulated a political vision for many radical black intellectuals: the vision changed over time, but the Party's role in sparking it cannot be denied.²⁸¹

Had the Comintern not intervened, repeatedly, into the Party, the Party would have remained aloof from one of the most important struggles in American society. The Comintern's interventions illustrate the beneficial role that the Comintern could play: instead of making it more difficult for the Party to understand American reality, this intervention *forced* American Communists to understand the United States.

²⁸⁰ Schneider, *We Return Fighting*, 389; see William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left*, 6, 8, for the importance of the 1920s in the black-Communist interaction, and the two-way nature of this exchange. On Robeson, see Klehr, *Heyday of American Communism*, 348. On the Party's influence in the later civil rights movement, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*.

²⁸¹ Robert F. Williams, letter to Harry Haywood, no date [1963-66?], in papers of Robert F. Williams, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan (microfilm reel 1, frames 54-55).

Conclusion: The Party, the Comintern, and American Society

In 1919, American Communists, mostly non-English speaking immigrants organised in several competing and hostile groups, were ignorant of the struggle for black rights and remained isolated from most of the nation's organised workers on principle. It is no wonder, then, that as the initial hopes for immediate revolution inspired by Bolshevik Revolution faded, tens of thousands of Socialists who had been sympathetic to the Communists quit the movement.

A decade later, Communists, now largely organised into one unified, legal Party, although still much smaller than their European counterparts, were poised to play important roles in the labour movement, among blacks, in the cultural field and, in some areas of politics as well. While at the time of the movement's founding, American Communists were at best aloof from the society around them, in the 1930s they began to not just to understand it better, but to change it as well.

This demonstrates that, contrary to traditional historians such as Theodore Draper, as well as newer 'revisionist' historians, the intervention of the Communist International did not hinder the Party's Americanisation, but rather encouraged it.

In its early years, the Third International sought to build a revolutionary movement throughout the world to get rid of capitalism and spread the gains of the Bolshevik Revolution. Since Lenin, Trotsky and the entire Bolshevik leadership believed it was not possible to sustain the rule of the working class in one, backward country indefinitely, this was also integrally linked to defending Soviet Russia itself. The Comintern sought to construct its sections out of the left wing of the labour movement; however, they also wanted to do more than found a renovated Second International: as the conditions for entry into the Comintern make clear, they believed that sections of the Comintern, while drawing on the traditions of struggle against

capitalism, had to be founded on a new model, namely the Bolshevik concept of a revolutionary vanguard party.

In the United States, the Comintern sought to assemble the disparate pro-Bolshevik elements, including immigrant social democrats, IWW syndicalists, radical intellectuals, black nationalists and left-wing Socialists, and transform them into a Party that would be able to lead an American socialist revolution. The early Comintern laid the basis for both the organisational and political foundation of the American Communist Party. It prodded American Communists to unite in one organisation, to take advantage of their right to organise legally, to work among unionised workers, and, most importantly, to grapple with the role of black oppression in maintaining capitalist rule. In this period, the Comintern guided the Party to better understand American society.

By the end of the 1920s, however, the relationship between the Comintern and American Communism had changed, because the Comintern itself had changed. As a result of developments in Soviet Russia, the Third International came under the control of Stalin who no longer wanted revolutions abroad, but instead insisted on socialism in (only) one country. Consequently, the leadership of the Comintern increasingly intervened into its member parties from this perspective.

Yet, this was not an overnight process. For several years, Trotsky and, for a time, other leading Bolsheviks, struggled against the Stalinisation of the Russian Party and the ECCI. Furthermore, even once Stalinised, the Comintern was unable to impose its will on all of the national parties at once. In the American Party, it was not until 1928-29 that the Party finally expelled Cannon's Trotskyist opposition and Lovestone's Bukharinist group, and consolidated a stable, non-factional leadership.

By 1929, then, the leadership and political programme of American Communism had become Stalinised, and the Comintern intervened into the Party to assure that this situation continued. However, once again, this was not a simple process. Many of these interventions had positive effects as well. Partly, this was by design: in order to create a pro-Stalin Party, the Comintern needed to finally eliminate factionalism and subdue the language-federations. Although the majority of the membership would continue to be immigrants for a long time, and although the Party would still experience internal tensions, these would not threaten Party unity again, even as it followed the changing Comintern line throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Partly, however, the Comintern interventions had unintended consequences. This was most obvious in the case of the 'Negro Question'. Stalin had forced the American Party, like others, to place basic democratic questions (in this case, the absurd call for an independent black nation in the South) ahead of the struggle for socialism. This was in keeping with Stalin's attack on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Yet, American Communists, especially black Communists, took this new line and used it to become champions of the struggle for black liberation. This highlights a key contradiction in the Stalinised Party: an increasingly non-revolutionary programme and leadership, and a membership still recruited to the idea of making a socialist revolution. Even as the Party became more and more right-wing under the Popular Front and, later, during the War, this contradiction remained. While it would prevent the party organising effectively for social revolution, it would allow it to have some successful outcomes in organising for more short-term gains.

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