

The Leadership of American Communism, 1924–1929: Sketches for a Prosopographical Portrait

John McIlroy and Alan Campbell

Prosopography, we argued in an earlier paper, is a useful, ancillary instrument in the historian's toolbox. Focussing on historical actors, significant and less significant, central or marginal in the historiography, generating knowledge of and facilitating comparison between their background, formation, and actions, it assists evocation of the past and helps explain it. That article outlined problems of prosopographical technique and our approach to them. It deployed quantitative and qualitative methods to develop a case study based upon a significant sample of the Central Committee (CC) of the Workers Party of America (WP) and its predecessors – which, following Harvey Klehr, we took as broadly representative, although not exhaustive, of the cadre – from 1919 to 1923.¹ Documenting statistical trends, we demonstrated that the volatility and turmoil of “the long foundation period” produced a high rate of turnover – almost 60% of activists who sat on the CC in this period no longer figured on it after 1923. The article concluded with pen pictures of those protagonists who ceased to sit on the committee after American Communism's initiatory period. The present essay takes this research forward to the end of the decade by examining the minority of cadres – over 40% – who featured in the leadership during the foundation years and continued to serve during the later 1920s, as well as those elected for the first time. It

¹ John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography of the American Communist Elite: The Foundation Years, 1919–1923,” *American Communist History*, 18, 3 (2019), ??–??; Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1978). The Workers Party of America became the Workers (Communist) Party in 1925 and the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) in 1929. For simplicity we have used Workers Party of America (WP) until the end of 1929.

combines statistical analysis with cameos of the majority of cadres who sat on the CC between 1924 and 1929.² It explores the composition of the WP elite, changing trends and rates of turnover, and the origins, characteristics and activities of its members through the prism of the body that governed the party between conventions.³

By 1924, conceptions of revolutionary organization, in certain respects at odds with Bolshevik ideas prior to 1917, dominated the Russian party directed by the *Troika* of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Stalin. Their impact on the Comintern and its US affiliate deepened after the Fourth World Congress, “the Congress of Bolshevization”.⁴ The WP had already arrived at an understanding of the need for a nucleus of professional revolutionaries, equipped with expertise in leadership and loyalty to Comintern policy, acting as the custodians of party governance and the motor of WP intervention in American society. The “leadership of the revolutionary movement,” American Communists pronounced “a profession in itself ... the highest and most honourable of all the professions.”⁵ The leading role of Communist cadres was contrasted with that of full-time officials in the pre-1917 Socialist Party of America (SP), “regarded as flunkies to be loaded with the disagreeable tasks, poorly paid and blamed if anything went wrong.”⁶ This article considers how far

² The CCs were elected in 1924, 1925, 1927 and 1929; following the expulsion of Jay Lovestone and his supporters, the March 1929 CC was extensively reconstructed in October. The CC included all the most senior members of the party. As pointed out in McIlroy and Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography”, cadres in the Russian sense of experienced Communists expert in political leadership, could function in a number of roles from the Control Commission to district leaders. For a study of local cadres, see William Chase and J. Arch Getty, “The Moscow Bolshevik Cadres of 1917: A Prosopographic Analysis,” *Russian History* 5, no. 1 (1978): 84–105. At the other end of the scale, one could define a cadre in optimal, if in practice not very useful, terms as a Communist activist trained at the Comintern’s International Lenin School (ILS) in Moscow. Focussing on the CC provides advantages in accessibility and manageability and permits comparison with Klehr’s findings. Following Klehr, we have included only full members of the Committee, not candidate or alternate members, in our survey.

³ The term “Central Executive Committee” was used in the early years. For uniformity, we have employed Central Committee (CC) throughout this article.

⁴ See Paul Le Blanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1990); Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Pierre Broué, *Histoire de L’Internationale Communiste, 1919–1943* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), particularly 367–85; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: A Historical Controversy Revisited,” *Labor History* 60, no. 3 (2019): 165–92.

⁵ James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1943; New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 24.

⁶ Cannon, *Struggle*, 24.

Communist leaders from the mid-1920s measured up to these aspirations. We have examined as many CC representatives as possible, well-documented and obscure, in order to provide a more complete and integrated picture of the elite than has previously featured in the literature. Theodore Draper, for example, devoted less attention in *American Communism* to CC representatives between 1923 and 1930 than to the founding cohort so vividly portrayed in *Roots*.⁷ Subsequent analytical narratives have inadequately filled this gap; the present essay goes some way to repairing the deficiency.

The years 1924–1929, conventionally considered, fall into two broad periods. The first, running until 1928, was dominated by united front politics, pursuit of partnership with reformist forces, and fierce factional warfare within the WP. Key events included the debacles of the Farmer-Labor Party and the Robert La Follette campaign; the Comintern’s 1925 intervention in favour of the Charles Ruthenberg-Jay Lovestone faction, which undermined the existing leadership around William Z. Foster; “Bolshevization,” which demanded more faithful replication of the regime obtaining in the Soviet party which privileged centralism as against democracy, suppressed dissent, prohibited advocacy of the Russian opposition, curtailed the role of the language federations, and remolded the WP via a system of workplace cells; the theoretical dominance of “Socialism in One Country;” and, from 1927, a left line on organized labor and moves towards “dual unionism.” The Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928 laid the basis for the break with earlier united front tactics; declaration of renewed capitalist crisis; proclamations of working-class radicalization; formation of Red Trade Unions; and, from 1929, the politics of “Socialism in One Country” and Class Against Class as the SP and the AFL bureaucracy allegedly entered the orbit of fascism.⁸ This is the background against which we trace developments within the WP

⁷ Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957); Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960).

⁸ Draper’s *Roots* and *American Communism* remain unexcelled and have recently been supplemented by Jacob Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

leadership before the 1929 turn and consider whether changes in the cadre at the onset of the “Third Period” reflected the political transformations Comintern initiatives wrought in party policy. The article concludes with reflections on the American Communist elite across the 1920s.

Stability in the mid-1920s? The core Communist leadership, 1924–1927

The first years of this period saw relative stability in the WP leadership. **Tables 1–3** list the membership of the CCs elected in 1924, 1925 and 1927. **Appendix 1** provides further information on the 41 committee members who served during these years, although data is almost completely lacking for two representatives.⁹ The mean age for the 39 for whom birth data was available was 37 years, three years older than the average for the 1919–23 cohort; the median age was 36. Immigrants made up 62%, those from immigrant families, 28%, and Americans with a more extended native lineage, 10% of the sample of 39.¹⁰ Therefore a total of 38% were born in the USA to either immigrant or “American” families. However, if we combine the figures for first- and second-generation immigrants, those from an immigrant background totalled 90% of our CC representatives – an even higher proportion than in our pre-1924 sample.¹¹ The number of leaders with roots in pre-1917 Russia had declined: only 13 (37%) of the immigrants and those from immigrant families had links with the former Tsarist empire compared with 49% of leaders from these categories in our sample for 1919–1923.¹² Others in our immigrant groups came from Germany, 6, the Austro-Hungarian empire and Scandinavia, 4 each; 3 from Irish families; and one each from England, Scotland and Holland.

⁹ A. Fred and Robert Mahoney – see Table 3 – have been largely discounted from our calculations.

¹⁰ For the three-fold distinction employed – immigrants, children of immigrant parents, and those born to families with a longer American genealogy – see McIlroy and Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography,” ??–??.

¹¹ McIlroy and Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography,” ??–??.

¹² McIlroy and Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography”. As explained there, ??, note 40, we have included the Finns among the national minorities in Tsarist Russia.

Table 1. WP CC elected at Third Convention, January 1924

Majority: Alexander Bittelman; Earl Browder; Erik Fahle Burman; James P. Cannon; William F. Dunne; William Z. Foster; Ludwig Lore; Young Workers' League (YWL)

Representative: Martin Abern.

Minority: J. Louis Engdahl; Benjamin Gitlow; Jay Lovestone; John Pepper; Charles E. Ruthenberg.

Source: Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960), 457–58.

Table 2. WP CC elected at Fourth Convention, August 1925

Majority: Martin Abern; Philip Aronberg; Alexander Bittelman; Earl Browder; Erik Fahle Burman; James P. Cannon; William F. Dunne; William Z. Foster; William “Bud” Reynolds; Jack Stachel.

Minority: John J. Ballam; Max Bedacht; J. Louis Engdahl; Benjamin Gitlow; Jay Lovestone; Robert Minor; Charles E. Ruthenberg; John Schmies; William Weinstone; William F. White.

Source: Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 466–67.

Table 3. WP CC elected at Fifth Convention, August 1927

Majority: Israel Amter; John J. Ballam; Max Bedacht; J. Louis Engdahl; A. Fred; Benjamin Gitlow; Knut E. Heikkinen; Abram Jakira; Alfred Knutson; William F. Kruse; Ben Lifshitz; Jay Lovestone; Robert Mahoney; Bert Miller; Robert Minor; Mossaye Olgin; John Pepper; Henry Puro; John Schmies; Jack Stachel; Norman H. Tallentire; Alexander Trachtenberg; William Weinstone; William J. White; Bertram D. Wolfe.

Minority: Martin Abern; Philip Aronberg; Alexander Bittelman; Earl Browder; James P. Cannon; William F. Dunne; William Z. Foster; Jack Johnstone; Charles Krumbein; William “Bud” Reynolds; Arne Swabeck; Alfred Wagenknecht; Joseph Zack.

Source: Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 492–93.

This distribution was far from representative of the WP membership as a whole.

Table 4 compares the ethnic background of first- and second-generation immigrant leaders on the CC with the percentage of WP members in the main language federations in 1925. The

Table 4. Comparison of the membership of the main WP language sections in 1925 with the ethnic background of CC members who were immigrants or from immigrant families, 1924–1927.

Language Federation	Average membership 1925 ¹	% of total WP Membership	Number of CC members who were immigrants or from immigrant families	% of CC who were immigrants or from immigrant families
Finnish	6410	39.3	2	5.1
English-speaking	2282	14.0	5	12.8
Jewish (Yiddish) ²	1447	8.9	17	44.0
South Slavic	1109	6.8	0	0
Russian	870	5.3	6	15.4
Lithuanian	815	5.0	2	5.1
Ukrainian	622	3.8	2	5.1
Hungarian	509	3.1	3	7.7
Lettish[Latvian]	434	2.7	1	2.6
Czecho-Slovak	295	1.8	0	0
Scandinavian	211	1.3	4	10.3
Uncategorized ³			2	5.1
Total membership	16,325			

Notes

1. The figures are based on the average dues-paying membership from January to June, 1925. At that time there were 19 language federations.
2. Klehr makes the point that the Jewish Federation was exclusive, in that only Jews could be members, but not inclusive, insofar as some Jews would be members of other language federations such as the Russian, Lithuanian or Polish organizations and that assimilated Jews might join the English-speaking section. (Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 28).
3. Jack Stachel, born in Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, and Joseph Zack, born in Austro-Hungary in what is now Slovakia to ethnic Austrian parents, do not fit neatly into the categories.

Sources: “The Membership of Our Party”, Microfilm of the files of the Communist Party of the USA in the Comintern Archives, 1919–1943 (hereafter Files of the CPUSA), Reel 52, delo 739, frame 10, New York University: Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; **Appendix 1**, below.

table demonstrates that Finnish Communists, the largest ethnic group in the party, were massively under-represented in the central leadership of the party with Knut Heikkinen and Henry Puro the only Finns who sat on the CC. Those from elsewhere in the Tsarist empire as well as Scandinavians and Hungarians were significantly over-represented in our leadership sample. Excluding the special case of the Finns, whose exceptionally large federation membership distorts the picture, 28% of the CC came from families with origins in Russia, Lithuania, Latvia and the Ukraine, while the language federations representing these nationalities constituted only 17% of WP membership, although if we add the predominantly Russian Jewish (Yiddish) Federation, the figure for the party membership is similar at 26%.

The occupations of mid-1920s CC members were diverse. The majority were divorced from the means of production and over half, 21 (54%) had experience of manual work, although only a minority had worked in archetypal proletarian, factory-based jobs, rarely on a long-term basis. Many had been employed in white-collar occupations, and included clerks, journalists, and teachers. Some had been labor movement organizers; others, students. Again, the cadre was far from representative of the WP as a whole. A survey of party members in 1924, which registered 78% of the dues paying membership, indicated that the four largest occupational groups were metal trades, construction workers, needle trades and miners, which accounted for 45% of the membership. A further 6% were laborers, housewives comprised 15%. The remaining 32% were employed in wide variety of industrial sectors but those that were clearly in white-collar occupations – businessmen, lawyers, doctors, dentists, teachers, clerks, and office workers, – only comprised 7% of the membership. The party, unlike its leadership, was dominated by manual workers, although many were not part of the factory proletariat.¹³ Moreover, just under a third were members of

¹³ “The Membership of Our Party”, Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frames 11–12, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

a trade union, although there were significant differences between the occupational groups: while 79% of party miners and 68% of the needle trades were unionized, the figure for metal workers was 23% and none of the 568 agrarian workers were union members.¹⁴ We lack reliable details as to how many of the 41 cadres were union members – let alone activists – but the figure probably did not greatly exceed the 32% of WP members who held a union card in 1924.¹⁵ To take one example, towards the end of our period, Bill Foster claimed that only one in eight of the top echelon of the Lovestone faction belonged to a union.¹⁶

We possess incomplete data on the inherited religious background of our cohort. Five are listed in **Appendix 1** as coming from Lutheran families, plus one Unitarian, while we know of 5 who were raised in the Catholic church.¹⁷ The 17 from Jewish families represented 44% of the sample (compared with 35% in our sample of CC members during the foundation years) and pointed to over-representation from this group, even allowing for the particularities of this section in the WP and the difficulties involved in double counting, given that an unknown although possibly significant number of Jews would not be members of the Jewish (Yiddish) Federation but would have joined other national federations such as the Russian body (see **Table 4**, note 2, above).¹⁸ Full information on educational experience is

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Of our 41 cadres, 29 had submitted entries to Solon De Leon, in collaboration with Irma C. Hayssen and Grace Poole, eds., *The American Labor Who's Who* (New York: Hanford Press, 1925). Only 11 claimed any union affiliation, and some of these were in the distant past, such as Robert Minor's membership of the Carpenters' Union, 1902–1905, or related to white-collar union membership derived from their party duties such as Abern's card for the Office Employees' Association. Only a handful, such as Erik Fahle Burman, William F. Dunne, William Z. Foster, Benjamin Gitlow, Charles Krumbein and Arne Swabeck evidenced recent activism in manual workers' unions, although this was also the case for some not listed in De Leon's compilation, such as Jack Johnstone, William "Bud" Reynolds, John Schmies and William J. White.

¹⁶ Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 235, 399, note 44. On Foster's account – he possessed animus but also ammunition – none of the WP's nine district organizers held a union card.

¹⁷ We are referring to the family religion of representatives although, in some cases, their parents' observance may itself have been lax. Little is known as to whether leading Communists pledged to secularism may occasionally have participated in religious ceremonies and the issue merits further research.

¹⁸ Whether Communists of Jewish origin should be categorized primarily in terms of religion, ethnicity or nationality is a problematic issue. The Bolsheviks invoked the criteria of territory, language, culture, common economy, etc, to reject the idea that Jews worldwide constituted a nation while special representation in the party compromised democratic centralism. It is arguable that concentrated by state ordinance in the Pale, usually speaking Yiddish, and sharing a common culture, *Russian* Jews exhibited the rudiments of an ethnic group. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks were assimilationists who enjoined Jewish Communists to identify themselves as

similarly lacking. For some, such as Foster, who began work at 10, it was rudimentary. In contrast, James P. Cannon, who quit formal education at 12, returned to High School at 17. Others, such as Bob Minor, left school at 14, while Arne Swabeck underwent vocational training at a trade school. A number pursued part-time study: leaving primary school after 4th grade, Charles Krumbein pursued a correspondence course in mechanics and worked as a steamfitter; after two years study at High School, Jack Stachel continued his education through evening courses, as did Bill Kruse and Ben Gitlow. If limited formal education followed by self-improvement and autodidacticism predominated, a number attended universities or similar institutions. See **Table 5**.

Table 5. CC Members 1924–27 with experience of higher education

Name	Institution
Martin Abern	University of Minnesota
Israel Amter	Leipzig Conservatory, Germany
Earl Browder	Lincoln Jefferson College, LLB by correspondence
William E. Dunne	College of St Thomas, St Paul, Minnesota
J. Louis Engdahl	University of Minnesota
Alfred Knutson	University of South Dakota
Ludwig Lore	Berlin University
Jay Lovestone	City College, New York; Columbia University
Bert Miller	City College
Moissaye Olgin	University of Kiev; University of Heidelberg; Columbia University
John Pepper	University of Budapest
Alexander Trachtenberg	University of Odessa; Trinity College; Yale University
William Weinstone	City College, New York
Bertram Wolfe	University of Mexico; Columbia University (MA Romance Studies, 1931)

secular revolutionaries. Detailed evidence on how Jewish Communists in America subsequently viewed these issues is lacking but our starting assumption has to be that what was most important to Communist cadres was neither religion nor nation but class. In the circumstances of 1919, some gravitated to the national federations, others to the Jewish (Yiddish) Language Federation. Acceptance of federalism was temporary and expedient, progressively subordinated to the demands of a “Bolshevized” party. By mid-decade, cadres’ adoption of a political identity went hand in hand with assimilation, although the process could benefit from further investigation. See, for example, V.I. Lenin, “The Position of the Bund in the Party”, at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1903/oct/22a.htm>; Erik Van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2002), 60–66; Joshua Rubinstein, *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 1–7, 29–35; Paul Buhle, “Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question,” *Radical History Review* 23 (1980): 9–33; Tony Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 217–50; Tony Michels, “Communism and the Problem of Ethnicity in the 1920s: The Case of Moissaye Olgin,” in *Ethnicity and Beyond: Theories and Dilemmas of Jewish Group Demarcation* (Studies in Contemporary Jewry, 25) ed. Eli Lederhendler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 26–48.

The table shows that 14, over a third of the group, had studied at university level. While 3, Israel Amter, Ludwig Lore and John Pepper, pursued their studies abroad, and Moissaye Olgin, Alexander Trachtenberg and Bertram Wolfe commenced their university careers outside the US, the remainder had attended American institutions. While we lack information on the educational achievements of WP members in general, the occupational composition of the party suggests that a significant proportion of the cadre were educated to a higher standard.

While 21 members of our sample served on only one CC during these years, 11 sat twice and 9 were on all three committees. Taking a longer view, **Table 6** illustrates the frequency of election of individual leaders over the entire period, 1919–27. Analysis of the CCs through that period indicates that a small group of 19 leaders were elected to 3 or more CCs between 1919 and 1927.¹⁹ The tables suggest that by the mid-1920s a fluid concentration of leaders distinguished by the relative frequency of their election to the committee had emerged, although continuity was qualified, and every member did not sit on every CC. The group of 19 constituted a pool of top cadres, with flows in and out, from which CC members were selected according to changing circumstances. The tables demonstrate that the composition of this group shifted and, far from being politically homogeneous, membership was patterned by faction. Nonetheless, in terms of personalities, and with the above caveats, we can talk by this point of a core leadership complemented by a penumbra of activists who served more briefly.

Table 6 records that between 1919 and 1927 Alexander Bittelman, James P. Cannon and Jay Lovestone sat on 6 CCs; J. Louis Engdahl and Charles E. Ruthenberg served on 5; Max Bedacht, Earl Browder, William F. Dunne, William Z. Foster, Ludwig Lore, Robert Minor, Alfred Wagenknecht and William Weinstone were elected to 4; while Martin Abern,

¹⁹ See McIlroy and Campbell, “Towards a Prosopography.”

Table 6. Leaders most frequently elected to CCs of CPA, CLP, UCP and WP, 1919–27.

	1919	1920	1921	1922	1924	1925	1927	Total
Abern					√	√	√	3
Ballam	√					√	√	3
Bedacht	√	√				√	√	4
Bittelman	√		√	√	√	√	√	6
Browder				√	√	√	√	4
Cannon		√	√	√	√	√	√	6
Dunne				√	√	√	√	4
Engdahl			√	√	√	√	√	5
Foster				√	√	√	√	4
Gitlow	√				√	√	√	4
Lore*	√		√	√	√			4
Lovestone	√		√	√	√	√	√	6
Minor			√	√		√	√	4
Pepper				√	√		√	3
Ruthenberg	√	√		√	√	√		5
Swabeck	√		√				√	3
Trachtenberg			√	√			√	3
Wagenknecht	√	√		√			√	4
Weinstone			√	√		√	√	4

*Lore was elected to the CC at the founding convention of the CLP in 1919 but swiftly removed.

Abbreviations: CLP: Communist Labor Party; CPA: Communist Party of America; UCP: United Communist Party; WP: Workers Party.

John Ballam, Benjamin Gitlow, John Pepper, Arne Swabeck and Alexander Trachtenberg appeared on 3 committees. There are distinctions between them. Ballam served twice and Lore, Swabeck, Trachtenberg and Wagenknecht only once between 1924 and 1927; their other appearances occurred during the foundation period.

Nonetheless, there was a thread of continuity running through the leadership from 1919: almost all members of the core – Abern, one of the youngest, was an exception – were part of our sample of CC members who sat between 1919 and 1923. Experience of the early years and adaptation to new challenges enabled them to maintain their position at the top or enter or re-enter the leading nucleus. Of the 19 comrades who made up the core, 8 – Ballam, Bedacht, Bittelman, Gitlow, Lovestone, Ruthenberg, Swabeck, and Wagenknecht – had been members of the CCs of the Communist Party of America (CPA) and Communist Labor Party (CLP) in 1919. A further 6 – Cannon, Engdahl, Lore, Minor, Trachtenberg and Weinstone – had entered the leadership by 1921. With the exception of Foster and Pepper, to whom special circumstances applied, and Engdahl and Trachtenberg, members of the Workers' Council, who remained in the SP because of their antipathy to the underground model of organization, all had become active in the two original parties at or around their inception.

Cut-off points in relation to both the number of appearances on the CC (**Table 6**) and definition of periods inadequately convey elements of continuity, and frequency of election gives a crude indication of popularity and ability;²⁰ or of power and influence within the leadership and more broadly within the party. In this context, power is a problematic and contingent concept: the ability of WP leaders to influence the decisions and actions of their comrades on and beyond the CC was circumscribed by factionalism and Comintern hegemony. As *capo dei capi* between 1923 and 1925 and 1925 and 1927 respectively, both

²⁰ Factions selected their own slates and these were subject to intra- and inter-factional compromise and, dramatically in 1925 and 1929, Comintern intervention: see Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 12–13.

Foster and Ruthenberg had to manage their own factions and increasingly assertive lieutenants. Both had to negotiate the antagonism of opposition caucuses. In 1925, Foster, and in 1929, Ruthenberg's successor, Lovestone, had apparently secured the allegiance of the party majority. In each case the Comintern demonstrated domination was derived, conditional and fragile. Within that context and with those caveats, Foster, who served on 4 CCs, was a more significant force in the party after 1923 than Cannon (6) and wielded more power than his supporters Bittelman (6) or Browder (4).

Because of his imprisonment and early death, Ruthenberg sat on only 5 CCs. (See **Table 6**). Yet until 1927, in terms of power and influence he stood several notches above his faction manager, Lovestone (6), who between 1923 and 1925 exercised markedly less power than Foster and after 1925 increasingly more. All three were more influential than Bedacht who before 1927 deferred to Ruthenberg; or Engdahl, elected to 5 CCs compared with 3 for the briefly very powerful Pepper. Abern, Ballam, Swabeck, Trachtenberg and Wagenknecht were, in terms of primary power, secondary actors. Moreover, we need to emphasise that although we can talk loosely of a core in terms of personnel, its composition fluctuated, and it was politically fissured. Cohesion was fractured by caucus alignments, changing factional fortunes and, ultimately, the predilections of whichever Soviet constellation was most influential in a Comintern whose edicts over-rode WP democracy. We should underline that our characterizations are specific to this period: by the end of 1929, 6 out of 19 members of the core – Abern, Cannon, Lore, Lovestone, Gitlow and Swabeck – had been expelled from the party, while Pepper was recalled to Russia. Nonetheless, during these years in terms of *personnel*, a changing but relatively stable leadership group developed which significantly reflected the 1919–1923 cohort, although many leaders of the foundation years were no longer predominant or even present.²¹

²¹ For this group, see McIlroy and Campbell, "Towards a Prosopography," ??-??.

Of the core group, 11 out of 19 (58%) were born outside America – they came from Denmark, England, Hungary, Germany, and the former Russian empire – while a further 6 (32%) were from immigrant families. Remarkably, with only two exceptions, the core sprang from immigrant backgrounds, although in contrast with some of the leaders of 1919 its members had acquired the skills necessary for leadership in America. On the available information, 9 of the 19 (47%) were Jewish by origin; 4 were Catholics, 2 Lutheran, and 1 Unitarian. All were white men. There were no Black Communists in the leadership, let alone the core, and the 3 women who had served on CCs before 1923 never reappeared and were not replaced in the mid-1920s. On average, the members of the nucleus had become Communists at the age of 33 and by mid-decade they were in their late thirties: the average age was 39. Lore, 50 in 1925, was the oldest, followed by Foster and Wagenknecht at 44, Ruthenberg and Ballam, 43, Bedacht, 42, and Engdahl, Minor, and Trachtenberg each 41. They were, by the standards of the time, entering middle age. At 39, Pepper and the contingent born in the early 1890s, Bittelman, Browder, Cannon, Gitlow and Swabeck – Dunne was a little older – were in their mid-thirties and by contemporary judgement in their prime, while Abern, Lovestone and Weinstone were young men in their twenties.

The background and earlier occupations of this nucleus mirror the diversity of our larger sample in **Appendix 1**. Foster had worked at different jobs in the fertilizer industry and on the railroads before serving briefly as an AFL official, Cannon in meatpacking and on the railroads, as well as serving as an IWW organizer. Dunne was an electrician; Bedacht a barber; Browder a messenger boy and accountant. Ruthenberg had been a shop assistant, book-keeper, and sales manager; Gitlow an office clerk; Abern a clerical worker and student; and Bittelman an engineer. Lore had worked in textiles before running a newspaper. Engdahl was a successful journalist, Minor a celebrated cartoonist, and Trachtenberg a student and teacher. Wagenknecht was a SP functionary and editor from the age of 24. Overall, their

accumulated experience of working-class American life was substantial. Nonetheless, Engdahl, Minor, and Trachtenberg were derided by Foster as “Greenwich Villagers” with little contact with the working class, and Lovestone, Weinstone and their circle dubbed “the City College boys;” the Foster group were in their turn disdained as “mere trade unionists,” aping the workers in dress and discourse.²² All the core had been members of the SP, with the obvious exception of Pepper. However, a high proportion, 9 out of 19 (47%) had engaged at some point with the IWW, 2 had been members of the SLP, while Foster and Browder were active in the Syndicalist League. New York figured strongly in terms of geopolitical roots but other areas such as Ohio and Kansas were strongly represented.

The core Communist leadership: snapshots of the cadre, 1924–1927

Cleveland was the birthplace and launching pad for the political career of Charles Ruthenberg (1882–1927) who personified the element of continuity in Communist leadership from 1919 and the CPA to the threshold of the Third Period. The child of German Lutheran immigrants – his father was a longshoreman turned tavernkeeper – he was formed in the radicalization and propaganda politics which stimulated the formation of the SP and IWW. Organizational skills and speaking tours ensured his appointment as a fulltime organizer; this in turn bolstered his profile. A regional rather than national leader before World War I, he developed as a shrewd politician rather than a visionary leader. He lacked the charisma of a Gene Debs and the theoretical fluency of Louis Boudin or Louis Fraina. His credentials burnished by opposition to the war and imprisonment, Ruthenberg emerged as a key Communist in the era of “the revolutionary offensive.” Acknowledging the weight of the language federations *and*

²² It is simplistic to see the split as between Ruthenberg and Lovestone’s advocacy of political action and the trade union line of the Foster faction. Orientations to the labor movement and cultural differences *were* relevant and embodied in the arguments about whether the WP’s headquarters should be located in “proletarian” Chicago, where the TUEL had its center, or cosmopolitan New York. The specific issues in contention changed over time and conflict was always circumscribed by mutual acceptance of the Comintern’s political supremacy.

the imperative to reach American workers, but ill-versed in Bolshevism, critics saw him as an equivocator. He split – for some belatedly – from the CPA but pursued reconciliation and unity, Americanization and legality.

Once in the WP, he proved unable to win over his opponents and contributed to the long-running dilemma: leaders had to combine attempting to build working-class support for the party with factionalizing to control the party. Party secretary until his death, and the unlikely beneficiary of posthumous cultism, he remained ambitious, personally colourless, politically devious, and theoretically unsophisticated. Basing himself on conviction that the leading role of the Comintern was non-negotiable, he genuinely attempted to hold the party together and treated adversaries with respect. He remained a factionalist who projected himself as above faction, a pillar of convention despite his philandering,²³ Ruthenberg was “a plain fellow ... it did not make much difference what he ate ... he was not a drinking man.”²⁴ His loyalty and ordinariness invited Comintern imprinting; respectability and aloofness facilitated his casting as a figurehead. There were parallels with the later Browder. Ruthenberg’s journey illustrates how, based on its constructive role between 1919 and 1922, a rebellious American socialist came to internalize the authority of an increasingly undemocratic, hierarchical, state-dominated Comintern. It raises critical questions about the ideological fragility of the pre-1917 American left.

²³ John Beck, “Ruthenberg, Charles (1882–1927),” in *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, ed. Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr (New York and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 340–44; C. Oakley Johnson, *The Day is Coming: Life of Charles E. Ruthenberg* (New York: International Publishers, 1957). Married since 1904 to Rosaline Nickel, the daughter of German immigrants, Ruthenberg conducted an affair with the manager of the WP Research Department, the Communist journalist, divorced wife of the WP’s agricultural expert, Harold Ware, and former daughter-in-law of Ella Reeve Bloor, Clarissa Ware. She died in 1923, allegedly after an illegal abortion: Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939), 153–54; Lement Harris, *Harold Ware, 1890–1935: Agricultural Pioneer, USA and USSR, Paper No. 3*, American Institute of Marxist Studies; Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of The American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 442, note 16. Ruthenberg’s son, Daniel, born in 1905, played little role in the party. The party leader was subsequently involved with Anna Damon, see below, p. 59.

²⁴ “Memories of C.E. Ruthenberg by Charles Dirba: Extracts from 1940 Interview by Oakley C. Johnson and Ann Rivington, 1940”, edited by Tim Davenport, at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1940/0000-dirba-johnsoninterview.pdf>.

His friend and adjunct, the avuncular Munich-born Catholic, Max Bedacht (1883–1972), traversed a similar path. The illegitimate son of a cook, he left school at 13, becoming a barber while accumulating experience of socialism in Switzerland. Emigrating to New York in 1908 in the aftermath of the financial collapse of a barbers’ cooperative and editing socialist papers in Detroit and San Francisco, Bedacht was a CLP charter member and close associate of Ruthenberg and Lovestone in the WP. His capitulation to Stalin and self-criticism in 1929 provokes questions about the relationship of Stalinism and religion.²⁵ Lacking Ruthenberg’s ambition, front, and managerial know-how as well as Lovestone’s ruthlessness and political savvy, deficient in theoretical and organizational acumen, Bedacht was an old-time agitator. But he knew the rules of the game, serving on the ECCI and acting as a link with the Comintern and Soviet intelligence after 1929. Downgraded by Lovestone, touching the top in 1929–1930 when he became acting secretary but side-lined by Browder, his career demonstrated how a family man – he was devoted to his wife, Elizabeth, while one of his daughters assisted in the WP office and Max Jr was involved in New York youth politics – of conservative inclinations, could become a Stalinist votary. Through the 1930s, Bedacht worked in the party’s institutions, notably the International Workers’ Order, before being expelled for leftism in 1948 and taking up chicken farming.²⁶

Like Ruthenberg and Bedacht, Jay Lovestone (1897–1990) represented continuity with 1919. Unlike them, he was of a generation which entered politics via the post-1917 SP

²⁵ Bedacht was conscious of the influence of Catholicism and the formidable opposition the Vatican represented. It was, he believed, one of “the most consistent counter-revolutionary forces in society;” but “if we revolutionists have not already learned the lessons in our experience we could learn the value of ideological unity and organizational centralization from the Catholic Church:” quoted in Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (1957; New York: Praeger, 1962), 160. Unity and centralization were, of course, underpinned by authority and in his Canossa-style submission to Stalin, Bedacht echoed the doctrine of papal infallibility he practised in his youth: “we not only accept the decision as a matter of discipline but we accept the correctness of the decision as a matter of recognizing the international and ideological superiority of the Comintern over ourselves:” quoted in Draper, *American Communism*, 421.

²⁶ Like others, he was reconciled with the party before his death: Harvey Klehr, “Bedacht, Max (1883–1972),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 11–12; Roger Keeran, “International Workers’ Order,” in *Encyclopaedia of the American Left*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 379–80.

left and the CPA. His single-mindedness and acumen were vital to the success of Ruthenberg's caucus. Raised in the Bronx, where his father, a Rabbi in Molchad, Lithuania, became a caretaker, Lovestone came to America as a child. Friends of his youth included Weinstone, WP activist, Ella Goldberg who married Bertram Wolfe, and an ornament of the Great American Songbook, the lyricist of "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow", Isidore "Yip" Harburg.²⁷ Having discovered Communism at City College, and worked briefly as a statistician and social worker thereafter, Lovestone was sufficiently well-known by 1919 to be elected to the first CC of the CPA. Emerging from the campaign against "undergroundism" as the leader's *homme d'affaire* and determined to prove that, contrary to the discourse of the Foster group, an intellectual could become a Bolshevik leader, he nonetheless bemoaned the demands of a job which left little space for private life, jokingly describing Ruthenberg as his "wife." Ambitious and power-hungry, he still found time to begin a dalliance with Clarissa Ware, an infatuation which ended acrimoniously when she left him for Ruthenberg. In an extreme example of the misogyny of some cadres, Lovestone excoriated Ware's attraction to power, dismissing her as "afflicted with a college education and totally devoid of any moral integrity ... she typifies the animal that makes all women so repugnant to me."²⁸

Lovestone was formed almost entirely within the party, indeed within its elite; he always remained an inner-party politician. Ruthless and relentless, schooled by Pepper in Comintern realpolitik, by 1927 he had constructed a following at the top of the party sufficient, with agile maneuvering, to succeed Ruthenberg as national secretary. He

²⁷ Harburg also wrote the lyrics for Groucho Marx's "Lydia the Tattooed Lady". In comparison, Harburg's wartime collaboration with Jerome Kern, "And Russia is her Name," represented a lapse into *kitsch*.

²⁸ Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist and Spymaster* (New York: Random House, 1999) [Google Books online, no pagination]. For a kinder estimation of Ware, see Joseph Freedman, *An American Testament* (London: Gollancz, 1938). Lovestone, it is claimed, also pursued Cannon's future partner, Rose Karsner, but never married. Under the political ferocity, he seems to have been capable of acts of kindness, even to political antagonists: Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 233, 472, note 100.

maximized the advantages the post offered and by the March 1929 convention commanded an overwhelming majority before his removal by the more ruthless and powerful Stalin. Unlike Thälmann, Thorez, Pollitt and others, Lovestone lacked the proletarian credentials, the solidity, and arguably the restricted political imagination required of a Stalinist leader. Refusing to accept exile and breaking with the party, in later life he combined successive careers as Communist oppositionist and anti-Communist adviser to union leaders with espionage for the Soviets and subsequently the CIA. It would be simplistic to identify his politics in 1929 with those of Bukharin and the Right Opposition or exaggerate his attachment to “American Exceptionalism.” He was ready to accept the left turn – so long as he led it in America. It was the Comintern, not Lovestone, who recognized an incorrigible factionalist, insusceptible to “iron discipline” when they saw one and proved unwilling. His development in the 1930s, as a supporter of the International Communist Opposition, possessed elements of both continuation and scission. His subsequent break with the left reinforces questions about the relationship between personal development, political disillusionment and material self-interest.²⁹

The son of a carpenter, William Weinstone (1897–1985) shared Lovestone’s Lithuanian and Jewish antecedents, City College education, relative lack of experience and blooding in the CPA. New York district secretary in the 1920s, Weinstone was less than consistent in his support for the Ruthenberg-Lovestone caucus, endorsing the “end of factionalism” initiative of 1926–27, contesting Lovestone’s succession, and remaining in the party when the latter’s supporters were expelled. Married to Gertrude, the sister of Carl Haessler who ran the Federated Press in the WP interest, Weinstone was attracted to power but outflanked by Lovestone in 1927 and Browder in the 1929–1931 interregnum. Axed as

²⁹ Morgan, *Covert Life*; Paul Le Blanc and Tim Davenport, *The American Exceptionalism of Jay Lovestone* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Robert J. Alexander, *The Right Opposition: The Lovestoneites and the International Communist Opposition of the 1930s* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981).

Michigan organizer in an argument over the popular front in the CIO, he remained an active Communist until his death.³⁰ Six years older, the trajectory of Benjamin Gitlow (1891–1965) illustrated the changing faces of Communist cadres in the foundation years. The son of a New Jersey factory worker from Russia, Gitlow started his career as a department store clerk and a dedicated, long-standing SP member. Blacklisted while organizing clothing workers, he worked in the garment industry, becoming a journalist and ephemeral member of the New York legislature. A collaborator of Reed in the CLP and considered by the authorities as an able leader who “would make America a Red Ruby in the Red Treasure Chest of the Red Terror,”³¹ under threat of a long prison sentence, Gitlow joined “the Geese”. Deserting “undergroundism,” he emerged, partly under Pepper’s guidance, as the trade union expert of the Ruthenberg–Lovestone faction. His wife, Badana Zeitlin, remained in the background but his mother, Kate, played a significant part in WP affairs as an organizer of garment workers and secretary of the party’s Women’s Committee. Unlike Weinstone, Gitlow joined the Lovestone splinter group in 1929 – together with Kate who was likewise expelled – before splitting to form the Communist Workers’ League in 1933 and graduating to anti-Communism by the end of the decade.³²

Another member of the Ruthenberg faction, Louis Engdahl (1884–1932), enrolled in the SP in 1907, after studying at the University of Minnesota and becoming a journalist. His conversion to Communism was belated, but there can be no doubt about his convictions and courage: in 1919 he was sentenced to 20 years in prison for anti-war activity, a sentence subsequently commuted. However, it was 1921 before, together with William F. Kruse, Moissaye Olgin, J.B. Salutsky, Trachtenberg and the Workers’ Council, he joined the WP. Engdahl edited the *Daily Worker*, 1923–27, subsequently representing the party at the

³⁰ Harvey Klehr, “Weinstone, William (1897–1985),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 409.

³¹ “The Gitlow Case (1920)” at: <http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/trials.php?tid=14>.

³² Harvey Klehr, “Gitlow, Benjamin (1891–1965),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 156–57.

Comintern. He remained loyal to Moscow after the 1929 exodus until he died in Europe in 1932 while a leader of the International Red Aid. He possessed little direct experience of workers' struggles and few pretensions to party paramountcy; he was considered remote, self-contained and prey to emotional insecurity. His demise provoked a dispute between his abandoned wife and new partner, the party functionary, Harriet Silverman. When Pauline Engdahl demanded his personal effects, Silverman staked a counterclaim. Demonstrating that political discourse had its part in "private life," she dismissed her rival's behaviour as smacking of the "rotten capitalist ideology, hypocrisy and smug righteousness that we repudiate. More than that, it has the peculiar characteristic of a social-fascist."³³ Sitting in a Solomonic judgement, the party divided the property.

Unlike Engdahl, who was the son of a carpenter, Bob Minor (1884–1952), came from the middle-class – his father was an unsuccessful lawyer who ended up a successful judge. Adverse circumstances pushed him into itinerant labor. Active in the IWW, SP and the Carpenters' Union, he became a prestigious political cartoonist and anarcho-syndicalist, hostile to Bolshevism, despite a visit to the Soviet Union. It was 1920 before he aligned himself with Communism and "undergroundism." A reconstructed member of the Goose Caucus, like Engdahl, Minor demonstrated that preoccupations beyond politics and an initially diffident approach to Communism were no barriers to progress in the WP and a lifelong dedication to Soviet orthodoxy. A Southern gentleman from San Antonio, Texas, his companion during the foundation years was the socialist journalist, Mary Heaton Vorse. He left Vorse for the illustrator, Lydia Gibson, who remained a faithful Stalinist into the 1960s. In Communist iconography, Minor was "Fighting Bob," the model for Don Stevens in Dos

³³ Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 282; Silverman subsequently authored the hagiography, *J. Louis Engdahl: Revolutionary Working Class Leader* (New York: Workers Library, 1935); *American Labor Who's Who*, ed. De Leon, s.v. "J. Louis Engdahl", 66; Harvey Klehr, "Engdahl, J. Louis (1884–1932)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 129.

Passos' *USA*.³⁴ Under the scrutiny of scholars, this “huge man with extraordinary bushy eyebrows ... intensely staring eyes and a booming voice,” was an artist of genius who “became a political hack.”³⁵ He “lacked the intellectual and moral qualities required of the independent leader ... he became the prototype of the pliable Stalinist functionary.”³⁶ The record reveals a Vicar of Bray who lionized Lovestone and Browder in turn, deserting each when expedient. His “outBrowdering Browder” made even Browder uncomfortable.³⁷ His consolation was to be held in high regard by the rank and file.³⁸

Like Minor, the prematurely silver-haired “Johnny” Ballam’s early politics exhibited volatility before subsiding into orthodoxy. Born in England in 1882 to Dutch, Jewish parents – his father was a cigar maker – the family emigrated to the US two years later and settled in Boston, where he was apprenticed as an engraver. He enrolled in the IWW in 1905 and the SP in 1912 and was instrumental in launching the CPA in Massachusetts. A CC member, he became a leader of the 1922 “Left Opposition” until presented with a Comintern ultimatum. Like others, he was testament to the Comintern’s ability to convert and assimilate those who once opposed its policies. Later aligned with the Ruthenberg group – apart from an interlude supporting the Cannon-Weinstone anti-factional movement – Ballam was unusual in it, given his links to organized labor. An energetic labor organizer, he stood for gubernatorial posts in Massachusetts and New Jersey in the WP interest.³⁹

More striking was the rise and fall of John Pepper, born József Schwartz, also known as József Pogány (1886–1938), a veteran of the insurrections in Hungary – where he was part

³⁴ Dee Garrison, *Mary Heaton Vorse: The Life of an American Insurgent* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 186. For Minor as plaster saint, see Joseph North, *Robert Minor* (New York: International Publishers, 1956) and Draper, *Roots*, 418, note 13.

³⁵ Draper, *Roots*, 123, 126.

³⁶ Howe and Coser, *American Communist Party*, 65–66.

³⁷ Howe and Coser, *American Communist Party*, 44–45, quoting Elizabeth Gurley Flynn.

³⁸ *American Labor Who's Who*, ed. De Leon, s. v. “Minor, Robert,” 162; Maurice Isserman, “Minor, Robert (1884–1952),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 275–76.

³⁹ US Federal Census, 1900, Roxbury, Boston; Draper, *Roots*, 175, 184, 335–40, 335–58; Draper, *American Communism*, 128, 236, 255, 266, 331, 419–20; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 142–45.

of Bela Kun's Soviet government – and Germany. Pepper's family was Jewish – his father, Vilmos Schwartz, was a tradesman who became a minor civil servant – but he kicked over the traces and assumed a Magyar identity at the University of Budapest. He arrived in America as part of the 1922 Comintern delegation with a brief to reorganize the Hungarian Federation. In the guise of a Comintern potentate, Pepper inserted himself into the WP leadership and molded it: he nurtured the Ruthenberg-Lovestone group and took a leading role on issues from “Americanization” and the Farmer-Labor Party to “the Negro question” and Trotskyism. Incurring the enmity of Foster, he was recalled to Moscow in 1924 but continued to influence WP policy and briefly returned in 1928 as Stalinization loomed. “Dressed like a dude,” fond of cognac, and possessed of personal magnetism, the question remains as to why he was able to exercise continuing power in the party as his claims to Comintern authority were questioned. That he might provide the Ruthenberg group with a passport to power is part of the answer. But their behaviour underlines not only the extent to which the WP was a site of Byzantine power struggles, but the depth of gullibility where Moscow was concerned. Pepper's partnership with Irén Czóbol, whom he married in 1909, did not impede this unlikely Casanova and on Gitlow's account he too was numbered among Ware's suitors. In the end, Stalinism caught up with him. Arrested by the NKVD in 1937, he was executed the following year.⁴⁰

The limited ability of the WP to develop theorists and the roles it assigned to intellectuals was evident from the career of Alexander Trachtenberg (1884–1966). Following a spell in the Tsar's army as an engineer, Trachtenberg, who was born in Odessa, the son of a businessman, participated in the 1905 Revolution, serving a prison sentence before moving to the United States. After studying for a doctorate in economics at Yale, he worked at the SP-

⁴⁰ Thomas L. Sakmyster, *A Communist Odyssey: The Life of József Pogány/John Pepper* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012); *passim*; Gitlow, *I Confess*, 136, a text sometimes prone to embroidery.

backed Rand School of Social Sciences. But he approached Communism with caution: an opponent of the underground party, he remained in the SP and campaigned for its affiliation to the Comintern, joining the WP in 1921 with the Workers' Council. A leader of the Jewish Federation, Americanized in comparison with some Russian activists, he supported the Ruthenberg group and served as a delegate to the Fourth Comintern Congress, where he was elected to the ECCI. Trachtenberg found his niche as interpreter and translator of ideas rather than an original thinker, generally popularizing received dogma and building a base as director of party schools and founder of its publishing house. He was active into the 1950s, surviving prosecution in the 1952 Smith Act case.⁴¹

Heading the other main faction, Bill Foster (1881–1961), the WP's only celebrity, came under increasing challenge from within the Comintern and his own caucus as the decade developed. Unlike the majority of the core, he played negligible part in the troubled birth of American Communism. But he stood alone as a leader of the trade union organizing drives of 1917–20, and in initially possessing a base in the Chicago AFL, a direct link to the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), and a circle of supporters oriented towards organized labor. As a working-class leader, Foster lacked the stature and resonance of Debs. A Comintern report reflected on his stunted political growth: "He's a poor Marxist ... If you analyse his activity you might conclude that he is still more a syndicalist than a Communist ... someone must direct him in the areas of theory ..."⁴² As a party politician, his leadership of the WP 1923–1925 represented his high point. By mid-decade, his aura as a front-line organizer was fading. He had become an oppositional factionalist, a manager whose positive image with rank-and-file workers contrasted with high-handed treatment of Communists he

⁴¹ Draper, *Roots*, 98–99, 142–43; John Gerber, "Trachtenberg, Alexander (1884–1966)", in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 387–88.

⁴² Quoted in James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 187.

considered subordinates. The crumbling of his defiance of the Comintern's termination of his leadership in 1925 was a milestone in his assimilation to orthodoxy.

The son of a Fenian father and Anglo-Scot mother, raised in the Philadelphia slums and formed in an itinerant existence, Foster began as a partisan of William Jennings Bryan and the Democrats. His political awakening led him to the SP and IWW before, influenced by European militants, he formed the Syndicalist League to “bore from within” the AFL unions. Despite failure to oppose the war and acceptance of AFL legality, his 1920 launch of the Trade Union Education League (TUEL) as the means to permeate the labor mainstream dovetailed with trends within Leninism. As single-minded as Ruthenberg in his determination to dominate and conviction that the party's all-important industrial work could not be entrusted to “petit-bourgeois elements,” Foster found his attempts to adapt Communism to trade unionism thwarted by the AFL leaders, Pepper, Ruthenberg, Lovestone, and the Comintern. His acceptance of dual unionism and the replacement of the TUEL with a Trade Union Unity League as a center for new unions in 1928 sealed his subordination to Moscow. Having burned his boats with the AFL bureaucracy, he had nowhere else to go. Refused the top job after Lovestone's exit and dogged by ill-health, his best days were behind him.⁴³

The prize he cherished fell to Earl Browder (1891–1973), a man of 1920, the CLP, and the drive towards American workers. The Wichita-born son of a former farmer and teacher, he had been a Foster supporter since his Syndicalist League days – although they parted company over the war. He was instrumental in Foster joining the party, organizing his

⁴³ Barrett, *William Z. Foster*; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*. Esther Abramowitz, who married Foster in 1918, was an advocate of free love who became involved in the Syndicalist League together with her then companion, the socialist journalist and future Communist, Jay Fox. Outwardly, the marriage seems to have been conventional, with Esther taking little part in party affairs and playing a supportive role. None of Esther's three children were involved in Communist politics, although Sylvia married the Irish-born Joseph Manley, a leading light in the TUEL before his early death. It was hinted that Foster had a relationship with Rebecca Grecht, later a district organizer, ILS student and IWO functionary; a Comintern representative reported: “it is rumoured that he has a weakness for women” – but no further evidence is forthcoming: Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 61–63, 85–88, 185–86, 203–4, 269–70; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 52–53, 71, 75–76.

attendance at the 1921 RILU Congress in Moscow. Active in the TUEL's early successes in the AFL and its subsequent reverses, Browder worked for RILU in Moscow from 1926, becoming on his own account "a pupil of Stalin". In the following two years, he helped form RILU's Pan-Pacific Secretariat in the Far East. The episode established his reliability in Moscow while his absence shielded him from potentially damaging rivalries at home. As Foster's star waned, Browder, attuned to Moscow's machinations, grew more confident and assertive. Advertising his mid-West roots, comfortable with realpolitik, industrious and a clever if theoretically shallow operator, he appeared promising leadership material. Once considered "Foster's pageboy" and "a Uriah Heep," he became part of the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA) secretariat that consolidated Stalinism and emerged as party supremo after Lovestone was deposed.⁴⁴

He was, his biographer concluded, emotionally cold and devoid of internal conflict – excepting the turn from anti-fascism to the doctrine of imperialist war in 1939. He abandoned his first wife, Gladys Groves, despite her ill-health, and took up with Raissa Luganovskaya, streetwise and ambitious, a Soviet lawyer who worked for RILU. They went through a form of marriage and in 1933 she entered the United States illegally. Their union symbolized American Communism's marriage with Moscow. Their children were kept away from the party and in accordance with their parents' ambitions and the CPUSA's embrace of respectability, arrested by their father's fall from grace, grew into middle-class citizens of America's post-war boom. Browder was a servant of Soviet policy, amenable to Moscow's methods, including espionage: he himself recruited agents while his sister Margaret, who partnered in turn the WP activists, Harrison George and Thomas Sullivan, worked for the NKVD and married the Soviet agent, "Thomas Meadows." Browder's dramatic removal from

⁴⁴ James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), *passim*.

power confirmed the lessons of the earlier cases of Hourwich, Ballam, Foster, and Lovestone: American party leaders were nothing without Soviet patronage. He spent the rest of his life on the margins, applying unsuccessfully for re-entry to the CPUSA and seeking refuge in the SP he had renounced in 1913.⁴⁵

Jim Cannon (1890–1974) also hailed from Kansas, where he collaborated with Browder as the new movement emerged and helped bring him into the Communist fold. Sharing Foster’s Irish background and early induction into working life, experience as an IWW organizer between 1911 and 1913 marked him and Cannon never signed up to Foster’s variant of syndicalism. At one with the latter’s mission to root Communism in the organized working class, his formation as a Communist preceded Foster’s and he was among CC survivors from the foundation years who had fought for Americanization and a legal party. Cannon became active in the CLP and developed skills as speaker and writer, agitator and organizer, emerging as chair of the WP CC. A leading light in the Foster faction, he was central to assembling the support that by 1924 enabled it to take the leadership. Distancing himself from Foster when the Comintern handed the majority to Ruthenberg in 1925, he formed his own faction which maintained an independent stance and an ultra-loyal line on the Comintern.⁴⁶ Zealous in proselytizing for “Bolshevization” which posed “the final liquidation of Trotskyism” as a central objective, an admirer of Zinoviev who envisioned the WP and the Comintern as “one inseparable whole,” Cannon insisted on “a centralized party prohibiting factions, tendencies and groups. It must be a monolithic party, hewn of one piece.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ryan, *Earl Browder*, 16–17, 27–29, 74–76, 137–39, 161–69.

⁴⁶ “I was then a convinced ‘Cominternist.’ I had faith in the wisdom and also in the fairness of the Russian leaders. I thought they had made a mistake through false information ... I thought Foster’s attitude was *disloyal* ... I went along with this treacherous double-play,” (original emphasis): James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism: Report of a Participant* (1962: New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992), 136–37. For Cannon generally, see Palmer, *James P. Cannon, passim*.

⁴⁷ *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920–1928* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 1992), 237. Cannon is quoting from the Theses of the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern. For “Bolshevization,” see McIlroy and Campbell, “Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern:” 11–15.

Registering scant success in internal struggles, 1925–1928, he was assiduous in extra-party activity, building the International Labor Defense and participating in trade union work. His embrace of Trotskyism demonstrated the possibility of cadres making new choices when Stalinism became ascendant. For Cannon had failed to speak out against the Comintern’s – and the WP’s – repeated endorsement of condemnations of the Russian oppositions between 1923 and 1927, retrospectively citing lack of information and immersion in national struggle. “Doubts and discontents” only emerged when Zinoviev joined Trotsky and they were expelled in 1927; Cannon’s doubts were never politically articulated.⁴⁸ In terms of political practice, his rejection of the road he had travelled since 1919 was unforeseen and his eleventh-hour conversion after reading Trotsky’s *Draft Program of the Comintern* at the Sixth World Congress came as a shock.⁴⁹ Expelled in 1928, Cannon went on to become the patriarch of American Trotskyism.

His closest friend, William F. Dunne (1887–1953) – his given name was Willis – a blunt, outspoken warrior, born in Kansas City but later domiciled in Butte, Montana, shared Cannon’s Irish Catholic background, appetite for alcohol, and down-to-earth philosophy of Communism. Dunne’s father was an Irish railroad laborer who emigrated in 1866, his mother the daughter of a French Canadian. After an unsuccessful spell at the Catholic College of St Thomas in Minnesota, he became an electrician, working in a number of north-western states, at one time trying his hand as a prize-fighter before being elected an official of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and vice-president of the Montana

⁴⁸ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 186–87; James P. Cannon, *The History of American Trotskyism* (1944; New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 45–59; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 304–30, refers to disparaging remarks about Stalin in 1928, 205, 313.

⁴⁹ Cannon married Lista Makimson, his schoolteacher from Kansas City, in 1913. He left Lista for Rose Karsner, a WP activist estranged from her husband, the socialist journalist and Debs biographer, David Fulton Karsner, in 1924. Cannon and Karsner remained companions and Trotskyists until her death in 1968. Like others in the Foster faction, Cannon liked a drink, although “more serious bouts with the bottle” seem to have occurred in the early 1930s after he quit the party. After his marital difficulties he seems to have led a conventional family life and the children, Carl, Ruth and Walta, were not significantly engaged in revolutionary politics. See “Reminiscences: Sam Gordon”, in *James P. Cannon As We Knew Him*, ed. Les Evans (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976), 56–58.

Federation of Labor. An SP member from 1910, he was elected to the state legislature on the Democratic ticket in 1918 and joined the CLP the following year. His wife, Marguerite, was a long-time Communist. Dunne worked closely with Cannon through a decade in which he served on the Comintern executive and co-edited the *Daily Worker*. His fundamental loyalty was to the Comintern. Disenchanted with Foster, Dunne refused to follow Cannon out of the party and even endured a spell as its emissary to Outer Mongolia in 1928. But heavy drinking descended into alcoholism, perhaps accelerated by the tragic death of his 7-year old son in 1925 in a Chicago auto accident. Estrangement from his friends and brothers who became Trotskyists cannot have helped. Restive with Browderism, Dunne was expelled from the CPUSA in 1946.⁵⁰

A leader of the WP in Chicago where he settled after arriving in America in 1916, Arne Swabeck (1890–1986) was active in the SP, editing its Scandinavian paper, and the IWW before aligning with the CLP in 1919. Born in Denmark to Lutheran parents, he travelled in Europe and the Near East as a painter, later combining work as WP district organizer with activism in the AFL painters affiliate. A leader in the unions but a follower in politics, Swabeck supported Cannon as the Foster faction fragmented from 1925 and acted as his lieutenant in the early days of the Communist League of America (CLA). After four decades as a Trotskyist, he converted to Maoism in 1968.⁵¹ Theory in the Foster group, which went only a little beyond pondering Comintern thinking, was largely the preserve of Alexander Bittelman (1890–1982), both praised and deprecated for his Talmudic talents. A

⁵⁰ US Federal Census, 1900, Little Falls, Minnesota; Kurt Wetzel, “The Making of an American Radical: Bill Dunne in Butte,” (MA Dissertation, University of Montana, 1970), 4–7; Harvey Klehr, “Dunne, William (1887–1953),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 124–25. Gitlow, *I Confess*, 249; William F. Dunne, *The Struggle Against Opportunism in the Labor Movement* (New York: Communication Committee, n.d. 1947); *New York Times*, 24 September 1953. It was claimed that, after his expulsion, Dunne unsuccessfully attempted to join Cannon’s Socialist Workers’ Party, his former comrade allegedly shouting: “Throw the bastard down the stairs” upon learning of his arrival at SWP headquarters: Wetzel, “Making of An American Radical,” 127, citing an SWP member as his source.

⁵¹ Paul Le Blanc, “Swabeck, Arne (b.1890),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 373–75; *Dog Days: James P. Cannon vs Max Shachtman in the Communist League of America, 1931–1933* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 2002).

Russian immigrant, former Bund official and Siberian exile, Bittelman, who had experience as a trade unionist back home, became a leader of the SP's Jewish Federation and a CPA charter member, valued for his ability to read Russian. A former printer who qualified as a professional engineer, this sometime attorney for the Russian Federation leader, Nicholas Hourwich, mutated into an ultra-loyal Cominternist. Comfortable in a secondary role, Bittelman received little credit from any quarter. Accepting a period of exile, he survived 1929 with difficulty but found his own voice in criticism of the popular front accommodations before belatedly embracing his own version of populism in the 1950s which provoked his expulsion.⁵²

Like Swabeck, Martin Abern (1898–1949), among the youngest members of the core group, was a follower of Cannon. “Sturdy of frame, square shouldered, broad in the chest and with a bull neck ... his sleeves always rolled up for the ‘menial’ work,” he had been brought to Minneapolis from Bessarabia in the Russian empire by Jewish parents in 1902.⁵³ At 15 he was active in the IWW and the SP youth. Expelled from the University of Minnesota where he excelled at football, for anti-war activity, Abern was a charter member of the CLP. He campaigned for the WP in Minnesota and moved to Chicago in 1922 to become secretary of the Young Workers’ League and a delegate to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. He was responsible for placing the League on a firm footing and connecting it with popular trends; its press optimistically designated the “flappers” of “the Jazz Age” heralds of “a mass revolt of youth.”⁵⁴ Developing as a functionary, Abern worked with Cannon as assistant secretary of the International Labor Defense before being expelled with him in 1928. Aligned with Max

⁵² Harvey Klehr, “Bittelman, Alexander (1890–1982),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 27–29; Klehr et al, *Soviet World*, 44–46; Palmer, *James P. Cannon, passim*; “Alexander Bittelman: Biographical Characteristics and Political Activities”, [1929], Files of the CPUSA, reel 128, delo 1664, frames 12–18, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁵³ Max Shachtman, “Martin Abern,” *Labor Action*, 9 May 1949.

⁵⁴ Peter Drucker, *Max Shachtman and His Left: A Socialist's Odyssey Through the “American Century”* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994), 16–17.

Shachtman in the faction fight in the Socialist Workers' Party in 1939, and following him into the Workers' Party, Abern died of a heart attack while riding a bus in 1949.⁵⁵

Contingent factors were significant in the formation of Communist leaders. Despite long grounding in the SP, some became dissenters in the foundation years before easing into orthodoxy under the Comintern's educative pressure. Alfred Wagenknecht (1881–1956), a leading light in the SP left before 1917 and the CLP from 1920, defended undergroundism as a leader of the Goose Caucus. He was another who represented continuity in the personnel but not the politics of the leadership. His Communist career suggested the patience of the Comintern in steeling its American students against leftism and subsequently schooling them in Soviet dogma. Born in Germany, Wagenknecht emigrated to Cleveland as a teenager. He joined the SP, opposed the war, became secretary of the Ohio state party, and married his fellow Communist, Elmer Allison's sister, Hortense. Living down his opposition to "the liquidators," he was a staple of the Foster faction after 1923. A lifelong Communist, he performed a number of roles as an organizer of strikes and the Friends of the Soviet Union, campaigner for the unemployed and against fascism, and party fund-raiser into the 1940s.⁵⁶

The political diversity within the core leadership was illustrated by the idiosyncratic German, Ludwig Lore (1875–1942), who before his expulsion in 1925 headed his own small caucus frequently allied to the Foster faction. From a Jewish family, educated at Berlin University and active in the SDP, Lore, who had worked in textile factories, came to America in 1903, joining the IWW and SP and becoming well-known as a journalist. Influenced by Trotsky during the latter's stay in New York in 1916, Lore was unusual in the perceptive stance he took towards Zinoviev's Comintern and was regularly condemned for Second International proclivities. Happily married to Lily Schreppe with three boys, Karl, Kurt and

⁵⁵ Albert Glotzer, "Abern, Martin (1898–1949)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 1–2 suggests that the area of Abern's birth was Romanian-speaking.

⁵⁶ John Gerber, "Wagenknecht, Alfred (1881–1956)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 399–400.

Eugene, Lore's uxoriousness contrasted with his political adventures. With a base in the German and also the Jewish federations and control of the influential *New Yorker Volkszeitung*, he was the only WP leader who, together with his then lieutenant Olgin, got things right over the Farmer-Labor Party and the only cadre to defend Trotsky in 1924. He was removed from his positions when his criticism converged with that of the Russian oppositionists over attempts to develop a Labor Party via La Follette's 1924 presidential campaign. His isolation and dismissal signified the Comintern's conquest of the WP cadre. But Lore had always been considered a maverick and a problem the Comintern was determined to resolve. He was never a political Trotskyist in the 1920s, although he came close to Cannon's group in the following decade. He later became embroiled with Soviet intelligence and provided information to the FBI.⁵⁷

From change within stability towards transformation: new blood and old hands, 1924–1927

Having emphasised the extent of stability, we need to assess innovation in the three CCs elected between 1924 and 1927 and the degree to which the established leadership core was replenished by new blood. The composition of the 1924 and 1925 committees (see **Tables 1 and 2**) signified the triumph of continuity in relative terms with restricted turnover in representatives. Erik Fahle Burman and Abern were the only members of the 1924 CC who had not served previously while the 1925 convention elected only 5 new activists – Phil Aronberg, Bud Reynolds, John Schmies, Jack Stachel and Bill White – to a committee enlarged from 13 to 25 members. With the exception of Abern and Stachel, all were trade union activists. The party was beginning – no more than that – to put down roots in organized

⁵⁷ Harvey Klehr, "Lore, Ludwig (1875–1942)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 252–53; John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 155–59.

labor. Newcomers constituted 15 percent of the CC in 1924 and 20 percent the following year, a turnover rate which reinforced the importance of the continuing core of leaders.

Erik Fahle Burman (1882–1937), born in Haparanda, a Finnish-speaking area in north Sweden, son of a timber mill supervisor, was a leading figure in the Finnish Federation. He had accumulated industrial experience as an official of the Western Federation of Miners and subsequently the Carpenters' Union. Joining the WP with the Finnish Federation in 1921 after a brief sojourn in the SP, he became a supporter of the Foster faction.⁵⁸ With the replacement of the Foster leadership by the Ruthenberg group in 1925, Jacob “Jack” Stachel (1900–1965) replaced Abern in the leadership of the YWL and sat on that year's CC. His parents were Polish Jews from Galicia – then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire – who emigrated to New York when Stachel was eleven. He joined the WP in 1924 and was the first of the post-foundation generation to achieve high office – taking only 12 months to reach the CC and two years to become New York District Secretary. Placing his career and the Comintern above domestic loyalties, he deserted Lovestone in 1929 and, playing to Moscow, continued a meteoric rise by succeeding Foster at the head of the TUUL. Stachel emerged as a Browder loyalist and CPUSA organizational secretary before demotion after the latter's demise. Weathering a long sentence after conviction under the Smith Act, he remained active into the 1950s.⁵⁹

Philip Aronberg (b.1884), a tailor who emigrated to Chicago from Russia, joined the WP in 1921 – at the relatively advanced age of 37. Another Jewish immigrant, union activist, and Foster supporter, Aronberg campaigned for the WP in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers in the early 1920s and represented the needle trades on the TUEL executive board.

⁵⁸ Information from Auvo Kostianen, January 2019; *James P. Cannon and the Early Years*, 576; Michigan Death Certificates, 1921–1952.

⁵⁹ James Gilbert Ryan, “Stachel, Jack (1900–1965),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 368–70; “Who's Who of National Leaders, Communist Party, USA,” (FBI, April 1963) at: https://archive.org/details/foia_FBI_MONOGRAPH-CPUSA_Whos_Who.PDF/page/n109.

He later served with Browder in the Pan-Pacific Secretariat and was suspected of working for Soviet intelligence.⁶⁰ Michigan-born William “Bud” Reynolds (1897–1972), perhaps best remembered as the husband of songwriter Malvina Reynolds, was another charter member of the WP and Foster supporter. An official of the Carpenters’ Union and president of the Detroit AFL who switched allegiance from Foster to the Cannon caucus, Reynolds, like Aronberg, remained in the party after 1928.⁶¹ Benefiting from leadership of the party between 1923 and 1925, the Fosterites secured a strong union base on the CC. But they did not have things all their own way as the Lovestoneites made some inroads into organized labor. William J. White (1871–1935), was an American-born steelworker from Pittsburgh who briefly represented the WP at RILU, a union activist who supported the Ruthenberg faction. White’s elevation was seen by the opposition as part of an attempt to lend a proletarian hue to the WP majority. He was employed by Lovestone as an attack dog to rake up Foster’s war record and his time in the party expired when he formed part of “the delegation of ten” authorised to travel to Moscow to appeal the Comintern’s challenge to the American leadership. After his expulsion, White remained with the Lovestone Communist Opposition until his death in 1935.⁶²

By 1925, the Ruthenberg-Lovestone opposition was staking its own claim to trade union work and challenging the domination of the Fosterites. Born in the Austro-Hungarian

⁶⁰ Philip Aronberg, Draft Registration Card, Chicago, 12 September 1918; Youngsoo Bae, *Labor in Retreat: Class and Community among Men’s Clothing Workers of Chicago, 1921–1979* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 173; *Daily Worker*, 19 December 1924; <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/other/tuel/tuel.html>; Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Fridrikh Igorevitch Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 46–49; Haynes, Klehr and Vassiliev, *Spies*, 209.

⁶¹ William “Bud” Reynolds at: <https://www.geni.com/people/William-Bud-Reynolds/6000000062816661843>; <https://ocweekly.com/the-life-and-times-of-malvina-reynolds-long-beachs-most-legendary-and-hated-folk-singer-7474438/>.

⁶² James P. Cannon, *Writings and Speeches, 1928–1931: The Left Opposition in the US, 1928–1931* (New York: Monad Press, 1981), 137; Draper, *Roots*, 404; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 271, note 11, 281, notes 30, 31; Alexander, *Right Opposition*, 22, 28, 35; “William J. White”, *Workers’ Age*, 19 January 1935; William J. White, Death Certificate, New York, New York City Municipal Deaths, 1795–1949, database, *FamilySearch*, at: <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:2WR9-17K>.

empire, and first elected to the CC in 1925, John Schmies (1898–1966), an inspector/machinist in the Briggs plant in Detroit, was an adherent of the Ruthenberg faction who developed into a leader of the TUEL– and subsequently the TUUL – and the small Auto Workers Union (AWU). In 1928 it was augmented by a number of other Communist-controlled unions; but starting in the early 1920s WP supporters had gradually supplanted the SP-inclined leaders of the AWU. From 1927, Schmies led strikes and built links with the unemployed – he was a leader of the hunger marches to the Briggs factory in 1931 and Ford’s Dearborn plant in 1932 – the latter led to police shooting four strikers including Joe York, secretary of the Detroit Young Communist League (YCL). Herculean efforts attracted few victories and at best slightly increased the membership of the AWU. Despite his election as part of the majority contingent to the March 1929 CC, Schmies was far from a committed Lovestoneite. He made his peace with Foster and was elevated to the inner circle in the TUUL national office, directing the organization while Foster was in prison. Schmies’ 0.6% of the vote when he ran for Congress in 1932 typified the CPUSA’s electoral performance during the Depression. He fell from grace and was replaced by Stachel. Moves towards the united front from 1934 saw the TUUL and AWU dissolved and Schmies replaced in Detroit by Weinstone. Schmies served as organizer for the IWO in Chicago and in the late 1930s in Minneapolis.⁶³

Death and expulsion respectively ensured the absence of Ruthenberg and Lore. But as **Table 3** demonstrates, 15 members of the core as well as the 4 freshmen elected to the CC in 1925 retained their positions two years later, and were joined by two other core members,

⁶³ US Federal Census, 1920, Detroit; John Schmies, Certificate of Death, Cook County, Illinois, 17 February 1966, at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q2MX-8WFD>; Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Union* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1980), 47–48, 69–70, 86–88, 91, 134; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 43, 58–59, 422, note 38; “The Achievement of the CC Plenum: Statement of the Communist Party Majority Group,” *Revolutionary Age*, 15 November 1929, 18; John Schmies, “Organizing in Fords,” *Labor Unity*, July 1932; John Schmies, “The Open Letter and Our Tasks in the Detroit District,” *The Communist*, October 1933; Albert Fried, *Communism in America: A History in Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 126–27; *North-West Organizer*, 29 September 1938.

Trachtenberg and Wagenknecht. With the 1927 committee enlarged to include 38 representatives, the WP elected a total of 20 activists (53%) who had not figured on the 1924 and 1925 CCs – a significant change when compared with the 20 percent turnover in 1925. Some of the newcomers, however, were not so new: they had served on CCs prior to 1924. Seven of the 20 “newcomers” –Amter, Jakira, Kruse, Olgin, Swabeck, Trachtenberg, and Wagenknecht – had previous CC experience having served during the 1919–23 period. In total, 20 out of 38 members (53%) of the 1927 committee had been elected to the CC before 1923 and the majority of them (13) had sat on committees between 1919 and 1921. It is noteworthy that the leaders of the foundation years were still playing a significant role as the consolidation period neared its end. In total, the 1927 “newcomers” consisted of 7 returning “old timers” and 13 “ingenues” who comprised 34% of the committee’s membership.

Looking at the first group, Israel Amter (1881–1954), born in Denver to a Jewish father from Latvia and German mother, joined the SP in 1901 but then spent a decade in Germany as journalist, music student and SDP member. Back in the United States, he worked as a professional musician and enrolled in the CPA at its foundation. Amter initially advocated “armed insurrection” and an underground party, before graduating seamlessly from the Goose Caucus to the Ruthenberg faction under the tutelage of Pepper. He represented the WP at the Comintern in the mid-1920s, later working as a party organizer in Chicago and Cleveland, where he justified every twist and turn of Soviet policy.⁶⁴ He became secretary of the New York party and part of the CPUSA’s public face. He was commemorated in Allen Ginsburg’s stream of consciousness poem indicting an

⁶⁴ Harvey Klehr, “Amter, Israel (1881–1954),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 6–7. Cannon noted Amter’s vociferous support for Lovestone and caricatured his reaction to the events of 1929: “He awoke on that fateful morning as loyal and red hot a Lovestoneite as you could find ... At twelve o’clock he received a copy of the telegram to the effect that Lovestone was no longer kosher. One hour later he was hunting for Lovestoneites to expel from the party and was as thick with Foster as one liberty bond to another”: James P. Cannon, *Writings and Speeches, 1932–34: The Communist League, 1932–34* (New York: Monad Press, 1985), 76. The reference is to Foster’s admission he purchased war bonds during the First World War.

undemocratic, Cold War polity which mobilized memories of Jewish New Jersey: “America when I was seven Momma took me to Communist cell meetings ... Mother Bloor made me cry I once saw Israel Amter plain.”⁶⁵ Like Amter, Abraham Jakira (1889–1931) was an early member of the CLP who became a voluble leader of the Goose Caucus and a determined advocate of “undergroundism.” Born in Dubno in the Ukraine, and secretary of the WP Russian Federation in the early 1920s, “Jak”’s leftism subsided, he accepted the Comintern position, and entered the Ruthenberg camp. Although he never recovered his previous prominence, he served as a district organizer before his early death from throat cancer at the age of 42.⁶⁶

The oldest of the returnees, Moissaye Olgin (1878–1939), was a former Bundist who supported the Mensheviks in the SP’s Jewish Federation after his arrival in America in 1915. Transformed by a 1920 trip to the Soviet Union, he joined the WP with the Workers’ Council group. A partisan of Lore and admirer of Trotsky, Olgin broke with both in 1924 and as an advocate of the Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction became the party’s authority on the Trotsky deviation. A would-be intellectual, he evolved, like his friend Trachtenberg, into an exegete. Olgin subordinated his Judaism to his image of the Russian savant serving historical progress and identified that ideal with Soviet Communism. In consequence: “He devoted himself to defending the party line whatever it was or smelling out what it was going to be. If any of his friends fell into bad grace with the party, he demanded the privilege of denouncing him. With his great talents he needed only a defect of character to rise to the top.”⁶⁷ In contrast, William

⁶⁵ Allen Ginsberg, *Selected Poems, 1947–1995* (London: Harper Collins, 2001).

⁶⁶ On Gitlow’s recollection, Jakira, who Bill Dunne characterized as “cackling like a goose” at the Bridgeman Convention, provided Lovestone with the pretext to dub the partisans of illegality “the Goose Caucus”: Gitlow, *I Confess*, 133; Draper, *Roots*, 453, note 19.

⁶⁷ Draper, *Roots*, 111; Harvey Klehr, “Olgin, Moissaye (1878–1939),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 297–98; Sid Resnick, “Olgin, Moissaye, 1878–1939,” in *Encyclopaedia*, ed. Buhle, Buhle and Georgakas, 545–46; Daniel Soyer, “Soviet Travel and the Making of an American Jewish Communist: Moissaye Olgin’s Trip to Russia in 1920–1921,” *American Communist History* 4, no. 1 (2005): 1–20. Olgin exhibited reservations about the line on Zionism into the 1930s but never challenged it: Michels, “Communism and the Problem of Ethnicity,” 26–48.

Kruse (1894–1979), quit after the purge of the Lovestoneites although he did not join their splinter organization, preferring a future in the educational wing of the film industry. A leader of the SP youth, the Workers' Council and the Ruthenberg-Lovestone caucus, Kruse studied at the Comintern's International Lenin School (ILS) from 1926. The child of German and Danish Lutheran parents who settled in Hoboken, New Jersey, he served as a party organizer in Chicago before demonstrating independence in refusing to repudiate Lovestone in 1929 and thereafter breaking with Communism and the orthodoxies he had been taught in Moscow.⁶⁸

If we turn to those elevated to the CC for the first time in 1927, Bertram D. Wolfe (1896–1977), another party intellectual, was already an experienced leader of the Lovestone caucus from a German-Jewish background in Brooklyn. He joined the CPA from the SP and achieved prominence in the foundation period. But he fled to Mexico to escape repression and spent several years there before being deported back to the US in 1925. Wolfe directed the WP's Workers' School and was the party's representative to the Comintern before his expulsion in 1929. He remained a member of Lovestone's groups throughout the 1930s, eventually becoming a well-known historian of the left, commentator on Communism, Fellow of the Hoover Institution and Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He enjoyed a lifelong partnership with Ella Goldberg Wolfe (1896–2000), the daughter of a Jewish family who emigrated to Brooklyn from the Ukraine in 1906. She taught at the SP's Rand School and joined the CPA at its inception. Intelligent and articulate, she observed that in the Lovestone faction women were treated like fourth-class citizens and pushed against their circumscribed role in the Communist movement. Living into her nineties, she ended as a supporter of Ronald Reagan.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Judy Kutulas, "Kruse, William (b.1893)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 234; "William F. Kruse," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_F._Kruse.

⁶⁹ Harvey Klehr, "Wolfe, Bertram (1896–1977)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 423–24; Geoffrey Hodgson, "Ella Goldberg Wolfe," *Guardian*, 17 January 2000.

Born into the very different world of a Victorian pit village near Bishop Auckland in County Durham, England, Norman Tallentire (1886–1951) was the son of a miner who served an apprenticeship as a colliery carpenter. After travelling to Canada to join his sister in Calgary, he emigrated to America in 1916 and became an active Communist in 1920, the year he acquired US citizenship. Arrested at the Bridgeman Convention, Tallentire worked for the WP through the 1920s as a district organizer and assistant editor of the *Daily Worker*. A supporter of Ruthenberg-Lovestone, a fellow functionary remembered him as “a big man with the classic style ... one of the famed orators of the movement” who “interspersed dread prophecy and soothing homily.”⁷⁰ In the 1940s he was associated with Dunne in the opposition to Browderite revisionism. At the time of his death, Tallentire was under sentence of deportation despite disclaiming membership of the CPUSA.⁷¹ Bert Miller (1891–1973), born Benjamin Mandel in New York, was another Lovestone supporter from a Hungarian, Jewish immigrant family who attended City College and enrolled in the CPA when teaching typing to high school students. A WP district organizer in Boston and New York, he was active in the Passaic strike and served as business manager of the *Daily Worker*. Expelled in 1929, Miller resigned from Lovestone’s Communist Opposition in 1932 to join A.J. Muste’s Committee for Progressive Labor Action. From there, he evolved into a professional anti-Communist employed as a researcher for the Dies Committee and other anti-Communist investigations.⁷²

On the trade union front, Benjamin Lifshitz (b.1890), was a Russian immigrant, naturalized in 1916, who worked as a machinist for a New York tool company.⁷³ He was a

⁷⁰ Census of Great Britain, 1901, Lynesack, County Durham; Norman Tallentire, Registration Card, Salt Lake, Utah, 5 June 1917; Norman Tallentire, Naturalization declaration, Alameda, CA, 1920; George Charney, *A Long Journey* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 67.

⁷¹ “Obituary”, *New York Times*, 9 November 1951.

⁷² Alexander, *Right Opposition*, 28, 35, 63–64, 98. Harvey Klehr, “Miller, Bert (1891–1973),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 274, states that Miller stemmed from a Russian Jewish immigrant family. However, the US Federal Census for 1910, Manhattan, recorded Mandel as born in New York to a Jewish family from Hungary.

⁷³ US Federal Census, 1920, New York City.

veteran whose experience stretched back to the CPA and the United Toilers. A “little corporal ... a small impulsive little fellow,”⁷⁴ he was a leader of the Jewish Federation, installed as New York district secretary of the WP before being removed by Foster during his first period in power from 1923. Cleaving to Ruthenberg-Lovestone thereafter, Lifshitz headed the Jewish Federation when the new WP leadership dissolved its leadership in the aftermath of Lore’s expulsion. When the axe fell on Lovestone, Lifshitz announced his approval and commended the expulsion of his erstwhile comrades. But the Comintern representative and his Fosterite henchmen were unrelenting and Lifshitz found himself, in turn, removed from the party. Returning to the Lovestonites in humiliating fashion, he organized the Communist Opposition in the Red unions with limited success. In January 1932, the *Daily Worker* returned to the attack, recording how the Metal Workers Industrial League had “unanimously expelled the renegade Benjamin Lifshitz, one of the leaders of the Lovestone group ... after John Steuben explained the strikebreaking role of Gitlow and Lifshitz.” When the Lovestone group folded, Lifshitz became a CIO organizer in New York.⁷⁵

The elevation of another Lovestone supporter, Henry Puro (1888–1981), coincided with his appointment as leader of the Finnish Federation. A farmer’s son, born John Wiita in Ostrobothnia in the Finnish countryside, Puro emigrated to America in 1905, joined the SP, and worked as a longshoreman and iron miner. His opposition to the war led to a move to Canada and a change of name to avoid the draft. Back Stateside, he became immersed in Finnish affairs in the WP and edited *Viesti*, the Finnish Communist theoretical journal. Puro survived 1929 to head the party’s agricultural work, remaining active until his resignation in 1943. After quitting the CPUSA, he worked in an airplane factory and later as a realtor in

⁷⁴ Gitlow, *I Confess*, 95.

⁷⁵ “Jewish (Yiddish) Language Federations,” at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/lf/lfedjewish.html>; James P. Cannon and the Early Years, 439, note 3; “The Achievements of the CC Plenum”, *Revolutionary Age*, 15 November 1929, 17; *Daily Worker*, 11 January 1932.

Connecticut.⁷⁶ His fellow Finn, Knut E. Heikkinen (b.1890), arrived in Canada in 1910 and moved to the US in 1916 where he was a member of the WP from 1923. Like Puro, Heikkinen served as editor of the WP's Finnish paper, *Eteenpäin* as well as the Finnish-Communist *Uusi Kotimaa*, which aimed at uniting farmers and industrial workers in Minnesota.⁷⁷

Their comrade on the CC, Alfred Knutson, born 1880 in Norway, was the son of a newspaper editor who emigrated to America in 1889. Following graduation from the University of South Dakota in 1912, he worked as a carpenter, abandoning Lutheranism for Marxism and the SP, and switching to the WP by 1922. After attending the Second Congress of the Peasants International (Krestintern) and travelling around the Soviet Union in 1925, he returned to North Dakota to set up the United Farmers' Educational League (UFEL), a rural complement to the TUEL. A casualty of the Third Period, Knutson was demoted to candidate status on the 1929 CC and removed as UFEL organizer in 1930, having accumulated debts to publish the movement's paper. Still loyal to the party, he moved to the South as an unpaid organiser. Working as North Dakota party organizer in World War II and subsequently as secretary-treasurer of the state's Communist Political Association, his decades of effort in the Communist cause yielded meagre results, one friend recalling: "He was no good at organizing farmers because he knew nothing about farming."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Information from Auvo Kostiainen, January 2019; and see Auvo Kostiainen, "Contacts between the Finnish Labor Movements in the United States and Canada," in *Finnish Diaspora I: Canada, South America, Africa, Australia and Sweden. Papers of the Finn Forum Conference, held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, November 1-3, 1979*, ed. Michael G. Karni (Toronto: 1981), 33–48, reproduced at: <http://www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article254e.htm#y11>.

⁷⁷ Knut E. Heikkinen, Registration Card, Astoria, Oregon, 5 June 1917; US Federal Census, 1930, Bronx, New York; United States Supreme Court, Heikkinen v. United States (1958) at: <https://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/355/273.html>; "*Eteenpäin*" at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eteenp%C3%A4in>; Dirk Hoerder, *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s–1970s: An Annotated Bibliography: Vol. 1, Migrants from Northern Europe* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 238.

⁷⁸ Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and the American Farmers* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 10, 29–33, 45–50; William C. Pratt, "Communists and American Farmers in the 1920s," *American Communist History* 17, no. 2 (2018): 162–75; William C. Pratt, "Farmers, Communist and the FBI in the Upper Mid-West," *Agricultural History* 63, no. 3 (1989): 64.

The 1927 CC also included several newcomers from the Foster opposition with a strong trade union background. Jack Johnstone (1881–1942), a Scottish housepainter and Boer War veteran, left school at 15 and emigrated to America at 22. He joined the Syndicalist League from the IWW and worked closely with Foster in the organizing drives of the post-war years and as his lieutenant in the TUEL. Foster’s “brusque and dictatorial” attitude to those he regarded as his subordinates fostered resentment. As Bittelman, Browder and Johnstone found their feet and their critical voices, an account of the tensions in the Foster group in 1928 recorded: “Foster stood over Johnstone threateningly, with his fist clenched and tried his old trick of intimidation with the snarling remark: ‘You’re getting pretty bold!’ Johnstone, almost hysterical, answered: ‘You have been trampling on me for years but you’re not going to trample on me anymore.’”⁷⁹ It was symptomatic of Moscow’s attitude to what it saw as innate proletarian reliability that it entrusted Johnstone with Comintern missions to Mexico in 1924 and India in 1929. He played a continuing role in the 1930s as CC member and district organizer.⁸⁰

Another union activist, Charles Krumbein (1889–1947), from a family of German immigrants, was a steamfitter and a fixture of the Chicago labor movement. A charter member of the CLP in 1919, he replaced Lifshitz as New York district organizer before attending the ILS with his wife, Margaret Cowl, a fellow party organizer. Krumbein later worked as a Comintern operative in Asia; linked to Soviet espionage, he served several prison sentences for passport offences.⁸¹ Joseph Zack (1897–1963) a CPA charter member, was born Joseph Kornfeder in Slovakia, and raised by Catholic parents. He arrived in the US

⁷⁹ Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 213. However, Johnstone joined the Communists in 1920, a year before his mentor.

⁸⁰ Harvey Klehr, “Johnstone, Jack (1880–1942),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 235–36; “Jack Johnstone”, Obituary, *New York Times*, 19 April 1942. It is unclear if Johnstone’s wife, Elizabeth Abramowitz, was related to Foster’s wife, Esther Abramowitz.

⁸¹ Harvey Klehr, “Krumbein, Charles (1889–1947),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 233–34. A not always reliable reporter recalled the amorous dimension to WP factionalism as Krumbein seduced a supporter of the Ruthenberg group: “After a fateful night with him on the Albany night boat, she was connected to Fosterism. Krumbein won a sweetheart and a majority on the New York District Committee”: Gitlow, *I Confess*, 190–91.

in 1916 and became a tailor and IWW and SP activist in New York. After working in the TUEL as secretary of the needle trades section, Zack, a supporter of Foster, followed Kruse and Krumbein at the Lenin School before serving as a Comintern representative to South America in 1930–1931. Engaged in complicated attempts to extricate his wife and children from Russia, he left the party in 1934 and after a brief spell as a Trotskyist and facing threats of deportation, evolved into a professional anti-Communist.⁸²

If we analyse the composition of the 1927 committee (**Table 3**), we observe once more elements of continuity combined with signs of change. The mean age of the 36 members of the 1927 committee for whom this data is available was 38 years (median 37.5), ranging from White who was 57 to Stachel, 27. The 1927 CC was therefore slightly older than the 1924–1927 sample as a whole (mean age 37). The new blood of the 13 “ingenues” only marginally deflated its age profile. The 10 for whom information was available suggests an average age of 38, Stachel’s relative youthfulness being countered by the two eldest, Tallentire, 53, and Knutson, 47.

Information on birthplace was available for 36 out of 38 members of the 1927 committee. Immigrants made up 61% and those from immigrant families a further 28%, making a total of 89% who were immigrants or the sons of immigrants, a figure only slightly lower than the sample for 1924–1927 as a whole. The alternative reading is that those born in the US comprised 39% of the CC elected in 1927 (very similar to Klehr’s 37.8%).⁸³ Almost a half (47%) of the foreign-born and those from immigrant families came from the Russian empire, including 2 Finns; 5 Germans (16%) represented the next largest group, followed by

⁸² Harvey Klehr, “Zack, Joseph (1897–1963),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 433–34; Max Shachtman, “The Case of Joseph Zack,” *Socialist Appeal*, 23 July 1938. Zack sometimes claimed, understandably in the face of state persecution, that he was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania and taken to Slovakia by his parents aged 2. At other times he stated he was born in Slovakia. See “Joseph Zack Kornfeder is Dead,” *New York Times*, 4 May 1963, and Tim Davenport, “Joseph Zack Kornfeder,” biographical note to “A Letter to the *Appeal* from Joseph Zack,” at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/swp/1939/1020-zack-lettertoappeal.pdf>.

⁸³ *Communist Cadre*, 25, Graph 1.

3 of Irish descent, 2 from England and Austro-Hungary, and a scattering from Scandinavia, Slovakia, and Scotland. The 16 from a Jewish background represented 44.4% of the 36 members of the committee for whom data on origins are available (a figure matching Klehr's 44.7%).⁸⁴ The founding generation of Communists remained strongly represented: of the 36 for whom we have information on their date of joining, 33 (92%) had enrolled in one of the parties between 1919 and 1922.

There were no black members on the 1927 CC, and the number of blacks in the party at this point remained negligible. The same cannot be said of women, although the opening of the archives has done little to remedy the paucity of accurate data on the WP's female membership remarked on earlier by Klehr.⁸⁵ Since many women were affiliated to the language federations, their decline reduced the female membership. This was compounded by "Bolshevization"'s abolition of the "dual stamp system" where husbands and wives paid single party dues, leading to a loss of some 4000 "housewives."⁸⁶ But many women retained their membership. In New York City in 1926, for example, there were 150 housewives; the largest trade union fraction in District 2, covering New York and its environs, was the 455 workers in "Ladies Wear," which accounted for 32% of the unionized membership of the district; the third largest, the 114 in "Men's clothing," represented 8%; both would have contained many female garment workers. However, there was only one woman among the 32 National Convention delegates elected from District 2 that year.⁸⁷ The absence of women in the WP leadership for most of the 1920s has been attributed to the emphasis on organizing

⁸⁴ *Communist Cadre*, 46, Graph 2.

⁸⁵ Harvey Klehr, "Female Leadership in the Communist Party of the United States of America", *Studies in Comparative Communism* 10, no. 4 (1977): 394–95. Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1961) does not address women in the party's membership. It is telling that almost a hundred pages of district reports assessing the progress of "Bolshevization" in 1926 fails to mention women: District Reports, Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frames 17–112, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

⁸⁶ Draper, *American Communism*, 187.

⁸⁷ "District 2 Report," [1926], Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frames 30, 32, 21, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

male workers in heavy industry, the adverse effects of factionalism on women's participation, and the chauvinism of leading cadres.⁸⁸

Transformative change: Stalinism and the Third Period

As the 1920s drew to a close, change accelerated. Although a 44-strong CC was elected in March 1929, the pathbreaking expulsion of Lovestone and his supporters in the leadership during the following months led to the committee being extensively reconstructed by October. It is therefore analytically useful to distinguish in practice two CCs in 1929 which we designate the March and October committees and deal with in turn. **Table 7** lists those elected to the March 1929 CC. It demonstrates that 12 (27%) were part of the foundation cohort and had served before 1924.⁸⁹ Continuity with the early years is deflated by the fact that Bittelman and Wagenknecht were not re-elected and Trachtenberg was demoted to candidate status. Of the 12, Gitlow, Kruse, and Lovestone had departed within months, reducing the number to 9, so that in real terms only 20% of the March 1929 committee had served between 1919 and 1923. The personal link with the foundation era leadership was significantly attenuated. Schmies had been on the 1925 and 1927 CCs and 7 (16%) of the March 1929 representatives – Lifshitz, Puro, Stachel, Tallentire, White, Wolfe and Krumbein – had been elected for the first time in 1927. But, a large number, 24 out of 44 activists (55%) elected to this CC were making their debut. It is clear that the Third Period led not only to a break with earlier politics but also with earlier personnel. It produced a degree of turnover unparalleled in the party's history. The 55% of newcomers in March 1929 compared with

⁸⁸ Rosalyn Baxandall, "The Question Seldom Asked: Women and the CPUSA," in *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism*, ed. Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten and George Snedeker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993), 144–47; Klehr, "Female Leadership," 397.

⁸⁹ They were Amter, Ballam, Bedacht, Browder, Engdahl, Foster, Gitlow, Kruse, Lovestone, Minor, Olgin, and Weinstone.

15% in 1924, 20% in 1925 and 34% in 1927. The first 1929 CC, elected as the Third Period accelerated, therefore represented an unprecedented rate of change in the WP's leading cadre.

Table 7. WP CC elected at Sixth National Convention, March 1929

Israel Amter, John J. Ballam, Max Bedacht, **Chester W. Bixby***, **Thomas J. Bradley**, **Cyril Briggs**, Earl Browder, **J. Morris**, **Lena Chernenko**, **Anna David**, **Ellen Dawson***, J. Louis Engdahl, William Z. Foster, **Tony Gerlach**, Benjamin Gitlow*, **Otto Hall**, **John Henry**, **Leo Hofbauer**, **O.E. Huiswood**, **Nils Kjar**, **E. Koppel**, **John Kamp**, William F. Kruse*, **Dominick Krutis**, *Benjamin Lifshitz**, Jay Lovestone, **Abraham Lupin**, **William Miller***, **Nicholas Minutella**, Robert Minor, Mossaye Olgin, **J. Patrick**, *Henry Puro*, John Schmies, **Frank Sepich**, **Dan H. Slinger**, *Jack Stachel*, *Norman Tallentire*, **Frank Vratarić***, **Albert Weisbord***, William Weinstone, *William J. White**, *Bertram D. Wolfe**, *Charles S. Zimmerman**

Notes:

1. Names in **bold type** denote a member elected for the first time to the CC in March 1929. These 24 members constituted 55 per cent of the committee's 44 members.
2. Names in *italic type* denote a member elected for the first time to the CC in 1927 and re-elected in 1929. These 7 members represented 16 per cent of the committee's membership.
3. An asterisk (*) designates a member who left with or soon after Lovestone: the 4 new members represented 17 per cent of the committee's new intake of 24.

Source: Draper, *American Communism*, 523.

Reading **Table 7** which lists the representatives elected in March 1929, and drawing on data on its members contained in **Appendix 2**, which tabulates the available information on all those who served on both CCs during 1929, we find that the average age of the 38 members of the March CC for whom this information is available was 39 years, ranging from

Lena Chernenko, 28, to Bill White at 59; the median age was 38 years. Information was accessed on the origins of 39 members of the March 1929 CC: 24 (62%) were immigrants and 8 (21%) came from immigrant families, while 7 (18%) were American. Our total of 39% being born in the USA is similar to Klehr's estimate that 36.6% of that committee were American-born.⁹⁰ The percentage of foreign-born Communists among the leadership in March 1929 (62%), in keeping with the earlier trend, continued to remain lower than it was among the party as a whole: Klehr cites one survey of five representative districts in that year as indicating 88% of members were born outside the US.⁹¹ Our percentage for the foreign-born is identical to that for the 1924–1927 cohort, while the proportion of those from immigrant families in 1929 (21%) was lower than that for 1924–27 (28%). The percentage from an immigrant background therefore remained high – 90% and 83% – in both periods but the proportion was declining.

The geographical origins of these first- and second-generation immigrants again reflected the dominance, albeit reducing, of CC representatives from Imperial Russia – 13 (33%) emanated from the former Tsarist empire, followed by 6 from the former Austro-Hungarian empire (15%), 3 Germans (8%), 2 Dutch and one each England, Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Italy, the West Indies, and Surinam. Previous research indicated that 65% of the 1919–23 cohort had their origins in the Russian empire with a similar scattering of Germans, English, Scots, Irish, and Scandinavians.⁹² There was thus by March 1929 a significant reduction of almost 50% in the Russian component of the elite. In terms of religious background, our figures also suggest a lower proportion of Jewish leaders in March 1929 – 12 (27% of the March committee) – than the 17 (44%) in 1924–1927; in addition, we know of 3 Catholics and 2 Lutherans. However, the absence of data again counsels caution:

⁹⁰ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 25, Graph 1.

⁹¹ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 22.

⁹² McIlroy and Campbell, "Towards a Prosopography."

Klehr reported a Jewish presence of 36.6% in his 1929 cohort. The most radical development – saw the election to the March CC of 4 Black activists– Briggs, Hall, Henry and Huiswood – representing 9% of the CC, an important innovation as Blacks remained a small minority within the WP.⁹³

Analysis of the March 1929 CC is further complicated by its swift disruption: no less than 11 members –Bixby, Dawson, Gitlow, Kruse, Lifshitz, Miller, Vrataric, White, Weisbord, Wolfe and Zimmerman, were expelled or suspended around the same time as Lovestone. Four of these, representing 17% of the new intake, were debutantes. When we also include Lovestone, 27% of the committee elected in March 1929 had departed within a few months. The Comintern restructured the CC. Boris Mikhailov (“George Williams”), the secretary of the American Commission in Moscow and a member of Stalin’s personal bureau, was despatched to the US in May 1929 and added to the CPUSA secretariat.⁹⁴ As the effective leader of the party in the aftermath of Lovestone’s expulsion, he set about the reorganization. In an exercise historians have left largely unscrutinised, the Russian archives reveal that by October 1929, 12 new members had been added to the 31 remaining from the March election; 2 of them, Dunne and Wicks, had served on earlier CCs, and the identity of two is unknown. See **Table 8**. However, the table demonstrates that the core of the earlier 1920s was in an advanced state of decay: only 8 – Ballam, Bedacht, Browder, Dunne, Engdahl, Foster, Minor

⁹³Estimates of black membership range from 50 to 200 in 1928: Draper, *American Communism*, 350; Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 56. The “Negro question” is examined in detail in Draper, *American Communism*, 315–56, and Zumoff, *Communist International*, 287–364.

⁹⁴ Draper, *American Communism*, 406, 423, 430; Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *Soviet World*, 138; Le Blanc and Davenport, *American Exceptionalism*, 92; Branko Lazitch in collaboration with Milorad Drachkovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 441–42; and see the testimony of Joseph Zack Kornfeder before House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, 9 August 1949, 555–56, at:

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DdIJAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA556&lpg=PA556&dq=%22George+Williams%22+Comintern&source=bl&ots=emexQvqM8X&sig=ACfU3U0ecilVuzKhXpzG-MP5ARVbDBRoQg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjJ3Kbbt8jiAhWVrHEKHavGCPQQ6AEwB3oECAgQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22George%20Williams%22%20Comintern&f=false>

and Weinstone – of the 19 key cadres whose names had dominated the CC in the era of consolidation remained at the top in December 1929.⁹⁵

The social composition of the reformed October 1929 committee exhibited a number of similarities and differences from that elected earlier in the year: see **Table 8** and **Appendix 2**.

Table 8. WP CC as reconstructed by 10 October 1929.

Mario Alpi (Ferruccio Marini), **Illegible**, **Illegible**, Israel Amter, John J. Ballam, Max Bedacht, Thomas J. Bradley, Cyril Briggs, Earl Browder, **J. Morris**, Lena Chernenko, Anna David, **William F. Dunne**, **Pat Devine**, J. Louis Engdahl, **James W. Ford**, William Z. Foster, **Harrison George**, Tony Gerlach, Otto Hall, **Clarence A. Hathaway**, John Henry, Leo Hofbauer, Otto Huiswood, Nils Kjar, E. Koppel, John Kamp, Dominick Krutis, **V. Kemenovich**, Abraham Lupin, W.A. Milo (Nicholas Minutella), Robert Minor, Mossaye Olgin, J. Patrick, Henry Puro, John Schmies, Frank Sepich, Dan S. Slinger, **Pete Smith**, Jack Stachel, Norman Tallentire, William Weinstone, **H.M. Wicks**.

Notes: 1. The quality of the original document is such that two names are illegible.
2. Names in **bold** indicate members who were not elected to the CC in March 1929. Dunne and Wicks had previously served on the CC.
3. By October the change of name from WP to CPUSA had been implemented.

Source: “Central Executive Committee”, 10/10/29, Files of the CPUSA, reel 128, delo 1664, frames 8–9, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

Of the 35 members for whom such data is available, the average age in October was 39, the same as that of the March 1929 sample; the median age was 39.5 years. Of the 36 cases for whom information on immigration status is available, 23 (64%) were foreign born, 5 (14%) came from immigrant families, and 8 (22%) were Americans. First- and second-generation

⁹⁵ “Central Executive Committee”, 10/10/29, Files of the CPUSA, reel 128, delo 1664, frames 8–9, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

immigrants therefore accounted for 78% of the CC in October compared with 83% in March. The total of those born in the USA reached 36%. Of the 36 cases where data on origins is available, the 8 Americans (22%) now equalled the presence of the 8 with roots in the former Russian empire. The backgrounds of the remainder were Austro-Hungarian, 6; English, German, Irish, and Italian, 2 each; with one from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, and the West and East Indies. It is striking that 5 members of the committee were Black, including three Black Americans, a reflection of the Comintern's engagement with "the Negro question" over the course of 1929. Data on religious heritage is fragmentary. We have identified only 8 from a Jewish background (22%), 5 Catholics, 1 Lutheran and 1 Unitarian, which possibly underestimates the real figures.

The triumph of Stalinism, determination to advance newly radicalized workers, and the exit of those who formed the Trotskyist Communist League of America and Lovestone's Communist Party (Opposition) saw the governing core of the years between 1924 and 1928 reduced to a kernel. The remnant operated in a transformed context. No longer fissured by factions, a leadership under close Comintern scrutiny tilted towards homogenization. Cohesion was facilitated by the absence of Cannon and Lovestone and the relative side-lining of Foster. Bittelman was under a cloud. Ballam's glimpse of power had come and gone by 1922. Bedacht and Weinstone were considered for preference in 1930–31 before being moved back into line. Engdahl died a little later. By 1932, Comintern control was exercised through a paramount chief in the shape of Browder – with Minor and Stachel as loyal assistants. Factionalism went out with the 1920s.

The emphasis in 1929 was on young, fighting, proletarian elements – although, as we have noted, with a mean age of just under 40 in October, the CC intake was far from young. The party aimed at "new layers of rank-and-file workers coming into struggle for the first time," emphasising an assumed leftward swing of the downtrodden, with unskilled labor and

the jobless favourably contrasted with the corrupted craft workers in the AFL and “demoralized,” well-paid employees. The elevation of Chernenko, David and Dawson doubled the number of women who had served on CCs since 1919. Briggs, Ford, Hall, Henry and Huiswood became the first black activists to serve on the governing body. Chernenko, Dawson, Gerlach, Miller, Vratovic, Weisbord and White had all been involved in recent struggles in the unions. This provided a contrast to the past. Ruthenberg recalled that at both 1919 conventions, “it would have been difficult to gather together a half-dozen delegates who knew anything about the trade union movement.”⁹⁶ By 1927 a group of union activists had reached the CC and 1929 marked the emergence of a new cohort whose experience sometimes post-dated the early years of American Communism. Nonetheless, and even allowing for missing data, the CC members of 1929 did not reflect the occupational composition of the party as a whole. Glazer supplied figures which showed that the largest occupational groups accounting for just over half of the WP membership of around 10,000 in May-July 1928 were the needle trades (15%), mining (12%), building trades (10%), metalworking (9%), auto (4%) and food (4%).⁹⁷ **Appendix 2** indicates that only 2 (4%) of our total 1929 cohort of 53 Communists— Chernenko and Zimmerman – were garment workers and 3 (6%) – Kemenovich, Sepich and Slinger – coal miners.

The new cadres of March and October 1929

After 1925, the Ruthenberg-Lovestone group were able to exploit the benefits majority leadership provided to draw WP trade unionists into their faction and advance their role within the party. By 1929, despite disparagement of their group’s credentials in this sphere,

⁹⁶ Quoted Draper, *Roots*, 198.

⁹⁷ Glazer, *Social Basis of American Communism*, 115.

the Lovestoneites had achieved success in bringing forward “their” labor activists onto the CC and blunting the edge the Foster faction had enjoyed four years earlier.

A key, if mercurial, figure in the new leadership of March 1929 was Albert Weisbord (1900–1977). He was dismissed in Foster’s imaginative account of the 1926–1927 strike at the mills of Passaic, New Jersey, as “a weakling.” With credit for conduct of the strike variously accorded to Ballam, Weinstone, Wagenknecht and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Stalinist history erased the central figure from the tableau.⁹⁸ Weisbord was born neither proletarian nor bourgeois. His father a Jewish garment worker, an immigrant to New York from Russia, had built up a profitable business in manufacturing accessories for coats. Educated at City College and Harvard Law School, Weisbord joined the WP from the SP youth in 1924 and sacrificed a professional career for life as an itinerant agitator. Having worked briefly in silk weaving and studied the textile industry, he demonstrated a precocious aptitude for organizing and strike strategy but remained a maverick who related better to workers in struggle than to professional Communists while the celebrity Passaic bestowed engendered a degree of hubris. Briefly the WP’s most famous figure next to Foster, Weisbord was caught in the crossfire between the TUEL leaders and the Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction’s competing ambition to control trade union work – as well as the tensions between boring from within the AFL and moving towards new Red unions. He was transferred to Detroit where he passed a successful period organizing auto workers before being elected

⁹⁸ William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1952), reproduced at: <http://williamzofoster.blogspot.com/2013/01/chapter-eighteen-communist-class.html>. The verdict of Cannon, who, like Foster, had little time for Weisbord, in his correspondence with Draper in 1955, is nearer the mark: “The organization of the workers in Passaic and the effective leadership of the strike itself were pre-eminently Weisbord’s work ... it’s a long way from committee meetings in a closed room, off the scene, to the actual leadership of a strike on the ground. The full credit of that belongs to Weisbord”: Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 141. For a recent account, see Jacob Zumoff, “Hell in New Jersey: The Passaic Textile Strike, Albert Weisbord, and the Communist Party,” *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (2015): 125–69.

national secretary of the Communist-dominated National Union of Textile Workers (NUTW) as dual unionism won the day in RILU and the Comintern.⁹⁹

Still in his twenties, Weisbord reinforced the NUTW's first major incursion into the textile industry in the South. Spearheaded by NUTW organizer, Fred Beal, the bitter conflict at the Loray Mill, Gastonia, North Carolina, culminated in violent skirmishes, with 15 union leaders charged with murder; those convicted, including Beal, escaped to the Soviet Union. At Gastonia, Weisbord proposed marriage to Vera Buch (1895–1989), a fellow WP organizer and graduate of Hunters' College he met at Passaic: it was an unconventional partnership based on creating Communists.¹⁰⁰ Comintern insistence on the centrality of “the Negro question” and ham-fisted attempts to raise it in strikes, claims that Weisbord indulged “white chauvinism”, his identification with the Lovestone group, the antipathy of the Fosterites and their desire to purge the NUTW, provoked his expulsion. Thereafter, he embraced Trotsky but denounced the American Trotskyists and formed the microscopic Communist League of Struggle. Weisbord later became an AFL official and finally a management consultant.¹⁰¹

The organizing drives of the Third Period mustered a multitude of rank-and-file Communists to back the professionals. One who found favour with the workers was Lena Chernenko (1901–1979), also known as Lena Davis, a New York garment worker drafted in to agitate at Passaic. A contemporary journalist reported: “Lena, as she is affectionately known among the strikers, Lena who goes with them at four o'clock in the morning to the picket lines, winter or summer, freezing cold or drenching rain and is with them through the day and again in the evenings at the mass meetings.”¹⁰² An older Communist reflected:

⁹⁹ “Albert Weisbord”, *New York Times*, 28 April 1977; Harvey Klehr, “Weisbord, Albert (1900–1977),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 412; Vera Buch Weisbord, *A Radical Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 30–34; Keeran, *Auto Workers' Unions*, 38–39.

¹⁰⁰ John A. Salmond, *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 34–38, 43–46.

¹⁰¹ James P. Cannon, *The Left Opposition in the US, 1928–31* (New York: Monad Press, 1981), 290–312.

¹⁰² Mary Heaton Vorse, *The Passaic Textile Strike, 1927*, excerpted in Fried, *Communism in America*, 81.

“Weisbord and a group of others like him, Jack Rubenstein, Lena Chernenko, Nancy Sadowsky, the new young ones knit the whole body together and dominate it with their spirit.”¹⁰³ At the end of the stoppage, sufficient pennies were collected to present her with a watch engraved: “From Passaic strikers to Organizer Lena”. Young in years, she was old in experience. A Pole who arrived in America in 1912, Chernenko joined the CPA at its foundation. Still in her teens she visited Russia with a delegation from the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union and was arrested in the Palmer raids. She attended the ILS, 1929–1931, having married her fellow Communist and ILS student, Marcel Sherer shortly before her departure to Moscow. Chernenko was subsequently a CPUSA district organiser in New Jersey, was active in the CIO organizing drives and remained a Communist until her death in 1979.¹⁰⁴

Weisbord was a WP organizer, Chernenko an “outside” supporter of the stoppage; Ellen Dawson (1900–1967) was a Passaic striker converted to Communism. They appeared an ideal trio of “fighting elements” to add to the CC in March 1929. The daughter of a foundry worker, Dawson came from a Catholic family in Barrhead, Scotland – her sister was a nun. She migrated with her family to Lancashire, England, and then crossed the ocean to Passaic in search of work. “A sprite-like young woman with black cropped hair, a Scotch accent and merry, twinkling brown eyes,”¹⁰⁵ she had no previous history of militancy but the Botany Mill where she worked was the first to strike. Her role at Passaic led to her election as

¹⁰³ James P. Cannon and the Early Years, 378.

¹⁰⁴ Lena Davis, “Strike of the Passaic Textile Workers in 1926”, unpublished typescript, Lena Davis (Chernenko), Papers, CPUSA files, Box 112, Folder 81, New York University: Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Art Shields, “Founding Member of CP Dies,” press cutting, 15 February 1979, Davis Papers; “ILS Students for the Years 1926–1931,” Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow (RGASPI), 531/1/32: 2 (Chernenko’s ILS name was “Lena Reid”); Haywood. *Black Bolshevik*, 200; Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *Soviet World*, 202; Sixth Report of the Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities: California, 1951, 76–78, 200, at: <https://archive.org/details/reportofsenatefa1951cali/page/200>. Sherer, an industrial chemist, later acted as a talent-spotter for Soviet intelligence: Haynes, Klehr and Vassiliev, *Spies*, 388–89.

¹⁰⁵ Vera Buch Weisbord, “Gastonia 1929: Strike at the Loray Mill”, *Southern Exposure*, 1, 3 & 4 (Winter, 1974), at: <http://www.weisbord.org/Gastonia.htm>; McMullen, *Strike!*, 75–95.

vice-president of the NTWU and her despatch to Gastonia as “co-director” with Beal of the Loray Mill standoff. Its scholarly chronicler described her as “a tough experienced organizer and a superb stump orator.”¹⁰⁶ In a CPUSA undergoing Stalinization, nobody was indispensable. For all her virtues, Dawson failed to survive the cull of Lovestoneites in the Boston district. She was briefly a member of the National Council of Lovestone’s new organization. But her activities had brought her to the attention of the FBI and threatened with deportation she abandoned politics. Dawson married a Hungarian, George Kanki, and returned to the mills where she labored for more than three decades, dying in Florida in 1967, still a Catholic.¹⁰⁷

Another trade union newcomer to the March 1929 committee, Charles Zimmerman (1896–1983) was born into a Russian Jewish family. Emigrating from Kiev to New York in 1913, Zimmerman worked in the garment industry, becoming a charter member of the CPA and an official of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) before emerging as a leader of the Communist Needle Trades Workers Union which represented the Lovestone faction’s base in that sector. Expelled from the WP in 1929, he continued as an adherent of the Lovestone organization until it dissolved in 1941 and remained a well-known left-wing trade unionist until his death.¹⁰⁸ Abraham Lupin (b.1888), who emigrated to the US from Russia in 1906, was another rank-and-file activist in the New York garment industry elected in March. Lupin was a leading militant in the bitter general strike of the city’s garment workers in 1926 and President of Local 22 of the Dressmakers of Greater New York, an ILGWU affiliate. He was subsequently at odds with his former comrade, Zimmerman, who led the Lovestoneite’s anti-CPUSA campaign in the union from 1931 and was elected

¹⁰⁶ Salmond, *Gastonia*, 20; McMullen, *Strike!*, 134.

¹⁰⁷ Alexander, *Right Opposition*, 28, 35; McMullen, *Strike!*, 178–83.

¹⁰⁸ Harvey Klehr, “Zimmerman, Charles (1896–1983),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 435–36.

manager of Local 22 in 1933. Lupin was later active in the IWO and became president of its New York Jewish City Committee.¹⁰⁹

A car worker from Detroit, active in the WP-controlled Auto Workers' Union (AWU), William Miller again represented the Communist stereotype of the insurgent union activist of 1929 and reflected the entry into leadership of workers who had joined the party after the foundation period.¹¹⁰ Anton "Tony" Gerlach (b.1902), whose brothers Fred and John were also Communist activists, illustrated the resilience of the immigrant strain. He was a Croatian of German descent who had emigrated to the USA in 1921 and enrolled in the WP a little later. "A thin, bespectacled balding man," Gerlach was a cook and union organizer active in the AWU, the Workers' Order and Croatian community politics in Detroit. He took a leading part in the 1933 Briggs strike and the move into the United Auto Workers as the Third Period faded, becoming the CPUSA's trade union organizer in the city.¹¹¹ In Chicago, Nils Kjar (b.1888), a leading industrial cadre from an earlier generation, embodied continuity. A carpenter and native of Denmark who emigrated to the US in 1915, he had been active in the SP but became prominent in the TUEL from 1922. Expelled from the AFL Carpenters' affiliate in 1928 for his campaign against its leadership, Kjar assumed a new role as an effective organizer of the city's unemployed. Arrested during a skirmish with police in 1931, he was detained for 18 months and deported to Denmark.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ New York State Census, 1925; *Daily Worker*, 25 July 1925; *Flanson Realty Corp v. Workers' Unity House Inc.*, at: <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/us/591478d5add7b049343ed3d6>; "Dressmakers' Local 22: Organizational History" at: <http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/KCL05780-014p.html#d0e193>; *The New Order*, Convention issue, April 1938.

¹¹⁰ Alexander, *Right Opposition*, 22, 28, 35, 38.

¹¹¹ US Federal Census, 1930, Detroit; John Krajic, "The Croatian Section of the Communist Party of the United States and the 'United Front', 1934–1939," *Review of Croatian History* 5 (2009): 143–144; Keeran, *Auto Workers' Unions*, 87, 91; Victor G. Devinatz, "Reassessing the Historical UAW: Walter Reuther's Affiliation with the Communist Party and Something of its Meaning: A Document of Party Involvement, 1939," *Labour/Le Travail* 49 (2002): 238.

¹¹² US Federal Census, 1930, Chicago; Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at its Grassroots, 1928–1935* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 59, 103–106, 134.

The coalfields were another site of militancy and Red Trade Unionism. Ohio and Pennsylvania were the storm centre as Communists battled both the mine owners and John L. Lewis's leadership of the United Mine Workers (UMWA). Several of them were elected to the CC in March 1929. Frank Sepich (1892–1972) had been involved in the Save The Union movement, a united front of the WP and progressive opponents of Lewis around the UMWA activist, John Brophy, and had been the WP nominee for Congress for Eastern Ohio in 1928. A UMWA official from Neffs, Ohio, Sepich was a Carpatho-Russian immigrant from the Austro-Hungarian empire who subsequently became a leader of the Red National Mineworkers' Union (NMU).¹¹³ Frank Vrataric (1898–1978) also known as Frank Vitane, another immigrant, a southern Slav whose origins were in the Austro-Hungarian empire and leader of the Anthracite miners in Eastern Pennsylvania, followed a similar path in the often unorganized coalfields before returning to the UMWA. Expelled as a Lovestoneite in 1929, Vrataric continued in the former WP leader's Communist Opposition before his resistance to the Lewis leadership produced a 15-year suspension from membership of the UMWA. He was subsequently employed as a CIO organizer in the cleaning and laundry industry.¹¹⁴

Dan H. Slinger (b.1878), an American-born former Illinois miner, was also active as an NMU organizer in the Pennsylvania coalfields in 1930 as well in the major stoppage of the following year. As the strike disintegrated, Slinger was transferred by the TUUL to the brutal conflict in Harlan County, Kentucky. Despite early success in recruiting miners into the

¹¹³ *Daily Worker*, 24 May, 16 June 1928; *Labor Unity*, July 1928; *New York Times*, 10 September 1928; Committee on Un-American Activities, *Report of the American Slav Congress and Associated Organizations* (Washington, 1950), 127, at: <https://archive.org/details/reportonamerican00unit/page/126>; Frank Sepich, Certificate of Death, Jefferson County, Ohio, 17 January 1972.

¹¹⁴ Walter T. Howard, *Forgotten Radicals: Communists in the Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1919–1950* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 35, 50, 58–59, 171; Alexander, *The Right Opposition*, 28, 35, 38–39, 53. Howard states Vrataric was Lithuanian: Walter T. Howard, "The National Miners Union: Communists and Miners in the Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1928-1931," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 125, nos. 1/2 (2001): 103. However, Vrataric's 1918 Draft Registration card states he was a citizen of Austria-Hungary while his birthplace is anachronistically listed as "Yugoslavia" (which did not exist at the time of his birth) in his 1940 census entry: Frank Vrataric, Registration Card, Uniontown, Pa, 12 September 1918; US Federal Census, 1940, Swoyersville, Pennsylvania. The surname Vrataric is most commonly found in Croatia and it seems likely that this was his homeland.

NMU, the strikes faltered with Slinger reflecting, in the face of employer violence, “they ought to have guns and kill all the thugs and then we would be able to organize them in the union.”¹¹⁵ The unsuccessful 1931 stoppages marked the last serious offensive by the NMU and TUUL in the coalfields; the NMU launched an abortive strike in January 1932 but the union had all but collapsed a year later.¹¹⁶ Dominick Krutis played a less prominent role. Born in Lithuania in 1900, he emigrated to the US in 1914 to join his family who had arrived in America the previous year. They settled in Elizabeth, New Jersey, which had a substantial Lithuanian population employed in the huge Singer sewing machine plant where Krutis and his brothers worked as laborers. Krutis joined the WP and was listed as an alternate convention delegate from District 2 in 1926, and as secretary of the “inactive” WP section in Elizabeth, New Jersey, in 1930. Despite membership of the WP Political Committee in March 1929, his appearance in the leadership was fleeting.¹¹⁷ An older activist, Nicholas Minutella, born in Italy in 1879 and an immigrant to the US in 1903, was a laborer employed by the city of Wilmington who unsuccessfully stood as the Communist candidate for the US Senate for Delaware in 1930.¹¹⁸ The fact that all the incomers were neither young nor new to the party was reinforced by the presence of the SP and CPA veteran – he had been an alternate member of the CPA CC in 1920 – Chester W. Bixby, another of those newly elected to the CC in March. In 1928 he had stood as the WP candidate for Governor of Massachusetts, the state where he was born in 1883. A shoe cutter by trade, Bixby was leader

¹¹⁵ US Federal Census, 1910, Glen Carbon, Illinois; Klehr, *Heyday*, 46.

¹¹⁶ *Wilkes-Barr Record*, 2 May 1930, reproduced in Walter T. Howard (ed.), *Anthracite Reds, vol. 2: A Documentary History of Communists in North-East Pennsylvania during the Great Depression* (New York: iUniverse, 2004), 28; Howard, *Forgotten Radicals*, 73; Klehr, *Heyday*, 44–47; Victor G. Devinatz (2019), “The CPUSA’s Trade Unionism during Third Period Communism, 1929–1934,” *American Communist History*, DOI: 10.1080/14743892.2019.1608710.

¹¹⁷ The Krutis family lived on First Street, close to the plant: US Federal Census, 1930, Elizabeth, NJ. Lithuanians comprised 25% of the population of the neighbourhood in 1930: <http://www.visithistoricalelizabethnj.org/forum2012.htm>; “National Convention Delegates”, [1926], Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frame 22, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Untitled List of District Secretaries, [1930], Files of the CPUSA, reel 152, delo 1967, frame 4.

¹¹⁸ US Federal Census, 1930, Wilmington, Delaware; List of United States Senate Elections in Delaware, at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Senate_elections_in_Delaware.

of the WP's shoe workers' fraction in the New York area before his departure from the party as a Lovestone supporter.¹¹⁹

Not all the new arrivals to the March 1929 CC were rank-and-file militants and like Bixby, Anna Damon, aka Anna David (1898–1944), represented a link with the early party. Born Anna Cohen in Latvia to Jewish parents who emigrated to Canada and then Boston, Damon became a charter member of the CPA after working as an IWW organizer. Employed as Ruthenberg's secretary, in reality more of a personal assistant – she shared his pseudonym of “Damon” and was privy to the WP's concealed transactions with Moscow. Damon was also instrumental in smoothing Lovestone's succession by passing on to the party leaders Ruthenberg's alleged last wishes. She conducted a lengthy affair with Ruthenberg and after his death with Browder. In 1934, she was appointed organizational secretary of the International Labor Defense. Her death in a fall from a building in 1944 occasioned controversy as to whether it was accidental, or suicide motivated by Stalin's removal of Browder.¹²⁰

Radical change was represented by Cyril Briggs (1888–1966), an immigrant from the Nevis-St Kitts islands and the most senior of the black activists who reached the CC in 1929. Educated at a Wesleyan Baptist school and an experienced journalist and anti-war agitator, Briggs had organized the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), elements of which he brought into the WP. He was a largely unsuccessful campaigner to move “the Negro question” up party agendas. After the ABB dissolved in 1924, he backed further initiatives in the black community and edited the American Negro Labor Congress journal, *Negro Champion*.

¹¹⁹ US Federal Census, 1920, Haverhill, Massachusetts; “Massachusetts: Governors at: <http://politicalgraveyard.com/geo/MA/ofc/gov.html>; Untitled list of fraction organizers,[1930], Files of the CPUSA, reel 152, delo 1967, frame 10; *Worker*, 15 November 1919; Tim Davenport, “CPA Party Officials, 1920,” at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>.

¹²⁰ Jennifer Ruthanne Uhlmann, “The Communist Civil Rights Movement: Legal Activism in the United States, 1919-1946” (PhD dissertation. University of California, Los Angeles, 2007), at: <https://dokumen.tips/documents/the-communist-civil-rights-movement-legal-activism-in-the-united-states-1919-1946.html>; Bella V. Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York: P.J. Kennedy, 1954), 172.

Expelled from the CPUSA in 1939 for “nationalist deviations”, he re-joined a decade later.¹²¹ Another long-standing Communist, whose father, like Hall’s, had endured slavery, Otto Huiswood (1893–1961) came to America from the Dutch colony of Surinam in 1913. A printer and SP member, Huiswood was active in the ABB and as a charter member of the CPA, one of the first blacks to become Communists. He chaired the Negro Commission at the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922, was selected first black delegate from the WP to a Comintern Congress, and was vocal in debates through the decade, opposing Stalin’s call for self-determination for “the black belt”. Splitting with Lovestone, Huiswood worked for the Comintern and RILU in Europe before returning to Surinam after being barred from re-entering the USA.¹²² Otto Hall, born in 1890, together with his brother Harry Haywood, was another of the tiny fraction of blacks who entered the WP. After serving in the US army, 1917–1918, Hall, an IWW sympathiser and ABB member, joined the WP around 1924, subsequently studying at the University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow. He opposed the turn to black nationalism and self-determination.¹²³ There is scant information regarding John Henry, simply listed as a “Negro comrade”, a worker and a supporter of the minority faction.¹²⁴

Time would prove that James W. Ford (1893–1957), who joined the reconstructed CC in October 1929, was the most important black cadre to emerge at this time. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, and a graduate of Fisk University in Nashville, like many from “the Cotton Belt”, he made his way to Chicago. Unlike others, Ford was an active campaigner for black rights and a militant trade unionist. He became involved in the American Negro Labor

¹²¹ Robert A. Hill, “Briggs, Cyril (1887–1966),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 44–45; Draper, *American Communism*, 322–26.

¹²² *James P. Cannon and the Early Years*, 584; Draper, *American Communism*, 326–28; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 322–33, 334–37, 359–60.

¹²³ Draper, *American Communism*, 333–35, 345; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 340–41, 356–57, 360–62.

¹²⁴ Annotated list of “Central Executive Committee of CP of America, elected by VIth Party Congress” [1929], Files of the CPUSA, reel 128, delo 1664, frame 4, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives

Congress, established by the Communists in 1925 to replace the ABB, and joined the WP the following year. Riding the wind of Comintern-propelled engagement with “the negro question”, and eschewing factional entanglements, his rise was swift. In 1928, he was elected as a delegate to the RILU and attended the Comintern’s Sixth World Congress. As Draper observed: “There had never been a single word written or spoken in the American party on the right of self-determination of the Negroes of the Black Belt before the Sixth World Congress” – certainly not by Ford.¹²⁵ However, he accepted the new doctrine and remained in the Soviet Union and Europe. Unlike Briggs or Huiswood, he could be presented as the quintessential Black American and on his return became the CPUSA’s leading authority on black issues. He achieved national prominence as Foster’s running mate in the 1932 presidential elections – he stood again in 1936 and 1940 – and was Harlem organizer and author of *The Negro in a Soviet America*. Ford’s fortunes waned in the 1940s and faded after Browder’s fall, although he remained engaged in party work until his death in 1957.¹²⁶

Ford’s elevation to the CC extended and consolidated the black breakthrough while Clarence Hathaway (1892–1963), also appointed to the CC in October, was one of a number of reliable TUUL replacements for the axed Lovestonites. Unlike others in the 1929 levy, Hathaway was a party veteran active in the International Association of Machinists for 16 years and prominent in the Farmer-Labor adventures of 1923–1924. The son of a carpenter of English descent and a mother with Swedish forebears, he left Minnesota for England in 1915 and shed his Protestantism for socialism when working in engineering factories in the British Isles and participating in the industrial unrest. On his return to America, he joined the SP and from there the CPA. A sometime semi-professional baseball player, Hathaway was a friend of Cannon and attended the ILS 1926–1928 on the latter’s recommendation. Back in the WP,

¹²⁵ Draper, *American Communism*, 340–56.

¹²⁶ Harvey Klehr, “Ford, James (1893–1957)”, in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 135–36; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 290–91, 327–37, 349, 359.

he broke with his mentor and spearheaded the onslaught against Trotskyism. After 1929, as district organizer in New York and Chicago and editor of the *Daily Worker*, Hathaway backed Browder. Heavy drinking during his stint in Moscow and desertion of his wife and three children did his reputation little good. A libel suit and prison spell announced the downward slope. After Dimitrov took an interest in his violations of “party ethics,” Hathaway was expelled from the CPUSA in 1940. Redemption came later in the decade and he returned to office in the late 1950s.¹²⁷

Like Hathaway, Harrison George (b.1888), made his debut on the October CC. He, too, was a product of pre-1917 radicalism who had chalked up an impeccable record of struggle and sacrifice as an IWW organizer and editor of the *Industrial Unionist*. His family were farmers with a lengthy American lineage, but George took to the road. Expelled with the SP left in 1913, he devoted his efforts thereafter to the IWW and remained a Wobbly after joining the UCP in 1920. He spent much of 1918–1923 in prison after indictment with the rest of the IWW leaders, continuing to proselytise for Communism in the IWW before breaking with it in 1924. Appointed WP representative to the RILU in 1927, he undertook “special work” for the Pan-Pacific Secretariat from 1929, later serving the Secretariat in San Francisco and becoming an editor of the CPUSA’s West Coast *Daily People’s World*. Together with Communists such as Bill Dunne and Verne Smith, he became disenchanted with Browder’s rightist course and the CPUSA’s failure to move sufficiently left after the latter’s removal. Expelled in 1946, he established a short-lived splinter group seen by later “anti-revisionists” as their forerunner.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Harvey Klehr, “Hathaway, Clarence (1894–1963)”, in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 186–87; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 336–340; Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *Soviet World*, 47–48.

¹²⁸ *Labor Who’s Who*, ed. De Leon, s.v. “George, Harrison”, 83; Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, *Secret World*, 54–60; Haynes and Klehr, *Venona*, 229; Paul Costello, “Anti-Revisionist Communism in the United States, 1945–1950,” at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1946-1956/costello01.htm>. George’s son, Victor Barron, whom he only met when the latter was in his twenties, worked for the Comintern and was involved in the abortive 1935 coup in Brazil: Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, *Secret World*, 55.

Another TUUL organizer drafted onto the CC in Fall, 1929, was Pat Devine (1898–1973), a recent immigrant from Scotland. Devine came to America in the aftermath of the defeat of the 1926 general strike in Britain. Born in Motherwell, Lanarkshire, he quit school at 13 and became a steelworker after working as a miner and serving in the Royal Flying Corps in World War I. He left the Independent Labour Party in 1920 to enrol as a charter member of the British Communist Party (CPGB). Settling in Pittsburgh after a spell in Canada, Devine married Frieda Tuhar, an 18-year old YCL activist who became Women’s Organizer for the NMU – her Croat parents had been charter member of the CPA. Organizing for the NTWU in an attempt to root the union in the Lawrence, Massachusetts, mills in early 1931, Devine was arrested, admitted passport offences and was deported back to Britain at the end of the year. Thereafter, he occupied various roles in the CPGB, as leader of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement, a Comintern worker in Dublin and Moscow, and in the 1940s and 1950s as Lancashire District Secretary. His son was a lifelong Communist.¹²⁹

One of Devine’s Pittsburgh comrades, Vincent Kemenovich (b.1899) was a Croatian miner elected a convention delegate for WP District 5 in 1926 and appointed to the CC in October 1929. Kemenovich remained active into the 1950s when he served on the CPUSA’s “coal commission” which organized agitation in the Pennsylvania coalfield. Arrested as a Communist alien, he exercised his constitutional rights to refuse to answer questions on his origins or political activities before Congressional committees but appears to have avoided deportation, at least for some years, due to lack of cooperation from the Yugoslav authorities.¹³⁰ Less is known about Leo Hofbauer (b.1875), an Austrian machinist in his

¹²⁹ “Pat Devine,” RGASPI, 495/198/2; “Patrick Joseph Devine, Summary of Activities,” KV2/1573, National Archives, UK (NAUK); “Frieda Maria Devine,” KV2/1545, NAUK; Frieda Brewster, “A Long Journey,” unpublished mss, CP/HIST/06/04, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Manchester, UK.

¹³⁰ “National Convention Delegates, District No. 5,” [1926], Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frame 57; Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-third Congress, first

fifties who had immigrated in 1905 and was a leader of the Communist fraction in the Iron and Bronze Workers' Union in New York and later a member of the CPUSA Control Commission; or John Kamp (b.1893) of Detroit, a carpenter from a Dutch family in Michigan – both served on the two 1929 CCs.¹³¹

The reconstructed 1929 CC was not entirely composed of rank-and-file trade unionists. Mario Alpi (b.1892), a.k.a. Ferruccio Marini and Fred Brown, was a refugee from Mussolini's Italy who edited the WP's Italian language paper and had strong connections with the Comintern. On the CC, he popularized the doctrine of social fascism and was promoted by Browder to head the organization department. A former activist recalled him as “a tall, romantic, swashbuckling figure of a man ... He could easily have passed as a Caribbean pirate” who could “concoct an imaginative report on membership and dues payments and deliver it with gusto,” although this sympathetic portrait did not obscure his covert role as a Comintern “watchdog”. He returned to Italy after the war.¹³²

Reflections

This study surveyed 74 Communists who served on the CC between 1924 and 1929. Around a quarter of them feature, often in some detail, in the existing historiography but almost three-

session ... November 9, 10, and 12, 1953, testimony of Matthew Cvetic, p. 60 at: <https://archive.org/details/subversiveinflue1953unit/page/60>; House of Representatives, Sub-Committee of the Committee on Un-American Activities, “Problems Arising in Cases of Denaturalization and Deportation of Communists (Greater Pittsburgh Area, Part 3)”, 12 March 1959, testimony of Vincent Kemenovich, 473–78. Although he claimed in the 1930 census to have been born in West Virginia, he stated in his 1918 draft registration card that he was a citizen of the Austrian empire: US Federal Census, 1930, Pittsburgh; Vincent Kemenovich, Draft Registration Card, Waynesburg, Pa, 12 September 1918.

¹³¹ Leo Hofbauer, New York State Census, 1925; US Federal Census, 1930, Bronx, New York; Untitled list of fraction leaders, Files of the CPUSA, reel 152, delo 1967, frame 10, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Klehr, Haynes, and Firsov, *Secret World*, 100; John Kamp, US Federal Census, 1910, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and US Federal Census, 1930, Detroit.

¹³² Klehr, *Heyday*, 25–26, 80, 413, 420; *The Communist Party of the United States of America: What It Is, How It Works: A Handbook for Americans*, 9, 21, 33, 52, at:

<https://archive.org/details/communistpartyof1955unit/page/2>; Charney, *Long Journey*, 50–51; Updated FBI Dead List, 21 November 2011, at: https://www.governmentattic.org/5docs/FBI-DeadList-Update_2011.pdf.

Alpi was also a link between the CPUSA and Soviet intelligence: “Role of the Communist Party, USA, in Soviet Intelligence,” FBI, February 1953, 40, at:

<https://archive.org/details/TheRoleofCPUSAInSovietIntelligence/page/n43>.

quarters have gone undocumented in even basic particulars. We have provided relevant data on 66 members of the group, including all but 2 of the 41 representatives elected to the committee between 1924 and 1927 and all but 6 of the 53 activists who sat on the CC elected in March 1929 and reformed in October of that year, although the drafting onto the committee of little-known elements whose incumbency was typically brief exacerbated research problems. Overall, we have presented information on the origins, background, age, ethnicity and gender of 89% of the CC population during these six years, although material on religion and education is more patchy.

Our data is sufficiently robust to permit a number of findings. First, there was a process of maturation, although this was hardly startling. The mean age of CC members between 1924 and 1927 was 37, three years older than that of CC members between 1919 and 1923; and it increased to 39 in 1929, despite the “Third Period” emphasis on youth.¹³³ Second, the rate of turnover of CC representatives increased dramatically *through* the period 1924–1929. Newcomers comprised a fifth or less of the committees elected in 1924 and 1925; by 1927 a third had not served on an earlier CC and by March 1929 that figure had soared to more than half of those elected. Further, a significant minority of the 39 CC members from 1924 to 1927 that we have listed in **Appendix 1**, 10 (26%), had been expelled from the party by 1929. An additional 4 were expelled after World War II so that in total more than a third of our sample of WP leaders in the mid-1920s were subsequently expelled. If we include death and resignation, more than 40% of the mid-1920s cohort were no longer in the party by 1939. The data in **Appendix 2** covers some of the same personnel and is less complete but it tells a similar story. Of the 38 CC representatives for whom information is available, 10 (26%) had been expelled by 1930 and additional 6 (16%) by 1946, making a

¹³³ Jack Stachel, the WP organization secretary, estimated the average age of the membership in 1929 as between 30 and 40 and urged the recruitment of younger workers: Jack Stachel, “Organizational Report to the Sixth Convention of the Communist Party of the USA”, *Communist*, April 1929: 185, at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/communist/v08n04-apr-1929-communist.pdf>.

total of 42%. Membership information for CC representatives across this period thus demonstrates a high rate of attrition.

Third, the data enables us to make some broad comparisons *between* “the long foundation period”, 1919–1923, and succeeding years in relation to turnover. In 1921, 12 out of 17 committee members had not served on a previous CC. In 1922, the figures were 12 out of 25; 1924, 2 out of 13, 1925, 5 out of 25, 1927, 13 out of 38. In March 1929, 24 out of 44 members had not previously sat on the committee and in October 1929, 8 out of 41. This gives us a turnover rate of 71% in 1921, 48% in 1922, 15% in 1924, 20% in 1925, 34% in 1927, 55% for March 1929, and 20% for October 1929. If we aggregate the two 1929 committees, which were only seven months apart, we can calculate an overall turnover rate of 59% for that year.¹³⁴ These findings broadly confirm our original perception of an initial period of instability, a decrease in volatility in mid-decade, a speed up in the rate of change in 1927 and further acceleration in turnover in 1929. Instability might be expected in the foundation years and the Comintern attempted to control it. In contrast, the changes in 1929 were consciously induced as part of implementing the ultra-left line of the Comintern. Nonetheless, we found that for much of the 1920s continuity and to a degree seniority was embodied in a core of 19 cadres who were elected to the committee on three or more occasions between 1919 and 1927. The core did not endure: defection, expulsion and death ensured that only 8 of the 19 were on the CC that saw out the 1920s. Insurgent Stalinism represented a rupture with earlier Communist politics and its leading protagonists. Comparison between the January 1924 and August 1925 CCs (**Tables 1 and 2**) with the committee of October 1929 (**Table 8**) is instructive.

¹³⁴ We have excluded from our calculations “newcomers” to these CC’s who had previously served on an earlier committee, such as Dunne and Wicks in October 1929.

Fourth, while foreign-born Communists constituted a slowly declining proportion of the cadre – down from almost two-thirds between 1924 and 1927 to 49% in the total 1929 cohort – this remained a party led by immigrants and the children of immigrants. However, this small decline concealed a more significant drop in the number of first- and second-generation immigrants with roots in Tsarist Russia – from around 40% between 1924 and 1927 to 20% by the end of 1929. Fifth, by that point, the prevailing gender and ethnic composition of the CC had been challenged. For much of the decade the committee remained the preserve of white males. During 1929, 3 women and 5 black males appeared in its ranks – despite the small numbers a change of some significance. Sixth, the CC did not reflect the social composition of what was a predominantly manual working-class party in terms of occupation and education, given the substantial numbers of the elite from a white-collar background and the fact that a third of the total had spent time in higher education. All of this must be seen in context. The 3 women who represented 7% of the March 1929 CC were leaders of a party in which 22% of the membership was female. And while over half of that CC was foreign-born, the rank and file remained predominantly composed of those born outwith the USA.¹³⁵

Seventh, our study illustrates some of the problems in writing prosopography – for example, striking a balance between protagonists and their environment, keeping the spotlight on actors, both individually and in aggregate, while at the same time providing but compressing analytical narrative which sketches the context. Tensions between the two confirm that prosopography supplements rather than substitutes for conventional historiographical modes. Eighth, the survey sheds some light on other issues of interest to historians. For example, it highlights in human terms the progress of the Lovestone caucus on the CC and its development of a cadre of trade unionists in the late 1920s; it underlines the

¹³⁵ Stachel, “Organizational Report”, 184–85.

extent to which by 1929 the faction enjoyed support among the WP cadre and more widely. In another sphere, at least 5 of the CC members listed in **Appendices 1 and 2** studied at the ILS, the Comintern academy for cadre training. This is a very small proportion of our sample but as the first US contingent was admitted in 1926–1927, we are addressing only 3 years, while some cadres were considered too “advanced” to require training and others could not be spared from party tasks. Of those completing the course, Chernenko, Hathaway and Krumbein remained lifelong party members, Kruse departed in 1929, and Zack resigned in 1934.¹³⁶ Nine of the CC representatives listed in the two appendices were involved or strongly suspected of involvement in various, if sometimes minor, forms of espionage: Alpi, Aronberg, Bedacht, Browder, Krumbein and George had links with Soviet intelligence while they were party members. Lovestone and Lore cooperated with Soviet intelligence after their expulsion and both, as well as Wicks, passed information to the American security services.¹³⁷ Others became professional anti-Communists. Bert Miller worked for the Dies Committee while Gitlow and Zack testified before it as friendly witnesses.

Finally, our analysis complements and provides a counterpoint to Klehr’s earlier study. At various points, we have used his specific information on CCs in the 1920s to provide benchmarks to validate our findings, which broadly follow the contours of his conclusions, for example, regarding the numbers of immigrants and Jews, and where they deviate is primarily due to our lack of adequate, comparable data. If our study lacks Klehr’s longitudinal reach, our three-fold distinction between immigrants, those from immigrant

¹³⁶ Despite reference to it in the literature, we await a study of American Communists at the ILS. For a personal account see Harry Haywood. *Black Bolshevik* (New York: Red Star, 1978), 198–201.

¹³⁷ Klehr, Haynes and Firsov, *Secret World*, 25, 42, 50, 130, 234; Haynes, Klehr and Vassilev, *Spies*, 156, 209, 233; Klehr, *Heyday*, 160–161. This does not include those too numerous to mention who undertook clandestine work for the Comintern which over time overlapped with Soviet intelligence.

families, and “Americans” provides a more flexible tool than the binary division between “foreign-born” and “native-born” to construct a statistical portrait of the CC cadre.¹³⁸

Once again, quantitative methods only take us so far. Our recuperation and perforce brief exploration of individuals humanizes and expands on the statistics, although the unevenness of the evidence imposes constraints: historians know more about Ruthenberg, Foster, Cannon and Ford than about Henry, Hofbauer, Kamp and Minutella. What we have unearthed and brought together militates against conceptions of a composite, even relatively homogeneous, cadre. Our core group is not defined simply by frequency of election: by and large, it consisted of the party’s senior figures, those who with some supplementation came closest to conceptions of the cadre as the rounded Communist and expert in Marxist theory exercising practical leadership as embodied in Stalin’s maxim, “Cadres decide everything”.¹³⁹ There is a palpable difference between this nucleus and other CC members who were more junior and transient. With a few additions, the core arguably constituted the cadre, at least in terms of the Comintern model.

The core became adepts, but, for the most part, adepts at applying received policy rather than advancing Marxist theory and practice. Ideological innovation was rare, creative political thinking largely limited to justifying, explaining, expanding upon and applying policy agreed with Moscow. This was true of both workers and intellectuals. With notable exceptions and differences across the period, the core demonstrated leadership from the office, at the podium, in the press, and in the party to a greater degree than in the field, or on

¹³⁸ Stachel used the term “American” in a similar fashion at the March 1929 Convention and was challenged to say if he meant “Americans” who had arrived on the Mayflower: Stachel, “Organizational Report”, 185. Given the restriction of our study to the first decade of American Communism, we have not followed Klehr – who covers four decades – in calculating “advancement scores,” based on the number of years between a member joining the party and elevation to the CC: Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 32

¹³⁹ Arguably better translated as “Cadres are the key to everything”: Joseph Stalin, “Address to the Graduates from the Red Army Academies, May 4 1935”, in J. V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 14, at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1935/05/04.htm>.

the street or picket line.¹⁴⁰ Those who survived the decade constituted the kernel of an evolving bureaucracy.¹⁴¹ Within the 1920s core, there were gradations: we can distinguish between Ruthenberg, Foster, Browder, Lovestone, perhaps Weinstone, who aspired to, and in some cases achieved, a Field Marshall's baton – to employ the Comintern's military terminology; those, like Bedacht, Engdahl and Minor, who were on the whole content to remain Colonels and Majors within the inner circle; and others for whom the pursuit of power appeared more problematic or who, like Cannon and his supporters, eventually learned some hard lessons. Such judgements are marked by hindsight: for most of the 1920s, Browder was considered a supporting actor, while others such as Bedacht might have summoned the necessary ambition and self-confidence to contest the leadership had the Comintern cards fell that way.

Conceptions of the cadre as a team prosecuting party policy in unified fashion were further compromised by the institutionalized factionalism which organized and patterned individual rivalries; it is only to exaggerate a little to state factionalism generated tendencies to two competing cadres, unified by deference to the Comintern. The WP leadership was far from the politically homogeneous instrument of Soviet ideology: a gap yawned between Russian visions and American practice. If we take the 74 activists who made up the party leadership between 1924 and 1929, many were “officer cadets,” cadres in a limited sense. Some appear more in the mold of the trade union militant than the Marxist leader; at the other

¹⁴⁰ Cf “The footloose Wobbly rebel that I used to be had imperceptibly begun to fit comfortably into a swivel chair, protecting himself in his seat by small manoeuvres and evasions and even permitting himself a certain conceit about his adroit accommodation to this shabby game. I saw myself for the first time then as another person, as a revolutionist who was on the road to becoming a *bureaucrat*” [emphasis in original]: Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 225.

¹⁴¹ By 1930, senior cadres working out of head office such as Browder, Bedacht and Foster were being paid \$40, Alpi and Damon were receiving \$30: “Weekly Payroll Central Office,” [1930], Files of the CPUSA, reel 152, delo 1967, frame 12. It is difficult to establish the remuneration of CC members outside the inner group, although it seems plausible that they were paid through a mix of national and district subventions or via the TUUL and the Communist unions and part-time employment. Given fluctuating party finances and the increased size and changing composition of the committee, by 1929 payment for “junior” representatives may have been sporadic – these questions could benefit from further research.

extreme, some possessed little direct experience of working-class struggle. Our analysis should in no way obscure the fact that the 74 believed passionately in 1917, and an American 1917 as a harbinger of socialist transformation; they acted with dedication and no little sacrifice to fight injustice and achieve a better world. Together with factionalism – which mingled personal ambitions and allegiances with conviction that unless the party achieved unity under the right leaders it could not unify and lead the working class – a burning commitment to human liberation was part of the Communist experience in the 1920s. But cumulative extinction of workers’ power and democracy in the Soviet Union and the advance of incipient Stalinization under the banner of “Bolshevization” in America loom large. In recognizing the different facets of the Communist experience and the commitment to emancipatory struggle of CC representatives, we have to ask: in the end, for what purpose, for what politics, and in whose interests, did they give so much of their lives through that decade?

What directions might future work in prosopography take? We have emphasised that CC members constituted only one, albeit sizeable part of the cadre, overlapping with other groups: further research could look at district organizers, party editors, journalists and federation secretaries and functionaries. The approach we have taken to the 1920s could be extended to succeeding decades. If we want to examine the 1920s cadre more intensively, and focus to a greater degree on interaction than our recuperative mission has permitted, a close reading of committee minutes and related documents might improve our understanding of how individual leaders functioned, how alliances operated and shifted, how power was distributed in practice between individuals and groups, and what factors and arguments facilitated and legitimated it. More work needs to be done on gender and ethnicity, the ways in which cadres thought about religion and national identity, and the role and personnel of the federations. Looking further afield, comparisons between the leadership of different

Comintern affiliates suggests itself. Then there is the question of “the personal and the political.”

In his biography of Browder, James Ryan observed that Communist cadres “possessed personalities that were 98% political. To understand this is to grasp an important aspect of the movement’s nature. Those who became top Marxists did so in part because they gave so much of themselves. As a result, their private lives were less than exciting.”¹⁴² Scholars who pursue the private and emotional lives of Communist leaders and their personal attitudes to *inter alia* femininity and masculinity, often encounter – particularly among the lesser known – a brick wall or fragmentary evidence derived from asides, anecdote and inference compounded by the usual problems of plumbing the human psyche and the intricacies and mysteries of relationships. It was not only Communist leaders who in these years possessed what some today might style repressed personalities.¹⁴³ Communism was moving away from the sexual liberation and Bohemianism of its liberal phase: American cadres were insisting that “self-expression” and “sex life” should be subordinated to workers’ power and its pursuit.¹⁴⁴ Restoring Communists in the round and analysing the aggregate results is part of the historian’s brief. The few bare facts about their relationships recorded here demonstrate how little we know and suggest the difficulties of understanding more. Opinions will differ. But perhaps engagement with the personal sphere is best consigned to the extended biography, a genre which, for some at least, “demands an engagement with the private life and inner person which is not the business of prosopography.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ryan, *Browder*, 134.

¹⁴³ His mother “had instilled in him the notion that it wasn’t seemly for people to make a public display of their feelings ... I have never been able to disclose my personal life to anyone:” Evans, *James P. Cannon As We Knew Him*, 164–65, 242.

¹⁴⁴ H.M. Wicks, “Apology for Sex Anarchism Disguised as Marxism,” *Daily Worker*, 19 June 1927, quoted in Kathleen A. Brown and Elizabeth Faue, “Social Bonds, Sexual Politics and Political Community on the US Left, 1920–1940,” *Left History* 7, no. 1 (2000): 10.

¹⁴⁵ Paul Magdalino, quoted in Katharine Keats-Rohan, “Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography,” in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, ed. K.S.B. Rohan (Oxford: P & G Publications, 2007), 141.

Notes on contributors

John McIlroy is Visiting Professor of Employment Relations, Middlesex University, London, UK. He was formerly a Reader in Sociology, University of Manchester, UK, and Professor of Industrial Relations, Keele University, UK. *Alan Campbell* is an Honorary Senior Fellow in the Department of History, University of Liverpool, UK, where he was previously a Reader in History. They may be contacted at: qx03@liv.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge generous assistance from Tim Davenport, John Earl Haynes, John Holmes, Harvey Klehr, Auvo Kostainen, Barry McLoughlin, and Jacob Zumoff. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers and the editor.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

Appendices

[INSTRUCTION TO TYPESETTER: Please insert Appendices so that each begins on a new page. Please ensure that all information on any individual is confined to the same page and does not run on to the next page]