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THE MANY WORLDS OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM

by

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

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2019

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PREFACE: THE MANY WORLDS OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM

In 2014, amidst a hot and humid June afternoon, the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) held its 95th anniversary conference. There, members young and old gathered to meet and greet as well as vote in the new generation of Party leaders. The conference numbered over 700 and attracted a large number of youth activists ranging from students to hard working young adults. In recent years, a growing interest in the concepts of Marxism, communism, and anarchism developed around the world as the international economy reached a crisis point during the 2008 recession. After the publication of Thomas Piketty's *Capital In the 21st Century* in 2013, which unveiled systemic conditions about income inequality throughout the modern world system, sales of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* soared throughout Britain and the United States. He Nian, a Chinese theatre director, re-created an all-singing, all-dancing musical to commemorate Marx's work. English literature professor Terry Eagleton published *Why Marx Was Right* in 2011 while French Maoist philosopher Alian Badiou published *The Communist Hypothesis* to rally activists into a new era of communist theory.¹ In the 2016 Presidential Election, the CPUSA ardently advocated for opposition against Donald Trump in a manner that mimicked their historical attitude toward the 'lesser of two evils,' earning them both attention and criticism from American activists, leftists, students, and unionists. In November 2018, the Historians of American Communism gathered in Williamstown to discuss the 100 years of American Communism and its legacy in the United States. Finally, in the summer of 2019, the CPUSA will hold its centennial celebration as one of the oldest radical political parties in the nation.

This dissertation examines the American communist movement between 1928 and 1957 by dividing up the narrative into worlds of activity; particularly political activism, labor organizing, and community organizing. It argues that American radicalism takes on features that distinguish it from a specific effort, such as civil rights legislation or collective bargaining agreements. As a radical tradition, American Communism has a difficult and sometimes contradictory history; conflated between questions

about ideological motivation and the practical gains netted by American workers and citizens as a result of such motivation. American communist history is not a history of organizations, nor is it a history of how certain ideologies had effects on the actions of individuals. It is a history of people and how they chose to balance their lives on the virtues of American democracy and the ideals of Marxist egalitarianism. This research asserts that American Communism can be understood in a variety of ways depending upon the context from which the examined organizers and activists engaged with American citizens. Social movements take on meanings that are very personal to those who experienced them, as well as to those who examine them. When one examines the work of communist political activists, they will find experiences that unveil a deeply ideological political movement. By switching to an examination of communist labor activists, one reveals a much different narrative; one focused on legal strategies for obtaining collective bargaining rights and that cared less about the conclusions of a political committee than it did the demands of local workers. Finally, if one examines the work of communist organizing in the communities against institutionalized forms of societal oppression, they will find a more emotional and cultural narrative that sees American radicals trying to balance the ideals of the nation with the ideology of Marxism.

I refer to the "many worlds" of American Communism as the variances of experience displayed in the historiographical and biographical record in an effort to unpack how American Communism meant different things to different people, and most importantly that these meanings changed with the individuals as well. American Communist history from 1928 to 1957 is best understood as one segment of long-standing tradition encompassing a variety of radical political, labor, and civil rights movements dating back to the late 19th century.² By the 1930s, American Communism was indeed a "world political movement," but it also existed as a domestic movement with localized influences that varied in experience from nation-to-nation. As a movement in the United States from the 1920s through the 1950s, American Communism varied from state-to-state, dependent upon geopolitical circumstances,

social tensions over issues such as race, the extent of unemployment in dominant industries, and the palatability of industrial unionism within a given workforce.

Since the mid-1990s, scholarship on American Communism has expanded as newer sources became available, the Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Documents of Recent History (RTsKhIDMII/RGAJPI) digitized its archives on the CPUSA, and new methods of interpreting history, such as an emphasis on personal experiences, became more widely used. James Barrett's *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* along with Randi Storch's *Red Chicago* were among the first works to benefit from newer sources and demonstrated a clear break between the 'traditional' and 'revisionist' schools of thought, as put by Vernon L. Pedersen in *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919-57*. The traditionalist school, best represented by Theodore Draper's *The Roots of American Communism* and Harvey Klehr's *The Heyday of American Communism*, viewed the ideological link between the CPUSA and the Soviet Union as the most significant aspect of this history, particularly when defining the boundaries of what made a particular strike, event, or organization "communist." Seeking to understand American communism as a domestic ideological movement, the revisionist school countered with an emphasis on the "correction of injustices in American society," with works such as Mark Naison's *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* and Robin Kelley's *Hammer and Hoe: Black Radicalism and the Communist Party of Alabama*.³ The traditionalist school suffers from a general negative perspective of communist ideology and treats it as a foreign/alien movement that only existed because of the Soviet Union. The revisionists suffer from a nuanced and overly positive perspective and attempts a 'so what' attitude to the counterevidence revealed by the opening of the Russian archives. Both schools, however, unveil an over-arching handicap that prevents the writers and readers of the subject to fully grasp the complexity of American Communism.

At the root of the traditionalist and revisionist schools of American Communist history is the placement of the CPUSA and its leadership class as the nucleus of the entire history; where the narrative

both begins and ends as a political history of dissidents and radicals. Both schools use the CPUSA as the nexus from which their conclusions are drawn: The CPUSA's ideological link and involvement in the Comintern served as the foundation for the traditionalist claim that American Communism was merely a front for Soviet espionage and subversive activities. The CPUSA's promotion of African American, labor, and civil rights as a political policy served as a foundation for the revisionists rejecting the significance of traditionalist claims. In both instances the CPUSA is the beginning and the end of the narrative, while the externals are used as contextual links and exceptions to the rules, such as divisions between the CPUSA and other socialist groups, are considered negligible. Trotskyists and left-leaning socialists are thus placed as a tangential narrative to that of the CPUSA. More importantly, the individual testimonies of low-ranking communists and communists with ties across various organizations are overlooked in these analyses. This unfortunately treats the history of American Communism as a singular narrative unique to the period of the early Cold War and fails to highlight the ways in which communists and radicals influenced the social and cultural direction of the United States.

The traditionalists focus on what I call the *political world* of American Communism; which indeed developed into a highly centralized political movement, with direct connections to the Soviet Union, centered on the CPUSA; but filtered out into other organizations such as the Communist League of America (CLA), the Workers' Party of America (WPA), and later the Workers' Party of the United States (WPUS). The revisionists focus generally on one of two different worlds, the *labor* and *community worlds* of American Communism and also tend to generalize the distinctions between the two around issues, such as racial equality in the workplace and at the community despite the fact that organizing for racial equality in the workplace was fundamentally different from organizing in the community. Randi Storch was among the first scholars to abandon the approach of a single narrative history by examining the social dimension of communist political culture in Chicago during the Third Period (1928-1934). While not ignoring the overt ideological connection with the USSR, Storch

demonstrated that amidst the early portion of the Great Depression, American communists both inside and outside the CPUSA "learned how to work with liberals and non-Communists" by developing "successful organizing tactics and fight[ing] for workers' rights, racial equality, and unemployment relief."⁴ Jacob Zumoff expanded on Storch's approach in his work *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919-1929*, where he demonstrated that while the traditionalists were indeed correct in the overt connection between the Communist International (Comintern) and the CPUSA, they missed the fact that part of this connection included an emphasis that the CPUSA "Americanize" itself and act as a more independent political organization.

The division of American communist history into multiple narratives both complicates the historiography and more accurately portrays the experiences of those who participated in the movement. Storch observed that the historiography at this point has a few particular avenues; one which observes the political dimension of communist activity, one which examines the community-based organizations and localized communist activism, and one which observes the movement's interconnection with other scholarship, such as labor and cultural studies.⁵ The concept of "many worlds" or "rival theories" in history is a common claim in the field of International Relations where "competition between the realist, liberal, and radical traditions" consistently reassess our understandings of social movements. International Relations scholar Stephen M. Walt argued this concept on a broad level when discussing the nature of international political ideology throughout the mid-to-late Cold War (1960-1991). In a subject where multiple interpretations exist in addition to multiple variances of experiences among sources, "no single approach can capture all the complexity" of a social and political movement. Furthermore, the end of the Soviet Union and the availability of new sources did little to resolve the struggle of competing theoretical traditions. Instead, it "merely launched a new series of debates" about the extent to which social movements were domestic in nature versus the by-product of international relations. For Walt, this was a matter about "contemporary

world politics" using a variety of sources and contextual evidence to develop a well-rounded approach to policymaking.⁶

The notion of multiple worlds of a single movement also incorporates observations from world literature scholars about how "writers frame their respective cultures as 'windows on the world.'" Daniel Simon asks, given the subjective nature of writing about international issues, "how do we read world literature?"⁷ This same question applies to almost any social/political movement at the domestic level: How do we read the histories of social/political movements that are invariably linked at the international level to various other cultures, movements, and people? The answer is that we read it divided: When we want to understand American Communism as a political movement, we look to its international roots and its ideological links abroad; when we want to understand American communist activism in labor, we look to its temperament and palatability with specific working groups, such as industrial auto workers and non-white agricultural workers; when we desire to understand anticommunism, we look to the Cold War for contextual explanations for the violation of domestic constitutional rights. The particular 'world' focused on—labor, community, political—is invariably written with a subconscious emphasis of the specific circumstances of each case, but rarely do historians take the next step of linking these various worlds as multiple experiences of the same history; as subjective relationships to the same movement. Instead, each approach tends to emphasize itself as *the* history to be examined; be it the history of American Communism's ideological roots in Europe, the history of the American labor movement and its tendency to utilize radical and militant communist organizers, or the history of individual American communist's resistance to racial injustice and social inequality.

The history of American Communism is too complex to relegate it to simply a political or social history. American Communism as a movement incorporated elements that extended into the political, the legal, and the civil corners of the United States. While both the revisionist and traditionalist schools

of thought have added important contributions to the history, they have also both suffered from an approach which treats a multi-faceted social movement as a singular, monolithic phenomenon; each emphasizing one aspect deemed significant over all others. Rather than act as simple conduits between Soviet policy and American communist activism, individual American communists channeled increased political energy into specific areas thought to be effective at, or at least open to, organizing for social change and typically sought at the very least tacit approval from their local Party nuclei. Storch pointed out that in Chicago between 1928 and 1935, "a wide variety of communists coexisted in Chicago," including high and low ranking Stalinist cohorts and also non-Stalinist activists engaged in social, political, and labor-oriented activities. Additionally, both the CLA and the CPUSA enjoyed the increasing romanticism and popularity of the Bolshevik Revolution among youthful activists, which by 1929 had "sparked the imagination of liberals and radicals throughout the United States."⁸

Elements of the pan-Socialist tradition, which in urban areas like Chicago included "socialist, anarchist, and militant trade-union traditions," rushed to engage with their society under an increased sense of urgency.⁹ The CLA and the CPUSA sought to gain momentum by seizing upon the increasing interest in revolutionary theory, Marxism, and the idealism of the Bolshevik Revolution. Under this context, it should be easy to understand that the term "American Communism" does not refer to exclusively one group, one organization, or one political party. This tendency to view the movement as a "monolith," where the degree to which someone is or is not a communist is measured by the degree to which they are separated or under the thumb of the CPUSA, dominates the existing scholarship on American Communism. It is important, however, to understand the subtle practical and theoretical differences of this movement if one is to understand the totality of its impact on American history.

The Communist International, or Comintern, played a role in the development of American Communism but it was not the sole actor as it did not have, and ultimately lacked the means of, direct influence over all communist organizations in the United States throughout the 1930s. Factional

disputes and power struggles internally contributed significantly to the redirection of local American communist politics between 1927-1929, which is part of the goal of the first chapter is to unpack and explain. The CLA continued to operate throughout the Third Period, but its work focused on advancing "Left Opposition" to the CPUSA instead of pushing a general political policy for the United States. The CPUSA, in turn, resisted oppositional groups like the CLA as endemic of what they called "social fascism."¹⁰ This dynamic forced the CPUSA to act politically and organizationally in ways the Comintern could never predict. Following the 1928 presidential campaign and the formal separation of anti-Soviet groups, the political agenda of the CPUSA "had neither a beginning nor an ending point," as it sought to "register the extent of [the] Party's support in the working class by mobilizing the maximum number to vote for candidates."¹¹ Throughout the subsequent Third Period, American Communism solidified into a social movement through the emergence of grassroots communist activism within the United States on the basis of an independent electoral and social strategy and the rise of multiple areas of strategic importance for communist work in the United States, areas that I call the many worlds of American Communism. 1928 serves as an effective starting point for the origin and evolution of this genuinely *American* communist social movement; one that purposefully differentiated itself from other socialist/Marxist organizations on the basis of both theory and action, and one that developed its own internal debate over support for Soviet-style communist regimes. Without an opposition group, American communism had little domestically-driven ideology.

The primary sources chosen for this analysis are broad, and for good reason: to understand what American Communism was we must examine not just Party records and the memoirs of Party leaders but also the memories of the lived experiences of the movement across different geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The sources break up into two categories. First, there are the Party's own documents and those archived by the Soviet Union, hereby referred to as the Comintern Archives. During the Soviet-defined 'Third Period,' a term used to describe the third phase in revolutionary activity

following the Russian Revolution which lasted from 1928 to 1934, the primary means of distributing communist theory in the United States was through a wide variety of Communist International and local Communist Party publications. For communists outside of the CPUSA, such as those that filled the ranks of the CLA and the SWP, other periodicals such as *The Militant* served as the basis for discussion and followed a format similar to that of the CPUSA publications. These anti-Soviet publications were central to building a theoretical understanding of communism outside of Russia under the circumstances of the post-Russian Revolutionary era. As such, these resources are the best remaining examples of American communist thought throughout the late 1920s and 1930s and include theories both constrained by and liberated from Soviet oversight, as some of the sources extend from groups disassociated from the USSR.

Among the most significant and dominant publishers for communist literature for American communists were Progress Publishing, based out of Moscow, and International Publishers, based both in New York and Chicago. International Publishers Company started in 1924 in a joint-venture investment project started by A.A. Heller, a wealthy socialist who had ties to production industries in the Soviet Union. The publishing company struggled for over 15 years. At first, it was held up only by Heller's overinvestment. It later gained a significant amount of support and following from the Workers' Party of America. The Workers' Party of America would become the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) by 1928, but it helped Heller find outlets for the publisher to distribute. To compete with the publication of Marxist and communist works by other publishers, International Publishers focused on books "not yet published in English" but written by prominent socialist thinkers.¹² Progress Publishers, based in Moscow, printed the various works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and the Communist International journal, *The Communist*, in multiple languages for communist parties in Europe and the United States. Since most American communist political philosophy had its origins in the broad theoretical traditions published by both International Publishers and Progress Publishers, they can be

seen as the lens through that political, labor, and community communist activism manifested and evolved throughout the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.

The next category of sources are personal memoirs, autobiographies, historical biographies, and oral histories. Part of this analysis accepts that party documents, government reports, and political newspapers present one interpretation of the historical narrative. But it also accepts that between the depiction of the events in official records and memories of those events by the men and women who lived them exists some semblance of the truth. Autobiographies, like that of Peggy Dennis, provide insight into the way American communists thought about the way Party leaders responded to Soviet policy decisions in the immediate aftermath of major political shifts. Similarly, autobiographies of some communists, such as musician and chronic traveler Russell Brodine, do not focus exclusively on their identity as communists but rather incorporate their ideological experiences into their broader life experiences. The same case applies to the autobiography of the CPUSA's oldest living member, Beatrice Lumpkin, who published *Joy in the Struggle* in 2015. Lumpkin's experience also uses her involvement in ideologically-motivated events as tangential and parallel to her overall life experience and thus provides a dynamic look into the life of a communist involved in multiple aspects of political, labor, and civic engagement. Personal memoirs, like that of George Charney with *A Long Journey* as well as historical biographies such as *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: Life as a Negro Communist in the South* by Nell Irving Painter do a similar service of discussing communist activism as part of what these American radicals believed to be a component of their American ideals. Memoirs that focus exclusively on specific, geographic, and widely-known experiences such as fighting in World War II help connect what grassroots communists believed to be patriotism to their ideological investment in socialism and Marxism.

Oral histories are continuing to serve historians as the ideal ways to understand what lived experiences meant to individuals still to this day. One of the most important aspects about oral histories

of a movement such as American Communism is how they convey a tremendous gap between the average activist and the ideological world of politics. While possessing the fault of any primary source in terms of questionable validity, oral histories are guaranteed to be real in the mind of the speaker. Over the course of 9 years this research has built upon over 10 oral histories of living and deceased American communists. Some of those interviewed remain active members of the CPUSA, others are part of political clubs in different parts of the country, and others prefer to remain anonymous for personal reasons. All of their stories, however, help fill in the gap of *meaning* for a movement that is told mostly through the lens of ideologically driven reports with a specific agenda. In total, the sources used are intended to provide a broad examination of the American communist movement from multiple angles. The sources chosen for this research were picked because of their desire to tell their personal side of the story, and to explain why some individuals dedicated years, often decades, of their lives to a movement regardless of how the vast majority of the nation viewed them.

Outside of strictly industrial workspaces, individuals across the nation joined the American Communist movement for a wide range of reasons and under an even wider range of conditions. As a Jewish second-generation immigrant from New York City, Lumpkin spent years learning about the plight of workers from her leftist parents and family, as well as fellow community members, as the nation descended into the Depression. William Z. Foster joined after facing difficulty within AFL and syndicalist unions in the post-World War I strike wave. Danny Rubin joined after witnessing anti-Semitism in Philadelphia and linking the treatment of the local Jewish population with the general treatment of the working class. Hosea Hudson joined the CPUSA in the wake of the Scottsboro case and the rising influence of the International Labor Defense (ILD) as an organization to fight discrimination. James Cannon, like many who eventually held leadership in either the CPUSA and/or other organizations such as the CLA, became inspired by the actions and tenacity of Russian Marxists to restore the "unfalsified Marxism in the international labor movement" and the romanticism of the Russian Revolution.¹³ Len

DeCaux joined the CPUSA as a result of his perception of "herd impulses" he felt from teenage conformities while attending the Harrow School during World War I and the subsequent shortcomings of the IWW with regard to a practical plan to organize the masses. Russell Brodine joined after finding difficulties in his college experiences with the organization of fellow musicians in order to secure spots in the orchestra and defend/increase existing pay rates. In short, there never was a single particular reason as to why American communists became American communists—just like any political/social movement, American Communism attracted people by the message it delivered and the hopes it promised. The outlets for these citizens were the organizations previously mentioned and the subsequent labor and community organizations, such as the CIO and the ILD, that emerged out of the struggle.

The backgrounds of American communists that ended up defining the movement after 1928 were as diverse as they were complex. While not exceptional by American political standards, the American communist movement was without-a-doubt one of the most diverse of all communist movements worldwide. The political idealists who crafted domestic communist policy in the United States under various organizations, clubs, and union locals faced a constituency with *American* values and *American* experiences, regardless of what their ideological schools of thought taught them. Either they, their parents, or their grandparents immigrated from Europe, or were liberated through emancipation subsequent to the American Civil War, to escape political and personal persecution. Many who came to identify as *communist* during the 'heyday' of the movement viewed the tenants of socialism as compatible with or parallel to the virtues of American liberty, while others viewed the American system as a viable Republic merely corrupted by the special interests of an oligarchic elite. In this sense, American communists by the late 1920s were genuinely *American* first, and *communist* second. Furthermore, the diffusion of communists across various organizations masks the numbers of active communists throughout the Third Period and Popular Front, as noted by more recent scholarship.

Many of the organizations and unions commanded by communists were not "numerically dominated" by members of the CPUSA, the CLA, or the SPA. The International Labor Defense (ILD), for example, operated as an independent organization of 2,520 individuals but was led and organized by a small group of 150 CPUSA members, and given substantial amount of funding to operate in cities like Detroit and Chicago. Auxiliary organizations, which combined political members with union numbers and groups such as the ILD, "suggest a much wider support base than membership numbers allow."¹⁴

The dissertation is broken up into 6 chapters, all of which are chronological except for the final chapter on anticommunism. The first two chapters break down the narrative history of American Communism as a political movement from 1928 until the end of World War II. Both of these chapters emphasize both the dependency of domestic communists on ideological conclusions made in Russia as well as the continuous attempt by the Soviet Comintern to domesticate the CPUSA and force it to relate more personally to the average American citizen. The third chapter covers the work of specific communists dedicated to the American labor movement during the same time frame, 1928 to 1945. The fourth chapter explores communist activism in the communities and the attempt to link class-based struggles with social issues such as unemployment and racism. Both the third and fourth chapters attempt to dislodge the notion of monolithism by demonstrating that each sphere of activism had its own dominant attitudes, actors, and results; none of which can be deemed all-inclusive of what the American communist movement sought to achieve. The fifth chapter explores the breakdown of the political dimension of American Communism and the circumstances of the postwar world as a handicap to the continuation of previous work done by communists in the labor and community worlds, leading to a mass diffusion of communist activism into other forms of organizational work. The final chapter explores the world of anticommunism, and attempts to expand the timeline of this discussion into the interwar period, address espionage, and ends with the *Yates v. United States* decision in 1957. The final chapter also presents the dominant trials of the postwar period while contrasting them with the

experiences of lower-ranking communists across the country. The *Yates* decision serves as an effective terminal point for this discussion because it is at that point that American Communism, as a movement, no longer existed alone in its emphasis on radicalism and militant organizing against societal norms deemed oppressive. Marxism and radicalism in general within less than one decade of the *Yates* decision became incorporated into a multitude of New Left ideology and philosophy, and communists could no longer claim to be the sole proponents of a radical vision for American society.

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CHAPTER 1: THE POLITICAL WORLD OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM, 1928-1934

Any history of communism as a social movement naturally begins as a study of its political theory, its constituent organizations, and its advocated policies. Communist political activism in the United States, as an element of a broader pan-Socialist Left tradition, held roots in the arrival of German immigrants in 1848 as well as the late 19th century labor strikes in railway industries. The theoretical heritage of communist activity originated with German idealist philosophy and carried with it implicit messages about the importance of certain political institutions and ideals. Later communist theorists of the 20th century, such as Vladimir Lenin, emphasized the need for political movements to attach specific social agendas. Ultimately, theory and action helped facilitate the rise of the world's first communist government in Russia. Theodore Draper's early work on American communists asked questions through this lens, such as: "Why did a revolution in Russia mean so much to them?" and "Why did so many early communists prefer the 'underground' to an open, legal Party?" Simultaneously, Draper depicted communist sources as tainted with an inherent level of "propaganda," thus alluding to the notion that communist activity and communist political theory were inseparable.¹⁵

This study thus begins with the political world of American Communism, a loose, but coordinated, network of political action groups, publishing companies, political parties, public figures, and grassroots activists. The political history of American Communism attracted the most attention during the early examinations of the CPUSA and the Socialist Party (SPA) in the late 1950s through the 1970s. In these studies, the work of communists throughout the 1920s and 1930s were politically-driven with specific political goals.¹⁶ In order to understand the manner in which communist activism split into different forms of social engagement that transformed the political ideals into labor and community-based policy, it is necessary to understand the foundation upon which communists in the United States built their political ideology. Because in communist theory the political sphere is intended to reflect the dominant conditions of society, the community and labor worlds of American Communism

sought identity and purpose from the organizations that rallied behind the banner of Marxism. This chapter argues that the political world of American Communism solidified in 1928 by ending of factional strife within specific political groups to create a multifaceted movement that subsequently pushed its political ideals into labor organizing and community activism.

The political world formed the central driving core of American Communism from 1928 to 1957, and it did not exist in any functional manner prior to or after those periods. By core, I mean the dimension of the American communist movement that most significantly influenced the others; where the output of information and policy was more primary than the input of external influences other than the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and later, Joseph Stalin. The labor and community aspects of American communist work influenced less political theory than they translated it into practical work in their respective fields. This does mean that the labor and community worlds were slaves to the political core found in American communist parties during this time period, but they also created their own spheres of influence that extended beyond what Party leaders could have hoped to achieve. The political core functioned very similarly to the manner by which democratic centralism in Leninist Russia bound various societal organizations and activist groups to a single political policy. If one were to envision the American communist movement from 1928 to 1957 as an atom, the political ideologies and strategies expressed by the CPUSA, Communist League of America (CLA), the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) and the Workers' Party of the United States (WPUS), formed the nucleus; the labor and community worlds orbited this core, both pulled in by its ideological system as well as pushing against it to create a dynamic movement with two primary spheres of influence. Influence filtered out of the political core more than it went in, but the core remained flexible and in tune with its orbiting spheres of influence right up to the start of its erosion in the final days of World War II.

This chapter pushes back on claims that communist engagement in the Popular Front was an act of dogmatic Stalinism. Grassroots communists throughout the Popular Front rallied to the desires and

ideals of their constituency, the working class American. From 1932 until the middle of World War II, American Communism existed as a legitimate political expression of radical Left traditions in the United States, and the CPUSA was the most popular radical political organization in the nation. It was only after 1945 that the political world, centered largely in and around the CPUSA, lost its grip on the American communist movement. This was in no small part due to the Party's depiction of the United States in 1946 as an emerging fascist power; a view that did not align with the sentiments and desires of working Americans. From 1928 to 1945, crusading against capitalism and oppression created a common ground that united radical labor activists, passionate proponents of civil rights and the New Deal, anti-Jim Crow politicians, working people of color, women, and common community activists eager to see the United States expand on its ideals of freedom and equality.

Although the ideological nexus of American Communism was broader than simply the CPUSA, the Party's national statistics during the early formative years of the political core provide a decent starting point for understanding the momentum and array of communist activity during the early Depression. The CPUSA had a healthy obsession with categorizing its members, allowing for an examination of socioeconomic backgrounds to provide a good understanding of the kinds of subgroupings that later came to dominate the movement by the 1930s. Between 1928 and 1931, the vast majority of American communists were unemployed, foreign born or African American, and male. As well, foreign-born members tended to stay longer and remain more active than native-born members. Some have speculated this resulted from a lack of exposure to broad American culture in the late 1920s. Whichever the case, foreign-born dues-paying members of the CPUSA remained more active for longer periods, with the majority leaving after World War II. Historian Harvey Klehr found that among the employed members of the CPUSA, white collar employees were more likely to remain with the movement than their blue collared comrades.¹⁷

Though the Party aimed at organizing equal numbers of men and women and focused its recruitment efforts on working class neighborhoods, it occasionally attracted well-to-do intellectuals and Jewish community activists, such as George Charney and Herbert Aptheker. Aptheker, like many college-educated communists, came to the CPUSA after participating with students in campus-based organizations and protests. Geographically, communists fell into two groups: travelers and settlers. Travelers such as musician and union organizer Russell Brodine commonly shifted location due to the transient nature of their work (Brodine played symphonic bass). Settlers, such as unionist and community activist Beatrice Lumpkin, usually stuck within the same geographic region for years. At times when they did move, it was typically to a similar scene (for Lumpkin's case it was New York to Chicago).¹⁸ As for Party leaders, most traveled the country and frequented the major districts of Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles. On the whole, however, it is difficult to give a single generic socioeconomic background of American communists. A complex multitude of "varied interests, backgrounds temperaments, and (un)willingness to devote themselves to Party demands" created a dynamic grassroots membership base in urban areas.¹⁹

During the 1932 electoral campaign, African Americans such as Hosea Hudson and Benjamin Davis made up about 9.4% of the CPUSA; and by 1935 they accounted for 15% of all new recruits into the Party. At the end of World War II, African American membership had grown to 14%. Despite gaining traction in the streets, only 20 people of color served on the Party's Central Committee^a from 1930-1961; compared to over 155 whites.²⁰ There was also a disparity between the backgrounds of blacks who joined the Party. Many of the most active black communists were highly educated: Ben Davis graduated from Harvard Law, William Patterson from the University of California at Berkeley, and Doxey Wilkerson completed postdoctoral work at the University of Michigan. Some historians believe that this explains the direction taken by many African Americans in joining the CPUSA, which included an

^a Sometimes referred to as "National Committee"

unwillingness “to give allegiance to parties that acquiesced in the racial practices prevalent in the United States.”²¹ Overall, American Communism’s fight against racism became one of its principled battlegrounds that spanned across all three major dimensions, attracting people of color but also contributing to its failure to gain traction with white workers; who at times were indifferent or antagonistic toward the plight of non-white workers. At times the Party made overt attempts to combat this, such as using slogans that decried ‘racism chains both’ during the 1932 Presidential campaign. As far as representing American Communism, however, African Americans remained marginalized throughout most of the pre-war and war years.²²

Women such as Lumpkin, Dorothy Ray Healey, and Emma Tenayuca also played a crucial role in building the movement from 1932 to 1939, although with significant underrepresentation in the political core. From 1930 to 1934, between 3.8% and 7.4% of elected CPUSA Central Committee members were women. This number jumped to 12.8% in 1936, and reached its height of 23.5% in 1940.²³ The shift in 1931 toward electoral politics and again in 1935 toward Populism, which brought communist activism off the shop floors and into the public sphere, inevitably meant “that women and the home front could no longer be ignored” by American communist strategists. As communists active in the community, many women such as Beatrice Lumpkin began to organize with men to address suicide, mortgage foreclosures, evictions, as well as lack of food and clothes for the poor and unemployed in New York, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Chicago.²⁴

In some cases, communist women in the communities proved vital as they took on a variety of community tasks, such as surveying their neighborhoods, recruiting for the Party, and promoting active participation in the community door-to-door. This generated a new approach that embedded “[women] in the minutiae of working class life instead of ‘going to the workers’ with a revolutionary message from afar” that only targeted one segment of American society.²⁵ The growth in support among women, however, failed to change existing CPUSA policies and stances that did not necessarily favor women’s

specific interests, such as the Party's opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, which it believed would "thwart the interests of working-class women."²⁶ This was not unlike most unions at the time, which rallied behind elements of masculinity in labor and the emerging concept of the nuclear family. Linn Shapiro expressed that, although the CPUSA maintained a limited understanding of the needs of women during the first four decades of its life, it nevertheless "kept alive unachieved women's rights goals," including pay equity, acceptance in unions, and, especially, equal rights for African American women.²⁷

Issues of gender and sexual inequality surfaced in the American communist movement during the early 1930s and, in many ways, defined the constraints put on women who found themselves absorbed into a male-dominated social and political movement. Because the Party and many individual communists traced their understanding of women's social position in society to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, both who emphasized that the oppression of women coincided with the development of capitalism, many within the CPUSA, CLA, SWP and their orbit insisted that women's equal rights could be ensured only via proletarian revolution. Within the constraints of capitalist society, communists believed, the achievement of women's social equality was impossible. Within the CPUSA women that held rank and occasional spots on the Central Committee did not always hold decision-making power or any ability to veto. Instead, much of the CPUSA leadership, such as Benjamin Gitlow, emphasized how in retrospect women within the Party "were able to exercise power only through their husbands and paramours."²⁸ In the lower activist and organizational ranks, women found themselves in a dark and sometimes dangerous place, as Dorothy Healey did during her high period of activism from 1934-1942, where her "salvation army approach" to love and marriage involved sexual relations with comrades and possible recruits and was described as "a sense of Party duty."²⁹

The Party's official stance on homosexuality "considered homosexual practice incompatible with revolutionary activity." In the streets and communities however, American Communism attracted gays

and lesbians, both white and black as well as young and old. At the grassroots level, political ideals met with the harsh practical reality that district organizers commanded significant gravitas within their geographic area. When the CPUSA ordered a purge of homosexuals during the late Third Period, district leader Junius Scales refused to comply with the order and instead emphasized the “courage” and “trust in the Party” many gays and lesbians had throughout communities.³⁰ When communist labor organizer Dorothy Ray Healey tried to lecture a younger comrade, Archie Brown, about how Lenin did not approve of promiscuity, Brown responded that Lenin “knew nuttin’ about sex.” According to Kathleen Brown and Elizabeth Faue, Left radicals were influenced by the “new Soviet culture,” particularly Lenin’s writings on the Women Question, which set a goal that women “achieve equality with men not only in law, but in life as well.”³¹ In Lenin’s collected works, these writings were prefaced by another influential figure for the American Left, Nadezhda K. Krupskaya. The issues of gender and sexual identity within American Communism from 1929-1936 highlight the growing disparity between the directives of the Soviet-run Communist International (Comintern) and the communist movement within the United States, which usually found itself adapting or molding Comintern policy to the practical situation found in American cities and homes.³²

The youth's story of American Communism is certainly an underexamined field in the existing historiography, in part on the sole basis that youths are so heavily emphasized for their impact on subsequent cultural movements such as Civil Rights and Second Wave Feminism. Draper pointed out how before the creation of the Youth Communist League (YCL), early American Communism found its greatest appeal among twenty to forty-year age groups and "did not fare so well above or below." Previous efforts, such as the Young People's Socialist League based out of Michigan, were short-lived and ineffective. The YCL after 1922 continued to provide "the main reinforcements to the Party's top leadership for the next two decades."³³ Lumpkin's experience in the YCL is an uplifting one that emphasizes the positive aspects of youthful communist political action during the Depression, but it also

represents one of the best examples of how communist youths took on passionate political action for both personal and selfless means. Lumpkin chose the YCL after weighing out a choice over the Young Peoples' Socialist League (Yipsels) and deciding that communists were better "organizers of the free speech fight."³⁴ The link between youth communist passion for their movement, their association of radical politics with protecting American values such as free speech, and the subsequent significance of youth involvement in political action during the 1950s and 1960s has yet to be fully unearthed, but it remains a ripe field for future research.

As a political institution, CPUSA leaders and district organizers throughout the late 1920s staunchly advocated a position of resistance to all forms of progressive, liberal, and Democrat policies, and they justified their rationale with Leninist communist theory. This meant depicting the world amidst a capitalist crisis, and rallying behind the institution of the Communist International for guidance. The start of the Third Period also hastened the synthesis of communist leaders and non-communist political/labor organizers by forcing communists to learn "how to work with liberals and non-communists" under the direction of their Comintern representatives.³⁵ By the mid 1930s and throughout World War II a shift occurred, and those same leaders worked to maintain their distance from other socialist organizations, operate more loosely without Comintern oversight, as well as contrast themselves from the Roosevelt Administration ideologically while simultaneously maintaining a cooperative stance with liberals and Democrats for both economic reform and resistance to the rise of fascism. This included challenging perceived reactionary Republicans and supporting Roosevelt's electoral campaign in 1936 as the means to preventing a step back into the economic conditions of 1930-31.

This move alone represented the largest divergence between the CPUSA and other communist groups such as the CLA and SWP that emerged in the mid 1930s. The latter rejected cooperation and only tacitly approved the efforts of the Popular Front. The SPA also routinely denounced the CPUSA's

position as meddling with reactionary and revisionist tactics, words that to a communist sound like "conservative" and "centrist." Outside the political world, the activism got blurry as cooperation across ideological lines was necessary in order to obtain real achievements for Americans which was understood as the real, practical goal. In labor organizing, communists, both men and women, such as Emma Tenyuaca, Dorothy Healey, John Gates, George Charney, and Beatrice Lumpkin worked extensively to maintain relations within the American Federation of Labor (AFL) while supporting the growth of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) led by John L. Lewis. Finally, in communities across the country, communists such as Russell Brodine, Benjamin Davis, and Charney, as well as Lumpkin and others, built local ties to strengthen their bonds as community members and promote solidarity between working people across racial, gender, and political lines.

Grasping the divide between organizations claiming to represent communism in the United States, such as the CPUSA and the CLA over ideology, is essential to understand the full spectrum of American Communism and how it existed as its own shade within a broader pan-socialist American tradition. Splits were and remain a common tendency of the pan-socialist Left in the United States, and their contribution to the distinction between socialist, communist, and progressive organizations should not be overlooked. Some might even argue it to be endemic of the Left tradition in the United States. Perhaps future studies can seek to examine the totality of the pan-socialist Left in the United States, of which such studies would find American Communism as complex and multifaceted actor. The CPUSA, CLA, and SWP were born out of such Leftist factionalism, as were the later sects of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) and the Communist Labor Party of North America (CLPNA).

The CPUSA, CLA, Communist Party (Opposition), and SWP formed the *political world* of American Communism. It was bound together by ideology, but distinguished by its variable interpretation of said ideology. Ideology served and continues to serve a foundation for self-identified radicals and the origins of American Communism as a political movement in the United States are no

exception. Differences in the interpretation of ideology led to factionalism and it was factionalism that created a world of communist political activity; for ideas to develop and reach their practical limits in American society. For Cannon and his supporters in the CLA from 1929-1934, the Foster/Browder-led CPUSA failed to give credit to the militant and constructive criticism of Leon Trotsky against the rising tide of Stalinism, further motivating them to engage with American workers. The CPUSA, in turn, found their opposition to more moderate socialists as their defining characteristic in 1928, laying a foundation for principled political campaigning in subsequent years. Far from being a handicap, however, the late-factionalism of 1928 within the international and national communist movements help explain why American communists distanced themselves from other socialists, how an obscure figure like Earl Browder came to head the CPUSA by 1929, and the political activism of American communists from 1930 to 1945.

The Third Period: 1928-1934

The years leading up to 1935 had been a long time coming for the fledgling American Communist movement. Prior to the Third Period, a broad, loosely organized pan-Socialist Left movement for socialism in the United States existed in enclaves across the nation. This movement consisted of numerous regional community clubs, unions, the left wing of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), the Workers' Party of America (WPA), which acted as the legal face of the underground CPUSA, and broad sections of civil activist organizations such as local chapters of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the Workers' Council of the United States, and the African Blood Brotherhood. The pan-Socialist Left movement is commonly underemphasized in studies of the Labor and Civil Rights movements prior to World War II. But throughout the 1920s there existed no homogenous or unified *communist* movement; those who identified as politically communist prior to 1928 were more likely to be found associating with their supposed political enemies than engaging in mass protests and organizing unions. Here we will examine the evolution of American Communism as a unique string of

this pan-Socialist Left, and how it solidified a distinctive political programme that distinguished communists from other radicals as a result of internal conclusions about factional strife as well as external pressure from the growingly-influential Third Communist International, or Comintern. The Third Period from 1928 to 1934 transformed the American communist movement from a small, radical contingent of a broad Left tradition in the United States into a sizable political force with influences that extended beyond the political sphere of American culture.

The CPUSA's origin as the left-wing separation of the SPA is a well documented and known story among scholars of American labor history.³⁶ Starting in 1919, early American communists built on existing, well established leftist cultures in urban areas such as New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia where the SPA had a significant presence. From there they "developed their own enclaves that dotted the cities' working class neighborhoods"³⁷ to create by the late 1920s a movement dismembered from its origins in the SPA. The CPUSA was not the only organization dismembered in this process, though it is certainly the organization that has received the most attention by scholars, and proved to attract more members. The CPUSA netted the most numbers compared to all alternative groups who similarly rejected cooperation with moderate socialists throughout the Third Period. By 1934, communists commanded significant political influence in a wide variety of American industries and political communities. But the CPUSA is not the entire story, nor is it functionally the same organization from its inception as the Communist Party of America (CPA) in 1919 through the 1920s, and leading up to World War II.

Between 1928 and 1934, the CPUSA thrust itself into the political consciousness of Americans with two presidential election campaigns, effectively making it the face of American Communism amidst other smaller and less radical organizations. Though much of the scholarship during the Third Period focuses on the nature of the CPUSA's subordination to the Communist International headed by Bukharin in the Soviet Union, the Third Period facilitated the means for American communists to distinguish

themselves from the rest of the Left and create a genuinely *American communist* movement by 1934. Most studies show that the early political thrusts into political campaigning by the CPUSA, CLA, and Communist Party (Opposition) from 1928-1932 were effective at recruitment: leading into the first post-stock market crash presidential election, the CPUSA saw an increase in membership from 9,219 to 14,474, and then to 18,119 by the start of 1933.³⁸ The CPUSA fielded candidates at nearly all levels of governance, and made a few local victories such as with Karl Nygard who was elected mayor of Crosby, Minnesota. By the end of 1934, American communist political activity could be seen across the nation, fueling the rising discontent of American workers suffering from the Depression, their desire to seek out alternative solutions to Depression woes, and the practical limits of Roosevelt's New Deal—then still only in infancy.

The beginnings of the Third Period were a significant turning point both nationally and internationally for American citizens as well as those who identified with Bolshevik communism. From July through September of 1928, the Comintern held its Sixth Congress where it outlined the dictums of what became known as the Third Period. The name of the era was coined from a Russian assessment of supposed revolutionary conditions around the world following the Bolshevik Revolution. The immediate years following 1917 accounted for the First Period, where the momentum of the Bolshevik Revolution pushed working class resistance to heightened levels around the world, including post-World War I America. The slow progression of the Revolution and the perception of a "stabilisation [sic] of world capitalism" by 1922 prompted the Comintern to declare a new Second Period which called for a united front with moderates in order to gain influence among working people. For almost four years, the Workers' Party of America functioned as the public face of the underground Communist Party. Mixed with the post-World War I red scare, communists saw little momentum in their movement and instead banked more on the success of cooperative efforts with the SPA in urban areas and the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP) in southern and rural areas. In 1926, this phase of cooperative politics ended as the

Comintern declared a new set of revolutionary conditions, where radicals should pit themselves against moderates to win over the working class. Between 1926-1928, numerous communists and communist groups split from their social-democratic parties and unions to form "red" alternatives while also intensifying existing factionalism within the CPUSA. The circumstances of the shift lay both inside and outside the politics of the Soviet Union and are somewhat beyond the scope of this study, however an understanding of the factional debates and their effect on the political direction of American Communism is important to grasping the solidification of a political core of the movement's ideals.

The Comintern's shift, according to Jacob Zumoff, "still confuses historians," and with good reason: Much of the conclusive assessments made from these shifts were elucidated as evidence of the CPUSA's subordinate nature to the Comintern. Internationally, the shift reflected "the failure of open class-collaborationism that had led to disasters such as the British general strike in May 1926 and the Shanghai massacre in April [of] 1927" while also paralleling the political changes of the Soviet Union as Stalin moved to oust all supporters of his rival, Leon Trotsky. As one of the last significant influential Russian revolutionaries after the death of Russian Revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, Trotsky remained Stalin's staunchest political opponent and pushed for an end to his attempt to control Soviet politics through the Comintern. Trotsky remained a proponent of what would be eventually termed "permanent revolution," or the development of socialism in agrarian regions and in nations lacking advanced capitalist production, while Stalin pushed for a new theoretical understanding of a state-socialist economic system he called "Socialism in One Country."³⁹

At the time, Stalin's theory of a socialist-based national economic policy took a somewhat significant turn from traditionalist Marxist and Leninist schools of thought on nationality and statehood. More significant than the altering of Marxist-Leninist theory, however, was the quick and immediate acceptance of it by numerous American communists. Scholars have attempted, for decades, to rationalize the desire by American communists to become integrated with their own working class while

remaining loyal to a political policy entirely alien to American life. Why, for example, do American communists accept Stalinist theories of socialism in one country while also assuming the Comintern knows the best path for their organizational activity? Zumoff argues that the overall purpose of the Third Period, which extended from the desires of Soviet diplomats concerned about national security, was to "persuade dissident communists" while insisting on "subordination and loyalty."⁴⁰ By emphasizing international relationships over domestic effects and how this process subordinated the CPUSA, however, scholars often overlook how CPUSA factionalism and quests for power among its leadership preceded Comintern intervention as well as how the CPUSA's loyalty to the Comintern distinguished communists from other radical Leftists to create a unique American communist social and political tradition in the United States.

In 1928, three voices held the most weight throughout the CPUSA's politics, each with their own faction of dedicated followers: Jay Lovestone, a Party Founder and Vice-Presidential candidate; William Z. Foster, trade unionist, Presidential candidate, and leader of the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL); and James Cannon, who, like Lovestone, helped found the rival Left faction within the SPA in September of 1919 but would later go on to lead the Trotskyist CLA. According to Storch, the factionalism which exploded in the early years of the Third Period had its origins in the CP's attempts to create a cohesive political strategy within the context of the Comintern's First Period. This suggests that the existing factions took with them to the Comintern's Sixth Congress their own personal convictions about the future prospects of domestic communist strategies. Hungarian-born American delegate to the Comintern, John Pepper, won the committee's support to force William Foster to try and spearhead a communist takeover of the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP); then just a fledgling political unit with broad but marginal levels of support among farmers and labor activists. Storch argued that this move pitted Foster and Cannon, who did not support integration with the FLP, against Jay Lovestone and Chicago-born Party chairman, Charles Ruthenberg; both who benefitted from support among the delegates of the

Comintern, particularly its leader, Nikolai Bukharin.⁴¹ This then set in motion a series of events that resulted in the rise of a unified and more importantly motivated political movement.

Throughout the early and mid 1920s, the Lovestone-Ruthenberg faction enjoyed majority control of the underground CPUSA, as well as its public face as the Workers' Party of America, and steered the two organizations through the First and Second Periods with relative ease, though the tensions between factional camps remained strong. Debates, such as those about the FLP, were routine, but rarely resulted in communicative breakdowns and staunch rejection of alternative positions. The decisive moment came when the Comintern began publishing articles that depicted a "right danger" of cooperative, progressive organizations between 1926 and 1927. Outside the context of American Communism, this action by the Comintern was part of a broader effort by Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party against Trotsky and Bukharin.⁴² Although supporters of Trotsky within the CPUSA were few in number by early 1928, Party representative J. Louis Engdahl flew to Moscow to criticize the American leadership for being soft on Trotskyism in America. This sparked a heated debate between the Foster-Cannon and Lovestone-Ruthenberg camps over the future of the American party.⁴³

This new debate was unlike previous factional differences within the communist political world. While Cannon and a handful of other Comintern delegates, such as Canadian communist representative Maurice Spector, silently supported Trotsky's efforts to reform the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, they made no real plans or initiatives to rally further support. When the Sixth Congress of the Comintern began at the end of July, the ideological divisions already present within the American Party became more visible and public, and particular factions seized the moment to wrestle for power. Only a few months prior to the start of the Congress, Stalin expelled Trotsky from the Russian Party and subsequently turned his attention to the last remaining obstacle in his quest for control over the Soviet bureaucracy, Bukharin and the Comintern as a whole. As such, the Congress quickly came to reflect the political changes of the Soviet Union and the "ascendant" nature of Stalinism over Leninism and

Trotskyism. American communists became the usable pawns in this move; with Soviet diplomats capable of playing the ideological devotion of members against their personal understandings of Marxism.⁴⁴ This created the context in which American delegates to the Comintern, particularly Foster, Cannon, and Lovestone, evolved their understanding of revolutionary strategy, cemented their factional strife, and solidified their ideological views for subsequent years.

Foster and Cannon responded to Engdahl's criticisms of the Party's soft nature toward Trotskyism by attempting, unsuccessfully, to oust Lovestone from the delegation. The camp submitted a document titled "*The Right Danger in the American Party*," labeling Lovestone as a moderate using the "rhetoric of the developing 'left' turn in the Comintern." Lovestone faced condemnation for his "failure to orientate towards new unions and the organization of the unorganized" as well as his supposed inability to create an effective resistance to the "[John L.] Lewis machine."⁴⁵ Foster, for his efforts, met difficulty with the Comintern once his historic support for "boring from within"^b existing labor unions clashed with the desire by Bukharin and the Soviet delegates to create alternative revolutionary unions. Foster then found himself further pitted against supporters of Lovestone in the higher legislative body as well as numerous Soviet delegates who desired a transformation of American labor theory to fit with transformations in Soviet policy.

Cannon faced criticism from his own supporters for trying to pressure a fellow communist, William F. Dunne, into withdrawing his seat as a representative. Both Foster and Cannon, however, remained united in their opposition to Lovestone. They argued that Lovestone was a "rightist" leader who "overestim[ed] the strength of American imperialism." Lovestone responded by stressing his "support for the Comintern's leadership (Bukharin) and its analysis" of international revolutionary conditions, while Pepper accused the Foster-Cannon camp for having "a basically different analysis of

^b This concept will be explained in further detail in Chapter 3, covering the Labor World of American Communism. Here it is suffice to know that the tactic predated the American Communist movement and was viewed as only one of a variety of approaches to be utilized under specific conditions.

American capitalism and its role in the general world situation."⁴⁶ According Zumoff, the opposition led by Lovestone against the Cannon-Foster faction "reflected 'corridor' gossip of a break between [Stalin and Bukharin]." In both scenarios, neither Cannon/Foster/Lovestone nor Stalin/Bukharin wanted delegates and party leaders aware of the growing factionalism.⁴⁷

The Comintern archival records show that a series of meetings between Stalin, Foster and Bittleman occurred to discuss Bukharin's support for Lovestone as the head of the CPUSA. There was a clear connection between Stalin's desire to focus on the CPUSA and the subsequent push to remove Bukharin from control, where Stalin's delegates Lozovsky and Lominadze attacked both Bukharin and Pepper for supposed "theoretical mistakes." Bittleman felt that the new atmosphere encouraged him and anti-Lovestonites "to take a more or less challenging attitude to Bukharin—the head of the Communist International."⁴⁸ Pepper, Lovestone, and Bukharin retorted by trying to explain the "exceptional" and "unique nature" of American capitalism which set it aside as a sort of 'special needs' situation with regard to revolutionary activity and theory. Here we see the emergence of a sort of dependency between specific CPUSA leaders and certain voices within the Comintern; not so much over their ideological proclivities but rather their desire to have political control of the movement back home in the United States.

Secretly, Stalin made moves to oust Lovestone by having Lozovsky argue to the Comintern that it was necessary to "built new unions, including in the US, and that Lovestone and Pepper 'regarded the reactionary AFL as a fetish'" which could still be molded with older tactics of winning workers over from within. Stalin's other aid, Lominadze, attacked Pepper's stance as suggesting that "everything is hindering" the movement and for having little hope for organizing the American working class. Lominadze, instead, insisted that there were "all the premises" necessary to build the CPUSA into "a powerful force" and, importantly, that the United States had "more favourable [sic] premises for the growth...than in a number of other countries."⁴⁹ Although it sounded promising, the American

delegation left the 1928 Sixth Congress, as Bryan Palmer put it, "more divided, and more precariously perched" than before. Lovestone remained in control of the Party, but the Foster-Cannon camp viewed this as Lovestone's ongoing effort to exploit loyalty to Bukharin in order to retain leadership. By December, Lovestone issued a motion asserting that Foster and his allies "accept all decisions of the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern without reservations."⁵⁰ It was not Foster, however, who would face the fallout from the Sixth Congress's Stalin/Bukharin split; it was Cannon.

Prior to leaving the Congress in September of 1928, Cannon came across a document by Trotsky titled *The Draft Program of the Communist International: A Criticism of Fundamentals*, which appealed against the expulsions of the Left Oppositionists as their right as delegates of the Comintern and "attacked the entire basis of the post-Lenin Comintern."⁵¹ It is not known whether Cannon accidentally came across the memo, as Cannon stated in his biography, or if it was part of a broad anti-Bukharin effort on behalf of Stalin, as suggested by Isaac Deutscher. Zumoff pointed out that Harry Wicks, a British communist at the time and later Trotskyist, recalled that the memo was "carefully circulated to students, heads of delegations, and members of the programme commission." The memo attacked Stalin's concept of 'Socialism in One Country' as a "betrayal of Communism that would only result in more defeats." The factionalism and stagnant theoretical debates, Trotsky argued, were "not failure[s] of analysis, but a programmatic reflection of the degeneration of the Russian Revolution itself."⁵² To Cannon and his sympathizers, Trotsky's staunch condemnation of Stalinist theory "brought together a forceful synthesis of what was wrong, programmatically, in the policies of the Communist International." By November, Cannon's camp drafted a new newspaper, *The Militant*, and published as its first headline article the entire Trotsky memo. Cannon eventually concluded that one "cannot build a revolutionary political party solely on a national basis" and viewed the Comintern's lack of emphasis in the broader, international scope of communist theory as a "fatal error."⁵³ Cannon returned to the United States

emboldened to "begin a struggle under the banner of Trotskyism" while Lovestone moved to, in Cannon's words, "weaken his factional opponents through guilt-by-association."⁵⁴

Foster and Lovestone's continued support for the Comintern after the release of the Trotsky memo reflected their idealism of the Bolshevik revolution; but more importantly it served the practical effort of keeping Cannon out of power. It also demonstrated the way American communist leaders came to realize how the politics of the Comintern were an effective tool for playing identity politics within the CPUSA. By looking to the Comintern for solutions to national issues and avoiding the problems of the Comintern as a whole, "national narrow-mindedness...pushed [American communists] into the blind alley of factional struggles." When it became clear that the only two solutions to factional strife was the idealist path of finding common ground for all the factions or the more realistic outcome of allowing one faction to simply "become dominant," those seeking approval and support from the Comintern used the biases of that institution to further their side.⁵⁵ By the end of 1928 Cannon's camp faced expulsion from the CPUSA and the Comintern, while Foster's faction did a quick about-face to condemn the Trotskyists and distance his camp from its previous alliance with Cannon against Lovestone; fully confirming the utilitarian nature of Communist Party leaders and their relationship with the Comintern. Although less than a hundred individuals left with Cannon, they took with them instrumental activists who for over a decade had a proven track record of organizational success, including Arne Swabeck from Chicago and most of the founders of the International Labor Defense (ILD).⁵⁶ The side effect was the creation of another face of the political world of American Communism that identified itself as a contrast to the CPUSA.

From December, 1928, through summer of 1929, Cannon and fellow Trotskyists laid the groundwork of what they called the Communist League of America (CLA), an opposition sect of the Communist Party. The CLA laid out its criticisms of the CPUSA, the Comintern, and the Stalinist Soviet Union, in the pages of *The Militant*. Their chief concern was to separate out what they believed were

central problems of Soviet development and what the Soviets, using the rhetoric of Stalin, depicted as the problem of Trotskyism in general. "Trotskyism," *Militant* author and CLA organizer Martin Abern wrote in December, 1928, "[was] 'discussed' without for one moment examining the actual economic, tactical and political, proposals of the Russian Opposition." Rather than allow open debate, the Trotskyists believed they were "suppressed" both at the Sixth Congress and back in the United States via their expulsion.⁵⁷ Trotsky's criticism of the Comintern was reprinted for each *Militant* bi-weekly issue between December and February, 1928/29. In the final issue of *The Militant* for February, 1929, Cannon printed his platform to build what became the CLA, signed off by Cannon himself, Arne Swabeck, Martin Abern, and Max Shachtman. The platform clearly distinguished the CLA from the CPUSA on the basis of their interpretation of the Russian Revolution as "collapsed" subsequent to the rise of Stalin and the ongoing "contradiction between the existence of a Soviet regime in a country with a predominantly peasant economy." To distinguish the CLA from Lovestone, Cannon emphasized the CLA's view that the opening of the American south to industrialization meant "new contradictions" to fight as opposed to easy solutions to fight racial injustice.⁵⁸

Communists in the CPUSA responded to the shifts of the post-Sixth Congress at the local level by pointing fingers and issuing instructions to activists at lower-level shop nuclei to fight against Trotskyism in their organizing efforts of party clubs. Joe Giganti, head of Chicago's ILD and barber by trade, attended Party meetings that discussed the "dire criminality of the Trots and their collusion with the bourgeois counter revolution." In an atmosphere where second guessing was viewed as suspicion, communists like Giganti faced expulsion for failing to adhere to the Comintern directives. By February, 1929, the Chicago Party leadership issued a dictum regarding interaction with Trotskyists: "No fraternizing, no audience, no contacts." As Stalin and the Soviet Union redirected its attention to the "right danger" in 1929, referring to Bukharin's ongoing control over the Comintern, American communists found their own "right danger" in Lovestone's leadership and his ongoing support for

Bukharin. Since both Lovestone and Bukharin continued to support the notion of American capitalist exceptionalism as opposed to a generalized theory of worldwide, historical capitalism, Lovestone became an easy target for communists looking to change Party leadership. Ruthenberg's death in 1927 made the anti-Lovestone effort much easier as Lovestone became the face of the pro-Bukharin camp in Chicago-based communist political clubs.⁵⁹

Beginning in 1929, the Comintern sent a delegation to request Lovestone to step down and hand the CPUSA over to Foster. Lovestone insisted that his efforts against Cannon were part of a broad effort against Trotskyism, and thus his own attempt at combating the perceived "right danger." He argued the legitimacy of his representation, accusing Foster of perpetuating factional problems and "harbor[ing] the most dangerous right-wing tendencies."⁶⁰ Unfortunately for Lovestone, the issue for Soviet politicians was not a matter of ongoing support for Trotsky but rather if "Lovestone had the confidence of Stalin." Lovestone flew to Moscow to try and plead his case to Stalin directly, who then suggested that Lovestone's popular support within the CPUSA was the result only because "the Party regarded [him] as friend of the Comintern."⁶¹ According to Zumoff, Lovestone "sowed the seeds of his own downfall" through his support of Bukharin, and thus his appeals to the Soviet delegates contrasted with the desire by Stalin and his supporters to increase their control over the Comintern. Lovestone attacked both Stalin's ally Lozovsky, and the backdoor negotiations between Soviet delegates and others such as Foster who supported removing Bukharin. This forced Stalin to deny a breakdown in policy within the Comintern and criticize Lovestone for undermining the organization as a whole.⁶²

Lovestone returned to the United States expelled, and scrambled to create a new organization with the few hundred that left the CPUSA with him. Lovestone's organization, similar to Cannon's, referred to itself as the Communist Party (Opposition). By the end of 1929, Stalin solidified his control over the Comintern by ousting Bukharin and his supporters. Communists high and low around the world were called to embrace the new phase of revolution and build a movement that linked to a hierarchy of

worldwide communist organizations.⁶³ The Soviet dictator's quick reversal of a decision to hand the CPUSA over to Foster and instead to a relatively obscure and unknown figure, Earl Browder, was clear evidence of a desire to avoid personable and passionate leaders in the American sphere. Looking exclusively at it from this angle, however, makes it difficult to see an alternative interpretation of the events.

In her autobiography, Peggy Dennis recalled that although Stalin's moves were part of a coordinated effort to consolidate power over communist parties in Europe by purging supporters of Trotsky and oppositional leaders, most active communists back in the United States did not "connect [their] own internal struggle with that which had raged in the Comintern." Whatever the cause, Dennis contended, the "salutary" and short-term benefit of the Comintern's ruling brought on a "militant young Party core" in key areas such as Los Angeles and Chicago; all dedicated and eager to begin organizational work and sought out political clubs from which to do so.⁶⁴ Dennis, who socialized with the inner circle of CPUSA leaders, likely was not alone in her view that Stalin's orders simply coincided with a general desire among American communists to end the factionalism and get to organizational work and it is likely that there is a somewhat duality to the ousting of particular factions. President Hoover's continued emphasis on balancing the federal budget as the only practical solution to economic crises further worried communist leaders that the U.S. government "did not intend to take significant action to relieve the plight of millions of Americans who had been thrown out of work," and that efforts to combat the situation would be left to the hands of a dedicated few.⁶⁵

There is another undervalued aspect of the Comintern's Sixth Congress of 1928 that underscores the significant difference between American Communism as a movement from the rest of the American pan-Socialist left throughout the Third Period: its conclusions about racial injustice in the United States and the placement of it as a core political platform. In terms of American communists' approach to theories of racial injustice, the 1928 Congress served as the critical "turning point in the communist

approach to the 'Negro Question'" where the Comintern argued that "the American black population was an oppressed *nation* [sic] with the right to self-determination, up to independence from the US." The conclusions built upon Stalinist interpretations of national minorities, which were themselves rooted in theories of ethnic and racial tensions of Eastern Europe, South Africa, and Canada and thus not exclusively communist in origin.⁶⁶ The difficulty for Stalinist strategists lay in the fact that African American members of the CPUSA and Comintern delegates predominantly supported the Ruthenberg-Lovestone faction throughout the mid 1920s. The factionalism of the Sixth Congress "intertwined" with the direction of the Party's understanding of solutions to racial oppression.

Future political leaders and organizers for the CPUSA James Ford, Harry Haywood, and William F. Dunne met in Moscow at the Fourth Profintern Congress in early 1928 to raise awareness of the issues of "black workers" and joined Lozovsky in criticizing the Trade Union Educational League for doing little "concrete work" at improving racial inequality. Ford directly attacked the CPUSA for its "little success in the organisation [sic] of Negro workers and Negro work generally" in a document that stressed the significance of black workers as a significant component of the American working class. The document also criticized the way leadership "relegated" African American communists "to insignificant positions" and sometimes even drove them from the Party altogether. Ford motioned for a special Negro delegation of eight African American communists, including Edward Dotty, Fort-Whiteman, and himself, to be given access to conferences in Moscow by June 1st, 1928. The Profintern Congress supported Ford's effort unanimously, and ordered the CPUSA to step up efforts in creating "special unions for Negroes" while simultaneously "fighting for existing unions to organise [sic] black workers."⁶⁷

The CPUSA responded by sending its delegate, John Pepper, back to the United States under the false last name of Swift in order to push a new Party line on organizing against racism. Pepper's document, *Policies on Negro Work*, "underlined that 'the Negro question is a *race question* [sic],' while stressing that communists should 'be the champion and organizer of the Negro *working class elements*

[sic]." The document overall emphasized linking racial oppression to economic oppression by promoting "intermediary organizations" to educate African American comrades and urge them to play leading roles in "non-Party organizations" as open and proud communists. Overall, the policy became a method of recruitment moreso than it was an effective means of combating racism. The policy subsumed the racial question beneath the Party's emphasis on class by insisting that "it is ideologically impossible to build a mass movement on a program oppositional to lynching, Jim Crowism, and political disenfranchisement" without first amassing African Americans into one political unit.⁶⁸ Although a theoretical failure, the document highlighted the importance of linking communists' ideas about democratic rights to perceptions of socialism in the United States. Localized conditions and an emphasis of them strongly undermine scholarly notions of the CPUSA's absolute submission to the Comintern. The limited program for organizational work, however, fermented resentment among veteran black communists who desired to see the fight for racial equality become central to the movement.⁶⁹ The Comintern's Sixth Congress in mid/late 1928 furthered these tensions over a concrete policy on race and Party factionalism ultimately dictated which stance the CPUSA took while other groups, such as the CLA, contrasted themselves by adopting stricter or more lenient solutions.

At the Congress, Ford's dream of eight African American delegates in a special American commission was struck down to just two; Lovett Fort-Whiteman and H.V. Philips. Ford was granted the position of a fraternal delegate, and he brought nine black students attending the Lenin School (KUTV) to witness the event. As the Congress opened, the Foster-Cannon camp used their "right danger" document to insist that Lovestone and his faction "systematically...neglected work among the Negro masses;" echoing Ford's criticism just a few months prior, this time charged with political rhetoric between two rival camps. The Congress concluded that the error lay in "white chauvinism" and Lovestone's assertion that African Americans in the rural south constituted "reserves of reaction" against the efforts of the Party.⁷⁰ The assertion of "white chauvinism," was broad and malleable enough

of a term to be similar in accusatory power of "rightism" or "Trotskyism," and would surface again in post-World War II party factionalism.⁷¹ As a malleable term, it also carried with it the power of suggesting ideological deviation that required no further explanation. In many ways the accusation itself was enough to cause suspicion among groups already prone to factional division. Lower ranking communists, completely alienated from the factional disputes going on in Moscow, would not see the overt connection between accusations of 'white chauvinism' and 'Trotskyism'. Instead, they would see the same individuals accused of the same various terms, and assume that one causes the other.⁷² In this case, the end result was likely that Trotskyists and Rightists within the Party were associated with 'white chauvinism' and the inability to recognize African Americans as potential allies; regardless of how individual Trotskyists actually felt.

On a theoretical level, it was easy by 1928 for Foster and Cannon to disassociate themselves from the accusations of 'white chauvinism' faced by Lovestone, who for reasons already mentioned lost support in the Comintern from all except Bukharin. Foster needed nothing more than to cite Lenin, who argued that "the American South is a kind of prison where [blacks] are hemmed in, isolated and deprived of fresh air," to link up Marxist-Leninist ideology with the Sixth Congress' conclusions.⁷³ This pitted them against Lovestone's view that "rural black Southerners were reactionary" and Bukharin's insistence that American capitalism represented an example of exceptionalism.⁷⁴ Others, such as Manuel Gomez, attacked Lovestone's conclusions about race for being "soft on US imperialism" despite the popularity of Lovestone among the CPUSA's African American members.⁷⁵ To the Congress and Soviet delegation, this had little to do with perceptions of racism among American communists and instead "highlighted the lack of the Party's connections in the South, still home to most American blacks."

Rather than create a new way of thinking about approaching answers to racial tensions, Lovestone "gave his factional opponents a convenient excuse to explain the problems the early

communists had with the Negro question."⁷⁶ Together, the events trickled into the one path optimal for both the Comintern and the Foster-Cannon faction: to stress that communists must recognize "Negroes' right to an independent existence" and view African Americans as "a subject nation" parallel to colonized people of the third world.⁷⁷ Setting aside the political quests for power within the Comintern, the process resulted in a unique look on race relations in the United States that, although not new and certainly not exclusively communist, came to define communist perceptions of race relations in the pre-World War II years. Within a matter of years it became communist canon to view racial oppression as inherently systemic; that it shared domestically many of the elements symptomatic of US imperialism in Latin America, and that solutions within the system were ill equipped to fix the oppressive and discriminatory nature of Jim Crow. The solution then became anti-systemic: the recognition of self-determination among African Americans became the building block to attaining class consciousness. This could then, if necessary, lead to the creation of a new nation-state on the basis of sovereignty.

Toward the end of the conference, the American delegation put forth a resolution titled *Resolution on Work Among the Negro Masses of the United States of America* where the delegates outlined their understanding of racial oppression in the United States. The document explicitly separated "the struggle for the full racial, social and political equality of the Negroes" from "a struggle for the right of national self-determination;" seeing the two as part of the same battle but separate objectives to achieve. By separating the concept, the resolution's final assertion subsumed the theory of racial oppression under class oppression: "The realisation [sic] of this self-determination cannot be secured under the present relations of power under capitalism."⁷⁸ When Ford's Negro sub-committee was able to submit a revised edition of the resolution, he focused instead on the "black peasantry" of the South and removed calls for a Negro Soviet Republic. Ford emphasized emboldening white workers to fight against racism in the workplace and in communities, desiring to see white communists become "champion[s] of the rights of the oppressed Negro race." As to national self-determination, the

document referred more to the *right* of African Americans to create their own state as opposed to the *need* for it. After the Congress, the Comintern issued a final declaration instructing Party leaders to come out openly in support for "the right" of national self-determination while also setting up alternative unions, predominantly in the South, for African Americans to join and fight for integration if they desired. "The Negro problem," the Comintern declared, must become "part and parcel of all and every campaign conducted by the Party."⁷⁹

The significance of this declaration by the Comintern cannot, and should not, be underemphasized. Ford's document, his delegation to the Comintern's Sixth Congress, and the subsequent approval of Ford's dual emphasis on both sovereign rights of African Americans and the right African Americans to integration by the Congress, all demonstrate a profound level of influence that American communists had on the Soviet-run Comintern. Whereas it is more common to view American Communism as the receiver of theoretical influence and thus a subordinate Moscow satellite, the conclusions of the Comintern Sixth Congress on the issue of racism in the United States demonstrates that this was not always the case. Furthermore, the charge of "subordination" to the Comintern is more suspect as these documents suggest perhaps a more *ideologically-driven* link between American communists and their Soviet idealists, as opposed to a blind faith. Ford's acceptance of subsuming theories of racial oppression under class oppression while emphasizing the practical demands of African Americans against the establishment of a Soviet Negro Republic demonstrated both his ideological affinity toward Marxist interpretations of social injustice as well as his domestic interpretations of racial injustice.

Between the CPUSA's Sixth Congress in March, 1929 and its Seventh Congress in June, 1930, a combination of ideological commitments, the practical demands of American radicals, and the new generation of activists shaped the political path for American Communism. Whereas prior to the Congress, American Communism as a movement existed mostly in the abstract, afterward it took on a

life that meshed with sentiments outside initial spheres of influence. The Party adopted its now-traditional and current name, the Communist Party of the United States of America, and accepted the Comintern's ousting of Lovestone and replacement with Benjamin Gitlow temporary Executive Secretary until handing the title of General Secretary to Earl Browder. During this transition, the CPUSA became a more public and visually active and dynamic political organization in comparison to its previous years, particularly in urban regions like Chicago. Chicago's local Party had a significant history with the city, dating back to the movement's split from the Socialist Party in 1919. After the Sixth Congress, Chicago's communist leaders "oversaw an organization with a lively, contentious, and varied local party culture where individuals and groups emphasized, ignored, or resisted different aspects of the party's dominant culture."

With their separation of the two groups in 1928/29, Cannon's CLA and Lovestone's CP (Opposition) effectively mobilized for the same goal, but under different methods, as the CPUSA. Organizationally, the two claimed to be at the polar ends of the CPUSA's political spectrum; with Cannon to the far left and Lovestone to the right; even prior to Lovestone's official split.⁸⁰ Many of the CPUSA's and SPA's ex-organizers found a new home in the smaller factions and while they clashed ideologically about the significance of Leon Trotsky's opposition, they nevertheless found common ground on issues such as the promotion of hunger strikes, addressing racial injustice and promoting an end to Jim Crow, and the establishment of workers' councils to facilitate the presentation of community grievances to local politicians.⁸¹ The inability of American communists to set aside ideological debates and focus on practical goals mixed with the desire of the Comintern to create revolutionary alternative unions forced the CPUSA to abandon collaborative approaches entirely throughout the Third Period. Cannon described the conditions of the mid-1930s as a period in which the "great conservatism" of the Republicans, the "craft-mindedness and corruption" of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and the "hooligan tactics" of the CPUSA were all secondary concerns to the opportunity presented by American

workers seeking organization and direction.⁸² Peggy Dennis remarked how during the mid-1920s the pan-socialist Left "hammered at the lessons unfolding in Soviet Russia," and "ridiculed the timidity of the reformists, the sellout of the Socialists (SPA), [and] the insufficiency of the economism of the IWW."⁸³ Realizing the potential for recruitment, the CPUSA pushed for a recruitment drive that "relate[d] economic trends to organizing possibilities" in urban, industrial areas like Chicago and New York.⁸⁴

Perceptions outside of ideology, such as Len DeCaux's that by 1921 the IWW had lost its "revolutionary appeal" due to its use of "desiccated syndicalism," redirected attention toward organizations that American workers and radicals believed would be useful platforms to build a movement for socialism, such as the CPUSA, CLA, and Communist Party (Opposition). DeCaux noted that inclination toward "this" or "that" organization tended to depend on which industry was under investigation. The IWW, for example, held a significant base in "western harvest fields, logging camps, general construction," and other "migratory occupations." The CLA held support from promoters of "Trotskyism" and the "new hope, new enthusiasm, new energy" of an internationalist theory of communist activity, particularly among college-educated Marxists.⁸⁵ The CPUSA netted a base in maritime, lumber, and heavy equipment industries by focusing on national labor concerns, such as wages, benefits, and workplace discrimination.⁸⁶ Once the CPUSA emerged in the late 1920s by uniting various sects at the orders of the Comintern, the American people witnessed the growth of a localized communist movement; from the ashes of World War I, ideological divisions in communist theory, and the labor struggles of 1918-1920. Radicals like DeCaux and Cannon responded to factionalism by joining the particular industry and organization that suited their worldview. As such the Communist movement developed between 1928 and 1935 as a multi-faced organic movement that embodied almost just as many differences as those between the Republicans, Democrats, and eventually the Progressives.

Part of what made up the multi-faced American communist movement was the diversity of individuals and backgrounds that came to define the movement by the 1930s. Though recruitment

drives were instrumental in building the Party in the early Third Period, it was certainly not the only reason the movement gained followers. A large contingent of younger activists joined because of familial backgrounds. Lumpkin grew up in the East Bronx, New York City, as the daughter of two passionate revolutionaries who fought in the anti-Czarist revolution of 1905 in Russia. Lumpkin's father became known as a hero to the Jews of Bobruisk, a city in Belarus, and her mother transported ammunition to the front lines. Through the stories of her parents' struggle, Lumpkin "picked up the idea of revolution to end exploitation."⁸⁷ Seeing her parents work so hard throughout her youth with "nothing to show for it" also firmly solidified the belief to Lumpkin that "there was something wrong" with contemporary capitalism. At age nine, the family moved a few blocks from 165th and Tiffany Streets where Lumpkin joined the Young Pioneers. The Pioneers were a youth organization for the children of left-wing parents, and facilitated a social life for young Lumpkin around like-minded youths. The organization would pile students into trains and travel in solidarity to striking workers, as Lumpkin did with striking textile workers in Passaic in 1929. Lumpkin left the Pioneers after being sexually assaulted following one of their late-night winter meetings in 1931. Two years later she joined the New York City's local Youth Communist League (YCL) after weighing out a choice between them and the Young Peoples' Socialist League (YPSL) and concluding that communists were "better organizers of the free speech fight."⁸⁸ Numerous young radicals like Lumpkin thus did not require an extensive recruitment program on behalf of the CPUSA, but rather naturally gravitated toward it due to personal, cultural, and family history.

The final months of 1929 rocked the lives of American radicals more than any proceeding or conference in Moscow could have hoped, especially those who were at the time outside the influence of American Communism. On October 29th, the stock market crashed and ushered in a wave of both hope and fear. George Charney, then only a Harvard graduate student with a "little interest in Marxism" and not yet a member of the CPUSA, watched as the crash contrasted against his professors' depiction of

banks as "the saviors of America."⁸⁹ Lumpkin, only 11 at the time, knew a woman from her block who committed suicide by leaping off her five-story tenant building, and the mother of her close friend leap in front of a moving subway car. In the papers, she read President Hoover instruct individual communities to handle their own. For Lumpkin's community, however, "there was no way the hungry could feed each other."⁹⁰ Those who desired a more action-oriented response to the situation quickly became exposed to communist literature, including *The Daily Worker* and *The Militant*, in search of explanation and meaning. Those following the *Worker* in the months prior to the crash as well as the 1928 presidential election recall the persistent prophetic announcements about the imminent collapse of capitalism. The pages of *The Militant* explained the crash as a result of "a road of production increase" without parallel "accompanied by an unprecedented export of capital."⁹¹ Very rapidly, many who refused to accept Hoover's nascent economic strategy concluded that the answers they sought lay in the economical conclusions of Marx and Lenin. Seen in this way, the crash of 1929 far exceeded the influence of the theoretical conclusions of the Comintern's Sixth Congress in 1928.

Similar to the stock market crash, the influence of Ford's document on the racial question in the United States had a far more profound effect on recruitment of African Americans in the years of the Third Period than Comintern conclusions about class theory in general. James Barrett noted that from 1929-1934 the CPUSA's political program offered young blacks "a rare opportunity to get organized and fight back" against their political oppression as well as participate in major national events such as the Scottsboro case in 1931.⁹² To some of its critics, communists seized on major societal incidents such as the Scottsboro case as a means for "dramatizing larger political issues." This argument overlooks communist theoretical claims of structural racism in the United States laid down by Ford in 1928 and the right for integration or national sovereignty. For most American communists, the systemic nature of racism did not require much convincing, as it already fit in with the similar Marxist argument of class antagonisms being systemic qualities of a capitalist society. The CPUSA's and CLA's assertion of racism

as a *systemic* kind of oppression, which although subsumed this oppression to class antagonisms nevertheless relates the two together, took a much more radical perspective on African American rights and the path for integration than what was offered by organizations such as the NAACP. Gates described the racial culture of the South as an "outrageous social and legal system" that separated individual cases "from the oppressive background which gave rise to them."⁹³ The Scottsboro case and the CPUSA's stances on systemic, structural racism served as a building block for organization and recruitment and even, at times, overshadowed communists' other political goals of economic equality. Instead of being a cause for socialism and workers' control over means of production, the CPUSA's and CLA's rhetoric about racial injustice caught the attention of numerous younger activists searching for means to end the conditions of Jim Crow. Once this dawned on Party leaders, ending Jim Crow became a pillar of the American communist tradition. Hosea Hudson, a singer for a Birmingham quartet, remembered how his early involvement with the CPUSA coincided with the news of the Scottsboro case breaking out in March, 1931.⁹⁴

As a young African American struggling amidst the Depression, Hudson turned to communist philosophy after meeting Al Murphy, an organizer for the CPUSA's district headquarters in Birmingham, and his neighbor, Frank Williams, a local Party member. Murphy joined the CPUSA a year earlier, in mid-1930, after attending a meeting downtown, "where a white communist led a discussion about unemployment, political rights for negroes, self-determination for the black belt, and the Depression."⁹⁵ Hudson followed a similar path. After learning about how Murphy faced public discrimination due to his overt support for the Scottsboro boys, Hudson became interested in Murphy's claims of organizational work among African Americans. It didn't take long for Murphy to invite young Hudson to a local CPUSA district meeting. At the meeting, which took place in late March, 1931, Hudson listened to Murphy explain the Party's personal view of the Scottsboro case, which amounted to a "frame-up of the Negro

people in the South." Along with most of the people attending the rally, Hudson signed his CPUSA membership card and paid his first dues that night.⁹⁶

The stances of communists on racial injustice, such as their unwavering, and more importantly public, support for the Scottsboro Boys and the theory of self-determination of national minorities, attracted young men like Hudson by the thousands. To these youths looking for ways to improve their communities, communists appeared as some of the most ardent proponents of civil rights leading into the early Depression. At the national level, James Ford's emphasis that "racism chains both" during the 1932 Vice Presidential election put the Party's official stance on the public ballot box; an act that caught the attention of national news outlets like the *Chicago Tribune*.⁹⁷ For Hudson, who sought involvement in progressive struggles, the CPUSA and CLA became the dominant outlet for expression and activism in Birmingham. Even after losing his job and facing scrutiny from his family for continuing political work, Hudson believed that he was best suited to "helping to get conditions better for other people."⁹⁸

Due to the large increase of membership in the months following the opening of the Scottsboro case, Chicago district leader Bill Gebert met with his constituency in September, 1931, to outline his belief that the Chicago Party faced a "mass influx of members that would mark the beginning of a second American revolution."⁹⁹ Just a month prior, Gebert and his constituency were front and center witnesses to the murder of three African Americans, Abe Gray, John O'Neil, and Frank Armstrong by Chicago police. The three men were part of a group of nearly five hundred citizens working to prevent the eviction of a 72-year old African American woman. Gray was a Chicago communist and associate of Gerbert's, and O'Neil was a leading member of the Chicago unemployment council—both known radicals by city officials. After their deaths, family members and friends laid the bodies of all three under a portrait of Lenin as a funeral procession that drew 60,000 participants and 50,000 sideliners blocked traffic throughout the city throughout the afternoon. Gerbert watched as within days the city became an uproar, with mass protest meetings numbering between five and eight thousand while fifteen

hundred "police patrolled the South Side with riot guns and tear-gas bombs."¹⁰⁰ The *Militant* blamed Chicago Mayor Anton Cermak for increasing pressure on landlords to collect rent and pushing efforts "to breakup the ever-growing unemployment movement."¹⁰¹ Reporting back to his base, Gerbert pointed out that most of the support seen throughout the city came from employed workers. Gerbert subsequently pushed for organizational improvements that helped facilitate the increased membership from 1931 to 1934.¹⁰²

For white urban youths like Beatrice Lumpkin, the worsening conditions of the Depression, the end of factionalism under Browder, the rising discontent over events such as witnessed and reported by communists like Gebert in Chicago, as well as the ineffectual nature of the Hoover Administration to respond to these national events all meant that answers to social problems rested in a socialist future. After her parents' laundry business in the East Bronx collapsed, Lumpkin turned to the YCL and the promotion of hunger marches for the unemployed. On March 6th, 1930, Lumpkin obeyed her teachers' request to avoid involvement in the march, sparked not long after the death of communist labor activist, Steve Katovis. Katovis' death had rocked the city since January of the same year, and the *Daily Worker* as well as the *Militant* published numerous articles emphasizing the need to stand up for justice. As the months went by, Lumpkin saw that "after millions joined the protests, [the people of New York] won a relief program" and recognition of Katovis' death united citizens together. She concluded that her parents were ultimately correct about the power of the people, and that the lessons given to her in the classroom didn't always dictate her political options. Rather, the experience of learning that mass resistance could influence local politics on the basis of need, "made [Lumpkin] very skeptical about the 'official' propaganda heard at school or read in the papers."¹⁰³ Although already exposed to radical literature and philosophy from her parents, younger radicals like Lumpkin manifested a communist political identity that usually built on lived experiences mixed with utopian ideals.

John Gates, a college student during the time of Katovis' death and the death of the three activists in Chicago, turned to communism for many of the same reasons. Gates attended CCNY where he met with other like-minded radical youths such as Winston Dancis, William Gomberg, Max Weiss, Max Gordon, Adam Lapin, and future American Communist historian Joseph Starobin. Gates and his college acquaintances watched President Hoover try to convince the nation to "sit tight, keep calm, chin up, [and] rely on private enterprise" as the solution to the crisis. While the socialists, particularly Dancis and Gomberg, tended to be in "violent disagreement among themselves," the communists "acted." Gates could not accept Hoover's plan and later charged that the President's lack of action and the shortcomings of the socialists at CCNY to turn him into a communist before even seeking avenues of joining an official party organization. Gates referenced both the success of the Bolshevik revolution and the same March 6th hunger marches referenced by Lumpkin as evidence of the communists' ability to act as opposed to squabble over theory like much of his fellow students.¹⁰⁴

Although Hudson, Gerbert, Lumpkin, and Gates all came from different backgrounds, their reasons for joining in the American communist movement share one specific trend: a romanticism about social change coming from the active work of a few dedicated Americans. Part of what drove this communist romanticism, in a political sense, among the radical youth was the loose social camaraderie of Leftist/Marxist clubs and organizations across the nation, which is referred to loosely throughout all of the written autobiographical and biographical record from the 1960s up through the present. In discussing social movements on a general level, Ronald Aronson commented on the concept of "hope" as a guiding force that motivates not just people but entire movements.¹⁰⁵ Gates described his fellow students at CCNY as, although more inclined to talk and debate than take action, possessing a "missionary zeal and a crusading spirit" that carried them along through their personal and public lives.¹⁰⁶ Lumpkin depicted the bonds of possessing camaraderie and its effects as the "yeast used to make bread; a little goes a long way and makes a whole batch of dough rise."¹⁰⁷ It was this social

solidarity and zealous passion that Hudson believed allowed the CPUSA to take on issues such as the Scottsboro case and link it to the struggles and plight of the nation's oppressed minorities. Camaraderie sustained contacts within external organizations such as the International Labor Defense (ILD) in an era when racial discrimination was allowed by local law.¹⁰⁸

These examples of individual communist experiences help explain the complexity of American Communism's adherents during the Third Period by downplaying the centrality of the Comintern and Stalin, and giving them a more domestic context. They also reveal the way American communists desired to see their political movement develop. Stalinism had its influence on American Communism indirectly through the Comintern, but the suggestion that it alone served as the main source of political action and theory also suggests that Americans who joined the CPUSA, CLA and those who tacitly supported the Party's electoral campaigns for their resistance to racism and unemployment, were acutely aware of the complex and highly abstract, not to mention highly secretive, nature of the Communist International's bureaucracy. It furthermore undermines the individual testimonies available that put the decision to engage in communist organizations within a much more personalized and choice-based perspective.

As neutral cooperation and increased membership diversity channeled American communists down the specific political path that emphasized rigid organizational theory throughout the Third Period, the movement also suffered a significant handicap that limited the entire pan-socialist movement of the early 1930s: the perception of what I call historical monolithism. The failure of a collaborative pan-socialist front by 1931 forced radical organizations, like the CPUSA, into a more centrist position for the 1932 election, while smaller organizations like the CLA remained outside the mainstream. In reality, the CLA and the Communist Party (Opposition) were entirely different organizations, and in the 1932 election held staunch reservations about the CPUSA's presidential campaign. The CLA charged that the CPUSA ran a fruitless campaign that stole votes and prevented "an accurate picture of the motion and

direction of the working class."¹⁰⁹ Despite this, the CLA and the pages of *The Militant* remained committed to supporting Foster and Ford over the SPA's Norman Thomas. The Socialist Party, in the eyes of the CLA, continued to represent "reform" as opposed to the "militancy" needed for substantial social change.¹¹⁰ Because of their continued support for the CPUSA, the CLA remained marginalized and faced an "imposed" perception as a "faction of the [CPUSA]," along with Lovestone's CP (Opposition), including at conferences where all three organizations were present. Another challenge for the CLA was the need for Cannon's supporters to continually distinguish themselves from Lovestone's Party; something the CPUSA had less trouble accomplishing. For this effort, CLA writers attempted to depict Lovestone's Party as "pseudo-revolutionary," falling just short of the militancy required to create a revolutionary movement. Tendencies of monolithism within both the communist movement but also the historiography tend to ignore the CLA's overt rejection of the Comintern as an organizational authority on revolutionary action, holding no representation within the Comintern, and occasional overlap in membership between CLA and CPUSA locals. The CLA is more appropriately described as the radical element; sitting just left of the CPUSA and even further left from Lovestone's Opposition. This tendency to view American Communism as a monolith would later serve as a canonical foundation of anticommunism during the first Smith Act trials of 1941.

For the CLA, Cannon believed that this monolithist tendency mattered little once the labor movement showed signs of new life and militancy between the 1932 presidential election. Cannon along with other leading figures in the movement more than accepted the fact that to the average American worker, the differences between the CLA and the CPUSA were beyond their interests or needs. When getting employment and food was a daily concern in the early days of the Depression, communist theories about support for Russian-led international organizations were of tertiary concern at best.¹¹¹ Of much larger significance to the leaders of the CLA was redirecting its constituents away from supporting Thomas and the SPA's depiction of socialism. Charging Thomas' Party as one of "petty

bourgeois reformism," the CLA's *Militant* declared that a vote for the SPA was a vote "thrown away in a futile attempt" to enact workers' rights without a "revolutionary" platform. Urging its constituents to see through Thomas' program and recognize that a party for the workers need not hide its revolutionary goals, the CLA officially backed the Foster/Ford campaign moving into November.¹¹²

It is important to note that the presidential elections of 1928 and 1932 created space for political activism that, during the early and mid-1920s, was unavailable to American communists, but available to the broad political Left. That is, socialist and third party candidates existed prior to 1928, but it took until then for the CPUSA to successfully result in large recruitment numbers. The breaking of factional ties after the Sixth Congress and the development of a program to promote mass public resistance, in part, helps explain why so many who rejected the SPA's cooperative stances turned to the CPUSA between 1929 and 1932. It also helps explain why so many radicals were willing to turn to the CPUSA and CLA on the basis of their push for issues such as ending Jim Crow. In many ways the 1928 CPUSA electoral campaign facilitated the growth of the Party by entrenching it in specific enclaves outside its home in Chicago, such as New York, Los Angeles, and Birmingham, and allowed for a more public campaign in 1932. This is not to suggest that 'communism' as an ideology became more respected or incorporated into the daily life of Americans, but rather that the policies communists promoted grew more mainstream and adapted to local consciousnesses of American working class citizens—as demonstrated by the experiences of Gates, Lumpkin, and Hudson. In many ways they also became less *radical*. The political consciousness of Americans radicals thus adapted as the conditions of the Depression sank in simultaneously as the CPUSA reoriented its political platform. By 1930 'communism' was no longer underground and was no longer as 'radical' as it was during the early-to-mid-1920s; it was in the factories, in the newspapers, and on the electoral ballots for the Presidency of the nation.

What emerged in the early 1930s were two divergent patterns for political engagement within the pan-socialist movement of the United States and continued to distinguish the communists from the rest of the radical left up until the start of the Popular Front. The Socialist Party (SPA) advocated revolutionary nuclei within the AFL as well as in farm and factory work while promoting the FLP as a progressive electoral alternative to the mainstream. In addition to supporting the FLP, the SPA ran its prominent leader, radical Protestant minister Norman Thomas, as its presidential candidate in 1932. The CPUSA and CLA remained critical of the SPA, seeing it as a reformist institution still dependent on its Old Guard; a generation of SPA leaders such as Morris Hillquit and James O'Neal. The Old Guard advocated tactics that specifically avoided radical political initiatives, but also fermented agitation with younger members. The CPUSA, CLA, and CP (Opposition), on the other side of the spectrum, advocated revolutionary unions pitted against the existing AFL as a means for destabilizing the organization's control over the labor movement. This division over strategy wedged the memberships of all organizations, and drew in new members.

The newer, younger radicals drawn to Marxism by the Great Depression who were present in the SPA turned against the SPA's Old Guard in 1932, sparking interest among communist leaders. At the SPA's May, 1932 National Convention in Milwaukee, the youths, who called their faction the "Marxist Militants," challenged the Old Guard and created a wedge within the SPA's functioning not unlike the very scene that saw the split of the communists from the SPA just thirteen years prior. Two years later, at a Party convention in Detroit, the Militants rallied behind Norman Thomas' message of working toward unity with other communist groups.¹¹³ Thomas' promises, however, did not live up to their ideals. Although Thomas accepted members of the CLA, and Trotskyists into SPA meetings, including former CPUSA members, he nevertheless remained "opposed [to] a united front on a general level, including any joint actions in political contests" with the CPUSA. Those among the Militants who could

not accept Thomas' stance on the CPUSA sought other avenues for radical work; the easiest and most visible alternative being the CPUSA itself, the CLA, and, after 1934, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP).¹¹⁴

When the Old Guard realized their lack of floor control at the Detroit convention over the issue of cooperative politics threatened their base support, they rallied behind Charles Solomon, a New York State assemblyman. Solomon published a pamphlet, titled *Detroit and the Party*, as a last-ditch effort to appeal to the SPA's base and reject the Militants' strategy and "preserve" the SPA. Solomon described the Militants and their chief strategist, Haim Kantrovitch, as promoting a banner of "thinly veiled communism." This brought to surface antagonisms preventing the SPA from "working harmoniously for a common objective."¹¹⁵ A delegate to the convention, Powers Hapgood, argued that the official position of the SPA had to be amended to include the sentiments of the Militant faction because "the workers object to the [SPA] not because it is too radical but because it is not radical enough." Cannon and the CLA pointed out the SPA's subsequent *Declaration of Principles* "proclaim[ed] anew" the organization's "faith in economic and political democracy" and replaced the Old Guard's "social reformism" with a generic centrism that "omits any mention of the revolutionary struggle to establish the so-called workers' democracy."¹¹⁶

One subtle theoretical difference between communists and non-communists among the pan-socialist Left was that communists believed in and reinforced the concept of *parliamentarianism* as a possible route toward building a socialist movement.^c The Marxist-Leninist interpretation of parliamentarianism derives from Vladimir Lenin's pamphlet on revolutionary tactics in a war-torn European setting: *Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*. A source of much debate within communist philosophy, the pamphlet usually finds itself in a scholarly or theoretical debate about the ethical tenants of Marxism-Leninism. Lenin's thesis, according to Sean McConville, centered around "pointing out the nature of the scientific communist outlook in contrast to the various 'abstract' or

^c This divergence, along electoral strategy, is an effective wedge for understanding the differences between the history of American Communism and a more broad history of the pan-socialist Left in the United States.

'pure' versions put forth at the time" in terms of achieving a socialist overthrow of both the means of production and the political superstructure of civil society.¹¹⁷ As the concept of 'communism' had already, by 1917, taken grip in the consciousness of working people, Lenin suggests, communist leaders must relate to the various differences between "Lloyd Georges" and "Churchills" (liberals and conservatives). Lenin exclusively singled out the Communist Workers' Party of Germany for their anti-parliamentarianism and utopian approaches to revolutionary action. Instead, Lenin insisted that as long as the working class held sentiment and support for parliaments, communists must dedicate themselves to working within such institutions and consider them just as viable a path to revolution as any other.¹¹⁸ This remained a canonical position by Leninists and Stalinists throughout the Third Period, and reflected the Comintern's support of CPUSA revolutionary campaigns. While the SPA remained firm in its commitment to an all-inclusive party of progressives, communists worked to advocate for whichever method seemed most appropriate based on location, which in some cases meant working with the Farmer-Labor Party and in other cases fielding CPUSA candidates for election.

The CPUSA thus engaged in American politics in a manner profoundly different from the SPA and other Leftist groups, including labor parties, to the extent that one might legitimately ask 'did the CPUSA even run elections?' In 1928, the CPUSA nominated Foster, well known for his work in steel and mining industries, and Benjamin Gitlow, a founding member of the Party.¹¹⁹ The CPUSA put Foster up again in 1932, this time with James Ford, the first African American ever nominated for the vice presidency. Ford was a postal worker, a trade unionist, a "trusted Party activist" in Chicago who spent his early organizing years in Alabama, and as stated, the commissioner of the Negro delegation to the Comintern during the Sixth Congress. In both campaigns, the CPUSA differentiated themselves from alternative socialist groups by drawing the line on a national organization policy. The CPUSA focused on broad, national agendas such as unemployment relief, eviction protection, and ending Jim Crow via sweeping reforms to appeal to the most troubled working Americans but were hardly practical for the

existing politics of Congress and the White House. The 1928 election charged that international capitalism was on the brink of failure, a campaign that many American workers by 1930 believed to be true. This new 'communist' political movement in the United States ballot appealed to the interests of working citizens while politicizing the failures of capitalism as the cause for societal ills and outlaying the solution in the establishment of a Soviet-style republic. The CPUSA garnered attention and strength through its national agenda combined with its rigid post-1929 lack of factional strife. Thus the second pattern for political engagement by American communists developed as a more traditional method that was recognizable and relatable to everyday Americans.

The CPUSA's approach to crafting a practical political strategy that appealed to American citizens rested on a philosophical question: Just what exactly *is* an electoral campaign to a political party advocating revolution? If one defines campaigns by how the two dominant American parties practice them, then the definition becomes straightforward: an organized effort to get an individual or policy voted into office or law, respectively. For the CPUSA from 1928 to 1934, electoral campaigns, as a means to an end, performed the function of drawing in the attention of American voters by offering radical alternatives to the solutions presented by Democrats, Republicans, and progressive socialists. The campaigns attempted to attract American citizens and workers into the orbit of the Party's auxiliaries where they could be exposed to communist ideology, literature, theory, and organizational methods. To do so, the CPUSA utilized the *Daily Worker* to depict capitalism amidst a crisis broader than the immediate effects of the stock market crash and the national economic depression. The *Worker* spoke of the specific and localized economic crisis as the first indication of a shift toward "an accentuation of the general crisis of world capitalism" that appeared insurmountable to stop.¹²⁰ Communists desired Americans to link the localized effects of the Depression to the worldwide development of capitalism, which included seeing the Soviet Union as the viable economic and political alternative. Long before the Soviet Union ever entrenched its Iron Curtain across Europe, American

communists were depicting the political world as dividing itself economically between the polarizing forces of those with Capital and those without as a means for incentivizing Americans into discovering communist ideology.

A closer look at the CPUSA's engagement into politics in 1932 helps explain this methodology heading into the end of the Third Period. The CPUSA did not run an electoral campaign with the goal of winning offices, but rather it attempted to politicize its domestic policies within broad sects of American communities. These policies included ending the Jim Crow laws, establishing a national relief network for families in cities, strict rent controls in areas like New York and Chicago, and organization of sharecroppers. Resisting racial discrimination served as a basis for entrenching in areas such as Birmingham, Atlanta, and Detroit between 1928 and 1932. Just like attracting workers into methodology through the *Daily Worker*, the Party utilized publications to demonstrate its message to Southern black voters and non-whites in California, Texas, and throughout the Midwest. In Alabama and nearby states, the Party published *The Southern Worker*, a regional edition of the *Daily Worker* which overtly rejected the label of a "white" or "negro" paper, and instead emphasized its recognition of "only one division, the bosses against the workers."¹²¹ Additionally, the 1932 election lacked the factional strife endemic of the 1928 election, allowing the CPUSA to push forward with a rigid programme for social change along with a dedicated cohort of activists.

The CPUSA's 1932 electoral campaign built on a series of conclusions reached both within and outside the Comintern. Mixed with the American view of the Depression as capitalism in crisis and the Comintern's assessment of an imminent collapse of international capitalism, leaders within the CPUSA and CLA became convinced that the Depression would stimulate a revolutionary movement among the working masses.¹²² In 1931, the Party responded to instructions from the Comintern about the need to "construct [a] 'political crisis' as a necessary intermediary stage between the revolutionary upsurge and revolutionary crisis" by "identifying the "weak situation of [the] Party in relation to the masses," and

contrast the CPUSA against the "other political parties" and their methods.¹²³ The Comintern desired to see the CPUSA become a Party "of the workers," which was unclear in its wording but to Foster and Browder translated into more hunger marches, the promotion of solidarity between farmers and workers by organizing sharecroppers along with industrial unions, and political campaign speeches organized by the Party's local district committees to encourage citizen representation in unemployment councils.¹²⁴ The resulting electoral strategy for 1932 attempted to read the temperature of dissatisfied and hungry working families and build a general political policy on the belief that working masses would reject the Democratic and Republican proposals for reform if such radical alternatives were proposed. In his acceptance speech, Foster reminded his comrades that they were "not going into the national election campaign solely for the purpose of votes; [they] also have bigger objectives." Those objectives, which included incentivizing workers "in a political sense" and "mobiliz[ing] them for struggle on all fronts," exemplified how American communist leaders like Foster viewed electoral ballots as "only one aspect of the general mobilization of the workers" in contrast to the SPA and Norman Thomas, who viewed winning the election as the goal.¹²⁵

Foster and Ford's 1932 campaign focused on key areas of Party presence: New York, Detroit, Washington, D.C., Birmingham, and Chicago. Foster's itinerary included traveling coast to coast to speak with over 200,000 people in just four months from July to September.¹²⁶ By the start of the electoral cycle, the CPUSA, along with the CLA, captured national attention through the promotion of national unemployment councils and by leading hunger marches throughout major cities at the local levels. New York had some of the CPUSA's largest marches in 1931 and 1932, as high as 110,000 demonstrators demanding food and relief. Detroit became the scene of a major tragedy when Foster held a campaign rally during the Ford Hunger March on March 7th, 1932. At the time, Detroit's automotive industry operated at around 20 percent full capacity. Already an enclave of communist labor organizing dating

back to the mid-1920s, Detroit's automotive industry was ripe for further agitation by communist leaders and fertile ground for politicizing a significant workforce.¹²⁷

The Detroit Unemployed Council, along with the Auto Workers Union, started the Ford Hunger March in downtown Detroit and squared off with a line of Dearborn police near the gates of the Ford Motor Company's River Rouge auto manufacturing facility. Although Foster emphasized avoiding provocation of violence, his speech rallied workers together to face off the armed police officers and private guards called in by Henry Ford and his associate Harry Bennett. After an unknown participant threw a rock into the line of police, the officers returned with gunfire. Bennett arrived shortly after the shooting began to try and disperse the crowd, but was quickly hit in the head with a rock and knocked to the ground. When he got to his feet, he pulled out his gun and began shooting at the crowd with the police.¹²⁸ The event ended with four marchers dead and dozens wounded. Within a week, nearly 100,000 were marching down Woodward Avenue toward downtown Detroit in a joint public memorial/hunger walk.¹²⁹ Developments like this served as an effective tool for organizing displaced workers, drawing in sympathizers to the issues promoted by the CPUSA, and directing many future American radicals down the path of exposure to the works of Marx, Lenin, and eventually Mao and Stalin. In less than a year, the campaign thrust the CPUSA to the center nexus of American communist political action.¹³⁰

Throughout the campaign, the CLA remained ideologically distant from the CPUSA's campaign but supportive of it by participating in rallies and recruitment drives. For example, on January 9th, 1932, the CLA criticized the Foster and Ford for advocating open trade with the Soviet Union as a means for combating domestic unemployment.¹³¹ At the same time, on January 24th, the CLA sent their delegate representative Frank Buckley to attend the CPUSA's and ILLD's United Front Conference to Fight Against Criminal Syndicalist Laws at the Peoples' Auditorium in Chicago.¹³² The two organizations even exchanged accusations against one another in mid-1932 over the death of a worker, Michael Semen,

after a CLA meeting on August 7th, at 7th Street and A Avenue in New York, even though attacks by conservative protestors were frequent in that area.¹³³ After the election, the CLA indicated its upset over the "distressingly low vote" for both the CPUSA and SPA, which collectively failed to break the 1912 vote number for Eugene Debs; long considered a watershed moment in American socialist history.¹³⁴ Ultimately, though the CLA may have held its reservations about the CPUSA during the election such as the unlikely development of making it on the ballot of numerous key states and fielding less support than the SPA, Cannon concluded on November 5th, 1932 that "the workers must be told to vote communist" and continued to use the popularity of CPUSA politics as a barometer of public sentiment about socialism.¹³⁵

It is not just because the CPUSA was a 'radical' Party that it campaigned in such a manner. Nor should the Party's methods be attributed solely to its relationship with the Comintern. Although these relationships and identities appear in the Party's historiography, focusing on them ignores another fundamental component to the CPUSA's history: the specific campaign strategy. When one observes the campaign of Foster, the Party's approach fits the definition of the *antithesis* of conventional campaigning. The goal was not that which the mainstream parties sought, but rather an approach that desired to undermine the meaning given by the mainstream parties to the electoral process. The goal was to use the campaign to criticize the Democrats and Republicans, thereby contrasting the communist political platform against what most Americans viewed as mainstream. The goal was reached, but only in part: while failing to politicize the dominant pillars of communist ideology, the campaign did draw attention toward social injustices in labor and in communities with respect to racism and unemployment. Though the CPUSA and CLA overestimated the capacity to radicalize workers in urban and metropolitan areas, the work of both groups and individual communists awakened "the plight of the unemployed and in courageously battling against deeply entrenched racial discrimination."¹³⁶ The collective endorsement, organization, and promotion of national hunger marches, as well as the

CPUSA's campaign emphasis on racial discrimination put American Communism into the front pages of major newspapers across the country.

Part of what made the CPUSA's campaign so attractive to the warriors of social justice against racism was the placement of the Party's "Negro Question" at the front and center of the campaign. This set the Party so far outside the mainstream they naturally gained attention—both welcomed and unwelcomed. The Party's nomination of James Ford to the Vice-Presidential ticket that year remains a prime example of how serious the CPUSA took its effort to politicize the plight of African Americans and the injustices of Jim Crowism. The subsequent rise in membership among black voters attests to the strategy's overall success. Additionally, communist lawyers continued to fight localized racial discrimination through the International Labor Defense (ILD) and brought together numerous black workers who were hesitant to join an organization that claimed to be a political party. The 1932 campaign decisively thrust the CPUSA into the spotlight and took attention away from alternative socialist organizations like the SPA, CLA, and IWW.¹³⁷ Subsequently, the fight against racism diffused into communities as communist lawyers such as Benjamin Davis worked to create legal precedents against Jim Crow and racial discrimination. Throughout the Third Period and Popular Front, however, ending Jim Crow remained a canonical CPUSA political tenet.

By 1933, Foster and Ford's campaign netted the highest election numbers in the Party's history, a CPUSA record held still to this day. The CPUSA received 103,307 popular votes, 0.26% of the total. An increase from 48,551 in 1928 reflected how the Party managed to recruit among groups of urban, working-class American voters and the increased appeal of its agenda, which did not alter throughout the early Third Period of 1928 to 1932.¹³⁸ Additional votes went hand in hand with additional membership: Chicago alone saw an increase of 2,009, a margin of 79%, between January and Foster's acceptance speech in May.¹³⁹ Both of these developments translated into political victories for the Party despite marginal numbers by comparison. To organizers like Gates, the limited votes failed to

"dishearten" the most passionate communists, who viewed their struggle as an overtly uphill battle which meant resisting efforts to diminish the significance of their movement.¹⁴⁰ Others, such as future New York Party chairman George Charney, argued that "cohesiveness and common outlook" made up for their lack of public support and such was "the dynamics of history."¹⁴¹ Increased votes meant an increased perception by the CPUSA of their legitimacy among American workers, and increased membership meant an increased demand for activism. These marginal victories were a litmus test of the palatability of Communist policy amidst the early years of the Depression.

For African American communists like Hudson, the campaign's increasing popularity meant increased action to gain membership regardless of the setting. On November 7th, 1932, Hudson and the Birmingham Party district organized an unemployed council meeting on the courthouse lawn. Within a matter of hours, the speakers were arrested and the meeting broken up by city police. Birmingham communists turned to the Masonic Temple on the corner of 17th and 4th, which offered the CPUSA space in their auditorium under contract for the remainder of the year. Numerous setbacks such as these, particularly with police and local officials, riddled communist organizing efforts in the South. When Hudson approached his church's pastor, Reverend Patterson, about holding a lecture in support of the Scottsboro boys at the church, he faced outright rejection. Patterson worried that the white community of Birmingham would respond harshly with full retaliatory force, and insisted that the church would not involve itself in further dividing the community. To get around the pastor, Hudson invited his speaker, David James, to have a quick announcement at a private event for the church right after Hudson's quartet finished a song. James was a member of the ILD and a CPUSA spokesman for the Scottsboro case. When he reached the podium to speak, he told the mostly young black audience that they should organize, educate, and arm themselves with the methods of revolution as a means for preventing job loss. When a young church attendee, Reuben Patterson, criticized James' stance as divisive against whites, the church's deacons intervened and ended the speech. Despite the disruption,

threats by racist groups, and failed attempts to get Reverend Patterson on their side, Hudson noted a steady increase in Birmingham membership in the subsequent months.¹⁴²

College-educated communist youths like Gates joined civil liberties and civil rights organizations to voice their support and direct their activism. The support of the Foster-Ford campaign by prominent intellectuals Gates respected while attending college, such as Edmund Wilson, John Dos Passos, Sidney Howard, Horace Gregory, Waldo Frank, and Sidney Hook, directed the young activist to the YCL by the end of the election cycle. During the election, Gates dropped out of CUNY and went to the local YCL headquarters on East 12th street to volunteer for organizing work in heavy industry. By November, the YCL instructed Gates to begin organizing work in Warren, Ohio, and to focus his efforts on the steel industry. Within a week, Gates changed his name from Sol Regenstreif to John Gates and set off for Cleveland where he met up with Joe Dallet, a CPUSA organizer for the district. In just two hours of his arrival, Gates was addressing the City Council of Warren, representing both the CPUSA and the unemployed council of Cleveland. On March 4th, 1933, Gates organized a demonstration for the Cleveland Unemployment Council in protest of Roosevelt's inauguration. Just like Hudson in Birmingham, Gates' demonstration in front of the courthouse was met with condemnation and resistance by local authorities. Both Gates and his organizing assistant, Frank Rogers, were arrested and placed in the county jail on the charge of "making a loud noise without a permit." To keep the two from talking, Gates was placed in the women's corridor of the jail by himself.

Lumpkin, still a Youth Communist League member at the time, remembered the unemployment councils setup by older but still youthful communists like Gates as "multiracial" and "ready to take action" on the issue of evictions and the "hidden homelessness" by organizing citizens to stand in line at relief offices; thereby bypassing the extensive procedure of filling out forms and obtaining vouchers. Younger communists commonly showed more positive enthusiasm in their everyday organizational work than older, hardened communists like Foster, Cannon, and Browder who occasionally concerned

themselves with the uphill battle of theory and revolution in a zealous pursuit of ideological perfection. Participating in the organized councils with the YCL gave Lumpkin "joy in the struggle" as she met new people while assisting needy families and, in her mind, helping to build a better community.¹⁴³ For those organizing the councils, such as Gates, the effort was about more than helping families; it also attempted to demonstrate a viable alternative to younger generations like Lumpkin to their existing paths of political change.

Part of what kept young men like Gates and Charney firmly in the communist camp was the lack of action found in organizations like the Democratic Party and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). These organizations, according to Gates, did little to educate workers on their socioeconomic position in the world and instead sought to appeal to them as a means for preventing the rise of alternative union choices. In an era where "the principle of government assistance to the unemployed was not yet established," organizations like the AFL were reluctant to support unemployment insurance measures. This fight, in the eyes of young activists like Gates, "was left to the communists."¹⁴⁴ Some communists went further, such as George Charney who believed that the rise of Hitler and fascism were symptoms of "the decay of capitalism" on an international scale. Smuggled over from Russia by his parents in 1906 in a pickle barrel, Charney also spent his early youth in the East Bronx with fellow Jewish community members like Lumpkin. These community-active communists viewed political groups like the Democrats and organized skilled labor such as the AFL as incapable of producing "effective resistance" to the degenerate effects of capitalism on local politics. Charney pointed to how the communists were some of Hitler's and Mussolini's first victims, creating the belief that communists were the most crucial element in resisting the tide of fascism and thus decaying capitalism.¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

The final years of the Third Period political activism leading up to the Popular Front were not always as progressive or successful as communists believed. Charney, writing years later, commented

on how his presence and activism drew on his enthusiasm for Marxism as the source for societal change but sometimes also prevented him from recognizing shortcomings. In his Bronx Party weekly meetings, groups would gather at a particular member's house with a "handful" of other activists. Meetings functioned in a manner where glory and gravitas shifted based on the perceptions of other "comrades," as opposed to "the masses." Gates felt that it was a lack of "healthy skepticism" that blinded himself and his associates from the limitations of their work. By focusing on appeasing existing Party members and fellow travelers, some communists avoided any serious engagement with the masses of unemployed and homeless and could get stuck in inner circles.¹⁴⁶ Gates, infused with "radical romanticism," abandoned college to begin work in a radio parts factory for 32 cents per hour. In the midst of the 1932 election, Gates bid his family goodbye and headed to Cleveland with no idea as to where he would live or what work he would perform. What he did know was the location of the local CPUSA, and in his eyes that's all he needed.¹⁴⁷ This tendency to place the ideal of the revolution over their personal lives caused many communists to develop the perception of support and legitimacy in the eyes of the masses, but in practice this became a "shibboleth without real meaning."¹⁴⁸ The avoidance of practical assessments in theory eventually served as the basis for the CPUSA's slow erosion in the 1950s, but it was clear as early as 1931 with the low-ranking membership.

For Cannon and the CLA, the emerging Popular Front signaled the need for broader involvement in organizational activities similar to that of the CPUSA. Starting in 1934, Cannon reached out to the American Workers Party (AWP). A.J. Muste and various activists from the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA) founded the AWP in 1933 as a more radical alternative to the Socialists (SPA), but also claimed to be more "American" than the Soviet-friendly CPUSA. Cannon described the AWP as ideal for collaboration due to Muste's "progressive character," but felt that the organization was mostly "a political menagerie which had within it every type of political species." Seeing the opportunity to expand the CLA's influence and reach by simply sacrificing their name for a new image, Cannon reached

out to Muste for a political alliance. Muste and activists from the AWP's Pittsburg conference agreed to unity, while the more "rank and file militants" diversely spread out into trade unions, and "were in dead earnest about fighting capitalism," rejected Cannon's proposal. The latter camp was led by J.B.S. Hardman, at the time known simply as "Salutsky," a long time activist in the broad socialist Left.¹⁴⁹

Salutsky worked with branches of the SPA in the early years of American Communism, from 1917 to 1919, and previously organized with the Jewish Bund of the Russian socialist movement before moving on to lead the Jewish Socialist Federation of the Socialist Party. In the 1920s, Salutsky and Cannon met for the first time at a joint negotiation committee for the underground CPUSA and the Workers' Council for the purpose of creating a legal communist party. Over the course of working with the subsequent (communist) Workers' Party, Salutsky developed mistrust and animosity against the "labor bureaucracy" of the underground movement, which he refused to join. After leaving the Workers' Party, he found his way to the more progressive CLA and thus into the orbit of Muste's AWP. When Salutsky sat down to negotiate unity once more in 1934, Cannon felt that he viewed working with the Trotskyists as the end to his personal desire to create a "pseudo-revolutionary Party," that did not clash with labor bureaucracy but instead acted as a sort of influential platform for the masses. When it became clear that Cannon and the CLA were swaying the majority of Muste's camp toward unity, Salutsky quit the Party and moved toward the Roosevelt coalition.¹⁵⁰ The turnout ended both the CLA and the AWP, but created a new organization: The Workers' Party of the United States (WPUS). Under the new banner, the CLA's editorial renamed itself *The New Militant* and continued its political organizing until diffusing into the SPA in 1936. It also remains an iconic example of how the 1920s factionalism pushed some radicals into the centrist mainstream by the 1930s.

From 1928 through 1934, the American Communist political world had gone through significant changes. The Depression channeled communist political activism into the issues and regions where it could be most effective, which meant expanding beyond the shop floor to engage Americans in their

communities. As explained, it also placed a heavy emphasis on the fight against racism and the rise of fascism as the years got closer to 1935. These latter issues, particularly putting a face on anti-Jim Crow activism, facilitated growth for the movement that was completely distinct from to the struggle of European communist parties, who faced a fundamentally different kind of ethnic/national question. As a political policy, it also gave spark to the subsequent development of a community of communism which took the fight against racism as its most dedicated struggle. To begin a broader movement built on collaboration, the CPUSA required substantial political reorganization and a new engagement with American voters in 1935—an engagement that pushed the Party even further centrist than the SPA and WPUS. As the Comintern’s Third Period came to a close, new ideas about how to develop a revolutionary movement in America fermented with the increase in popular activism from 1930-1934, the increase in CPUSA, CLA, and SPA membership from 1932-1935, the passage of the National Labor Relations (Wagner) Act in 1935, the rise of non-specialized unionism within the AFL by early 1935, and the perceived increasing reactionary nature of anti-New Deal Republicans heading into the 1936 national election. By the time the Comintern published its decision to push a Popular Front in *The Communist* in 1935, the American Communist movement had begun its swing toward Populism and engaged in a passionate rally cry for working Americans to unite against domestic discrimination and the growing threat of European fascism.

CHAPTER 2: THE COMMUNIST POLITICS OF POPULISM, 1934-1944

Peggy Dennis and her husband, Eugene, spent most of the harshest periods of the Great Depression in the Soviet Union. They returned in 1934 to see the America they left transformed by years of struggle and attempts by the Roosevelt Administration to quell the conditions of the Depression with reform. They also returned to see a domestic American communist movement unrecognizable from when they left; with active Party clubs in almost every major metropolitan area throughout the country. The Third Period had transformed both the CPUSA and the broad sect of politically-active communists from fringe radicals to commonplace instigators. The two presidential elections of 1928 and 1932 put the CPUSA on the map, and increased membership among youth activists who sought allegiances across political lines and community-based political action. Rather than a small cohort of overtly communist organizations and unions as existed in 1929, the Dennis' returned to a menagerie of various political and social activist groups—The Workers' Alliance of the Unemployed; the Unemployment Insurance Agency; the American Student Union; the American Youth Congress; the American League against War and Fascism. The Dennis' also witnessed the emergence of the Workers' Party of the United States (WPUS) as the Trotskyist counter to the more public CPUSA, and the ending of Cannon's independent CLA, while Jay Lovestone's CP (Opposition) took solace in the Socialist Party (SPA). At the start of the Popular Front, the previous lines of division between the CPUSA and other groups became blurred as communists inside and outside the CPUSA began to engage in broad, coalition-style organizing efforts.

The CPUSA emerged after the 1932 election as the dominant Marxist-Leninist party, while the WPUS continued to organize under the leadership of James Cannon, emphasize the Trotskyist message of permanent revolution, and continued rejection of the Comintern as an authority. The SPA, likewise, continued to reject cooperation with progressives and thus drew the hard line between the communist and non-communist left. While these ideological proclivities appear at the onset to invite further

factionalism and division, the three groups loosely cooperated from 1929 to 1933 to try and sway Democratic Party policies further to the left and resist what they collectively called “social fascism.” This relationship, however, proved not to last as the tide of populism became apparent by 1935. With the opening of the Popular Front, the CPUSA shifted further away from its political allies, toward a centrist path of cooperation and engagement with Democrats as well as Progressives in order to further advance its base among American workers. From 1935 up through 1944, the political world of American Communism attempted to assert its ideology as the “left wing” of American politics as the Roosevelt coalition struggled to maintain its broad alliances leading into the 1936 election and as the nation slowly descended into war with the Axis.

Peggy and Eugene brought with them the resolutions and agenda of the Comintern on the future of international communist movements; resolutions that would have a profound impact on CPUSA politics after 1934 by effectively ending the Third Period. As explained in Chapter 1, from 1928 through 1934, the Comintern emphasized that communist parties should resist Western liberalism on the grounds that it “conceals the counterrevolutionary character of bourgeois democracy as a form of dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and thus itself serves as an active factor and channel for the fascization of the capitalist state.”¹⁵¹ By January of 1935, this policy shifted to a general resistance against fascism on all levels, and did not rule out working with progressives in this mission. On the contrary, the new political tenet set forth by the Comintern’s resolutions required cooperation with non-communist groups and a decentralization of political policy. In July, Bulgarian antifascist Georgi Dimitrov encouraged American communists to contrast Roosevelt against the “most reactionary circles of American finance capital” and welcome “socialists and middle-class reformers into their coalitions.”¹⁵²

To communists like Dennis, Lumpkin, and Charney, this meant less criticism of domestic conditions and more cooperative organizing to resist fascism as a political philosophy. The process began five months earlier in September of 1934, when Browder reached out to Norman Thomas and the

SPA to establish a “united front” on the basis of specific political and union-related strategies.¹⁵³

Thomas quickly rejected the proposal, refusing to work with the pro-Soviet CPUSA and ending the short-lived alliance the two organizations had in promoting alternative, anti-AFL unions prior to 1935. Browder and the communists then embarked on a new, more centrist political journey.

Coinciding with Browder and Thomas’ fallout was the mid-term elections of 1934, which factored heavily into how the American communists assessed the possibilities of a united or popular front that crossed political, regional, and ideological boundaries. Jay Lovestone’s address for the SPA to the International Lady Garment Workers Union Convention in 1934 outright refused all political cooperation with the CPUSA. Instead, he emphasized trade union work, not electoral politics, as the “most all-inclusive, the most elemental organizer of the working class.”¹⁵⁴ Positioned ideologically between the SPA and CPUSA, the *Militant* agreed in January of 1934 that Roosevelt’s promises for the New Deal masked “ruling class plans” that ignored the plight of workers; a view that was carried over into the WPUS.¹⁵⁵ By contrast, Browder reported to *The Communist* that the 1934 mid-term elections demonstrated “mass dissatisfaction with the programmes of the major parties” throughout the United States as well as the need for a radical political program to take advantage of said dissatisfaction.

Browder expressed that the decline in popularity for the rival SPA was the result of internal factionalism over participation in collaborative organization efforts, and the unwillingness to consider political action as paralleled in importance to trade union work. In his report, Browder emphasized the importance of politics by praising Anita Whitney for netting 80,000 votes for the House in California on an independent, socialist ticket, and he reported national votes for the CPUSA at 225,000. These marginal successes, however, were misunderstood as a confirmation of Browder’s Comintern-influenced conclusions about the significance of 1934. Browder attributed the CPUSA’s shortcomings to “insufficient contact with the masses, remnants of a sectarian approach,” and a “low degree of consciousness among the leftward moving masses.” The solution was thus not to abandon political

work, but rather to expand it and work with progressive political groups. The CPUSA's new path thus involved cooperation, willingness to compromise where the SPA and WPUS were not, and above all working with groups previously seen as class enemies, such as the Democrats.¹⁵⁶

Leading into 1935, international developments again influenced the direction of the American Communism movement. To Browder and the rest of the top leadership of the CPUSA, the wave of support seen for their movement since the 1932 election coincided with a perception of victory in the Soviet Union after the first Five Year Plan from 1928 to 1933. Triumphantly declaring the Soviet industrialization plan a “splendid new victory” amid the “capitalist world falling to pieces,” CPUSA leaders and the Comintern saw the success of Soviet industrialization and the rise in popularity of communist parties around the world as a validation of their efforts. In a series of articles during the first quarter of 1935, the Comintern declared 1934 the “year of great advances” and attempted to measure the strength of the proletariat on a global scale by downplaying localized political conditions and emphasizing the simple fact that communist parties were on the rise throughout the Western world. Subsequently, in the minds of many American Communists, the rise of fascism as a prerequisite for “revolutionary crises” in central Europe and the united front of communists and social democrats in Spain against Franco's fascist forces paralleled the upsurge in the labor movement of the United States from 1931-1934.¹⁵⁷ Gaining momentum by building bridges across political lines with progressives and Democrats, the CPUSA’s political strategy from early 1933 until the 1936 election promoted a third-party alternative to the mainstream—the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP)—as well as pushed for an expansion of New Deal-style legislation such as unemployment insurance, health insurance, and expanded relief programs. This strategy was short lived as the CPUSA continued to push for more cooperation with the New Deal coalition, but was a critical step in the political evolution of domestic communist politics.

After the Comintern’s article was released, the Soviet Communist Party passed resolutions that filtered down to the lower echelons of the Comintern, which pushed the burden of political theory onto

communist activists/organizers and away from the political center of the CPUSA. These new resolutions required change in how Communist Parties function and engage with their local working class. Boldly, the Comintern enunciated that it would "avoid direct intervention in internal organizational matters of the Communist Parties" and "urged each Party to 'avoid mechanical application of the experience of one country to another country and the substitution of stereotyped methods and general formulations for concrete analysis.'" In a clear contrast from the Third Period, the Comintern's new stance urged Western communists to think for themselves and organize along means that fit the conditions of their domestic political arena; which included abandoning the Third Period "alternative only" approach with regard to unionism. Foster's classical tactic of entryism was welcomed once again, provided it resulted in fruitful advances of the socialist programme.¹⁵⁸ The result was two fundamental shifts leading up to the 1936 Presidential election that redefined the politics of the CPUSA for the next decade.

First, freedom of movement and interpretation of local conditions allowed "practical politics and tactics even when communists acted within Marxist-Leninist confines."¹⁵⁹ Between January of 1935 and February of 1936, the FLP served to facilitate an alliance of socialists, workers, laborers, and communists in rural communities of the South while promoting a "break-up of old political alignments." Through this approach, the FLP created a somewhat neutral ground between communists and socialists, the latter still refusing all cooperation with Roosevelt, the Democrats, and other progressives. But the FLP's shortcomings by 1936 also represented the continuation of failed political projects during the Third Period, such as the inability to find agreement between Trotskyists in the WPUS and Leninists in the CPUSA. The circumstances of the 1936 election, and the need to resist the Republican Party's "Hearst-Liberty League-Wall Street drive toward fascism," necessitated the end of the CPUSA's full endorsement of the FLP. Party leaders such as Browder demanded a more direct engagement with voters than via proxy, and subsequently built their 1936 presidential campaign on a defense of the New Deal.¹⁶⁰

This shift drew the CPUSA further into the centrist politics of the Roosevelt Coalition and faded the significance of the FLP as a viable alternative in the eyes of communist political organizers. This became clear once the CPUSA published its campaign program, which gave tribute to the FLP's growth as a "real people's party," but focused most of its criticism on the "extreme reaction" of Landon and the Republicans. Party presidential candidates Browder and Ford ran their 1936 campaign not to draw attention to communist ideals—as was the case for Foster and Ford in 1932—but rather to urge the SPA, the FLP, and the WPUS to "unite" with the "mass of the toilers against reaction," solidifying a 'lesser of two evils' strategy; a strategy that still exists within the CPUSA to this day. The CPUSA pushed the envelope on criticism of the Democrats only slightly: they used 1936 to call for an agenda of social reform funded by "taxation of the rich" coincided with a repeal of sales taxes to compensate lower-income citizens.¹⁶¹ In rural areas, the CPUSA emphasized support of the FLP as a means to bridging together with socialists and ridding the local movement of factionalism. In states with large urban areas, like Illinois, the Party directed its appeal to "workers, farmers, professionals, small home owners, small businessmen, youth and negro people" and encouraged resistance to the "fascist threat" of the Republicans and the Liberty League.¹⁶²

Second to the first element of restructuring, the Popular Front made more room for activities that "had begun in the Third Period and created new opportunities to further an agenda the [CPUSA] increasingly shared with liberals." Among these opportunities were "racial equality, progressive coalition building, advocacy for the Soviet Union, and a belief that industrial union building through the CIO and New Deal were important agents of social change."¹⁶³ Browder and the CPUSA leadership were hesitant to dissolve Party work in political organizing, particularly since they had built such momentum by calling for expansions of New Deal programs such as the Works Progress Administration. This included, but was not limited to, the establishment of old age pensions, unemployment insurance, and the establishment of civil rights for African American citizens.¹⁶⁴ The CPUSA Central Committee was

particularly concerned over Roosevelt's relations with the Supreme Court. Many Central Committee members believed that, heading into the 1936 election, those relations had "deteriorated ever since the justices' 1935 decisions holding the NRA and the AAA unconstitutional." The Central Committee questioned the future of the Wagner and Social Security Acts, and abandoned its previous ardent support for them on the basis that they could not be a reliable bridge of solidarity.¹⁶⁵ As the years went by after 1936, the CPUSA became more and more open to meeting with Democrats and progressive moderates. By the start of 1939, Eugene Dennis was regularly meeting with New Deal progressives and moderate Republicans such as Vito Marcantonio (at the time a Republican), the FLP's John Bernard, and long-time democratic socialist and women's rights advocate Meta Berger. Although these meetings were done in secret, usually in pre-determined apartments or houses of certain activists, they do point to the willingness of CPUSA politicians to seek outside avenues for political strategy as opposed to their approach during the Third Period.¹⁶⁶

While the CPUSA took further steps during the Popular Front to integrate itself among the American electorate and surface issues of concern, the WPUS and Cannon struggled with sectarianism. Cooperation with the SPA against the CPUSA represented an ideal for Cannon since they had "a quite lively youth movement," and "a considerable number of activist worker elements, trade unionists and fighters in the unemployed field," but lacked "Marxist leaders" and a revolutionary organizational strategy. For other leaders of the WPUS, such as Hugo Oehler, working with the SPA and the CPUSA were out of the question and amounted to treachery against the working people of the United States. Oehler's supporters believed that if the "Stalinists" of the CPUSA desired cooperation, they needed to simply join the WPUS. Oehler, like A.J. Muste, was fond of equating all pro-Soviet Communist Parties around the world as being one-and-the-same, and used the term "Stalinist" to distinguish between anti-Soviet domestic communists and those within the CPUSA. Muste rejected cooperation in Cannon's view on "the grounds of organizational fetishism," and his overt desire to avoid ever working again with

Cannon's former organization.¹⁶⁷ Likewise, working with the CPUSA meant working with the Democrats, who Muste believed was deceiving both the CPUSA's members and the masses with promises of peace.¹⁶⁸

For his part, Cannon worked to convince the WPUS to accept the CPUSA's emphasis on a resistance to fascism more than he approved of working with Democrats and moderate Republicans. During the election cycle, Cannon reminded his supporters that they follow the tradition of Lenin, who worked to dismember the "agents of imperialism" from his movement in order to unify working groups together. Boldly, Cannon called for a Fourth International to succeed the Soviet-dominated Comintern and jump-started his international career as a communist politician.¹⁶⁹ The Oehlerites, however, took a firmer stance and denounced the CPUSA's 1936 programme as "glib propaganda" that masked the "far more dangerous and far more criminal" act of deceiving American workers into trusting the Roosevelt coalition. This latter act, according to *New Militant* writer Arne Swabeck, led to a "blurring of the class issue" and the subsuming of revolutionary action for reformist collaboration with "Rooseveltian" capitalists.¹⁷⁰

After months of internal debating and Cannon's refusal to give up the issue on collectively resisting fascism, the Oehlerites made a move to split. Before they could fully break off, however, Cannon and the majority faction of the WPUS expelled supporters unwilling to get in line with Cannon's majority. Muste's faction fell silent when Muste himself left the movement to devote himself to his local church, only returning infrequently to participate in WPUS meetings. Cannon and the WPUS then turned their attention to criticizing the CPUSA's ongoing support for the Comintern.¹⁷¹ Although the CPUSA operated for the most part independently of strict Comintern control by 1936, to most Trotskyists like Cannon the difficulty for future organizing lay in both avoiding "reformism," the tendency to place faith in economic reform as a relief to the woes of capitalism, and the Comintern's oversight.¹⁷²

The attitude of reformism among lower-ranking members was not new for the CPUSA. It traced back to the Party's solutions to unemployment during the 1928 and 1932 elections. At the same time, early CPUSA interpretations of the New Deal criticized it for being too moderate, as was the dictum of the Third Period to reject appeals of social justice which did not offer, as its base, proletarian revolution. It was depicted as merely a rejection of Hoover's "rugged individualism" as opposed to any substantial relief for unemployed Americans.¹⁷³ The stances against the Democrats between 1928 and 1935 shaped the years to come as writers within *Political Affairs* argued that "no issue of broader appeal" existed among the masses other than relief. Whereas the 1932 platform of unemployment relief was attractive, it was argued as a necessity by 1935 that could not be resolved through localized, state-based relief, nor by the efforts of a handful of understaffed, but dedicated, unemployment councils. Issues and policies such as these likely defined the limits of success for communist activism among members such as Lumpkin and Charney by creating hard lines of tolerance on policies. It also maintained an identity that separated the political ideals of communists from those of more moderately-perceived Democrats. Moving forward from 1935, some within the Party desired to see continued advocacy of a bill for unemployment insurance on a broad scale to create a more radical alternative to that presented by the Democrats. This, however, was too close at the time to the program promoted by the SPA and the WPUS. Ultimately, the national CPUSA leadership chose to expand their identity from an advocate of workers' rights into a national resistance to fascism.¹⁷⁴

In March of 1935, the CPUSA published continuous criticism of the Roosevelt Administration for not taking more radical steps to address unemployment and racism. Their solution, instead, was the creation of a National Unemployment Congress, united with various labor leaders such as Thomas Kennedy, and community activists in major cities.¹⁷⁵ These more 'radical' steps to unemployment and racism were picked up by the House of Un-American Activities Committee in 1936-37, and were correlated to the "Red International of Labor Unions" in Moscow. Based on HUAC reports, it was

believed that the communists sought to take over the AFL and CIO in order to shift popular support away from reactionary politics.¹⁷⁶ CPUSA leaders' criticism of Roosevelt reached newer heights when the administration embargoed shipments of arms to rebels in Spain later that year. Browder, wanting to steer away from the hierarchical nature of mainstream political organizations, sought to create a genuinely populist political party that contrasted itself against the "Hearst men" of the Republicans and the attempts by Roosevelt to "steer a course between the Hearst Program, on one hand, and the interests and demands of the people on the other."¹⁷⁷ While this initiative did not successfully filter down to the lower levels of the Party as well as affiliated allies/organizations, many American communists at all levels of the movement desired to see more dramatic reform out of the Democrats and an increase in the pace of reform.

Former Vice-Presidential candidate James Ford created a program in 1935 for incorporating the issue of racism into the Popular Front. Ford believed that an important difference existed between a reformist and a radical when uniting together, and that this difference must be acknowledged if the two groups are going to work together to enact reform. Radicals, he contended, showed an unwillingness to "give in to the white rulers" and instead "fight every step against the ruling class."¹⁷⁸ This mimicked the perspectives of other black communists like Benjamin Davis, who saw Roosevelt's New Deal as an accomplishment of only part of the major systemic problems within contemporary capitalism. Pointing to lynching, such as that of Claude Neal in mid-1935, Ford charged that Jim Crow and its cultural effects represented the "economic remnants of slavery." Ford declared it the communists' duty to promote support for persecuted blacks and that a popular front of progressive groups could not afford to ignore this fundamental issue.¹⁷⁹

Ford's words resonated with active black communist lawyers such as Benjamin Davis, who, throughout the 1930s, found himself defending African Americans such as Angelo Herndon against racial discrimination. These cases, including the Scottsboro case, were part of a larger national question that

forced an alliance on the left of blacks and working-class whites.¹⁸⁰ But even Davis' work, within the International Labor Defense (ILD), was not enough for the political ideals put forth by Ford; who desired to see the struggle extend beyond the periphery of the ILD and the unions to infiltrate mass community organizations. To Ford, combating Jim Crow was not only a political policy, it was also a moral imperative that required grassroots, community-based engagement. What he ideally sought were the utilization of community elements such as churches and social clubs. Though Christianity in the United States had its own criticism of Communism as an ideology, Ford saw no conflict. Instead he emphasized that the church had the potential to "play a revolutionary role" in combating Jim Crow. Citing Lenin and the claim that communists must unite with "all forms of struggle," Ford put the struggle against Jim Crow as a political pillar for American Communism, which filtered down to regional locals and eventually spilled into the community world.¹⁸¹ At the same time, Ford's conclusions merely gave the Party's weight onto concepts many understood. Numerous communists, such as Hosea Hudson, already recognized churches and book clubs as fertile grounds for organizing African Americans and integrating them into the movement. This diffusion of political policy into community based activism will be addressed again in the community world of American Communism, but it is important to note how CPUSA leaders typically concluded what their lower-ranking organizers already understood at the grassroots.

Because of the CPUSA's dual approach to social relief, where its national reformist strategy mixed with a lower-ranking criticism of the limitations of New Deal reform, some communists saw the New Deal and the ongoing popularity of the Roosevelt Administration as demonstrative of a "split in the working class" between reformists and revolutionaries. These strategists believed that economic development was of "decisive importance" to CPUSA politics. They pointed to how much American industrial output contributed to world production and how increases in automation contributed to increased industrial productivity throughout 1935. The result, which was a halt in the harsh depictions

of the Depression and a temporary “calm of the masses,” meant that Popular Front tactics had to be adopted on a wide enough scale so as to reach those who benefitted enough from social programs to remain above “a low crisis level.”¹⁸² The conclusion was that to remain effective in a post-NIRA America, the CPUSA required tinkering at the local levels of shop and community nuclei to find strategies that fit with a large majority of Americans—white, black, Latino, gay, straight, working men and women as well as stay-at-home moms. In the background, the aforementioned issues of creating an Unemployment Congress, pushing for the FLP, and growing divisions within the CPUSA between upper and lower tiers, were seconded to the realization that to remain part of the political landscape within the United States, American communists had to communicate a message that resonated with broad groups of citizens.

The WPUS's argument that the Popular Front was ultimately a forced decision, and that the CPUSA's endorsement of Roosevelt was a sacrifice of ideals for the sake of class unity, is deeply rooted in the Trotskyist view of international communism. In Cannon's personal view, Stalin's expulsions of Leon Trotsky and Grigory Zinoviev allowed Jay Lovestone and his faction to gain support by organizing meetings to "enlighten" members, branches, and community divisions on the Comintern's decision. William Foster's group fell in line behind the so-called "Lovestoneites," and the minority became Cannon's camp in 1929.¹⁸³ More recent studies suggest that the Popular Front developed into a "social and political tragedy" with regard to its effect on the militancy of radical groups like the CPUSA and WPUS. Some scholars pointed to the numerous shifts in political trends by communists, identifying them as evidence that connected American communist actions to Soviet-oriented decisions in Moscow.¹⁸⁴ The criticism is a mirror of Cannon's; that the decisions of the Comintern, be they productive or regressive for the American worker, ultimately defined how an American communist viewed politics. This view, however, overlooks the fact that the same political evolution that occurred at the top level of the CPUSA also occurred at the lower levels and for sometimes different reasons.

For young, working class communists like Lumpkin, college-educated activists like Charney, and low-ranking CPUSA officials like John Gates, the endorsement of a Popular Front had little to do with Trotskyism and was more of a practical approach to socialism directed by experts in both the CPUSA leadership and representative factions within the Comintern. For Lumpkin, the radical demand by the CPUSA, the CLA, and the SPA for unemployment insurance and employment programs in the 1932 and 1934 election cycles resulted in the public works jobs programs and increased economic conditions by 1935.¹⁸⁵ Charney described Browder as an effective leader who led to a "flourishing" cultural movement throughout New York City, where "thousands" came to work together and attend CPUSA meetings.¹⁸⁶ Gates remembered the transition of 1935 as the moment when communists "began to participate seriously in politics" by forming alliances and pacts between the Democrats while "looking forward to an independent mass farmer-labor party."¹⁸⁷ While not ignoring the influence of the international schism in communist ideology, it is important to see the personalized view of these shifts and account for all interpretations of motive and the desire to stick with the movement by American radicals.

When confronted with the charge that American communists engaged in class collaborationist policies during the Popular Front, it is important to note the role of Soviet oversight with regard to the transition. Regional political leaders, representing the movement's ideological core, took the task of creating the Popular Front and applied it individually the best they could in their communities. In February of 1935, the CPUSA's think-tank, *Political Affairs*, published the immediate tasks for regional leaders, emphasizing an "acceleration of the concentration of capital" by leading industrialists and a "leftward swing" by American workers as demonstration for the need to expand the influence of the Party.¹⁸⁸ Many district locals of the Party suffered from a slack in membership recruitment from 1934-35 in areas outside American Communism's hometowns of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and believed these new tasks set by the Communist International to be the solution to slacking recruitment. Extending from the "international apparatus," the conclusions of *Political Affairs* also meant increased

oversight. Middle-ranking communists, such as Charney, experienced estrangement from the upper leadership when they discovered that numerous close associates worked with them as "secretive, mysterious...Communist International representatives" on orders to maintain order and discipline in the various party organizations. Charney believed this created an ironic twist within Party circles where communists "boasted, on the one hand, of [their] ties with Moscow and, on the other, of [their] independence" and freedom of interpretation.¹⁸⁹

For Baltimore district leader Earl Reno, the new strategy to engage in the Popular Front meant reviving the Party's membership and ending internal factionalism throughout Maryland. Like many regional locals of the CPUSA, methodological differences and the distance between communist labor organizers, communist political organizers, and communists active in the community created differing views and interpretations on the national Party's policies. Reno joined the CPUSA during the throes of the Depression in 1932. By the time he was appointed to the Baltimore headquarters in early 1935, he realized the principal problems of the local Party centered on having only fifty-two of sixty dues-paying members. It also had an ineffective section committee riddled with factional strife.¹⁹⁰ By reorganizing the section committee's oversight of the district into three separate groups that worked in their own field of activism and mimicked the three worlds of American communism (one for the Party, one for the community, and one for unions), membership increased to 96 by May. While this effort was done to reduce "the threat of factionalism" and "centraliz[e] authority in Reno's hands since each committee reported directed to him," it also facilitated the independent growth of these three orbiting spheres of communist activity in Baltimore and other cities that adopted a similar strategy.¹⁹¹

Communists in the larger cities like Chicago centered their local political platform on ending support for the failed Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) and reorienting toward independent unions, such as Chicago's Associated Employees (AE), the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers (AA) and, eventually, the Steel Workers' Organizing Committee (SWOC). The TUUL, by this

point, was a vestige of the Party from the 1920s. As an organization, the TUUL sought to bring workers directly under the influence of labor-organizing communists and, in turn, bring them under the umbrella of the CPUSA. By the end of 1934, the TUUL's Chicago membership of little over 2,000 was insignificant compared to the AFL's membership of over 53,000. The Chicago CPUSA leadership acknowledged the increase in union membership to over 41% of the city's workforce since 1930, but it reported that less than 18% belonged in the TUUL. By 1935, the Party's leaders in Chicago and elsewhere became convinced that "if they wanted to have input into mass union drives, they would have to change their strategies."¹⁹²

Instead, the CPUSA implemented a new strategy to bring workers within their orbit via independent and worker-controlled locals, which meant less political organizing and more labor organizing was necessary. The labor world of American Communism had always been one of the most staple and dedicated spheres of activity since 1919; but after 1934 the means by which the political world engaged with its labor world fundamentally changed. In Chicago, for example, this included utilizing women's auxiliaries to promote solidarity across ethnic lines since most of Chicago's steelworkers were a mixture of Spanish, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and Mexican immigrants.¹⁹³ The moment eventually came when the CPUSA's political strategy to broaden its appeal coincided with the success of specific union drives within the AFL, led by John L. Lewis and the burgeoning Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

In other cities, such as Boston, the means to working effectively as a political party after 1935 meant replacing old regional leaders with new ones and creating a new sense of purpose among the political cohort. Charney watched as the National Office of the CPUSA replaced their district organizer with Phil Frankfeld on May Day of 1935, which to him "symbolized the transition or leap from the old line of the party to the new." Under Frankfeld, Charney believed the membership became inspired "to unprecedented activity," and that the district responded "to the new opportunities for effective mass

work.” By fall, Frankfeld tasked Charney and his fellow comrades with building bridges between Boston’s union leaders and the city’s middle-class students and professionals; networks and bridges previously tasked to the local TUUL branch.¹⁹⁴ For Charney and other mid-level leaders like him, the overall shift in political strategy toward cooperation with progressives and the elevation of American Communism from a movement for workers’ rights to a national struggle against fascism, simply “seemed right.” Party and Comintern publications conformed with the new direction as well. One article published in early 1936 compared the Popular Front with Lenin’s strategy of broad, mass appeal via public presence among working people.¹⁹⁵ Charney began to adapt his understanding of the New Deal and the immediate needs of Americans as a whole, concluding that “patriotism...was not necessarily reactionary.”¹⁹⁶ The dramatic growth of anti-fascist sentiment allowed the communists of Boston to reach “far and wide” across class groups as public presence of the Party grew during the months leading up to the presidential election of 1936.

Planning out an electoral strategy for the 1936 campaign that mixed Popular Front resistance to fascism and workers' rights was the first serious test of the CPUSA's new policy of “collective security.” The term *collective security* contained the idea of the Popular Front right in its words: it meant that national security and peace rested on a collective and collaborative effort. Some of the tactics the CPUSA utilized came from the British Communist Party (BCP), which also sought collaborative approaches to resisting Hitler’s expansion of political power. Publicly, the CPUSA and other western communists made their views of uniting political parties against fascism clear as early as January, 1935.¹⁹⁷ The 1936 Electoral Program pamphlet released in August dictated that the American people faced “the greatest crisis since the Civil War” and compared the “collapse of the Hoover-Republican prosperity” with the inability of the New Deal “to protect and restore our living standards.” On the issue of racism, the program declared that African Americans “suffer doubly” due to the lack of civil rights

protection. On Roosevelt, the program depicted him as a man unfairly attacked by the Republican “camp of reaction,” but also as a leader too weak to fight back. Instead, “Roosevelt compromises.”¹⁹⁸

Not all of the CPUSA's political philosophy from the Third Period changed after 1934. In a similar approach of politicizing issues through campaigning, the 1936 Browder-Ford campaign sought to uphold aspects of the New Deal while criticizing the shortcomings of Roosevelt's administration. The campaign promised a “free, happy and prosperous America” for those who voted communist and lambasted the New Deal as a failed attempt to reform capitalism.¹⁹⁹ Downplaying the political issues publicly but promoting them in Party locals and nuclei, the CPUSA adopted a populist stance that “engendered a spirit of cooperation between liberals and radicals” that was both cooperative yet constructively critical of the various policies put forth by New Deal Democrats. Working together in this manner laid the groundwork for “the empowerment of North America's least privileged citizens” while not compromising communist principles for its base supporters. This process exposed more progressives to communist organizers and brought communist debates about politics into the mainstream political discussion. In just the first few years of the Popular Front, American communists saw their new programme produce amicable results: the CPUSA increased its dues-paying membership from 26,000 in 1934 to over 85,000 moving into 1939.²⁰⁰

Part and parcel to this depiction of Roosevelt were Party debates at the national level focused on the “theory of the lesser evil” as an “alleged responsibility for the advent of fascism.” The theory rested on the belief that Roosevelt “could not be relied upon to oppose the Liberty League and advance a genuine program of social reform,” and thus Roosevelt could only be tacitly supported. The limits of Democrat reform had to be outlined and shown as only partially effective for this line of thought to make sense for grassroots communists. Criticism of Roosevelt had to be maintained to both distinguish communists from Democrats in addition to continuing the effort of politicizing communist ideals.²⁰¹ Furthermore, criticism of Roosevelt served to contrast Democrats from rising influence on the right,

particularly among proto-fascist and white supremacist organizations. On the campaign trail, Communist leaders' fears about the stance of Roosevelt amplified when the German-American Bund, a white supremacist, Nazi-sympathizing organization, became the public face of National Socialism at the end of the summer.

In actuality, the Bund failed more of its goals that it accomplished and never amounted to a serious political threat in the United States.^d Hitler ended up resenting the organization because it drove more Americans away from supporting Nazi Germany than it drew them in.²⁰² For American communists, however, the German-American Bund was an anomaly that combined the worst elements of domestic white supremacy with the worst elements of European fascism. The Bund was fond of large marches down Pennsylvania Avenue where they waved Nazi flags and promoted the supremacy of German nationalism. Mixed with the KKK and other white supremacist organizations like the Black Legion, the presence of the German-American Bund terrified CPUSA leaders as well as everyday communists and served as another basis for continuing a moderate political path that was inclusive of progressives and Democrats. With the Bund criticizing Roosevelt from the extreme right, in addition to the SPA and WPUS criticizing cooperation with Roosevelt from the left, the CPUSA enjoyed being able to remain critical of Roosevelt while still maintaining a positive role in the Popular Front.

For regional Party activists such as Charney, the national Party's concerns for the 1936 election were “considered the Soviet and world communist attitude,” and were “primarily intended for Party consumption, to allay the fears of the diehards and to carry the Party along, step-by-step” as opposed to a realistic national campaign program.²⁰³ Browder continuously attempted to remind members at meetings that the ideal purpose of the Popular Front was to curb public sentiment into their favor.²⁰⁴ For Charney, this polemical view of the alternative political groups in America amounted to a “spirit of orthodoxy” where the Party could “never embark on a new policy without insisting that it represented a

^d For a complete history of the German-American Bund and their impact on politics in the United States, see Charles Higham. *American Swastika*

continuation of the old one.”²⁰⁵ For younger members, like Lumpkin, no amount of Party rhetoric or political analysis could detract from the visual progress created by the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration. Quite the contrary, in her hometown of Brooklyn, Lumpkin saw both her active work in the Youth Communist League and Roosevelt’s New Deal as an “escape route from the misery of the Depression.”²⁰⁶

It is of no small significance that Ford’s program for ending racism and discrimination in the community resonated more with everyday communists and activists than did Browders’ criticism of Roosevelt, in addition to the overall CPUSA message about the dangers of fascism. Browder’s criticism, and his early 1936 promotion of the FLP despite its small potential, highlighted a major discrepancy within the communist movement that has often been overlooked. The structure of the CPUSA, best illustrated and described by Randi Storch, wedged a dividing line between local leaders and national leaders. The Party’s eighteen districts represented major cities such as Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles, and regional localities such as the entire states of Indiana, Wisconsin, and the southern half of Illinois. District branches in theory commanded control over local nuclei, either shop- or community-based. The local nuclei of the Party, however, were not only the lowest level, they were the most decentralized components of the Party structure—more flexible in terms of electing leaders and the methods used for bringing Marxism to their community.²⁰⁷ The lower levels of the movement, Naison points out, confined support for the FLP “strictly to state and local elections.” At the same time, Browder campaigned nationally—but only to condemn Republicans for threatening to tear down the progress of the New Deal. This process worked, but as Peggy Dennis pointed out, among the leadership it blurred lines between dedicated cohorts and so-called “sympathizers and fellow travelers.”²⁰⁸

One thing the CPUSA and Cannon’s WPUS agreed on was abandoning support for the FLP in mid-to-late 1936. Although the Comintern continued to characterize the Democrats in the United States and the Labour Party in Great Britain as “reactionary” and “pro-capitalist,” it emphasized that Western

communists must present themselves as the heads and leaders of workers' struggles over "rent, housing, work schemes, public assistance relief." It also encouraged candidates to run for office on the platform of a united front with the mainstream Parties against fascism and to reject the sectarian positions of the SPA.²⁰⁹ As stated, Comintern declarations from 1934-1936 coincided with a collective effort among American socialists and communists to promote the FLP while also running their own candidates. The FLP gained traction during this time in areas such as Minnesota and Chicago through the support of local unions as well as congressmen Ernest Lundeen and Vito Marcantonio.²¹⁰ By the summer of 1936, however, the organization failed to achieve the levels of broad support seen by the New Deal coalition and faded in significance for American communist political strategists. Browder remarked that although the FLP and progressive forces "brilliantly penetrate[d] into the territory of the old south" and "arouse[d] a mass democratic movement," the southern United States nevertheless remained under the dominant political influence of "reactionaries" and the Republican Party.²¹¹ The *New Militant* similarly reported that the results of the FLP were "hardly an object of support to socialist workers" and concluded that the movement for socialism remained to be built.²¹²

The CPUSA and WPUS's conclusions about the FLP were, admitted, late by at least a year. As early as May of 1935, the third-party strategy failed to meet CPUSA expectations in recruitment and engagement, particularly in areas believed to be prone to union organizing such as Birmingham and Chicago. It was believed that the FLP alternative in southern and rural areas would be able to bridge issues that were similar in economic terms but separated by the regional politics of the Republican and Democratic parties. The approach failed to factor in regional and racial boundaries in political ideology, such as southern, reactionary Democrats and the racially-divided urban neighborhoods of Chicago. By spring of 1935, a growing split between workers and farmers against CPUSA leaders and union officials distanced communists outside the FLP from those inside it.²¹³ Although the FLP found ways to bridge previous gaps in local politics, the prospects of the FLP generating a peoples' movement larger than the

Democratic coalition was viewed as unrealistic. Browder emphasized that American communists had a duty to acknowledge this shortcoming as a lesson for future organizing drives. In May of 1937, Browder finished the debate when he announced the Party's full endorsement of Roosevelt and the New Deal at Carnegie Hall.²¹⁴

These conclusions heavily influenced Party strategists, who sought to maintain their identity as American communists while expanding their reach in the years following the 1936 election. Their national debates about a cooperative strategy did not, however, always convince district-level organizers and leaders. Party political strategist John Barnett argued that the failure of the Party to gain traction in rural parts of the country from 1934 to 1936 meant the CPUSA needed to organize the FLP in those regions instead and reject cooperation with progressive Democrats the way they had during the Third Period. Support for the FLP and Browder's post-1934 attitudes attempted to "ease the Party's path to political influence" by "loosening the demands of Party membership" and "disavowing armed revolution as a goal" for the movement in the United States.²¹⁵ Of equal if not greater importance, the rising popularity of New Deal programs forced Browder and Party strategists like Barnett to reassess how to move forward, which in this case included dismembering older elements even if they served a functional political purpose in the past. To do this, Barnett pushed for working with farmer unions such as the sharecroppers in the south, and within the existing so-called "old-line" Farmer organizations: The Farmers Union, the Farm Bureau, and the National Holiday Association.²¹⁶ For all of Barnett's passion toward the rural districts, the FLP as an organization failed to resonate with communists active in their community such as Lumpkin and Charney, who instead admired and supported individuals of FDR's cabinet such as Frances Perkins, agreed with cooperation between communists and Democrats, and the overall effects of the New Deal by 1937.

A look into the personal lives of individual communists helps explain the difficulty faced by CPUSA leaders in continuing their support for the FLP. Many younger communists thought broadly

about societal change and were neither bothered by nor wrapped up in the sectarian debates over organizational theory. Rather than play in the streets with other kids her age, Lumpkin attended classes at the Workers School downtown, where she read the works of Frederick Douglas, Marx, and Lenin. After Hitler seized power in 1933, Lumpkin took to the streets with her local YCL chapter. She believed that “Hitler [had] won over many frustrated youth,” and that “millions of young Americans...had no chance to work and to learn about labor solidarity.”²¹⁷ At college in 1927, Charney “absorb[ed] humanist culture through exciting books...that gave [him] some understanding of the human drama, of the life of man and his times, and above all an inchoate compassion for humanity.” Additionally, college life exposed Charney to a critical assessment of Marx, where theories of a class structured society were deconstructed to demonstrate failures to account for “tradition, family, the human personality, and so forth.”²¹⁸ To these younger comrades and field activists, 'socialism' and 'the revolution' were more abstract goals than they were to strategists like Barnett, who tended to think of 'revolution' as a carefully stacked deck of cards, built on broad theoretical conclusions from international think tanks.

Lower-ranking members like Charney and younger members like Lumpkin didn't necessarily share the Comintern's nor Barnett's views on the Democrats or the direct necessity of an alternative political party such as the FLP. While Browder and the Comintern promoted the FLP throughout most of 1935 and the early months of 1936, Lumpkin found herself attracted to the American Labor Party (ALP), which supported the New Deal while pressuring Roosevelt for more worker-oriented benefits.²¹⁹ Charney saw the support of a third party alternative as dangerous since it could steal votes away and allow a Republican victory in 1936 under Alf Landon.²²⁰ In unionism, the most important non-communist figures to capture the attention of the CPUSA's base was John L. Lewis and the emerging CIO leadership. Upon engaging with the Popular Front in early 1935, the CPUSA “set in motion change in Party life that gave it greater flexibility to adapt to popular attitudes and pursue opportunities for political influence.”²²¹ By November of 1936, Browder and the rest of the CPUSA leadership found

themselves supporting Roosevelt's reelection with yet another step toward moderate centrism.²²² For rank and file activists like Charney, the FLP remained an ideal to strive for, but the importance of Roosevelt's victory and the thrust of the CPUSA further into the public sphere outweighed the significance of an alternative Party movement.²²³

After hearing about the success of ousting the so-called "Old Guard" of the SPA by younger, more militant radicals at the party's Cleveland Convention, Cannon and the WPUS concluded that the SPA was "the best rallying ground for the revolutionary forces in building the party of the American proletarian revolution." All members of the WPUS and those who considered themselves "revolutionary workers" were urged to join the SPA. To Cannon, the ousting of the Old Guard was the culmination of events following the SPA's Detroit convention in 1934, where younger members rejected the "cowardly and treacherous Social-Democratic reformism of the [World War I] and postwar years." The *New Militant* also exclaimed that Browder's CPUSA represented a "national socialism of Stalin" and "ceased in actual fact to be a party" by 1934. This ended the short-lived existence of the WPUS, but quickly inflated the left wing of the SPA by the end of the year.²²⁴ At first, the national SPA permitted no publications of the "Left Oppositionists," as the existing younger militants knew them. Cannon and his fellow Oppositionists found solace in the Chicago-based *Socialist Appeal* edited by a local Trotskyist, Albert Goldman. As independents who shared a more sympathetic view of communists such as Leon Trotsky and Lenin, Cannon's Oppositionists always remained somewhat on the fringe of the SPA's Left Wing. Goldman shared Cannon's views on the Cleveland Convention of the SPA and the ousting of the Old Guard, calling it an "outstanding achievement" that "marked the climax of the two year struggle which [had] gone on since the Detroit Convention of 1934."²²⁵ Former prominent writers for *The Militant* and *New Militant*, such as Maurice Spector, Max Shachtman, and Arne Swabeck began writing for the *Socialist Appeal* in October, 1936.

The months between 1936 and 1937 also saw a growing separation between upper CPUSA leaders such as Browder, Foster, and Dennis and lower-level district organizers like Charney and Lumpkin. The wedge had its origins in 1934 but didn't become visible until the Party leadership amped up its criticism of Roosevelt's perceived shortcomings before and after the election. In a dramatic about-face, top Party leaders and supportive union organizers within business and industry, who had supported the New Deal and were afraid of a reactionary backlash, asked for cutbacks on social programs advanced by the Roosevelt Administration and “demanded repressive action against the mushrooming mass movements.”²²⁶ But communists like Lumpkin and even some high ranking members like Peggy Dennis rejected criticism of Roosevelt for the same reason they rejected the idealism of the FLP as an alternative. Dennis saw aspects of the New Deal as a tremendous achievement, specifically the mass work projects that put Americans in places of employment and training, as well as the successful organization of non-specialized workers in auto, steel, rubber, and communications industries under Section 7a of the National Industrial Recovery Act.²²⁷ Lumpkin, at the time only a regional activist for the CPUSA with no seated position, instead emphasized the “great things [done] in record speed” by the Roosevelt Administration and applauded its response to her work on unemployment councils in New York. Neither Lumpkin nor Dennis showed any support for cutbacks on social relief for the sake of appeasing reactionary Republicans.²²⁸

To these more grassroots members and organizers, the public works projects of the Civilian Works Administration and the passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 by New Deal Democrats represented major victories for the working class that could not be ignored.²²⁹ Meanwhile, the channels of CPUSA literature—*The Communist*, *The Daily Worker*, *Political Affairs*—echoed the sentiments of Party leaders like Browder and Foster, remaining cautious and critical about advancing programs that might give political ammunition to Republicans. Nearly all of the CPUSA's leaders concerned themselves chiefly with criticizing the SPA for rejecting the New Deal and the notion of a reactionary backlash

should they lose Roosevelt in the 1936 election.²³⁰ Although she acknowledged the role of communists in addressing issues such as unemployment and hunger, Lumpkin believed these actions were necessary, as opposed to following a rigid scheme for revolution. Lumpkin rarely acknowledged the political lines that separated New Deal legislation from the goals of American Communism. To her and communists like her, the headline of *Labor Today*, which stated that the Civilian Works Administration had put 814,511 unemployed to work, signified the real gains for American workers and the nation as a whole, not the ideological debate of which organization or what method would further expand communist influence. While organizers like Lumpkin may have been exposed to American Communism's core ideological policies, such as linking the Soviet Five Year Plan with the rise of CP popularity, the way in which organizers interpreted these policies were highly subjective and rooted in their personal hopes for equality and justice.²³¹

The split between upper and lower echelons of the CPUSA could have resulted from switching political policy at the top while many activists, including Lumpkin and others such as Russell Brodine, saw some elements of strategy from 1929 to 1935 as effective for the goals of organizing working people and thus saw little reason to change course. A prime example came from the Party's central battleground to define their political identity while moving into 1935: the attempt to establish a National Unemployment Congress. The CPUSA's proposal, which had its roots in the cooperation of the Socialist-led National Unemployment Convention and communist-led unemployment councils, rejected Roosevelt's initial claims that the New Deal had improved conditions for relief. Communists worked with the unemployment councils as well as a labor coalition led by Louis Weinstock to support Ernest Lundeen from Minnesota in pushing "a more egalitarian approach to social insurance" with *The Workers' Unemployment and Social Insurance Bill* (H.R. 7598). The purpose of the bill was to provide relief to American workers and farmers who lost "wages because of unemployment, part-time work, sickness, accident, old age or maternity."²³² The proposal also included maternity benefits for women

workers as "a serious attempt at ameliorating the effects of childbearing on women's access to federal resources."²³³

The CPUSA's ongoing criticism of the New Deal echoed their sentiments of the Third Period albeit with a more respectful tone toward Democrats. One *Political Affairs* article described the New Deal as manipulative since it addressed areas "useful in quieting unrest" such as banking and heavy industry, but left little relief for farmers and their families. CCC money was criticized for being given to banks and well-off farmers affected heavily by the dustbowl, but only "a minimal amount" went to address the worst-affected groups. Coinciding with this charge was the belief that the New Deal sought to "put the small farmers out of commercial production" entirely by catching them "in a reduction net" of high prices.²³⁴ Lumpkin, in contrast to the article, remembered instead the positive impact of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in her community and the role of the CCC in rebuilding the American working class during the worst years of the Depression. Brodine, struggling as a bassist while organizing fellow musicians, obtained temporary work through the WPA up through the 1938 symphony season, and saw the practical benefit of social safety-net programs.²³⁵ These everyday communists not only saw utility in the New Deal, their experiences gave little reason to reject the program on any practical basis. Under such circumstances, more radical propositions such as the CPUSA's social insurance bill came to represent an ideal to strive for while maintaining the practical approaches to the goal set forth in the New Deal.

The Third Period criticism of Democrats that remained throughout the Popular Front focused on perceived New Deal shortcomings in terms of racial justice for two categories of American workers: industrial wage-earners and farmers. Nowhere in the country did these two programs come more predominant than in the south, where the plight of white farmers was pitted against the racist culture of Jim Crow. From 1937 to 1939, Southern communists "gained influence in larger organizations than the [CPUSA]," including the (Southern) Negro Youth Congress.²³⁶ At the same time, the CPUSA took steps to

moderate its public activity considering their need for support from southern white progressives, despite observations by Party strategists like Rob Hall. Hall believed that southern whites carried “considerable remnants of the old race prejudice,” and would prove divisive if rushed too quickly into working with African Americans.²³⁷ Part of the growth in progressive activity was external to the American communist movement, as pointed out by Harvey Klehr:

The South was undergoing a transformation. The CIO launched organizing campaigns in 1937 and some communists got staff jobs, particularly in the steel mills of Birmingham. Court decisions made Communism less risky. Early in 1937 a unanimous Supreme Court struck down the conviction of Oregon Communist Dirk de Jonge, convicted of criminal syndicalism for participating in a peaceful Party protest meeting in 1934.²³⁸

Examples such as de Jonge’s acquittal demonstrated that the CPUSA’s political engagement with Southerners benefitted from an atmosphere already undergoing social change.

Another example of the more advantageous atmosphere in the south from 1935-1937 came from Alabama, where the Workers' Alliance of America (WAA) built a statewide movement for unemployment relief and farmers' relief through the use of SPA and CPUSA organizers. The organization was founded in 1935 on the passion and spirit of unity that engrossed numerous activists on the verge of the Popular Front. Unlike the policy of the national SPA with regard to cooperative work with communists in 1935, the SPA's organizers in Alabama were keen to working with CPUSA activists from day one, and elected several to leadership positions, including John Donovan, Henry Mayfield, and Hosea Hudson. Within a year of its founding, the WAA merged with the existing CPUSA-led unemployment committees of Alabama. Although an important move for Southern communists, the WAA remained marginalized until 1937, when Donovan sought to reorganize the Birmingham local. Donovan wanted to overcome the WAA's largest obstacle: the presence of a conservative white majority in numerous locals, particularly Birmingham and Fairfield. To break up the racial majority of the locals,

Donavan sent in groups of radical African American activists, knowing it would wedge tensions into the group and split off those unwilling to work together. When the chairman of the Fairfield local walked out of a meeting with a group of white workers after refusing to compromise, Donavan made his move and motioned to elect new candidates to fill vacant positions. The SPA proved more willing to work with Donavan by 1937, and the national leadership of the SPA began to lean in favor of cooperative work. Less than two months later the organization elected James D. Howell president, Hudson vice-president, and Edwina Collins as the recording secretary. Although only Hudson was a card carrying CPUSA member, the WAA's quick support of the anti-poll movement and the right of African Americans to vote earned them the label of 'communist' long before any labor-related organizing began.²³⁹

In the case of the WAA, the ability for communists to become more active in community political organizations rested on the tactics desired by unionists and organizers outside the communist ideological sphere of orbit. Most organizers, like Donavan, desired to see an end to racial divisions handicapping the organizational process. While communists such as Hudson rejected racial discrimination as a societal threat, organizers like Donavan saw it more directly as an unnecessary barrier to the goals of unionism. Red baiting, or the accusing of an organization harboring communist sympathies, served an effective purpose among white workers who commonly associated racial equality with communism. It also worked: By 1938, 60% of the WAA's Birmingham local were black. This did not deter communists like Hudson, however, from continuing strategies utilized by the unemployment councils to draw attention in to the needs of Alabama farmers and wage workers.²⁴⁰ To maintain their image as a community-built organization, the WAA turned to employees of the Department of Water and Power to create shop committees and town hall debates to deal directly to the WPA. Over the course of the next year, the WAA turned into a "trade union for the WPA workers" by narrowing its fight against utility shut-offs and more rigorous pay schedules.²⁴¹

The expanded history of the WAA explores some of the limitations faced by both the Popular Front in general and American communists in specific, but it also represented some of the changes that took place in the south in terms of politics between 1935 and 1937. In Robin Kelley's assessment, the WAA "only slightly resembled the predominantly black, underground, neighborhood-based unemployment movement of the early 1930s." Rather than a dividing force against groups like the Fairfield local, the WAA welcomed any and all WPA employees into its ranks including "white-collar professionals who had no interest in the fight for racial justice and equality" and an even less tolerance of communism. With regard to the WAA, the "[CPUSA] adopted a somewhat accommodating political posture—much like its position with respect to the CIO" and made little effort to pressure the organization into accepting this-or-that method or strategy. Furthermore, it highlighted the contrast between the Third Period approach of focusing on the radicalization of all issues to the Popular Front approach of focusing on so-called "bread and butter issues."²⁴²

After a year of writing for the Chicago-based *Socialist Appeal*, Cannon and the Oppositionists within the SPA's Left Wing began to publish a New York-based version of the *Socialist Appeal* in August, 1937. In their debut issue, the Left Wing declared that it "refuse[d] to be muzzled" and rejected the ongoing attempts by the national SPA to suppress the circulation of the Chicago-based *Appeal* and the overall position of the SPA's on the Popular Front.²⁴³ The Oppositionists asserted that the Left Wing at a fundamental odds with the national SPA's moderate leaders, particularly over the issue of their right to publish the works of Trotsky for members. According to Max Shachtman, the differences between the two camps amounted to "reformism" on behalf of the moderates for their support of the Popular Front by 1937 and "revolutionary Marxism" on behalf of the Oppositionists, who desired to see a continuance of revolutionary alternative unions and organizations. The tendency for the SPA's moderates such as Gus Tyler to support collaborative efforts like the WAA in Alabama, in Shachtman's words, forced the entire SPA "to become a watch-charm on the chain of the Communist Party." The Oppositionists within

the SPA, including Cannon, continued to publish their criticisms of the Popular Front throughout 1936 and 1937 and instead praised the efforts of the Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) for resisting the SPA in its attempt to suppress Trotskyism.²⁴⁴

Boldened by an easing of tensions and heightened community support, the CPUSA held an all-Southern Communist Party Conference in Chattanooga, in September of 1937. Browder was in attendance, as was Ford, along with one hundred and thirty-three other delegates. Party leaders applauded increased membership and activity in Southern states. The goal of the conference was to seek local liberal support for the Party's southern efforts at combating racial discrimination and to avoid linking racial equality with foreign conceptualizations of communism. Part of the effort in doing so involved renaming the major communist publications, such as *The Southern Worker* to *The New South* and replacing "published by the Communist Party, USA" with "The Journal of Progressive Opinion." The conference also had a negative outcome by exposing a conflict between the political desires by southern communists and the New York-based national CPUSA leadership. Browder, willing to support "experiments in Southernization" to the extent that it garnered more support and membership, also wanted to demonstrate the ability for the CPUSA to obtain real gains for southern workers. Browder's interpretation of support for the south, however, usually meant appointing New York-born or North Midwest-born representatives, such as John J. Ballam, to lead southern Party efforts. This effort did little to bridge the gap between southern communists and liberals and if anything further complicated communist organizing efforts for the lower district activists.²⁴⁵

Regional organizer Rob Hall eventually recanted some of his earlier prejudices about the south, seeing that the movement was picking up momentum independently without communist agitation of the local political scene. The communist camp could not, he maintained, use racism and white chauvinism as a linchpin against any and all political enemies found in the southern states.²⁴⁶ To demonstrate this new interpretation of local southern politics, the CPUSA endorsed Lister Hill in 1938 to

fill Hugo Black's seat in the Alabama state senate, despite his opposition to antilynching legislation. Black ran on a conservative, anti-New Deal platform that made Hill's position appear to be the more appropriate choice given the options. Still, the CPUSA's announcement to endorse Hill met with opposition from its African American base who pointed out that Alabama Democrat had a history with the Ku Klux Klan. Overall, by the end of the election it was clear that CPUSA leaders sought to "deemphasize" and downplay their involvement in "black issue oriented politics" by placing what was a canonical, national political tenant in the 1932 Presidential election into a more localized, decentralized context. No action by the CPUSA Central Committee exemplified this better than when, in mid 1937, they broke down the Alabama ILD and encouraged their local African American base to become more active in the NAACP. By then, the NAACP had become a more socially activist organization subsequent to the popularity of unemployment councils in the early 1930s, but the breakup of the ILD and encouragement by the national CPUSA leadership to join contributed directly to the NAACP's growth in membership in Alabama, which quadrupled between 1936 and 1938.²⁴⁷

Not all African American organizers accepted the CPUSA's new political stance nor joined the NAACP willingly. Many, according to Hudson, had to be persuaded by CPUSA leaders at length that local community resistance to racial injustice was more effective than national resistance. The NAACP, to Hudson and his other local black communist organizers, was an organization of "better class folks;" where "ordinary negro[s] didn't feel that was [their] place." District CPUSA organizers explained that unbeknownst to their base members, the NAACP had served as a liaison between the Birmingham district Party local and the surrounding black neighborhoods and that despite whatever perceptions of the organization's members were, that they had helped facilitate cooperation during the Third Period. Whichever the reasons Alabama black communists chose when they made their switch to the NAACP, they brought to the organization a cadre of experienced community organizers that exhibited "a greater appreciation for black culture" and a "grassroots theology that forcibly made a niche for itself within

rank-and-file circles."²⁴⁸ Though communists were not responsible for building the NAACP into the national organization it became by the end of World War II, they certainly held the blame for bringing in passionate and dedicated activists which made the organization more effective. In doing so, communists also demonstrated by 1938 that issues of racial injustice were not seen in the eyes of Party leaders as solely issues of communist ideology. Instead, as Rob Hall explained at Chattanooga, resistance to racial injustice was in the process of becoming its own movement that did not require the direction and leadership of the Communist Party. Most importantly, this new movement against racial injustice did not necessarily require defense from the CPUSA, and instead could look to its own communities and local organizations to begin an effective resistance.²⁴⁹

A key test to the CPUSA's dedication to fighting racism and fascism and their tolerance of Democrat stances on peace surfaced once the Roosevelt administration favored neutrality on the issue of the Spanish Civil War in late 1936. Roosevelt would admit later in 1939 that it was a mistake to endorse neutrality, but from mid-1936 to 1938 it created yet another effective thorn communists used to remain critical of the limitations of Roosevelt's administration. Additionally, some 3,000 Americans signed up to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, a battalion of the International Brigades, and shipped off to fight against Franco's fascist forces until defeated. The International Brigades were sponsored and organized by the Comintern as well as numerous European Popular Front activists from France, Germany, and Italy. Many of the brigade leaders were communists, or worked closely with communists in their home country. However, the vast majority of those who fought in the brigades were not communists; and it was these citizens Browder and Ford hoped to win over by denouncing Roosevelt's pacifist stance.²⁵⁰ For John Gates, the Popular Front presented opportunities to link with a wide variety of progressives and anti-fascist individuals. As General Franco launched an armed revolt against the Republic of Spain on July 18th, 1936, Gates and other communists faced the challenge of taking up a call to arms. When YCL organizers gave Gates the opportunity to join the fight, he wasted no time and

became the first volunteer from Ohio to join the Abraham-Lincoln Brigade, XI International Brigades. Gates kept his travel plans secret from his family, left for Europe on February 6th, 1937, aboard the S.S. *Paris*, and arrived in Albacete a little more than a week later.²⁵¹

The Abraham Lincoln Brigade outfitted Gates with French revolutionary uniforms and Russian-made rifles, and placed him into a unit composed of English, French, Belgian, German, and Russian-speaking justice warriors. After training, Gates was put into the 86th Brigade, and earned the initial rank of a Brigade Adjutant. In contrast to J. Edgar Hoover's suggestion in *Masters of Deceit* that communists merely "use glittering promises, underhanded tricks, and downright fraud to coax young men to go to Spain," Gates asserted that "no one had to be coaxed to go to Spain. There were no promises other than the possibility that [they] might lose their lives." Instead, many of those who fought with the Brigades chose to stay even after their tours were up, particularly those with flying skills since Spain's revolutionary guards were in short supply of reliable and effective pilots. Communists also found themselves accompanied by numerous American and British authors, including Claude G. Bowers, Ernest Hemingway, and George Orwell.²⁵² During his tour of duty Gates met and lost countless friends, but at each of his three chances to return home, he refused. When forced to retreat after a battle on the Cordoba front outside of Madrid, Gates took charge of the American contingent of the Brigades in Albacete while most of his regiment returned home.²⁵³

The communist experience in the Spanish Civil War between warriors of the Republic and the fascist forces of Franco also mirrored some of the domestic issues of ideology when the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) instigated an armed insurrection against the Spanish Republic in Barcelona in the spring of 1937. The POUM claimed to be a Trotskyist, anti-fascist political party that advocated "proletarian revolution and the immediate abolition of capitalism in Spain."²⁵⁴ Between May 3rd and 8th, POUM revolutionaries held events and brawled with members of the Comintern-backed Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia throughout the streets of Barcelona. The response by the Spanish

Republic, led by Spanish Socialist Party premier Francisco Caballero, was to at first denounce the condemnation of Trotskyist supporters, until he lost significant support and resigned on May 15th. The new prime minister, Juan Negrin, was sympathetic to the criticisms of the Stalinist Spanish Communist Party and accepted the accusations of the POUM as a fascist organization working for Franco. On June 21st, Soviet KGB agents assassinated the POUM's leader, Andreu Nin.²⁵⁵

For American communists actively fighting for the Spanish Republic, the POUM incident helped justify the continued stance against Trotskyism in the United States as a degenerative and utopian approach to revolution. Gates viewed the Republic's response to the May riots as "entirely reasonable" and believed that the POUM's stance of advocating proletarian revolution was "what the supporters of Franco also claimed, although from the opposite direction." To "the communists," who according to Gates included not just American but also Spanish communists, "the only issue was democracy versus fascism."²⁵⁶ In other words, it was the same schism that back in the United States wedged apart the WPUS and the SPA from the more centrist CPUSA. The bigger issue for Gates in the public perception of the Brigades lay in the debates among progressives about the bias nature of communist commitment toward fighting fascism. Some criticized the Soviet Union for decreasing arms sales to the fight in Spain after it became clear it was a losing battle. Others criticized that the Soviet Union provided arms only to communist forces in the Brigades and did little to help the Spanish Republic. The criticism centered on the notion that communists fought only when they could obtain a politically favorable outcome, and didn't actually hold strong convictions against fascism. Gates instead remembered how the French closed its borders with Spain in late 1937 while Germany and Italy were given permission by "Loyalists" to maintain a naval blockade over Spanish ports as the explanation for why the Soviet Union stopped its shipment of arms. With respect to the ratio of arms and equipment across the Brigades, Gates noted that while his brigade was stockpiled with plenty of rifles and machine guns, the unit was persistently in short supply of ammunition and artillery.²⁵⁷

Back in the United States, CPUSA local districts across the country saw a tremendous rise in membership after the start of 1937, although turnover rates continued to be an issue. In Maryland, Albert Blumberg resigned from his position as professor of philosophy at John Hopkins University after the spring 1937 semester to run for District Administrative Secretary of the Maryland Communist Party. Blumberg had been a CPUSA member since 1933, but had kept his membership relatively unspoken. The Baltimore CPUSA district not only "had a solid base in labor" but also worked with numerous young former AFL leaders who had turned to the CIO by the start of the year, in addition to Patrick Whalen who, in May, became the president of the Baltimore National Maritime Union local and the Baltimore Maritime Union Council. Blumberg's state-level CPUSA local was an iconic representation of the political balance communists sought during the Popular Front. Local efforts after Blumberg won control of the district focused on establishing communist clubs at the Glenn L. Martin Plant in Middle River as a means to combat the Lovestone-supporting CP (Opposition)'s presence within aircraft manufacturing and the greater Baltimore area. Once these initial efforts succeeded in July, the CIO and the local CPUSA made motions to demand a citywide industrial union council. Quickly, Blumberg's district nominated members as council officers to attend the Baltimore Industrial Union Council's first meeting on July 21st. The council consisted of "seventy-seven delegates, representing twenty-four unions," of which five were CPUSA members and seven were non-CPUSA communists.²⁵⁸

While Popular Front CPUSA locals became more expansive in their outreach after 1937, one problem faced by local district leaders such as Blumberg during this period of membership growth was the "low level of ideological awareness among many of the new members."²⁵⁹ Dorothy Ray Healey ran into numerous organizational issues with membership in California since huge contingents of new members were Mexican-American and Filipino; most of whom had joined because of the Party's work in agricultural unionism as opposed to an ideological affinity to Marxism.²⁶⁰ While numerous districts contained their own workers schools that aimed at education in working-class literature, CPUSA district

leaders such as Blumberg worked to expand the school's budget to two thousand dollars and move it to a larger address. In the Fall, 1937 semester, the Baltimore Workers' School enrolled one hundred and twenty-five students at two dollars for each course. The school's curriculum included English, history, politics, philosophy, and economics. By 1938, Blumberg was so satisfied with the results of the School that he recommended one be put in Washington D.C. by the District of Columbia Communist Party's chairman, Martin Chancey. Similar schools either sprung up or expanded in Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and Birmingham. In each district the goal was one-in-the-same: help fix negative turnover by educating new members and those interested in Marxism.²⁶¹

Some communist schools, such as the New York Workers' School, had a long history of building educational foundations for Marxist and socialist clubs extending back as far as 1923. In the spirit of the Popular Front and "invok[ing] the directives of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International," the New York Workers' School reached out to non-communist clubs and organizations in an effort to "fight reactionary legislation threatening 'academic freedom in schools generally,' and 'interference with workers' education particularly.'" Additionally, the New York Workers' School "was largely self-supporting" as opposed to relying on financial support from the New York district CPUSA, as was the case in Baltimore. Those who taught at the school were selected "not only on the basis of their ability and experience but also on the basis of their close contact with the struggles of the workers and the familiarity with their lives and needs."²⁶² The schools also expressed much more ideological freedom than any other type of Party-backed institution. Newer research suggests that many of these schools, during their height of influence between 1937 and 1939, rather than promote toe-in-step approval of national CPUSA policies and support of the Soviet Union, "approximated an indirect but necessary path to revolutionary transformation" and attempted to instill the notion that "the Leninist model of armed seizure of power in a period of severe governmental breakdown would not work in advanced industrial countries."²⁶³

The gains and progress of the American communist political movement hit a dead halt in September of 1939, when Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany and Stalin's Red Army invaded Poland; making it clear to the world the reality of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the dawn of World War II. For over 4 years leading up to the Pact, the CPUSA and American communists worked with progressives and built alliances on the backbone of a policy that wholeheartedly rejected fascism as the single greatest danger to the world. Throughout the Popular Front, fascism came to replace capitalism as the canonical evil that must be destroyed and that to accomplish that feat, communist cooperation with Democrats and progressives was necessary. Many liberal organizations, including those supported by the Democratic Party, held a moderate-to-significant communist presence by summer of 1939.²⁶⁴ The Nazi-Soviet Pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, shifted the American communist political movement into a crisis unparalleled throughout the prewar years. After years of building ties built on solidarity against fascism and the promotion of domestic involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the CPUSA began a quick reassessment of international events leading up to the pact. This reassessment served to justify Soviet actions and appeal across the political lines to advocate Roosevelt's previous stance of non-involvement and neutrality.

CPUSA leaders pointed to U.S. Senator William Borah, who in March charged that Britain encouraged Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. They also focused on how the Roosevelt Administration recognized Franco's fascist regime in April. Finally, following the Soviet Union's declaration to "act alone, if necessary," the CPUSA noted that neither Britain nor the United States offered a hand of support to the USSR, who for years had attempted to pressure Western nations into resisting Hitler.²⁶⁵ Unlike previous shifts seen from 1928-1929 and again from 1934-1935, the communists in 1939 had a lot to lose—secure allies in the Democratic coalition and popularity among politically-active labor organizations. It was the pivotal moment when the CPUSA had the capacity to continue its existing political line while dismembering itself from its attachment to Soviet policy, and like its previous years it

defaulted to the ideological step. After years of denouncing fascism and the rise of Hitler, many communists found themselves reluctantly advocating peace with Nazi Germany.

In the autobiographical and oral history record, American communists are reluctant to discuss their involvement in and opinion about the Nazi-Soviet pact. Lumpkin, for example, makes no mention of the pact in an autobiography that covers involvement with the American communist movement over a period of nearly 75 years. Charney, already frustrated with elements of CPUSA leadership by 1939, described the signing of the pact as “a complete shock.” Some of the local CPUSA district members of Harlem shared Charney’s “hot resentment....toward the wiseacres of the Party leadership.” Writing thirty years after the event and an ex-CPUSA member, Charney lamented that the emotional “hangover” continued for decades, despite the subsequent change of policy in June of 1941. The Nazi invasion of the socialist motherland reversed the national Party line almost overnight, causing cynicism and mistrust within the organizations that shared communist presence.²⁶⁶ Much of the anxiety and tension over the pact stem from the fact that the Soviet Union's actions caused two results. First, the CPUSA's official explanation for why American communists should support the Soviet Union's actions read "like a well-written plot." Quickly, leaders like Eugene Dennis and Browder rushed to reinterpret and reprint Stalin's speech at the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's 18th Congress in March. Requests for Western involvement by the USSR mixed with the anti-war sentiments of centrist Democrats and Republicans to produce a stance that pivoted the CPUSA between non-involvement and support for war elsewhere.²⁶⁷

Secondly, and arguably more significant, the explanation for the USSR's actions raised the philosophical question of just exactly how independent the CPUSA was from foreign influences. American communists like Lumpkin, Charney, and Peggy Dennis found themselves in an atmosphere where flexibility on action was encouraged—but only when the action didn’t conflict with the need to support the USSR. Most studies assign responsibility to the Comintern for the CPUSA's actions with regard to the support of the pact; but they fail to account for the Party's previous years of tacit support

for cooperating with the Roosevelt coalition and the internal Party debates over what the Party would support in the outbreak of war. By 1939, the Comintern still heavily influenced the Party's national leadership, but it maintained its 1935 declaration and asked communist parties to act on their own interests and conditions. In months leading up to the outbreak of war, Browder and the CPUSA leadership spilled much ink over the topic of Roosevelt's neutrality. Roosevelt's stance on non-involvement with Spain was a contested and controversial issue for the entire American Left, but with regard to Germany in 1939, it remained a popular stance. In May of 1939, the CPUSA urged "every mass pressure upon Congress to repeal the Neutrality Act, or fundamentally modify it to penalize the aggressor and aid the victim of aggression."²⁶⁸ After the news of Hitler's invasion began, the CPUSA hesitated and then recanted. The Central Committee pledged in a public letter unwavering "support of Roosevelt's position 'against American involvement in the war or in the rivalries and antagonisms which have led much of Europe into chaos.'"²⁶⁹ This action, above all, defined the political ideology of American Communism leading into World War II: A noble, but inexperienced, effort at linking international socioeconomic developments to the domestic politics of the United States.

Between September of 1939 and July of 1941, American communists like Dennis and Charney spent most of their time rationalizing the Nazi-Soviet agreement. Dennis remembered her husband Eugene formulating the official characterization of 1940 with the battle cry, "The Yanks Are Not Coming," after the AFL and CIO passed anti-war resolutions.²⁷⁰ Browder addressed a crowd in Chicago to celebrate American Communism's 20th birthday and read sections of Molotov's speech to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, trying to emphasize that lower ranking members not "rush to judgment." The Party's publications subsequently poured out their general explanation for the pact. They assured their members and readers that the Soviet agreement would sustain peace in the same manner as appeasement.²⁷¹ William Weinstone, a central committee member throughout the Popular Front, arrived in Baltimore on October 2nd to give a six-hundred word speech on the humanitarian efforts of

the Soviet Union with regard to invading Poland. He described the war as little more than "a battle between two bandits for the loot of the world."²⁷² At face value, the CPUSA desired to frame the war as justified for the defense against growing capitalist influences extending from Britain, France, and the United States.

Behind the veil, Party leaders such as Browder, Foster, and Alexander Bittleman debated over how to maintain local alliances while supporting the Soviet decision. Bittleman wanted to see increased support for Stalin's decision and emphasized that a Germany-Soviet alliance might result in a war against the capitalist powers of the world. Foster, reluctant to support a policy that would mean an immediate break with existing Popular Front alliances, wanted to maintain the depiction of an agreement for peace while avoiding repudiating Western alliances.²⁷³ Overall, the direct causes of the CPUSA's choice to go neutral on the Nazi-Soviet Pact were fundamentally complex. They were rooted in the duality of the Party's ideological affinity to the USSR as well as the years of building a domestic political platform that attempted to mediate the language and rhetoric of mainstream Democrats and progressives in order to appeal to broad constituencies. The years of 1937 to 1939 give clues into how the CPUSA's decision in September of 1939 represented an odd mixture of Soviet dependency and American political ingenuity. The issue of supporting the Soviet Union as an ideological parent is no different from the Bolshevik romanticism that existed in American Communism since the days of splitting off the Socialist Party in 1919; but it can easily mask and distract from the less obvious causes to support neutrality. More covert are the issues of maintaining political/labor alliances and friendships, maintaining a populist domestic policy, remaining critical of New Deal shortcomings while praising its practical accomplishments, philosophically debating if the enemy of one's enemy is one's friend, and attempting to maintain some resemblance of organizational independence—as they had been doing since 1935—all in one.

CPUSA locals directly experienced the Pact's subsequent toll on their popularity and tolerability among locals, as was the case with the Communist Party of Maryland. Blumberg, the Party's mayoral candidate for Baltimore at the time, and his Wife, Dorothy, received a summons from the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) in December of 1939. Both refused to testify, and the Committee pushed for a trial to associate Blumberg with the CPUSA based on gathered material. For his defiance, Blumberg faced charges of contempt while at the same time the WPA announced a purge of all "Nazis, [German-American] Bund Members, and Communists from its ranks." The HUAC accelerated its efforts and in June, 1940 collected the election petitions sent out by the Baltimore CPUSA to place candidates on the ballot. The HUAC then implied that the signature collectors' efforts were "tantamount to admitting Party membership" while at the same time charging that the signatures themselves were fraudulently inflating elector signatures. Maryland's State attorney, J. Bernard Wells, responded by pushing charges of perjury against six of the highest-ranking Maryland Party members: Dorothy Blumberg (Albert's wife), Sophie Kaplan, Minnie Stambler, Paul Jarvis, Richard Bourne, and Benjamin Davis on the grounds that they collected "at least part of the contested signatures."²⁷⁴ The national office of the CPUSA in New York tried to respond by drawing attention to the trial as an example of overstepping civil rights. The CPUSA extorted the view that the case was directly linked to world events, such as the breakout of war, as opposed to any serious threat posed by the defendants. The Party may have been correct, but the majority of Americans by 1941 felt that the government was justified in attacking political dissidents regardless of the world situation.²⁷⁵

Individual communists had their own personal quarrels over the matter independent of the CPUSA's leadership. Charney extorted the Party line, albeit reluctantly. To him and his Harlem Party associates, the Nazi-Soviet Pact was, at first, a natural response to the failure of Britain and France to extend a defensive alliance to the USSR by 1938. Along with this, however, Charney and his Harlem political associates felt "limp and confused" in the aftermath of the pact. They rushed to justify it via

non-Party sources such as Frederick Schuman of Williams College and Ambassador Joseph Davies; both who found ideological explanations for the agreement.²⁷⁶ Marxist historian and CPUSA member Herbert Aptheker publicly towed the Party line while joining with other members in private to press "antifascist policies" and reject the "inherent racist and anti-Semitic character of Nazism."²⁷⁷ Meanwhile other Party locals, such as Maryland's district under Benjamin Fields, rejected the premise of the pact; asserting that fascism and communism could never "exist together permanently." District leaders like Fields and Charney felt the pact put at risk much of the gains made during the Popular Front and was endemic of their organization remaining, as one historian put it, "hostage to events abroad."²⁷⁸ With no real strict consensus across the CPUSA's upper and lower tiers, the shock and awe of the pact faded relatively fast with the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. For years, however, it remained a stain on the movement that few willingly acknowledged as necessary. The quickness of its fading helped fix, for many, the ideological upset caused by the shifting stances; but membership dropped 15% between 1939 and 1940.²⁷⁹

The significance of these discrepancies in the narrative cannot be understated. While many historians point to the Party's leadership and subsequent response to the Nazi-Soviet pact reflecting the attitudes of American communists, more recent scholarship and autobiographical testimony reveal new perspectives on the event.²⁸⁰ District leaders like Charney, Dennis, Fields, Healey and everyday activists like Lumpkin and Brodine demonstrated a clear disconnect with the conclusions of their political leaders. Both Lumpkin and Brodine spent their time between 1938 and 1940 working in their respective fields—organizing unions in the cities and expanding communist influence in the orchestra industry. Charney and Fields rejected the premise of the pact and towed the Party line as an excuse of "pure expediency" that rationalized Germany's invasion of Russia.²⁸¹ Lower-ranking members like Lumpkin were more allied with district leaders such as Charney or Healey than they were with leaders like Browder and Foster. In turn, these district leaders were more inclined to share the political visions of their base than

they were to project the words of leaders. In less than a decade, lower-ranking members shifted away from the concerns of their national Party leaders and turned to politicians like Henry Wallace and progressive Democrats.²⁸² By examining the ideological connection between the Pact and the CPUSA's promotion of non-involvement, we overlook the impact for individual American communists. The year 1939 and the Nazi-Soviet Pact marked the beginning of the end of the CPUSA's grip on the political center of American leftism, and the start of a decentralized era for the political sphere of American Communism.

The CPUSA published a series of articles between September of 1939 and July of 1941 about the dual hazards of "U.S. Imperialism", which remained critical of Roosevelt's slow shift away from neutrality. Simultaneously, the CPUSA made a quick reversal of pre-1939 strategies and announced its own ticket in the 1940 General Election. It was here where the public gave their response to the Party's actions. Efforts to get the Party on state ballots met, occasionally, with "violent resistance" while candidates faced indictment threats and public exposure in a heightened period of pre-1945 anticommunism. When the Party succeeded in gathering 30,000 votes over the requirement in New York City to get on the ballot, they faced opposition from the American Legion, who called into question certain districts where CPUSA support grew. It ultimately ruled the votes as invalid.²⁸³ Even with this limited exposure, Klehr noted, the CPUSA still had some moderate presence in the election. Although facing a serious decline in New York City, the CPUSA saw an all-time high of 30,000 votes in San Francisco's municipal election and an increase in votes throughout Ohio as much as 300%.²⁸⁴ Lower-ranking members were instructed to avoid "oversimplify[ing] problems" and consider the "possibility of an American and British *rapprochement* [sic] with Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union." Such a result, Eugene Dennis declared, would necessitate a "course of domestic reactionary policies" and a "phony war." Luckily for the CPUSA leadership, much of the industrial labor alliances agreed, including

both the AFL and CIO conventions and the National Farmers Union. Nevertheless, the CPUSA "steadily lost ground in the movements it had once exercised decisive influence."²⁸⁵

Once Nazi Germany invaded Russia in July of 1941, the war for American communists had transformed once again into a "just war" for the purpose of destroying fascism and defending the socialist motherland. It is of no small significance that Hitler's invasion of the USSR served to retroactively rectify the logic of expediency for numerous CPUSA members, including Charney and Gates. The invasion of the USSR was yet another battle cry, albeit with more ideological significance. Blumberg in Maryland promised committed support from the state Party district and obtained radio time to broadcast the Party's call for U.S. intervention. The passionate response for action against the Nazis and the subsequent Soviet-American alliance during wartime did little, however, to fix the stain created by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. As an organization, the CPUSA continued to see a sharp decline in its membership, in addition to its political alliances. Howard Costigan, a popular radio personality for the Washington Commonwealth Federation, resigned in 1940 and later endorsed Roosevelt for reelection as did numerous former CPUSA members from the state who left the Party after the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In California, the Popular Front collapsed as long-time loyalists who bridged the gap between the state Democrats and the CPUSA, such as Culbert Olson and the Yorty/Tenney Committees went separate ways. Progressives, such as Lieutenant Governor Ellis Patterson, who built a platform to separate themselves from Roosevelt and utilize CPUSA views on domestic and foreign policy, found themselves landing fourth place in the state elections.²⁸⁶

While longstanding alliances began to break and sew divisions that not even the subsequent Soviet-American wartime cooperation could fix, the CPUSA remained, for the most part, intact. Members and activists like Lumpkin, Charney, Healey, and Brodine remained loyal "no matter what they thought of the Pact and its consequences," but it is questionable just how much of their continued work was emblematic of communist tendencies versus the tendencies of tenacious and highly motivated

activists. In private, members talked about the "revolting episode" that was the Pact and the subsequent months of trying to ignore it. With the political world divided, the CPUSA turned most of its attention to the labor world of American Communism. The goal, which built off previous desires for an alternative third party, was to rally behind John L. Lewis and the CIO by encouraging "greater union militancy" while keeping their overt involvement in strike activity to a minimum. Charney described the period between the Nazi invasion of France in 1940 and the subsequent turn against the Nazis in 1941 as "self-critical" that "valid as it was, [was] met with suspicion and cynicism."²⁸⁷ This remained until CIO leader John L. Lewis announced an endorsement of Republican Wendell Willkie. Lewis made it clear that although he shared some of the anti-Roosevelt sentiment of the CPUSA, the CIO did not support the creation of a third party alternative.²⁸⁸

Japan's surprise attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, prompted further calls for involvement in the European war. The CPUSA issued a nationwide statement declaring its unwavering support for the United States and Roosevelt's decision to ask Congress for a declaration of war. All efforts, the Party's declaration insisted, must be directed to quicken the "pace of machines producing implements of war to save [the] nation and increase aid to the Soviet Union, Great Britain, China, and all nations [resisting] Hitler-Japanese aggression."²⁸⁹ It wasn't until Pearl Harbor, Charney noted, that Americans became less inclined to "rake over the past;" referring to the Pact. Instead, "tensions dissolved rapidly and the overriding popular sentiment was for unity."²⁹⁰ Lumpkin, as well, reminisced of the unity created in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and how the political atmosphere changed once the USSR and the US became allies. One of Lumpkin's friends had been under investigation by the FBI in the years leading up to Pearl Harbor, but the investigations were dropped after agents found out she was a CPUSA member of New York City.²⁹¹

The opening of war also helped give communists political success as the atmosphere for accepting communists in local politics became once again breathable. After winning an election in 1943

for city council, Benjamin Davis began work as "an architect of Black Popular Front politics in New York." A member of the Alpha Phi Alpha, the Elks Club, and a veteran member of the CPUSA, Davis' political career embodied the community-based role desired by other CPUSA politicians. Davis rarely published in CPUSA publications; but in his first year as city councilman for Harlem, he introduced a series of antidiscrimination bills, pushed resolutions to urge New York's congressional delegation to support anti-poll taxes, and supported a law which barred racial and political discrimination in urban areas of the city. Although many of the attempts in Harlem to enforce resistance to discrimination failed, Martha Biondi described Davis' work as a "benchmark in the evolution of urban antiracist politics."²⁹² By the middle of the war, Davis became the icon of grassroots communist political work.

Davis' political initiatives mimicked the Marxist historical view dominant throughout the CPUSA's educational circuit, which was best exemplified by Herbert Aptheker. Aptheker described race relations under modern capitalism as an evolved form of the social arrangements predominant during slavery in the United States. Davis and other communists active in community politics took these lessons with them when they crafted initiatives that sought to depict racial barriers as "unspoken attempt[s] to keep blacks and other marginalized people in menial labor."²⁹³ From 1943-1944, Davis' political agenda emphasized a fight for "social and economic empowerment, including affordable housing, veterans rights, and the maintenance of price and rent controls." Davis' accomplishments and popularity among the people of Harlem helped him strengthen ties with the local Democratic and Republican Parties. His sponsors, which included Lester Granger of the National Urban League, actress Lena Horne, and Ludow Werner of the Republican *New York Age*, helped broaden the audience for Davis, making him one of the most popular communist politicians during the war. By the end of the war, Davis' clout with the people of Harlem and the city of New York had both Republican and Democrat leaders "doubt[ing] their ability to defeat him" and withdrew candidates to avoid jeopardizing the loss of a popular black councilman.²⁹⁴

On the national level, the work of individual communist politicians such as Davis remained distant and diffused from the CPUSA's broader concerns and internal fragmentation over issues such as the Popular Front and the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Browder, shuffling the policies back to their populist stance, began to push for the dissolution of the Party in 1944. This came in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Comintern, and historians placed much overemphasis on the link between the two events. Klehr noted, offhandedly, that Browder's decision built upon "interpreted signals" from the actions of Stalin at the Tehran Conference in 1943. Mainly, Klehr charged, Browder sought an organization that worked "within the two-party system to support progressive candidates committed to peaceful cooperation between America and Russia."²⁹⁵ Still, there remains no direct evidence of a link between Stalin's decision with the Comintern, a shift in international communist ideology, and Browder's subsequent desire to engage in two-party politics.

Peggy Dennis criticized Browder's idealism in the aftermath of Tehran, arguing that the "projected" purpose of the Party by 1943 and the "dissolution of the Party...evoked little reaction" from the base membership. As early as November, 1943, Dennis noted a distinct separation in how Browder and the rest of the Party leadership understood the significance of the wartime alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union. To both Foster and Eugene Dennis, the Tehran conference represented "a popular goal to fight for, a rally-cry to keep intact." To Browder, Tehran symbolized the success of this goal and a new state "in which an 'enlightened capitalism' was being led by 'men of vision and intelligence.'" The divergence became fully clear to leaders like Foster and Dennis when Browder portrayed the organizational shift as "dramatic proof that we were now a loyal opposition."²⁹⁶ While Browder tried to steer American Communism into an era of cooperative unity with the two-Party system, the rest of the leadership rallied behind the critical rhetoric of French Communist Party leader Jacques Duclos. Duclos' notoriety in the international communist circuit was well known, and to leaders like Foster and Dennis his criticism of Browder was "not a personal viewpoint;" rather, the stance was

that of most Communist Parties around the world.²⁹⁷ This will see more development in Chapter 5 as the political world diffused into various forms of civil and social activism.

Conclusion

One of the unspoken dilemmas of American Communist history is the need to separate out, or distinguish between, the various elements of ideology, methodology, and action into categories that either do or do not fit the definition of *communist*. If, for example, an active communist obeys the Comintern's directive to act more independently after 1935 and not apply a mechanical schema to organizational activity, then what actions done by said communist constitute *communist action*? If communist organizational action is defined by localized conditions that do not require a scheme, then is the CPUSA's endorsement of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet Pact a rejection of communist methodology as dictated by the Comintern in 1935? These more existential questions about the nature of communist activity in the United States is generally beyond the scope of most historiographical scholarship on the subject, but they are nevertheless important and necessary questions to address. The period of 1928 to 1945 serves as a good foundation for understanding this complexity since American communists both inside and outside the CPUSA, CLA, and WPUS began to act more independently, join new and more organizations, and broaden their social activism to incorporate various elements of the Popular Front, all the while retaining hope and romanticism of Bolshevism. In turn, these individuals diffused within other growing social movements, from the rise of Progressivism to Civil Rights. This does not necessarily mean that issues such as combating racism and unemployment meshed into a broader range of issues and lost importance, but rather that those policies on racial and labor justice which began as communist principals during the Third Period transformed due to communists' broad engagement with the various fronts of the political, labor, and community worlds.

Politically, American Communism from 1934-1945 steered toward a centrist pathway that it has since never fully deviated from—though it certainly lost momentum and significance after this 'heyday.'

During the period of the moral crusade, the CPUSA embodied the physical and ideological face of American communist politics. Other organizations such as the SWP, CLA, and later the WPUS, embodied the American tradition of contrasting different approaches of ideals while claiming to desire the same goal. Following the Comintern's 1935 directive on a new methodological approach, the CPUSA made a series of gear shifts that brought it into the wing of Populism while remaining somewhat critical of particular Roosevelt stances and continuing to emphasize civil rights reform and the expansion of unemployment benefits. These criticisms served to maintain a distance between the CPUSA and the Democrats while also trying to tug Democratic policy to the Left and avoid concession deals between moderate Democrats and Republicans. Individual communists like Dennis and Charney applied this method to their local districts, while others such as Lumpkin embraced the benefits of the New Deal while upholding the CPUSA's initiatives as long-term ideals. 1939 proved to be a serious strain on the method, as ideological commitment to the Soviet Union contrasted against the very stances which brought the CPUSA to its height. A paradox ensued where individual communists maintained their commitment on the home front of labor and racism while trying to sideline the war effort due to ideology. While the 1941 invasion of the USSR helped to rectify this ideological conundrum for many American communists and helped communist politicians such as Davis secure practical gains for American citizens, it did not fix the slow end of the CPUSA's grip on the political sphere.

CHAPTER 3: RALLYING THE WORKERS AND THE LABOR WORLD OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM

When known communist lawyer and International Defense League (IDL) member Maurice Sugar visited the Soviet Union in 1932, the experience set a precedent for how the CPUSA's key attorney in Detroit would approach a strategy to develop public sympathy for industrial unionism in the Great Depression. Having worked with the Party during the hunger marches of 1930-1932, Sugar believed that official contact with the Soviet bureau of public defenders would provide guidelines for legal work in the United States. When meeting with workers and laborers throughout the USSR, including engineers and project managers working for the Ford Motor Company at the Gorky auto plant, Sugar got the sense that regardless of the Soviet Union's imperfect politics, Russian workers “really did feel they owned the means of production.” Publicly educated children demonstrated proficiency in the concept of social class and worldwide affairs such as the Depression’s effects on cities like Detroit. Upon his return, Sugar took his experiences and began to craft a practical legal platform to raise awareness of the plight of American workers. Simultaneously he worked to better workers' conditions within the framework of the newly passed National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933.²⁹⁸ As one of the foremost left-labor lawyers in Detroit throughout the 1930s and 40s, Sugar's strategy represented a prime example of domestic communist labor legal strategy in urban and industrial areas of the United States.

Sugar also represented something else to communists throughout Detroit; a community icon, a public figure, a friend of the industrial working class. Numerous other Americans—including Beatrice Lumpkin, Benjamin Davis, and Woody Guthrie—also became community representatives of linking the hopes and dreams of Americans with the plight of working people, people of color, and all those who felt disenfranchised. Many of them attempted to equate the principles of Marxist communism with the values of American society. While the political realm of American Communism set ideological limits and created bureaucratic barriers that guided organizational theory, at no point did it ever outright control the more multi-faceted, dynamic, and—above all—*personal* spheres of labor and community organizing.

American Communism in the workshops and community centers of the United States generated different experiences from what played out in the higher plenums of the CPUSA, CLA, and WPUS headquarters in each specific district. Sometimes, as John Haynes argued, it was a negative quality. It might be understood as a silver-lining. One can link communists in their communities to their ideological program set by the Comintern, but one cannot ignore that multiple communist movements existed: Centralized, hierarchical national political organizations that identified (be it positively or negatively) with the international communist movement as well as a coalition of loosely-run, decentralized local labor organizations that linked together groups regardless of ideological affinity.²⁹⁹

This chapter explores the next dominant world of American Communism after the political core: the labor world. The labor world was unique in that it remains to this day the most iconic memory of communist activism and organizing efforts at the grassroots by contemporary communists. According to the CPUSA, communist commitment to the American labor movement spanned from “organizing the sweatshops in textile in the [19]20s to the founding of the CIO and the mass production industries, to the fight against the right-wing George Meany leadership of the AFL-CIO.”³⁰⁰ Since the modern CPUSA places much emphasis on this world, the chapter addresses one of the central questions of so-called “revisionist” scholarship of American Communism and the CPUSA as a political organization; that is, the extent and significance of communist involvement in the American labor movement. The labor world of American Communism includes the internal political methods of engagement with both workers and other union organizations, as well as the grassroots communists involved in shop floor organizing. For communists in the CLA and CPO, organizing labor was a national effort. For the CPUSA, it was an international affair. Both agendas, however, required at the very least means at the state level to sustain grassroots organizing and activism. Communist labor organizing amounted to an effort to both radicalize the American workforce while also obtaining support that could further fuel the legitimacy of communist politics during the Popular Front. The labor world differed from the political world in that it

was more dependent on local conditions and specific labor grievances than it was dependent upon political directives. The labor world also attracted far more people to communist thought than political discussions about Stalin, Trotsky, the Comintern, and the theories of the Third Period and Popular Front. For many American workers, the labor world of American Communism offered a chance to radically challenge conventional labor standards and give one's self to the broader social movement of societal change.

Examining American Communism as a bifurcated phenomenon that is an amalgam of personal experiences is a relatively new approach for scholars of the subject. The existing scholarship on American Communism in labor typically views the ongoings of district-level and national-level communist activism as two shades of the same organism. However, as Chapters 1 and 2 make clear, even within the highly ideological political movement there existed fragmentations, factionalism, and above all an overt disconnect between upper and lower stratas of the CPUSA. Furthermore, the labor world was broken up into grassroots organizers who identified with communism, such as Emma Tenayuca, and Party stalwarts, such as Southern California district leader Dorothy Ray Healey. It is this disconnect specifically which begs the questions: Just exactly how independent did communists act in their workplaces with respect to their political organizations? Were individual American communists involved in labor activism passive actors in a grand scheme of international communism? Or were communists at the local level pressured both by the context of their working and living conditions as well as their ideological proclivities? This chapter seeks to unearth these questions and demonstrate that communists in the American labor movement were, in general, Americans first and communists second. During the Third Period, CPUSA organizers developed an open-ended approach to trade unionism that cannot be easily nestled into the theoretical conclusions of the Comintern or the national CPUSA leadership, which then facilitated their transition of trade union organizing well into the Popular Front.

A dynamic and adaptable approach to unionism in communist organizing efforts came about due to the fact that the labor world of American Communism by 1932 was much more regionally-defined and locally-expressed than communism's political ideals. Communist activism in the labor movement depended not only on the location, due to variances in industrial production across the nation, but also on the identities of workers and unions in each region. Historian Victor Devinatz pointed out that much of our understanding of communist organizing during the Third Period has changed with the availability of Soviet archives after 1991, and that a thorough reexamination is required to understand the complexity of organizational work leading into the Popular Front.³⁰¹ The CPUSA's Third Period approach from 1928 to 1934 necessitated both the creation of alternative unions to radicalize workforces but it faced the practical reality of differences in union makeup between large cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and smaller areas like Salinas, California and San Antonio, Texas. In the Popular Front, this activism expanded to build unions via any means possible that sustained the role of workshop councils and bargaining committees. These approaches were not necessarily new to communist organizers, but the number of achievable goals and the attitudes of American workers after 1929 most certainly presented new complexities communists had to mitigate with their ideology. The multi-faceted approach which developed during American Communism's moral crusade years from 1928 to 1944 built on a decade of strategies utilized by revolutionary trade unions and organizations both communist and non-communist.

At the onset of 1928, American communist labor strategists had two methods for building their unions: entryism and dual unionism. Entryism had its roots in early labor efforts pushed by the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, and involved using workshop-level nuclei to infiltrate both local and state-level union organizations with the ultimate goal of persuading membership to support specific policies, or, in some cases, take over the union entirely. Dual unionism developed within syndicalist circles throughout the World War I and during the early communist movement after 1919. This method sought to pit

revolutionary trade unions against the more moderate "reformist" unions of the AFL. The politics of the Third Period necessitated a stricter view of these methods, but typically leaned heavily on the political effort to resist "social fascism" as opposed to contrast the tactics of AFL locals. Stalin's emphasis on the "misrepresentation against the Soviet Union" made by "reactionary trade union bureaucrats" tended to pit communists against AFL locals in whichever manner contrasted the best.³⁰²

Many leaders, like Foster and Browder, however, recognized the limited view the Soviets had on the American labor movement and acted accordingly. Foster serves as an ideal example of the kind of leadership-led resistance to Soviet influence on American labor methodology in the early stages of the Third Period, because of his continued insistence on the tactic of entryism past 1928. Entryism was Foster's favorite organizational tactic, and tremendously successful throughout his career in the late syndicalist movement and early communist movement up through 1927.³⁰³ Foster believed that organizers and radical workers should continue to focus efforts on infiltrating conservative AFL unions in order to "influence the rank and file, instead of perpetuating their own isolation."³⁰⁴ As the AFL began to utilize syndicalist strategies in the early 1920s, James Barrett argues, Foster found "an alternative field of operations" in the CPUSA that allowed him to remain a figure in the American labor movement.³⁰⁵ Foster's clout and popularity among radical labor militants earned him the trust and support of Browder, who in 1928 was looking for someone to lead the CPUSA's spearhead push into labor organizing. In this sense, Browder allowed leeway in Foster's use of entryism, but maintained emphasis on dual union efforts until 1934. Biographers of Foster point to the Russian Revolution and the romanticism of Bolshevism, with its "effective, exportable workers' system" that made it easy for the syndicalist organizer to "adapt to powers stronger than himself within the labor movement to use...for his own purposes." Once Foster joined with Browder after the 1928/29 power shuffle, the two worked extensively to "Americanise communism" for the American people, starting with a broad organizational institution that utilized both dual union and entryist strategies.³⁰⁶

The Evolution of Communist Labor Strategy

Foster organized the Trade Union Educational League during his days as a syndicalist labor organizer in the few years after World War I and the early 1920s. Later, he brought the League into the orbit of the CPUSA, renaming it the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). His inclination toward working class attitudes and labor strategy came from his parents, James Foster and Elizabeth McLaughlin, and his experiences in Philadelphia's vibrant labor movement. Historians Edward Johanningsmeier and James Barrett offer a good depiction of the future CPUSA Presidential candidate's early influences on labor strategy. Both parents were born into working class families in Europe and immigrated to the United States, where they met and eventually married. Although it is not fully known why his mother emigrated from Britain, Foster's father did so to escape persecution as a member of "a secret revolutionary brotherhood that had conspired to raise an armed revolt by Irish soldiers of the British garrison in Ireland." As Foster was growing up with his three siblings in Philadelphia, he witnessed his younger brothers die from respiratory infections, croup, and bronchitis; solidifying his understanding of the plight of the poor under desperate circumstances. Two other siblings "disappeared" and "cannot be accounted for in either municipal records or census manuscripts."³⁰⁷

In 1895 during the Philadelphia street railway strike, Foster became active in what he described as "the class struggle" as he stood side by side with striking workers. Although the event resulted in violence and property damage, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* declared a day later that the city's citizens' hearts lay "with the strikers." When the strike ended in a compromise, Foster described how it demonstrated to him both the "harsh realities of the labor movement" and "impress[ed] upon him the possibilities of solidarity and militant direct action by an otherwise excluded community of supporters for a grievance of labor."³⁰⁸ At the turn of the century, Foster's migrant life of working and organizing where he could, as Barrett puts it, "placed him at the center of a distinctive brand of working-class

radicalism, one that continued to affect his thinking long after he had become a prominent figure in the American labor movement and throughout his early years as a Communist."³⁰⁹

During World War I Foster and his fellow syndicalists centered on entryism as primary strategy for radicalizing union workers, which he called 'boring from within.' We have already discussed the political impact of this strategy during the Third Period, but it is important to understand the strategy in full to see how specific American communists engaged in specific, localized union organizing. The Chicago stockyards during the final years of the Great War provided Foster the perfect opportunity to test the strategy as well as "realize his goal of organizing the unskilled masses in American basic industry" via such a strategy. By moving into existing labor organizations and winning over its constituents, as he did by becoming an elected business agent for the Chicago District Council of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen and later serving as a delegate for the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), Foster remained consistently "at the center of things" throughout Chicago's booming and "effervescent" labor movement.³¹⁰ His growing popularity among Chicago's working class organizations and the further involvement of organizations such as the CFL into Chicago's electoral politics informed his understanding of the 'boring from within' tactic as not only theoretically plausible but demonstratively effective with the American people.

In the early 1920s, the CFL had a substantial communist presence, estimated at around 20% of its membership. Although Draper argued that Foster's early communist supporters "were not bookish, ideologically punctilious types" who only "adopted to communism emotionally long before they mastered it intellectually," as James Barrett points out, most were "worker intellectuals, not only gifted in their line of political involvement and union work but also intellectually engaged and already familiar with Marxist theory." W.F. Hoxie, a lecturer for the University of Chicago, invited Foster to talk in a classroom about Hegelian philosophy while economist John R. Commons spoke highly of Foster's speech before students and faculty of the University of Wisconsin.³¹¹ Foster's TUEL newspaper, *Labor Herald*,

"reflected this sophistication" by aiming at a literate and politically-active working class. Likewise, these early American communists, which included future leaders Cannon, Bittleman, and Dennis saw in Foster the potential to link their ideological movement to the "real world of the American worker."³¹² Both Foster and the TUEL became quickly absorbed into the communist sphere of the pan-Socialist Left during the First Period (1920-1924). The Comintern under Lenin desired to see the expansion of communist presence in unions to pit members against reactionary AFL organizers, endorsing entryism but also leaving room for alternative approaches. Under these ideological conditions, according to the Comintern, Foster's tactic for the American labor movement was an ideal strategy to build upon with a track record of success.³¹³

During the Second Period, following Lenin's death in 1924, Foster's strategy of boring from within remained an established approach. The TUEL's ability to "gain a following by concentrating on concrete concerns and providing leadership and a program for indigenous militants" impressed the underground CPUSA leaders, although shortcomings in raw organized numbers were a common criticism. Rather than pay tribute to the Comintern's desires, the organization "provided communists [in the United States] with their first genuine base in the labor movement." As the long-time leader of the TUEL, Foster's influence on the organization soon became entangled in the CPUSA's and Comintern's factional struggles. Eventually, Foster's inclination toward ideological conflicts in the Comintern "cut [him] and his followers off from their natural constituency in the unions."³¹⁴ This was best evidenced by the conflict of 1928 after the Sixth Comintern Congress. Foster reorganized the TUEL into the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in 1929 and overtly subsumed it beneath the CPUSA's Central Committee. This new body, designed for Third Period organizing strategy, served as the bulwark for revolutionary, communist-led unions against the organized power of the AFL and alternative "social fascist" unions led by socialists and Trotskyists.³¹⁵

Although it was a guideline of the Comintern on labor strategy in America, the Third Period did not see the death of Foster's tactic of 'boring from within.' It continued to function in practical circumstances. Some of the first grassroots organizing drives occurred in the South, in late 1929, and, with the help of the TUUL, "penetrated the region's mines, mills, and cotton fields."³¹⁶ Under the TUUL, communists organized both alternative dual, or sleeper, unions and internal shop committees within existing unions, choosing whichever means produced the most effective results. In some cases, utilizing both tactics was seen as necessary to loosen the grip of AFL locals. In Foster's organizing home of Chicago from 1929 to 1931, communist presence in unions amounted to about 23% of the city's membership, compared to the national membership average of 15.9%. Unlike many other cities with CPUSA presence in these years, the majority of Chicago's communist unionists were in reformist AFL unions as opposed to the revolutionary Party-led unions.³¹⁷ The city's diversity of interests, backgrounds, and temperaments among local communists resulted in a different organizational scene, with higher turnover rates and reluctance to devote time to national and international Party interests. For a city like Chicago, mixing the tactics of dual unionism and boring from within were ideal organizing practices. In other regions, such as the rural South or New England, local union conditions resulted in different approaches.³¹⁸ To suggest that the Third Period necessitated a full abandonment of Foster's early syndicalist strategy would be to overlook how the TUUL molded the strategy to their new purpose of subsuming organized labor into an international communist movement. Instead, what we see is the evolution of Foster's syndicalist strategy and its limitations based on geography and working-class demographics.

Outside of urban cities like Chicago, communist organizers faced a multitude of varying conditions that necessitated the utility of other methods. In North Carolina's textile region, the communist-led National Textile Workers Union (NTWU) organized the most militant of the state's workers in a series of short-lived strikes at Gastonia, which preceded a national textile workers' strike in

1934. A small city like Gastonia, where communist unionists preferred a revolutionary counter-union to that of the AFL, saw the dual union strategy reign supreme. Local worker sentiments shaped the nature of communist activism and channeled activists down certain strategies while overtly avoiding others. Unlike the AFL unions staffed by communists in Chicago, strikes conducted by the NTWU and other unions faced staunch accusations of Russian influence and harboring radicals. Harvey Klehr noted how the Party's efforts in North Carolina's textile industry in mid-1929 fell dramatically short when organizers faced the "deeply religious" local working class who "regarded outsiders with reserve and suspicion."³¹⁹ In deep Southern states, like Alabama, the independent Farmer-Labor Party (FLP) netted more success than the TUUL and dual union strategies. Combating racial tensions, though, proved more difficult than in Northern states. In California, a combination of efforts, including boring within existing unions, promoting the TUUL, and organizing independent communist-run unions all proved effective. There, the CPUSA banked heavily upon inclusion of a predominantly non-white, Spanish-speaking labor workforce.³²⁰ In total, American communist labor strategy leading up toward the Popular Front was anything but homogenous. Unlike the political world, which found its defining ideals in both foreign theories of social change and practical conditions of American politics at the federal and state level, the labor world found its ideals shift from workforce to workforce and from city to city.

Communist Labor Strategy during the Third Period

By far one of the largest successes of communist labor strategy during the Third Period was "organizing the mounting legions of unemployed" in the early days of the Great Depression. This operation resulted in the tremendous expansion of CPUSA, CLA, and CP (Opposition) influence and recruitment for labor organizing. The ideological framework of the Third Period dictated certain constraints but also put forth practical goals to achieve. The general economic crisis of 1929 to 1930, far more than the dictums of the Comintern in 1928 and the solidification of a Third Period strategy, provided American communists with "their greatest opportunity" to influence workers and young

organizers. To accomplish the goal of “organizing the unemployed,” the CPUSA worked with SPA and CLA to setup the Unemployment Councils of the United States of America (UCUSA) informally under the umbrella of the TUUL. These organizations functioned as community-based centers of action, but were operated much like a labor union. The SPA countered in certain areas like Chicago by setting up their own independent Council for Unemployment, but the purpose of the councils was uniform: facilitate means of resisting the perpetuation of unemployment. For the purpose of this chapter, the unemployment councils are considered a bridge between the labor and community worlds, but one that starts with labor strategy and the TUUL. For both CP-led and SPA-led organizations, “local organizers represented the heart of the movement,” in part because the collaboration of the two parties was unexpected throughout the Third Period.³²¹ The collaboration was not immediate, and it took between 1930 and 1932 for the unemployment councils to find common ground to build what they termed a united front against unemployment.

From 1930 to 1934, local activists inside and outside communist groups marched for relief, forcefully moved evicted citizens back into their homes, and physically confronted authorities on behalf of those without a job in the first two years of the Great Depression. Part of what made the unemployment council movement so successful were the countless other non-communist activists who “shared the social justice perspective of the CPUSA,” but didn't necessarily identify with the Party; instead preferring the label “militant democratic unionism.”³²² Although the communist-led UCUSA was not the only existing organizations of the unemployed, they were by far “the most effective.” The city-based councils organized hundreds of marches across the nation, creating precedents in law for fighting evictions and assisting welfare recipients in obtaining their benefits.³²³ As such, a large portion of the TUUL's work was directed toward community activism as well as labor organizing. It is here where thousands of poor American families came into the orbit of street-level American Communism. Communist labor strategy throughout the Third Period and Popular Front continued to work as a fusion

of ideological theory and practical applicability at the local level to produce a diverse and vibrant tradition that linked community-based activism with appeals to specific workers' rights and the promotion of unions to pressure politicians into supporting said rights.

While regionally-defined conditions framed the nature of communist labor organizing, communists generally responded to any opportunity that offered the chance to bring their presence to public attention. Such was the case after a police officer shot a picketing communist organizer, Steve Katovis, during a small CPUSA-led strike at Miller's Market in New York, in early January, 1930. The TUUL had called for a demonstration to show solidarity with striking clerical workers on the 16th, and contingents of the local CPUSA, YCL, and Bronx Cooperative responded assist the striking workers. Katovis had collided with a police patrolman, Harry Kiritz, while trying to prevent the police from reaching the loudspeaker used. After being knocked back and having his club taken from him, patrolman Kiritz fired several shots from his small pistol, hitting Katovis. Katovis spent the next eight days in the hospital. The police gave an official report on the incident, where they described Katovis as a "criminal" guilty of "felonious assault" against a New York City patrolman. On the eighth day in the hospital, Katovis told his family and friends to "keep up the fight; organize the workers" before dying from his wounds.³²⁴

By January 25th, seeking to make the issue national news, the CPUSA under the leadership of Sam Darcy organized a public march on City Hall. There, demonstrators squared off with city police. After the demonstration was broken up, around 50,000 citizens gathered in Union Square for Katovis' funeral. The CLA's *Militant* described the actions of New York police patrolman Harry Kiritz, as "savage" and questioned the police department's actions in contrast to its passive approach to "gambling, bootlegging, racketeering thuggery, and general corruption."³²⁵ Popular participation in the funeral and the energizing speakers shocked most Party leaders, as the event involved less planning in comparison

to the organized fundraisers and marches of the UCUSA. Some falsely took it as an indication of the public's support of a persecuted communist.

After the demonstration, the CPUSA felt imbued with a sense of purpose and continued its push for several weeks following Katovis' funeral. Foster's return from the Comintern in early 1930 brought orders for the CPUSA to hold demonstrations in remembrance of "International Unemployment Day." The New York Party district organized a march for March 6th that defied all their expectations. Over 35,000 citizens participated in the march, while the CPUSA claimed numbers as high as 110,000. The situation degenerated after Foster refused assistance from police commissioner Grover Whalen for a car escort to obtain a permit at City Hall. Questioning the city's demand for a permit, Foster turned to his constituents and asked them if they accept Whalen's demand for city approval. After a resounding "no," Foster began a march toward City Hall. The march quickly decayed into a chaotic mob as police moved into the crowd and set off a series of street brawls.³²⁶

Across the country, *The Daily Worker* claimed support in numbers as high as 100,000 in Detroit and 50,000 in Chicago.³²⁷ The CPUSA heralded it as a great moment in the awakening of the masses to both the plight of labor and the solutions offered by communists, but jumped the gun on expectations for future efforts at organizing the unemployed and radicalizing those in trade unions. Subsequent drives in May and August were significantly smaller in number, and the Party ultimately concluded that the March 6th demonstrations were less of the result of the CPUSA seizing workers' sentiments and more of a "spontaneous outpouring of hundreds of thousands of workers with no other outlet for expressing their feelings." Regardless, the CPUSA continued to organize what became known as hunger marches following the tradition of their work on March 6th. Subsequent marches tended to be smaller than the March demonstration, but continued to build physical presence in the eyes of unemployed Americans.³²⁸

Despite their political division with the CPUSA, the CLA's leaders did show support for their fellow communists both during and after the March 6th demonstrations. In April, 1930, *The Militant* reported on how William Foster and his four CPUSA associates were "framed" by the city of New York due to their March 6th demonstrations. Martin Abern's description of the event amounted to an emphasis on the significance of the upcoming May Day and the ability of the CPUSA leadership to rally thousands, including those merely sympathetic to socialism, to the defense of workers' rights. Abern felt that the CPUSA, CLA, and SPA were necessary elements of a "broad campaign to mobilize the working claims against the repressions of the workers and their organizations by the employing class and the government." May Day, which has a rooted history in the United States labor movement, represented the one moment in 1930 where the three divergent sects of the pan-Socialist Left could come together. It had the potential to both commemorate the origin of socialist labor practices in the United States while simultaneously represent the unity of the three camps. The only pre-requisite to this process, Abern insisted, was a general agreement for unity by communists within the labor movement and a halt to workplace factionalism; an agreement that did not demand nor require political uniformity. Abern's criticism of the CPUSA focused on their framing of the conditions of the United States, as opposed to any fault on their understanding of the needs of American workers.³²⁹ Nevertheless, both the CLA and the CPUSA overestimated the palpability of May Day onto the consciousness of American Workers. By mid May, communists in Boston concluded that while the May Day demonstrations were "well attended," their limited numbers also proved that "the big crowd of 25,000 on March 6th was a curiosity, excitement-seeking crowd" who expected "a big fight" between police and activists. The conclusion, on May 24th, was that the limited turnout and result of May Day proved the ineffectiveness of communist engagement with the masses in the early part of the Depression.³³⁰

One of the issues discussed by the Central Committee of the CPUSA in terms of limited organizational success was labeled "language work." Many of the communist clubs in New York functioned as language-based "fractions" that gathered activists in their respective neighborhoods, such as the Finnish Cooperative, Lithuanian Workers' Club, and the Jewish Buro. Of equal importance to communist city leaders to organizing the unemployed was combating the "nationalism advocated by [language fraction's] respective bourgeoisie" published in the native languages of members. The opportunist response by Jewish communists in New York over a Palestinian uprising in early 1930 was a cited example and represented the ongoing prevalence of "nationalist ideology in many workers' language schools for children." The central problem in language work was termed "federationism;" the process of maintaining language fractions by national identity as opposed to unify on the basis of being workers under the same oppressive system. The CPUSA tended to deny agency to individual's ethnic background in these discussions, referring to the embracement of ethnic culture over proletarian unity as "stubborn resistance to the line of the Party."³³¹ This was but one of many examples of the CPUSA looking outwardly toward their own ineffectiveness as opposed to a realistic assessment of their shortcomings. When publishing the membership breakdown of its language fractions, the CPUSA emphasized whether or not organizations were "controlled" or "influenced" by the Party or if they were "under enemy leadership." Even still, regardless of those organizations "controlled" by the Party, their influence was "comparatively narrow" contrasted with "organizations consisting of over a million members."³³²

In terms of inward criticism, communists in the CPUSA placed blame for their shortcoming after March 6th on "a lack of sufficient political clarity and [due] to a failure to develop proper methods of work." By this, communist writer C.A. Hathaway meant that the communists had failed to maintain their "intensity" after the demonstrations; that the pressure of communist rhetoric had waxed over the months to become more routine and less radical. Party members, Hathaway maintained, had to be "the

first and most aggressive in giving expression to [workers'] demands and in organizing their struggle."³³³ The CLA focused their criticism of the post-March 6th lull in public response as a result in a failure of "strategy and tactics among the masses." The socialists would, Swabeck contended, "continue in their role as tools of imperialism" by making the very process of uniting workers nationally a near-impossible feat.³³⁴ Rather than be distracted by the politics of more moderate leftists, the CLA encouraged its constituent shopfloor workers "to move toward elementary forms of shop organizations" and reject the idea that the TUUL was the only means to reaching workers in a revolutionary way. The AFL offered even less opportunities as "part of the employers' industrial staff" for CLA labor organizers. Subsequent examinations of the movement's need for a reassessment by the CLA called for less political action in the street and the organizing of more shopfloor nuclei. Simultaneously, the CPUSA encouraged more effort in the unemployment councils.³³⁵

To some activists and communist scholars, the early experiences during the Third Period made it clear that not only was capitalism unlikely to suffer any immediate collapse but also that the approach of specific strategies, such as relying heavily the Party-run TUUL "produced ambivalent results at best." One historian charged that the CPUSA's Third Period labor strategy from 1929 to 1932 both trained a dedicated cohort of labor activists while simultaneously dividing the national labor movement between progressive and revolutionary forces, producing limited results and gains that ultimately fell far short of ideals.³³⁶ This however negates the divisions within the pan-Socialist Left and places excessive blame on communists as a group. Rather than see it as a broader effort to engage the American people that failed, scholars have tended to depict the CPUSA leadership as showing hesitant strides toward a cohesive labor strategy in the years leading up to the Popular Front. Although political disputes between socialists in the SPA and communists in the CLA and CPUSA commonly muted any attempt at a broad labor strategy among the pan-Socialist left, this is not necessarily true of American Communism as

a movement at the workshop and local district level. There, local conditions and the personal sentiments of those involved took precedent.

The presidential election year of 1932 brought forward the most potential for the CPUSA and CLA in their desires to create a broad and unified labor movement during the Third Period. It began after Foster gave his speech at the River Rouge manufacturing facility on Monday, March 7th. The rally was called for by the CPUSA-staffed Unemployment Council of Detroit, and began the march in downtown; moving along Michigan Avenue until they crossed the road that leads up the Rouge River to the plant. After the death of four workers amidst Foster's campaign speech about emphasizing the rights of citizens moving forward into the depression and the need for an unemployment bill in Congress, news of the Ford Hunger March spread fast across the CPUSA and CLA's periodicals. The men killed, Joe York, George Bussell, Coleman Leny, and Joe Blasio were all identified as Detroit-born workers and members of the CPUSA's YCL. To communists across the nation, the response by the Dearborn police in rallying for the defense of Henry Ford's massive auto facility represented the "peacemaker of modern industry and of industrial democracy, whose hands are dripping with the blood of militant workers." It also further highlighted the significance of the fight against unemployment and secured unemployment relief as the primary message to deliver to labor groups leading up to November.³³⁷

For the remainder of the election cycle, the incident at Ford's plant in March created a backdrop upon which communist criticism of industrial democracy and unemployment rights developed. When Henry Ford reported to the *New York Times* in June about his interest in finding solutions to help those taking to the streets, the *Militant* responded by comparing Ford's proposal with a "return to feudal serfdom." Even if, the communists asserted, Ford's words about higher wages were honest, he was "helpless before the competitive chaos of which he is such a characteristic example." The "limitations of modern capitalists" and the notion that higher wages threatened the stability of the industry prevented communists from taking seriously any notion of industrial democracy from above.³³⁸ The CPUSA

heralded an event urging recognition of the fallen workers hosted by the local Detroit Party district, the Dearborn Conference of Labor and Fraternal Organizations, the Detroit Unemployment Council, the Dearborn local of the SPA, and workers from the city council as "monumental." *The Communist* reported that following the Ford Hunger March, "no two workers could gather on the streets of Dearborn" until, within months, "a new and determined fighting spirit" developed to "intensify a broader united front movement."³³⁹ This movement gathered momentum from June through August, until leaders within the various organizations decided to meet in Chicago for a national conference of unemployed councils.

In preparing for their annual conference as the 1932 electoral process neared a close, the Lovestone-led Communist Party Opposition (CPO) noted that the CLA, CPUSA, and SPA all saw significant increases in broad levels of support among urban constituencies of the American working class, particularly in metropolitan cities like Detroit, New York, and Chicago. The CPO also criticized the same organizations, including their own members who held cross membership, for failing to uphold serious dedication toward building a united front of labor organizations.³⁴⁰ The CPUSA expressed their thoughts on the shortcomings of their unemployment efforts as early as the aftermath of the Ford Hunger March, but typically focused on other issues such as public defense of the Soviet Union as a legitimate nation-state, criticism of the SPA for the same shortcomings in organizing the unemployed, and staunch rejection of the AFL for their previous support of the Hoover Administration despite the Federation's call to institute "six-hour day[s] and five-day week[s]."³⁴¹ Building this "united front" of labor both during and after the election was not easy and it did more to unveil deeply-rooted rivalries embedded within different labor traditions across the United States than it did to unify workers behind a single cause.

The earliest recorded meeting between the CLA and CPUSA in terms of an official communist-organized united labor front meeting occurred on May Day, 1932, in Hillside New Jersey. There, the local Unemployment Council ran by organizers from the local district CPUSA, the Hungarian Sick Benefit

Organization, the Hungarian Workers' Singing Society, the Slavish International Labor Defense (a subsidiary of the ILD), the Polish Workers' Club, and the Jack London Club collectively met to discuss terms of coordinating efforts. Joseph Freeman, representing the CPUSA, and Louis Basky, representing the CLA, co-conducted the meeting; the purpose of which was to demonstrate the capacity for unity across the working class groups of the city. To do so the group sang songs from the Singing Society and watched play reenactments performed by younger members of the Jack London Club. Though a small and rather insignificant meeting at the time, it demonstrated the desire by individual communists and working organizers at the local level to push the issue of a united front while national leaders spent most of their time bickering about organizational shortcomings. It also delivered a message to Party leaders about the desire and inclination for cooperative work by lower-level Party activists such as Freeman. Over the course of the summer, numerous other sects of the CLA and CPUSA held small meetings until pushing for an open united labor front conference set for November, in Chicago's working class districts of its Southern Loop.³⁴² By the end of the electoral cycle, prominent leaders from the various district-level echelons of the CPUSA, CLA, and CPO reached out and requested for a formal meeting held in Chicago after the election results became public.

The November meeting for a united front council in Chicago brought together all the hopes, dreams, as well as pitfalls of the 1932 electoral cycle to a head as around 750 delegates representing over 350 unemployment organizations met together; including local representatives of the FLP, AFL, CLA, SPA, CPUSA, various city unemployment councils, and the TUUL. The *Militant* reported a dramatic scene, where workers who engaged "in a common fight against a common oppressor" set forth practical demands for the city's employers and politicians. The CLA, hopeful about the context of the convention, asserted that although different organizations carry out independent work and retain "their right to criticism [and] to formulate their own opinions," the purpose of this new united labor front was to form a consensus on one acute issue: unemployment relief.³⁴³ The CPUSA engaged with the conference in a

more confrontational manner, insisting that the existence of two unemployment councils, the CPUSA-led Unemployment Council of Chicago and the Socialist Party-led Chicago Committee for Unemployment, "reflect[ed] the weakness of our unemployed organizing and activities" moving forward into any kind of unified movement.³⁴⁴ Although ideological rhetoric masked their criticism, the CPUSA attempted to address the elephant in the room: the fact that a visible split between the communist "left wing" and the socialist "right wing" existed apriori and would continue to exist unless it was addressed immediately at the conference. The Socialists, pushing for an emphasis on labor as opposed to political identity, desired to avoid open displays of communist presence in the effort, particularly the CPUSA's banner and the usage of the CLA's publication *The Militant*, both which used the iconic hammer and sickle as its centerpiece. It is here, not on the actual issue of unemployment relief, that the CLA took the philosophical stance of backing the CPUSA.

In response to the SPA's desire to avoid political identity in any united labor movement, the CPUSA insisted on "drawing the political lessons of the protest [for unemployment]." The CLA, as well, stated that they believed the CPUSA was justified in bringing its banners for Foster and Ford to the conference despite their low polling numbers in the election. Anything short of this "would have marked a capitulation to the Right Wing and the reactionaries [of the SPA]." While a progressive move for the CPUSA in terms of widening its audience and reach, this "right-about face" of working with those previously denounced as "social fascists" demonstrated a shift in overall CPUSA policy as a direct result of the 1932 election.³⁴⁵ Though the move was important to the CLA because it linked various workers' organizations together, it also "marked a departure from the official Stalinist (CPUSA) position on the United Front [sic]." By the end of the conference, the ideological rigidity of the CPUSA became somewhat exposed, leading to further debate about the future of cooperative communist labor organizing, both within the CPUSA and the CLA.³⁴⁶ The CLA continued to support the change in attitude by the CPUSA while also continuing to depict it as a deviation from the standard, Comintern-influenced

Third Period ideological line. *Militant* author and CLA organizer Max Shachtman referred to the CPUSA's shift as an affirmation of the Trotskyist theories of labor organizing and warned its readers to avoid "opportunistic tendencies" such as sacrificing gains for unemployed but employable workers in favor of a broad political alliance.³⁴⁷

1933 proved to be a rather dynamic year as it was both the beginning of the end for Third Period organizational and political policies as well as the early stages of a united front for radical labor. Starting with the appointment of Adolf Hitler to the position of German Chancellor on January 30th and then the tremendous popularity of Roosevelt's first hundred days, the CPUSA made national overtones of the political shift first expressed at the Chicago conference while the SPA made signs of an internal breakdown. By the start of the year, a significant split in the SPA gave advantage to the CPUSA, CLA, and CPO in terms of winning over the more militant union organizers. A battle between the Socialist Party's "Old Guard," and the younger "militants" led by Devere Allen and Presidential candidate Norman Thomas over the latter's insistence of rejecting war resulted in bogged down effectiveness as an organization up through 1935. The Old Guard believed that the younger Marxists were succeeding only by accepting former CPUSA members and allowing CLA organizers to work together with SPA-led unemployment councils and that their allowance of antiwar rhetoric opened the door for repression from the federal government.³⁴⁸

As the SPA became increasingly tied up with internal divisions over support for issues such as how their members presented themselves and spoke, communists warned against "opportunist distortions of the united front tactic" and instead told organizers that all they needed to do was "draw the masses into the most basic struggles," such as the campaign to free Tom Mooney, the defense of the Scottsboro boys, and the promotion of May Day. Communists focused their criticism on a conference called by the SPA in New York just under a week prior to a conference setup by the Unemployment Council of New York City. The SPA's conference excluded all organizations except their own, including

Devere Allen and the "militants." The "militants," in turn, organize their own conference and invited the Unemployment Council of New York but voted against efforts to work with the CLA, CPUSA, and IWW at relief bureaus. Efforts to exclude members from the CLA, IWW, and CPUSA from united front strategies amounted to "stupid sectarian politics," according to *Communist* author C.A. Hathaway, and served little use for building a broad movement of numerous working groups. As the months went by, militant organizers from the CLA and the SPA's younger Marxists turned to the CPUSA, attracted by its calls for practical action and its rejection of divisive tactics.³⁴⁹

As the 1932 united front convention came to a close and it was clear that the CPUSA would have to continue to labor organizing on their own, the Party tasked its members of the Unemployment Council of Detroit with focusing on the Briggs auto manufacturing plant in Highland Park. The Briggs Manufacturing Company produced body parts for Ford and Chrysler in four plants, and faced increasing pressure under the conditions of the Depression to lower wages. At the start of the New Year the company announced a wage cut, causing the entire factory to shut down as the workers walked out.³⁵⁰ John W. Anderson was one of those who walked out, having just joined the Briggs workforce between Christmas and New Years. Anderson recalled that the wage cut was only the straw that broke the camel's back. Working conditions and variances in pay were the staple issues. The plant's "air was full of dust particles," it had "no adequate facilities for washing your hands," and there was "no cloak room or dining area." Typically workers would arrive each day "never know[ing] how many hours [they] would work." Additionally, workers across all divisions of the plant were paid unevenly according to three different standards: "some at piecework rates, some on a bonus system, and others an hourly rate." Anderson was hired at fifty-two cents per hour to match his previous earnings at other plants, but he never received that rate while working at Briggs. When the wage cut dropped his earnings to thirty-five cents per hour, Anderson and his fellow workers decided to walk out as a group, spreading the word "strike" throughout the plants six floors until the entire facility shut down.³⁵¹ Anderson told his fellow

workers that they had to make demands and meet with the company, and volunteered along with two other metal-finishers to speak for the strikers. Anderson met with Walter Briggs, owner of the factory, but failed to get the company to agree to anything in writing. It appeared, at first, that the battle had gone nowhere.³⁵²

When Anderson returned outside to the striking workers, he found that Phil Raymond, representative of the Unemployment Council of Detroit, was encouraging the workers to make their way to Hamtramck “where many [CPUSA] activities were carried on.” While a large contingent of the striking workers followed Raymond to Hamtramck, Anderson was hesitant, worried that being seen as a leader of the strike would hurt his future goal of working management. Instead, Anderson tried to report the Briggs Company for violating labor law to the Michigan Department of Labor and Industry. The department representative, while sympathetic to the strike, told Anderson that he couldn’t challenge the company without a union and that his proper place belonged on the strike committee. He returned the next day to the plant to discover that unbeknownst to him, the workers had elected him to the strike committee. By the next day, the other three Briggs plants went on strike amounting to a total of fifteen thousand workers. To handle the size of the strike, the CPUSA used its TUUL-affiliated Auto Workers Union (AWU) to help “formulate the demands of the strikers” and provide “organizers, meeting halls, legal defense, and the money to pay most of the expenses.”³⁵³ The lead organizers were Phil Raymond at the Mack Avenue plant, John Weissman Mack at the Highland Park plants, and CPUSA candidate for governor of Michigan, John Anderson, representing the ILD.^e Lacking a strike fund to setup a kitchen, local communists organized “chiseling committees to solicit business places and others with money who were in support of the strike.” While the company began to improve working conditions, the strike committee held out for union recognition and a return of all strikers to their jobs.

^e This is a different John Anderson than John W. Anderson, from whom this testimony refers to.

Anderson believed that without the work of these three CPUSA organizers "the strike would have been broken in a few days with no important gains made."³⁵⁴

In Chicago, a struggle over leadership in a dressmakers' strike at the Sopkin and Sons factory broke out in June between the union's representative, Oscar DePriest, and white Jewish communist E.B. Girsch. Sopkin's factory employed predominantly young African American women, but subjected them to harsh "sweatshop-like conditions." DePriest felt he could connect with the women as an African American unionist, and garnered support from the local NAACP.³⁵⁵ Organized by the District Committee of the Chicago CPUSA, the strike organizers targeted the Sopkin shop on 39th and Michigan Avenue, in the heart of downtown, as a means of "crippl[ing] production in other shops." The local communists criticized DePriest as a "Negro reformist" and "misleader." Politically active organizers present, such as Claude Lightfoot, noted that the communists did not bring the Party's presence "to the forefront" of the strike so as to "avoid the 'red scare' issue."³⁵⁶ The event stunned Lightfoot as the striking women chanted "we want Girsch!" and demanded that DePriest step down as committee organizer. After a quick vote, Girsch was elected lead representative of the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union under the TUUL. After his defeat, DePriest tried to coax the Sopkins to refuse bargaining agreements with the workers, but ultimately failed. The workers won not only recognition of their shop bargaining committee, but also a 17.5% increase in wages. Lightfoot became a regular member of the Chicago CPUSA after the affair and remained with the organization until his death in 1991.³⁵⁷

In under a month of the Chicago dressmakers' strike, the CPUSA announced that no party could claim to be a revolutionary party nor be serious about a united labor front if it did not concentrate daily efforts on transforming the labor movement into a broad social struggle that linked the personal with the political. Organizing the unemployed remained a canonical platform, but linking unionized industrial workers, the unemployment councils, and the broader community efforts against racism became the new means for broadening the effort originally established by the unemployment councils and hunger

marches.³⁵⁸ This new directive set forth clear and concise directives to build "a mass proletarian Party," while accepting that the CPUSA in its current form was anything but what was necessary to move forward. What was needed, Party theorists concluded, was "concentration work," or efforts to concentrate on specific, key industries as a means to mimic the tactics of Bolshevik organizers in Petrograd, Moscow, Don Basin, and Baku from 1912-1917. The Party noted some centers of concentration, such as the unemployed, mining, and in parts of the auto industry, but also concluded that Party districts could not expect to take leadership over the multitude of struggles that varied from factory to factory and state to state. The Party's Third Period policies boosted the popularity of their program and led numerous efforts for the daily demands of working Americans, but it failed to "raise the consciousness" of the general public. While communist ranks grew by the thousands in its Third Period organizing efforts, many of those who joined found that "from inside, the Party looks different" than it appeared from outside. New recruits were exposed to an "inner life permeated by sectarianism, bureaucratism, and mechanical routine work" that destroyed the "'why' that brought them to join." Only by improving the latter and steering the Party districts away from becoming tightly-knit ideological sects would new members remain with the movement and stay within the orbit of the CPUSA.³⁵⁹

In much of these Third Period efforts, the CPUSA used their union drives and organization of strike committees as a dual purpose; they sought to both direct/organize the workers, but also to recruit them into the Party. It was this latter aspect of the CPUSA's presence that occasionally disinterested workers. When John W. Anderson attended a meeting of the Briggs striking workers hosted by local communists at Dance Land Hall in February, 1933, both he and a number of strikers quickly lost interest. As a result, IWW organizer Frank Cedervall spoke to the workers and helped convince the strike committee to vote to remove Phil Raymond as the daily speaker. Raymond at the time was incarcerated, arrested outside the plant without being charged until a writ of habeas corpus set him

free. By that point, the strike committee had turned “hostile to the CP[USA]” and the communists were labeled “foreign” in contrast to the “Americanized” IWW.³⁶⁰

Browder’s open letter to denounce dual unionism in 1934 served as the starting point for new avenues of strategy. Communist labor activists such as Sugar, who desired, in contrast, a flexible approach, found their place by 1935 and the opening of the Popular Front. Browder remarked how although the strike movement of 1934 was a “major manifestation of radicalization of the working class,” the independent “red” unions, within which so much hope was placed throughout the Third Period, the TUUL's efforts “passed into the background” while AFL locals continued to expand.³⁶¹ But while communist labor strategists like Sugar developed specific labor approaches based on local factory conditions in the years leading up to the CPUSA's political shift between 1934 and 1935, regional communist activists throughout the United States abandoned the Party's TUUL based on practical necessity. Just like the efforts in Chicago and Gastonia, national organizing strategy up through 1944 continued to depend on what communists found both necessary and practical as opposed to idealized schemes. The process of retooling organizational methods also undermined the CPUSA's goals by prompting resistance by moderate, anticommunist labor organizations such as certain AFL chapters, continuing a trend by conservative labor leaders to “shape federal legislation and policy on policing political radicals.”³⁶²

Activists and low-ranking communist labor strategists in California and Texas, such as Mexican-American field organizer Emma Tenayuca, avoided the Party's national agenda and instead turned to the work of local organizers such as Donald Henderson. Although only influenced by her work with the CPUSA, her work nevertheless gained her the title of one of Texas’ most well known communist organizers by 1937.³⁶³ Tenayuca grew up in San Antonio, Texas, in a Mexican-American working class family. She participated in a series of strikes for cigar and garment workers between 1933 and 1934, eventually helping “to organize a series of sit-ins and other protests against local officials’ exclusion of

mexicanos [sic] from many New Deal relief programs.” She joined the CPUSA in 1937. According to historian Max Krochmal, Tenayuca’s attraction to the CPUSA was “not out of adherence to Party dogma,” but rather because the Party's support for improving “the civil rights and working conditions of ordinary *mexicanos* [sic].”³⁶⁴ Others, such as Latane Bartlett, who grew up around North Carolina’s labor scene and attended various “radical political clubs,” joined the CPUSA during the Popular Front because “she ‘saw them as more effective than the socialists in terms of what was going on in the South.’”³⁶⁵ Tenayuca reached national attention when she was arrested in July of 1937 at a local CPUSA meeting in San Antonio where the city police suspected she was using the meetings to organize Mexicans against the local government. The support Tenayuca got from the local community was a "radical step" at the time for agricultural organizers.³⁶⁶

While no Party stalwart, Tenayuca’s views on Latino history in many ways paralleled the CPUSA’s theory of national self determination for African Americans. She and her husband, Texas Party leader Homer Brooks, described the Southwest United States as a region “originally Spanish and later Mexican, whose customs, language, traditions and culture were essentially different from those of the rest of the country.” She argued that Latinos were critical components in the building of the railroads in Texas, California, Colorado and Arizona, which also explains the development of Latino populations in those states. Latinos in the Southwest were divided, Tenayuca states, between “descendants of those living in the territory at the time of annexation” and “immigrant Mexicans and first or second generation native-born drawn from the impoverished peasantry of Northern Mexico to work as super-exploited wage workers.” More specifically, Tenayuca believed that the expansion of the United States into those states segregated Latinos from whites “into colonies” characterized by “disease, low wages, discrimination, and lack of educational facilities.” The specific use of the word “colonies” most closely resembles a parallel to the concept of national self-determination of the black belt, which was frequently described as a nation within a nation. As such, Latino organizers who shared the radical

sentiments of Tenayuca fit neatly into the political world's desired depiction of oppression shared by other non-white communist labor organizers, such as Hosea Hudson in Alabama.³⁶⁷

Brooks' work in Texas extended back to 1935, when he became the lead publisher and editor of *Red Trade Unionist*, a monthly paper that focused on statewide organizing issues and mirror articles from the *Daily Worker*. In 1936, he became executive secretary of the Texas Communist Party and held the position until 1938. Throughout the 1930s, the Brooks focused the majority of the Texas district CPUSA's attention to the plight of sailors and longshoremen across the Texas Gulf Coast. Brooks benefitted from the fact that radicals had already seized enclaves in the Texas maritime industry throughout the early 1930s. Grassroots communist organizers, whose influence "overshadowed labor activism in the Texas maritime industry," directed the attention of its readers to the "abominable working and living conditions" of sailors aboard US vessels. After a series of wildcat strikes between 1936 and 1937, Texas communists helped establish the National Maritime Union as "a militant alternative to the ineffective International Seamen's Union. After 1938, Brooks stepped down from Party leadership but continued his work with the Party until 1939.³⁶⁸

Henderson, an economics professor at Columbia University and field labor organizer, pushed for an independent, agricultural-based union movement starting in southern California, eventually spreading throughout the Southwest. Henderson lost his tenure once his CPUSA affiliations became public, but he quickly began work into the organization of agricultural workers in southern California canneries with the help of a dedicated cohort led by Dorothy Healey.³⁶⁹ Although a communist, Henderson believed that the path to union victory rested on what was most palatable for the workforce, and in the case of California agricultural workers the TUUL made insignificant headway. The dual union strategy served to help turn the mostly non-white, female, Mexican-American workforce away from corporate unions. Once the dual union effort gained renewed momentum in late 1937 and early 1938, Henderson looked to activists like Tenayuca in Texas and Healey in California to organize in their home

communities with working populations that could identify with union leadership on a personal level. By 1938, the lower-level activists such as Tenayuca proved to be the defining elements of communist-led agricultural unionism as opposed to the over-arching strategy of the unionization.³⁷⁰

Contrasting the experiences of labor organizing by communists during the 'Moral Crusade' is one of the few ways to understand the multi-dimensional nature of American Communism's labor world. Although the political world forms a core of defining the limits of what is and is not *communist* activity in American history, the labor world permeates aspects of national culture and functions with the community world in ways that the political core could never hope to achieve. The political world's relationship to American labor is like that of the CPUSA's leaders to William Foster in the early 1920s: It was a means for them to take ideology and put it into the lives of American working people. The political realm of American Communism was conscious early on of the importance of linking their ideals to individuals and organizations that had a broadly diffused constituency.

UCAPAWA: Grassroots Communist Labor Organizing at its Peak

Communist labor organizer Dorothy Ray Healey grew up in Denver, Colorado, with her parents, brother, and sister. Her mother rebelled against the "orthodoxy" of Judaism and Christianity as deceptive and controlling, leading her to read and study socialist philosophy. While Healey's father didn't always approve of her mother running off to socialist rallies, Healey admired her mother and looked up to her for her passions and joined the Youth Communist League (YCL) at the start of the Third Period in 1928 at the age of 14. During this time, Healey became a dedicated and passionate stalwart of the CPUSA's youth wing. In 1937, she met Henderson, along with Walter Donnelly, the first regional director of the CIO, and Lou Goldblatt from the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in Denver. There she got her first look at the merger of the Communist Agricultural Workers Industrial League (AWIL) and the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union (CAWIU), which formed the

United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA). It became one of the largest agricultural unions in the nation and heavily staffed by communist activists and sympathizers appointed personally by Henderson.³⁷¹

Healey then went to the San Francisco district CPUSA chair and requested organizational work. Schneiderman handed Healey the task of organizing for UCAPAWA in Southern California. In the months prior, national YCL chairman Frank Carlsen attempted to oust Healey from organizational work at the same time, calling her efforts of leading the YCL in southern California "a failure." He preferred instead that she spend time organizing a small club in North Beach, near San Francisco. After pleading her case to Schneiderman, the Party organized a meeting and voted Healey to lead the organizing effort for UCAPAWA. She was to be listed as an international representative and Vice-President of the union second only to Henderson. Carlsen's vote was the only nay. By the start of 1937, Healey moved to Los Angeles and began her active role as a communist unionist for UCAPAWA.³⁷²

Healey's first major role as representative of UCAPAWA centered on forming a union at the California Sanitary Canning Company (CalSan) in mid-1937. Her work was understood as the basis for gathering strength against the cooperative business association responsible for worsening work conditions in California agriculture, the Southern California Grower-Shipper Association (GSA). CalSan employed roughly 400 individuals on a seven-month seasonal basis. Its work force was predominantly female, and its canned goods were produced and distributed by the GSA. As early as 1932, the GSA commanded significant political power over the southern California canning industry and agricultural labor. It retained close business relations with large industrial conglomerates of Southern California such as Southern Pacific Rail and Pacific Gas and Electric. Henderson and the CPUSA viewed organizing the migratory workers at companies like CalSan as "imperative because they were an integral part of the state's highly integrated agricultural industries." In the early days of the UCAPAWA, they laid the groundwork for collective bargaining with company unions such as the GSA.³⁷³ Henderson's strategy

involved organizing industries that the GSA depended on, specifically canning and shipping. This would then create leverage with which to organize against the GSA as a whole, bringing pickers and field workers into the bargaining process.³⁷⁴ To start the effort off, Healey organized picket lines outside the Beverly Hills home of Joseph Shapiro, an owner of CalSan, in the summer of 1937. She used her connections in the Los Angeles Jewish organizations to "adopt resolutions condemning [Shapiro] for his refusal to bargain with the union." Working with local students who sought summer-time jobs at the cannery, Healey and the UCAPAWA got first-hand knowledge of key workers, stewards, and bosses involved in the company. When Shapiro refused to concede that the union represented the majority of his employees, Healey called for a strike which lasted about two weeks.³⁷⁵

By the summer of 1937 when Healey led the strike at CalSan, the UCAPAWA had already made tremendous strides in building an agricultural labor movement staffed and organized primarily by communists. Henderson built the union into an icon that defied the attempts by Southern California growers to avoid collective bargaining agreements, which in 1934 were not protected rights by the National Industrial Recovery Act section (7a), which only guaranteed the right to bargain for industrial workers. Henderson's approach sought to work around this handicap by organizing canneries and the shipping industries that California growers depended on. This forced recognition of wage standards by the growers through their dependency on canning and shipping industries prior to passing of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The subsequent act, along with its creation of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), provided the means for the UCAPAWA to organize pickers on the basis of organizing dependent canneries even though the NLRA still lacked protections for agricultural workers. UCAPAWA exemplified the regionally-based and more independent strategy pushed by communists who did not hesitate to work with the AFL and emerging CIO under John Lewis. They built their union on the practical local needs of the workers.³⁷⁶ Once the Popular Front began, the union was already

poised to take advantage of the CPUSA's acceptance of cooperative strategies and began a militant organizational push leading up to the 1936 Presidential election.

In 1936, Salinas Valley workers for the GSA picked approximately 90% of all lettuce eaten throughout the nation. At the time the workers were organized under AFL Local 18211, but regularly dealt with attempts by the company to encourage membership in the company-run union. Sensing little to fear from the mostly Mexican-American and female-run union, the GSA posted a new non-negotiated contract on September 1st, 1937, for its Salinas Valley pickers, which replicated the previous years' terms but included a wage cut. One day later, over 3,500 GSA lettuce pickers walked out on the job and jump-started the Salinas Valley Lettuce-Pickers strike from the grassroots. The GSA, in turn, teamed up with the city banks, electric companies, and the Sheriff to setup to Citizens' Association of Salinas Valley (CASV). What concerned workers the most according to their legal representatives was the highly anti-union atmosphere and lack of concern shown for the workers by GSA associates as opposed to picking conditions and work hours.³⁷⁷ When the GSA hired a deputized city militia who used clubs, teargas, and machine gun nests to defend the entrance of the packing sheds, the strike turned violent. Within a week the company lost the support of the federal National Labor Relations Board. As images of the striking workers hit headlines, the chairman of the State Federation of Labor, Edward Vandeleur, sided with the GSA and removed the AFL's representative from Local 18211. Having won the short game, the GSA used its re-hiring efforts to exclude AFL organizers and representatives from employment and posted a blacklist of names that could never again be part of the Salinas Valley picking community.³⁷⁸ When criticizing the AFL representatives and Local 18211, the GSA referred to organizers as "ruthless leaders, often trained in communist schools, but shrewdly acting in the name of labor."³⁷⁹

J. Huddleston, a Salinas Valley picker, contacted UCAPAWA in August of 1937 to express his grievances about the failed 1937 strike and the possible options for future organizing efforts. Huddleston stated that he was "approached by an organizer of the company union," and told that all

workers in Salinas would "have to join, or they [would] be moved out of the job."³⁸⁰ Since blacklisting and exclusion of individuals based on current and former union affiliation was a violation of the National Labor Relations Act, classified as illegal hiring practices, Henderson and Healey saw the opportunity they needed to expand the union and broaden the scope of union representation. The CPUSA's subsequent endorsement of Henderson's UCAPAWA and the Salinas Valley strike indicate that they saw the GSA's illegal activity as a means for securing national support for the lettuce workers under a new non-AFL and non-Company affiliated union. The CPUSA began funding Henderson to start up the Cannery and Agricultural Organizing Committee (CAOC) as a means to educate the mostly uneducated female workforce, who were generally not fluent in English, and to publish pamphlets and distribute literature to Salinas Valley workers.³⁸¹ Henderson then turned to the San Francisco law firm Gladstein, Grossman, and Margolis to open an NLRB case against the GSA for illegal hiring practices.³⁸² The firm, in their letter to the GSA, focused their attention on a specific foreman's discharge of three union members due to their "CIO union talk," highlighting that "discrimination against employees by reason of union activity constitutes [a] violation of the National Labor Relations Act."³⁸³ In NLRB court, the case proved to be long and drawn out, but by 1938 UCAPAWA managed to obtain open negotiations with work-shop agreements that protected pickers' choice of union membership.

With little to back up their illegal hiring practices, the GSA accepted the UCAPAWA and the CAOC as the new bargaining agent for the workers of Salinas. The results of the case also caught the watchful eye of John Lewis and the national CIO leadership, who increased funding to Henderson. The CIO asked that the union consider expanding into other sections of the nation's agricultural industry. On Henderson's appointment, Healey then took on a commanding role in both the CAOC and the Southern California UCAPAWA, noticing that "many of UCAPAWA's organizers were [also] communists." To a young activist like Healey, this generated a strong devotion to the union's purpose similar to the experiences of Lumpkin and the ILGWU. Healey noted that, once the CPUSA took interest, the union

came to embody many of the ideological commitments held by communists. Among its tenets was an emphasis on gender equality within the workplace and racial equality in the communities of Salinas and other southern California agricultural towns.³⁸⁴

The efforts of the UCAPAWA as a known communist-run union headed by Henderson did not always turn out so fruitful. This was the case for organizational efforts in the Florida citrus industry, where throughout the seasonal periods of 1936 through 1938, the UCAPAWA combated efforts by the Ku Klux Klan to suppress strikes and union negotiations. Depicted as "rural, agrarian, and southern" in the early-to-mid 1930s, the Florida citrus industry was ripe for organizational efforts against the collective efforts of citrus owners. The owners of the various citrus farms and distributors believed "that organized labor, communism, socialism, and what the American Legion called 'the other isms' were essentially alike—un-American." Throughout the early 1930s, the Florida Klan suppressed union organization by the United Citrus Workers "swiftly and fiercely;" including abducting and assaulting Joseph Shoemaker for organizing a state-wide group to socially combat the Klan called the Modern Democrats. Shoemaker died in a hospital after two weeks from burns, internal bleeding.³⁸⁵ Henderson responded by sending a single field organizer to central Florida with \$40 a week to train and recruit other activists locally. Within a month, Edward Norman, a local from Polk County, became the most passionate and dedicated activist for UCAPAWA in the region.³⁸⁶

To resist the union effort early on and try to prevent Henderson from gaining traction, city officials across the state passed anti-picketing ordinances. This was the case the employers of the Eckerson Fruit Canners Company expected a strike in December, 1937. Utilizing local police forces, employers such as C.H. Eckerson were at first successful in keeping early UCAPAWA efforts to a minimum.³⁸⁷ UCAPAWA Local 10 workers at the Polk Packing Association at Winter Haven refused to work after John A. Snively announced a reduction in wage rates during the 1937-1938 picking season. Working with the United States Conciliation Service, the UCAPAWA agreed to cover the difference in the

wage and get the workers signed for bargaining recognition as well as get striking workers back to work. Finally, the UCAPAWA's organizers came head-to-head with the Klan after the summer of 1938 when negotiations between the workers of AFL Local 21210 in Auburndale and the Lake Alfred Citrus Growers Association broke down. As picket lines were established on November 29th, about 600 workers walked off the job. Once news of the strike came to Winter Haven, the KKK organized a parade for Lakeland on August 31st, and told citizens that "strikers and radicals will not be tolerated." With the intensity increasing as the year closed, the strike was called off and no bargaining contract or negotiation agreement was made. An example of some of the negatives created by the UCAPAWA, the efforts of Henderson and Edward Norman in Florida "reinforced the already widespread belief that organized labor and communism were indistinguishable."³⁸⁸

In the Southwest, the UCAPAWA met similar difficulties related to the work and involvement of communists in unionizing drives. Emma Tenayuca represented the kind of American labor activist who participated in communist political meetings and union organizing because of its tangential connection to promoting civil rights and social justice as opposed to Marxism-Leninism and the overthrow of the state. Tenayuca admitted that her commitment to the Party's ideological foundations was minimal at best.³⁸⁹ She became active in 1938 when the Pecan Shelling Workers Union (PSWU-UCAPAWA) put up resistance to Julius Seligmann and his Southern Pecan Company. The strike against Southern Pecan proved to be a decisive moment in Texas labor history, and remains a primary example of how communist labor organizing could act as a progenitor for a much larger social struggle. Seligmann, the Texas "Pecan King," employed nearly 12,000 workers, 90% of whom were women who lived in the West Side of San Antonio. Collectively, the workers shelled about 15 million pounds of pecans per year and netted the company a significant profit margin by avoiding machine shelling, keeping the cost of production relatively low. The burden of intense, high-speed labor thus fell onto the individual workers in the form of speed-ups and unpaid work after shifts. The average family living off the company's

payroll took home \$192 annually. It amounted to some of the lowest wages in the country and kept the workforce dependent on Seligmann's employment to survive. Between 1934 and 1937, the Southern Pecan Company enjoyed relative ease with the lack of overt protection for agricultural workers from the Wagner Act.³⁹⁰

Strikes at Southern Pecan were regular from 1934 onwards; however a company union was the sole bargaining agent for workers. UCAPAWA's San Antonio Local 172 was established in 1937, but it took Emma Tenayuca to turn the tide for the workers.³⁹¹ She seized the moment on January 31 1938, after Seligmann posted a 15% paycut, increased unpaid "homework," and the company issued a refusal to address the "deplorable" plant conditions. She ordered a walkout by the shellers, to which "six to eight thousand" employees of Seligmann's 170 shelling plants responded.³⁹² It was not long after the walkout that she was elected strike organizer and PSWU lead negotiator by the mostly Mexican-American, and mostly women, shellers.³⁹³ Tenayuca directed the strikers' attention to a combination of both the failure of Seligmann to properly address concerns as well as "the city's miserly public assistance, the refusal of firms to hire *mexicano* [sic] workers into skilled jobs, and the terrible living conditions on the West Side."³⁹⁴

The *Socialist Appeal* reported over 700 arrests after the strike began, with numerous strikers held in jail without charges. In the midst of the strike, the SWP encouraged its national base to focus attention and donate in order to provide relief to UCAPAWA organizers.³⁹⁵ The incident turned for the worse in August, 1939, when the KKK organized local citizens to storm the city's municipal auditorium during a speech given by Tenayuca. Threatening to lynch Tenayuca and her closest supporters, the mob formed "the largest riot ever in San Antonio." Tenayuca and her supporters escaped out a back exit, eventually finding a way to secretly leave town.³⁹⁶ The initial battle met fierce resistance by San Antonio police, who rather than address the KKK moved in on the union and arrested all leading UCAPAWA organizers. Tenayuca was charged with "communist agitation," but the effort backfired on the police as

the incident prompted many citizens of San Antonio to take an active participation in the city's labor struggles.³⁹⁷ By this point, the strike had “taken on the aspect of a mass uprising among the Mexican-Americans in the entire West Side of San Antonio.” While many of those who participated were part of the union or the labor community, many others were, in the words of activist George Lambert, just concerned about “improving on the poor conditions on the West Side.”³⁹⁸

The turnout of the riot, particularly the response by police, caught the attention of the national UCAAWA as well as the CIO. They also found their assigned organizers arrested and detained when trying to take control of the situation locally.³⁹⁹ Once CIO leaders and Henderson arrived, the lines were “blurred” between the strike and the community protest against city conditions. As Krochmal described it, the strike “rattled the city machine.” In the eyes of San Antonio’s handful of business elites, a united West Side “threatened to disrupt” their control over City Hall. Local police Chief Owen Kilday, who treated the event as a means from preventing “a communist-led uprising along class lines,” insisted that he did not interfere with the strike, but rather he “interfered with a revolution.”⁴⁰⁰ Two things resulted; first, the Texas State CIO council took over negotiations from the PSWU, and second, the CPUSA informed Henderson that continued financial support to his union was conditional upon downplaying the role of Tenayuca in further strike efforts.^f Henderson and the rest of UCAAWA recognized that their communist identities were hurtful toward the union’s purpose, and set themselves aside to allow a friendlier ‘CIO’ face to handle the formal negotiations.⁴⁰¹ While local “ordinary *mexicano* pecan shellers” did not embrace the ideals of communism, it is important to *not* make the mistake of omitting ideological agency and ignore the role played by organizers like Tenayuca in the incident; but rather to see them and her as a fundamental motivating element in linking the conditions of the West Side with the demands of the workforce in San Antonio. Alberta Zepeda Snid, who joined the strike after local

^f The AFL used the moment to plant organizers such as Rebecca Taylor in order to gather information against Tenayuca and the UCAAWA leadership. See: Zaragosa Vargas, *Labor Rights Are Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 139.

UCAPAWA organizers came to her neighborhood, remembered “interacting with Communist Party officials, other *mexicano* leaders from the Workers Alliance,” and unionists because “being united is power regardless.”⁴⁰²

To take over the strike, Henderson sent Luisa Moreno, a skilled contract negotiator and feminist organizer, to replace Tenayuca.⁴⁰³ Moreno had a long career in grassroots organizing prior to joining the CPUSA in 1930. In 1929, she organized co-workers into a garment workers’ union in East Harlem, then was hired by the AFL in 1935 to organize Latina and African American cigar rollers, all before ending up with UCAPAWA by 1938.⁴⁰⁴ The decision to remove Tenayuca from a central role in the strike was not taken lightly by Tenayuca or her close supporters, who ignored the CPUSA's request and continued their work in the strike. Kilday also refused to back down, and promoted an anticommunist smear campaign to disrupt the strike while protecting scab workers on their way to the shelling plants. Kilday believed he was preventing a popular insurrection, and gained further support from local conservative, anti-unionist citizens in pushing back strike efforts. Tenayuca instructed the union workers to take a passive-aggressive stance by not looking directly into the eyes of police, avoiding agitation such as spitting, and following all city ordinance laws. Despite this, a few workers vandalized pecan shipments and police cars, resulting in a crackdown by Kilday. Following the damaging of property, police began to physically break the strike by using teargas to disperse crowds and clubbing those who refused to leave. More often than not, Kilday’s efforts were endemic of excessive police brutality, including incidences of clubbing women and children. Those who had the misfortune of being caught usually found their entire family sitting with them in jail.⁴⁰⁵

The San Antonio incident caught the attention of Texas State Governor James Allred, who viewed the KKK riot at the auditorium and ongoing strike by the workers as a “popular uprising.”⁴⁰⁶ Desiring a swift end, Allred warned Kilday that if his unit was incapable of restoring order the Texas Rangers and National Guard would be called. Kilday pointed to Tenayuca, the Texas district CPUSA, and

the UCAPAWA as the source of agitation when the Texas Industrial Commission opened up public hearings for the workers. The most discussed issue in the hearings was the possible civil rights violations done by Kilday's police officers against the workers for their choice in union membership and political affiliations. To both Kilday and Governor Allred's relief, Seligmann stepped in to end the debate by recognizing UCAPAWA Local 172 as the sole bargaining agent for his pecan shellers, thirty-seven days into the strike. Unbeknownst to the shellers, this victory was short-lived as mechanization and a more efficient industrial shelling system left many of Local 172's workers unemployed the following season. Local 172 continued to fight for those who kept their jobs at Seligmann's company, but overall union activity dropped significantly after the strike of 1938. Tenayuca left the town blacklisted and found employment in Houston under a pseudonym. To rescue Tenayuca from public defamation of character, the CPUSA nominated her for the San Antonio Candidate for Congress. From then on, Tenayuca's active organizing work was predominantly political for the next year until she got married and moved to San Francisco.⁴⁰⁷ Tenayuca's work in the Pecan Shellers' strike has been called the origin of the Hispanic Workers' Movement by the AFL-CIO as the "fearless and effective union activist" encouraged young Mexican-American women to stand up for their rights as citizens and as human beings.⁴⁰⁸

The last UCAPAWA local established prior to 1939 was Local 64 in San Diego by the workers of the Van Camp Seafood Company (VanCo), the precursor to the contemporary Chicken of the Sea Company. The union gained traction between fall of 1938 and winter of 1939 as it fought off racism and red-baiting tactics used by a local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, and later gained acknowledgement by Henderson as one of the most important fights "popularizing the conditions of black and Mexican American workers." Within a year of establishing the grounds for the local in May of 1939, VanCo signed a contract guaranteeing Local 64 as the sole bargaining agent.⁴⁰⁹ Apart from being a successful union, the UCAPAWA set a standard that went unnoticed by most of the political leaders of the CPUSA

but did catch the attention of union organizers. This helped the union stand out during a time when red-baiting threatened to destroy gains made.

Back in California, UCAPAWA locals led two final fights near the end of the 1939 season: One against CalSan and one in Madera County. In Madera, cotton pickers had been pressuring for better wages since 1933, when a massive strike over base wages and going rates turned into “the largest agricultural strike in California history.”⁴¹⁰ In March 1939, farm supervisors from over seven San Joaquin Valley counties met in Madera to plan how to limit the power of increasing numbers of migrants into their cotton-picking workforce. Nationally, concern about low wages and poor working conditions in the cotton industry had become a major concern as demonstrated by a cultural milieu of novels and testimonies identified by historian Devra Weber. In the start of October, pickers were on strike again with Mexican-American workers playing “a role disproportionate to their numbers.” Cotton pickers in Madera were joined by sheep shearers and other field workers’ locals through the help of UCAPAWA organizer and secretary for the Shafter Local, Stephen Rodriguez. Rodriguez, in turn, found assistance from other Mexican-American organizations such as Labor’s Non-Partisan League, the Workers Alliance, and Josefina Fierro de Bright and Eduardo Quevedo, two leaders of the Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española, also known as the Spanish-Speaking People’s Congress.⁴¹¹

To generate momentum, Rodriguez’s local used local recruitment camps setup within the FSA relief camps just outside Madera County. Once ready, UCAPAWA demanded \$1.25 per 100 pounds of cotton as a set wage, and asked that wages be placed “on a sliding scale to be renegotiated with price increases.”⁴¹² Strikers started on October 12th by mass picketing outside cotton ranches. By October 15th, 90% of the workforce was on strike, mimicking the tactics used in 1933 which included using caravans of cars sent from FSA camps to showcase signs in support of the strike and cut off strike breakers. The strike spread to other areas of the valley, with walkouts confirmed in Fresno, Kern County, and Corcoran. As seen by footage of strikers protesting the arrest of thirteen union leaders

outside the Madera County courthouse, the movement was multiethnic and embodied the previous traditions of UCAPAWA as an inclusive union.⁴¹³ To resist the strikers, the Associated Farmers criticized UCAPAWA and the People's Congress as "headed by nationally known communists" and "following in the footsteps of Hitler and Stalin."⁴¹⁴ With UCAPAWA operating on only three organizers in the valley, the strike became more localized and responsibility for sustaining the energy of the strike was left to the workers. Once it became clear to the Associated Farmers that they were dealing with a strike that rivaled the size of 1933, they sought government help and at the grassroots level farmers threatened to lynch non-white strikers.⁴¹⁵ Even after physical assaults were made, the State of California made no effort to intervene. In the end, the strength of the growers mixed with the "reluctance" of state relief administrators in supporting the strikers to create to the most significant loss of UCAPAWA's history. It was also the first instance where Henderson's original goal of expanding New Deal programs to agricultural workers.⁴¹⁶

At CalSan, Healey took another commanding role in a strike made up of mostly Mexican, Russian, and Jewish immigrants. Healey described the work against CalSan as her first action as a "feminist," fighting explicitly for rights to address the needs of working women and expanding the union's scope.⁴¹⁷ The fight against CalSan utilized local YCL chapters who were eager to assist Healey and her efforts. Students and young communists flocked to Healey for advice, direction, and to find ways to get involved. Making matters easier for the UCAPAWA, the chartered AFL Local No. 21,138 had become increasingly unpopular among CalSan employees by 1939. Healey and the local UCAPAWA leadership seized the moment to charter Local 75 the same year, banking on those workers who felt dissatisfied with or untrustworthy of the AFL Local.⁴¹⁸

To get the workers involved quickly, Local 75 took their fight directly to the homes of the Shapiros. In August of 1939, they picketed and caused various noise disturbances throughout the night. Picket lines were set up along the entrances to stores known to sell CalSan goods, as well as the homes

of food processing plant owners. The vast bulk of community support came from Los Angeles Jewish organizations. These organizations, seeking to support the Jewish contingent of the striking workers and reject the aggressive bargaining tactics of the Shapiro's as bad for the community, began to condemn the Shapiros' business practice publicly. Shapiro then called for a midnight bargaining session with the leaders of Local 75, Healey, and members of the Jewish organizations, and UCAPAWA received recognition as the sole bargaining agent.⁴¹⁹

Healey and Henderson handled the UCAPAWA's over-arching strategy remarkably for its size and limited staffing capacity. While Local 75 secured its slow victory over the CalSan, Healey also worked with California State Assemblyman Samuel Yorty to organize walnut workers on the other side of Los Angeles. Yorty was known as a 'red assemblyman' for his association with figures like Healey and Henderson but also for his strong public support for grassroots unionism. In 1938, due to a confession made by an associate, Arthur Kent, Yorty was charged as a communist from the California division of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Yorty's popularity among leftists and communists, however, had little to do with his actual ideology and more to do with his actions and stances on particular issues, such as his membership in the American League Against War and Fascism and his championing of political unity to combat the rise of European fascism. In an era where Roosevelt followed isolationist policies despite his fears of European totalitarianism, Yorty banked his political popularity on pressing for a more critical view of passivity and neutrality.⁴²⁰

Throughout these events, relationships developed among the UCAPAWA, the CPUSA, and the state government through the cooperative activity of the Farm Security Administration (FSA). Commonly remembered in literature by Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, the camps setup by the FSA facilitated the purpose of providing a stable center for laborers to live while searching for temporary or permanent employment. UCAPAWA locals such as Rodriguez's in Madera and the Los Angeles district CPUSA found them ideal hubs for organizing and extending their network of supporters. Healey

particularly noted the advantage of "a relative stability and continuity in the camps; when you went back, you could find the same workers you talked to the previous time and sign them up."⁴²¹ Working in the camps demonstrate how relationships among the Party, their supportive unions, and state organizations helped mature younger communists like Healey. It gave them a political perspective on the possible benefits certain political actions and actors could have for unions and their members. Healey noted how these experiences taught her that "the fact someone works for the government doesn't mean that they've been coopted and sold out" and that "it can make an enormous difference what administration is in power and what kind of appointments they make."⁴²² Direct experiences such as these likely contributed toward Healey's worldview as a communist during the Popular Front more than any resolution made in Moscow, or even from the higher echelons of the CPUSA. Many American communists like Healey simply learned that to be a good communist you had to keep your hands busy and obtain real results for American workers.

It was difficult for organizers within UCAPAWA who worked with communists to maintain their ties once the world got closer to war. As early as 1938, the House Un-American Activities Committee held a series of hearings which honed in on the CIO for "harboring hundreds of communist organizers." Several active labor Communists faced increasing scrutiny within their workshops, but typically not from the workers. Until the Nazi-Soviet Pact became a reality, the CPUSA routinely ignored the HUAC/Dies Committee investigations. To the CPUSA Central Committee, such accusations came off as bleak efforts to accuse communists of being Un-American and subversive. After the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Committees "adopted much more direct and threatening tactics" in specific cities such as Baltimore and Chicago in order to root out communists organizing for labor.⁴²³ The Pact, according to *Sun* columnist C.P. Ives, "stripped Stalinist communism of its 'recent aura of romanticism.'" Ives charged that American communists were "agents in good standing of a foreign dictatorship which is only technically friendly with [the United States] and is in close cahoots with another dictatorship not even technically

friendly."⁴²⁴ On the grassroots level, individual communists faced a growing intolerance within their areas of activity—first from union leaders and regional organizers, eventually to the point where the political atmosphere no longer permitted an open admission of communist affiliations.

In the months leading up to the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the UCAPAWA had roughly 93,000 contracted beet-pickers and nearly 100,000 cannery workers under its banner. Stretching across lettuce, cherry, and nut industries, the union commanded enough labor power to rival the United Auto Workers (UAW) in size and scope. In August of 1938, however, Henderson faced public scrutiny when the *New York Times* labeled him as a "red" and the UCAPAWA as a "communist ruled" front bent on overthrowing the government.⁴²⁵ The article, and the public scrutiny that followed, were promoted by AFL President John P. Frey, who subsequently prompted the House Un-American Activities Committee to begin an open investigation of CIO-affiliated unions, including the UAW and the UCAPAWA. Frey's continuous public scrutiny of non-AFL unions was an iconic example of so-called "commonsense anticommunism."⁴²⁶ After the article, Henderson and the Union continued its interracial organizing campaign by targeting Memphis, Tennessee. There, union leader and CPUSA member Harry Koger built a stronghold local out of mostly African-American cotton stocking and seed oil processing workers.⁴²⁷ Koger joined the agricultural labor movement in 1938 when he served as a regional director for UCAPAWA locals in Texas and Oklahoma. Within under a year, he was organizing various locals utilizing a key tactic that worked around anticommunist fears.⁴²⁸ Koger won over the Memphis workers with his appeals to southern hospitality and Christian values which, to him, "supported class struggle, equal rights, and socialism."⁴²⁹

By 1941, women were encouraged to continue to take leadership roles in the UCAPAWA. A prime example came from Local 92, organized by Luisa Moreno with help from CalSan Local 75, also known as the California Walnut Workers Association (CWWA-UCAPAWA). The mostly female, non-white work force of 500 gravitated toward UCAPAWA's appeals to gender and racial equality and linked it with a fight against the "masters of monopoly."⁴³⁰ UCAPAWA leaders informed the women of their chief

concerns: violations of the Wagner Act which gave the union precedent and an advantage in opening up bargaining agreements. The union leadership found that growers were routinely "firing union organizers and had setup a company union," that made it nearly impossible for workers to present grievances.⁴³¹ Having been through this fight before, Healey filed charges of unfair bargaining practices with the NLRB, making it the first time since the battle in Salinas that the UCAPAWA had taken its issues to the national level and the first time Healey got to witness the process.⁴³²

The UCAPAWA managed to stand out from most other unions in the communist orbit in that it was not an explicit Party organization, such as the TUUL. Instead, throughout the 1938-1939 seasons, UCAPAWA presented itself as an arbiter of agricultural workers against the power and influence of the GSA, corporate unions, and conservative AFL locals throughout southern California and Texas. Their method of organizing specific grower-dependent industries as a basis for organizing others created a foundation upon which the union steadily built membership. Henderson, Healey, Tenyuaca and other professional organizers within the UCAPAWA, however, were dues-paying members of the CPUSA, or affiliated with a regional communist club, such as the Los Angeles Workers' Association. Those who were not part of the CPUSA found themselves surrounded by advocates and activists who identified with communism and linked the practices of the GSA to the overall failure of capitalism to offer a fair deal to workers.⁴³³ Although the organization went through intense scrutiny during and after World War II, the UCAPAWA remained in the eyes of communist labor organizers a primary example of how the shifts in communist labor strategy of the early 1930s did not necessarily require or expect support and policy endorsement by the CPUSA. Rather, the organizers of the UCAPAWA focused on the practical necessities of agricultural workers within existing labor law and seized the momentum in the late 1930s to build the union into the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA-CIO), one of the largest agricultural unions, by 1947.⁴³⁴

Not all communist-backed unions or members shared the rapid success of the UCAPAWA. Many unions that followed a similar path, especially those created by the TUUL, faced growing condemnation from the AFL. AFL anticommunism traced back to before World War I, but the intensity and ferocity by which it developed during the 1930s reached an early peak in 1927 when American trade unionists, including John L. Lewis and future Illinois senator Paul Douglas, visited the Soviet Union to discuss the nature of the Comintern and the American communist movement. While the delegation returned to pronounce the legitimacy of the American communist movement and the need to diplomatically recognize the USSR, the AFL sided with former Menshevik revolutionary Alexander Kerensky in rejecting both conclusions. Historians have since drawn a distinction between the "armchair anticommunism" of anti-radical authors and activists such as Elizabeth Dilling, who "had little occasion to contend with actual communists in their daily life," and the "commonsense anticommunism" found in AFL leaders. While antiradicals drew connections between Communist theory and anti-Christian or anti-American values, the leaders of the AFL understood American Communism "as a much more delimited phenomenon that was manifest in communists' observable activities organizing workers and activists into parties and unions."⁴³⁵

The AFL was not the sole bastion of pre-World War II anticommunism in the sphere of labor that made it difficult for communists to continue their engagement with the Popular Front after 1936. The early days of the UAW from 1935 to 1937 were riddled by attempts from conservatives to brand "nativism" as part of local workers' movements in rising areas of labor activity such as Detroit. Many of the foreign-language workers, such as those in the Polish and Jewish communities, did not join the Automotive Industrial Workers' Association (AIWA), the early precursor to the UAW, in 1935. Because of the lack of participation by non-Catholic and non-Lutheran workers within the local Detroit community, which did not pick up until mid-1936, the "political weight" of the earlier, anticommunist, and nativist members of the AIWA was "decisive in the formation of the leadership structure" of the

subsequent UAW.⁴³⁶ To combat the rising influence of communist organizing, the AFL's anticommunists and UAW nativists simply told workshop recruits about working conditions in the USSR to link domestic efforts with international communism while emphasizing that "desperation was the breeding ground of radicalism."⁴³⁷ Pre-war anticommunism, however, lacked the social estrangement where domestic communist activity was understood as fundamentally anti-American. As such, many communists simply continued their work albeit with less overt ideological overtones.

The isolated few unions that could avoid most of the stigma of pre-war anticommunism, such as the UCAPOWA, were ideal unions for communist labor organizers to work within. Among the largest unions in the nation, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE), contained by far the largest percentage of communist members within the industrial working community. In the late 1930s, it was "the largest and most powerful organization run by communists and their allies" mainly due to growing alongside the increases in production leading up toward World War II. By 1945, it was the third largest member of the CIO, and had the highest proportion of women out of all unions represented.⁴³⁸ The UE was perhaps the best example of a 'flagship' communist union, an organization that typified the ideals of the Party line. UCAPOWA, however, was more dynamic in its reach and effectiveness *because* of its lack of rigid Party control and the more grassroots-level presence of communist organizers. Some of UCAPOWA's organizers were Party stalwarts, but others were "independent leftists who had been schooled in a political culture strongly influenced by communist views on race."⁴³⁹ The work of historian Vicki Ruiz revealed a "more complex picture" made up of Marxist board members who were better trade unionists than communists and some were "better described as 'just good liberals.'" Neither the UE or UCAPOWA gained traction exclusively through rank-and-file communist organizing or "boring from within" AFL locals, but the latter demonstrated the semblance of grassroots trade union organizing with set on incorporating a diverse group of laborers.

Although methodology was integral to CPUSA, CLA, and SWP locals throughout the 1930s, many of the unions that came into the orbit of American Communism did so "because [their] leaders recruited communists as staff members and organizers." This was much less a matter of choosing ideology over effective organizers as much as it was the simple fact that at times communists were more effective labor organizers than they were political advocates.⁴⁴⁰ Henderson was a Party man prior his work in the UCAPAWA and some of his best organizers got their training in CPUSA district locals. Although the UE's president was not a member of the CPUSA or SWP, his two top officers and a large percentage of his staff were. For the UE and UCAPAWA, this process produced admirable results. In other efforts, such as with the Denver-based International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (Mine-Mill), the coalition was unstable and prone to infighting as the communist leadership's priorities conflicted with ethnic and racial tensions on the shop floor.⁴⁴¹ Union in-fighting such as those at Mine-Mill not only made organizing difficult, it also cultivated an atmosphere where anticommunism quickly served the needs of workers looking to oust their communist union members.

The burgeoning anticommunism present in the labor movement served as a basis for filtering out into political work after World War II, as the very *presence* of communists in political and labor organizations was used to justify their persecution. It was only after World War II that the social estrangement of communism as an ideology brought on by the Cold War took root. Afterward, American communists in public opinion went from committing acts of radicalism to acts of treason. UCAPAWA and other unions influenced by communist organizers and leadership nevertheless impacted a significant portion of the American economy. A large majority of American communists outside of these unions instead turned to existing unions and the emerging CIO under John L. Lewis to solidify their goals. This was particularly the case in industries where communist presence extended back for more than a decade: shipping, auto manufacturing, mining, and steelwork. For active Communists from 1933 to 1938, organizing for the CIO became "the most conspicuous achievement of the People's Front

period."⁴⁴² This perception reflected the growing militancy of industrial unionists to distance themselves from craft unions--such as Lewis' punching of 'Big Bill' Hutcherson in the jaw because of "the fighting image that appealed to advocates of industrial unionism."⁴⁴³

Communist Labor Organizing During the Popular Front, 1934-1939

For those communists not working in a large multi-state union like the UCAAWA, working within the local industrial scene was the only means for securing further support among American workers. To build their movement in Detroit, communists and fellow travelers sought representation from CPUSA and ILD lawyers like Maurice Sugar, who attempted to create a systematic approach to industrial unionism based on working cooperatively with members of the community, local labor organizations, and civil rights groups. It was in this way that the labor world of American Communism split over into both political and community work. In many respects, the flow of methodology between the labor and the community world was inward; the community at large typically dictated the organizational methods that would prove most effective. The flow of methodology between the labor world and the political world was reversed; more often than not organizational methods attempted to influence political policy. Even if regional differences such as those explained by UCAAWA necessitated particular strategies, organizers like Healey found themselves routinely explaining justification of their methods to local and national-level CPUSA leaders.

The strategy of working with both political and community groups for labor organizing dictated involvement across various social spheres; communist labor *clubs* or *shop-nuclei* were both in the workplace and in the communities. Communist labor organizers utilized a wide range of methods for meeting with associates in local bars, at picnics, or at formally organized Party meetings that it is questionable if they were even 'methods' as much as they were 'meeting with friends.'⁴⁴⁴ As well, regionally active communist political organizing went hand-in-hand with promoting labor and civil rights to link the ideals as one and the same. This built ties within the community abridged from communist

ideology at the national level and localized into a common effort at the city level. Such was the case with Sugar and his strategy for Detroit. Starting in December of 1934, Sugar, working with William Weinstone of the CPUSA, Baptist Pastor Reverend A.C. Williams, and Detroit Board of Education member Crawford Nelson, crafted a general legal strategy for the city that sought mayoral and court affirmation of the right to organize and picket, rejected factory spying, and attacked production speedups. Ultimately, Sugar and his associates attempted to link the plight of workers with the international struggle against fascism by building a community resistance effort against local employer business practices deemed tyrannical.⁴⁴⁵

Like many American communists pursuing a broad strategy, Sugar and his associates in Detroit understood that their efforts mixed at times with a battle against ethnic divisions and workplace discrimination. Additionally, the lack of union membership among Detroit workers made the existing organizing strategies suggested by Weinstone and the CPUSA nearly impossible. To Sugar, this battleground was not new. He had gained notoriety in labor circles for pushing back against the Michigan alien-registration law of 1931, which many throughout Detroit took as an attack on Jewish-born communists. Building off this resume, and his recent experience with Soviet workers, Sugar organized for the Detroit Federation of Labor (DFL) in early 1935. He began a two-month tour of eighty-four different union locals, auto plants making up the dominant portion. For Sugar, however, like much of the Party's labor functionaries, preaching to the already organized about future union prospects remained a secondary goal at best. Instead, the "main goal" was to organize those untouched by the unions but still present in working-class communities—the "the mass of Detroit workers who through fear, ignorance, or ideology kept trade unionism at a distance." To accomplish this, "communist-sponsored organizations" setup contact points where individual workers would meet with passionate and ideologically-driven activists. The first official formal gathering of Sugar, his associates, and unorganized workers happened on February 3rd, 1935, organized by the International Workers Order,

and raised money for branch leaders with a banquet open to all working families of the city. Meetings such as this "in turn led to appearances before gatherings of the same ethnic group that were not necessarily left-wing." They then served as a basis for communist organizers to reach out across ethnic lines and bring them into the union community of mostly white auto workers.⁴⁴⁶

From 1936 to 1941, Sugar spent the majority of his time "revealing the layer upon layer of repressive instruments, legal and illegal, that had hamstrung the labor movement [of Detroit] for so long."⁴⁴⁷ During that time, he worked as the legal representative of Local 600 of the UAW, not shying away from his Party affiliations in the communist-friendly local.⁴⁴⁸ Detroit's companies, not unlike Sugar's labor legal strategy, built a massive umbrella that linked various political and community groups together to combat the tide of labor. Sugar tried to expose how the Detroit-based antilabor strategists at Ford and GM developed a "hegemonic apparatus" that "included civic groups, fraternal organizations, many churches, and the schools" in order to promote the "values of rugged individualism" and the "'natural' capacity of male WASPs to lead." He did so through speaking tours of the workshops and union halls to describe the auto labor movement as a "two-front war" between the plants and the workers on the one hand and the industry and city life in general on the other. Sugar's main target was the white supremacist Black Legion, which had a rather substantial enclave in Detroit by 1938.⁴⁴⁹

In workshops where Party presence was a familiar expectation, social camaraderie strengthened ties between workers. Local 600 was known for its indirect affiliations with the local CPUSA branch of Detroit, particularly its defense councils. With a flat fee of only \$3 per year, per worker, the union provided an internal support for ease and efficiency. Elements of the Party's organizational efforts in Detroit blended into the fraternal community of Local 600. Local 600's basic correspondence paperwork mimicked the jargon and prose of common CPUSA publications such as *The Daily Worker* and *The Communist* when discussing union grievances and demands. Throughout all of the correspondence minutes of Local 600, the words "brother" and "comrade" appear no less than once per paragraph. The

language of camaraderie worked to further instill the social notion of solidarity among fellow employees within a specific workplace. Local 600 also supported its members beyond their employment, providing instruction to "assist [members] in seeking or obtaining employment after alleged discrimination and discharge."⁴⁵⁰

While Henderson organized field and cannery workers under the umbrella of a non-communist industrial union in California and Sugar worked with local Detroit organizations to cross ethnic and political boundaries, younger communists like Beatrice Lumpkin in New York City acted independently. In the years following the Seventh Congress of 1935, the CPUSA directed attention at continuing support for the Farmer-Labor Party to rally against the centrist policies of Roosevelt. Regardless, communists such as Lumpkin did not fully share the Party's overarching conclusions about activism and instead used their political affiliation and Party stance to give meaning to their actions in workshops and communities. Lumpkin viewed the Party-driven efforts to combat unemployment in urban areas as an effort to unveil the "hidden homelessness" of the Great Depression and present the conditions of the 1930s in a manner that left no room for misinterpretation of the necessity of action.⁴⁵¹ These grassroots communists took their Party affiliation and ideological connection to mean something passionate for their own actions while the whims and decisions of upper-ranking CPUSA bodies were not as significant as the identity of being a communist. Thus, for a dedicated activist like Lumpkin, the CPUSA was an idea and symbol to rally behind—not a directive body from which to derive meaning and purpose.

At the age of 15 Lumpkin got her first job on the lower East side of New York City, building and sorting radio parts for the Eby Company. After feeling shorted on her first paycheck and seeing quotas double after the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) instituted minimum wages, Lumpkin began to work with her local YCL chapter to try and organize the factory of about 100 women. Lumpkin succeeded in gathering an organizing committee with recognized union cards, but her final year at high school began once bargaining started and cut her role short.⁴⁵² Lumpkin remained, however, with the

YCL for many years as a result of her early organizing work and experience. Experiences such as the Eby Company convinced her and other young communists that "the YCL and the [U.S.] labor movement in general were another source of rich culture." As teenagers, exploring the outdoors on weekends in the city meant climbing the roof of a local tenement building, where they "talked, laughed and sang movement songs until the sun came up." At dawn, Lumpkin and her friends would begin a local *Daily Worker* route through the city and finish off their day at the beach.⁴⁵³

Lumpkin's experiences were common among other labor activists inside and outside the Party's political circle. The social cohort of socialist and communist families, the community-style approach of organizing committees, and the work for the Party created an atmosphere for young communists where the philosophical and social arguments about labor in the United States manifested as truths, not debates. Lumpkin described her experience with the YCL as one that provided "an escape route from the misery of the Depression." She rationalized that the economic issues were "not the workers' fault," and that "blaming oneself for not having a job was self-destructive and paralyzing." Witnessing the legal effects of the NIRA "taught [Lumpkin] that it paid to fight" and that there was "joy in the struggle" since it forced more radical measures out of politicians.⁴⁵⁴ Historian Michael Goldfield argued a similar point when he described the NIRA as a result of the pressure felt by government officials over the "increasing strength and influence of radical organizations, particularly the Communist Party."⁴⁵⁵ Between 1935 and 1937, thousands of young Americans found themselves exposed to pan-Socialist Left labor theory via associations with either the YCL, a local communist club, or—as Len DeCaux put it—through "Brother X of the AFL, Comrade Y of the Socialist Party, Fellow Worker Z of the IWW." Many American communist labor activists identified this "not only by what they advocated, but by the way they went about things."⁴⁵⁶

Other younger and community-level communist activists approached their labor organizing methodology with a heightened awareness of local conditions. For Hosea Hudson in Alabama,

organizing was concentrated among miners and industrial workers. Hudson and his Birmingham comrades understood their job as needing to be personable and relatable to workers on an individual basis. Unlike Lumpkin's fellow workers at the Eby Company, Birmingham workers were predominantly male and contained a sizable non-white contingent. When faced with workers hesitant to join a political organization for reasons of being open to suspect, Hudson directed them to the ILD.⁴⁵⁷ Similar to Lumpkin's approach, however, Hudson utilized his local CPUSA district and YCL to reach out to steelworkers' and miners' families. The goal was to link community-based issues to the plight of a divided labor force. Hudson's district began to print *Hot Blast*, a paper aimed at addressing known grievances among the local working community and allowed individual miners to contribute stories.⁴⁵⁸

Throughout the mid-1930s, activist Len DeCaux remembered how communists like Lumpkin and Hudson were "behind the scenes" in almost every major rally or event. Some made themselves known with either speeches to "unite the crafts into industrial unions" or to politically "recognize Soviet Russia." But for organizers like DeCaux, while communists may have been "a problem to a lot of people," they understood the value they contributed outside of their political debates.⁴⁵⁹ Historian Roger Keeran commented on the conflict between most writing on American communists in labor and the different conclusions drawn from investigating their involvement in CIO unionism. Rather than be seen as illegitimate or lacking significance, more recent historical evidence suggests that "[communists] were legitimate, even exemplary trade unionists, that they played an important, even crucial role in the development of [the United Auto Workers], and that they were as good Communists as they could have been under the circumstances."⁴⁶⁰ This helps explain the rapid success of communist activity in CIO-based unionism between 1935 and 1937. Such was the case with the United Laundry Workers (ULWU) of New York City, where Lumpkin got her first real hands-on experience in organizing the unorganized in the summer of 1937.⁴⁶¹

The ULWU managed to succeed in organizing 20,000 city laundry workers within about two months that summer. In June alone, the union grew from 2,750 to 11,000. This succeeded in part because the ULWU organized all workers throughout the industry—including service, maintenance, production workers, and even the lunch kitchen staff. Lumpkin worked on the CIO organizing committee and helped link the hundreds of plants scattered across the city. Meeting directly with workers to collect grievances and sign union cards, Lumpkin and her team of hand-picked organizers built the local movement on the central issues brought forth by laundry workers: "miserable wages, long hours, hot heavy work, sexism and racism." Of the 30 organizers working with the laundry workers, half were active in either the YCL or the CPUSA. This was common in most industries where the YCL had a local presence throughout the city, and YCL organizers within the ULWU regularly committed to unlimited hours, sometimes reaching 16 more or day, as the case of Lumpkin. With pay set at only \$10 per day, Lumpkin survived by living at home with her parents throughout most of the summer.⁴⁶²

In the years leading up to World War II, Lumpkin persisted to "overcome divisions" that existed in the working spheres of America for decades, built on sex and race. These divisions proved both difficult and abrasive barriers to union organizers. For Lumpkin and the ULWU, the workers essential to the success of the union that summer were predominantly black kitchen workers. She noted that, while many African American workers were inclined to work with the union since it was legally backed by the NIRA, some were "concerned about the sincerity of the union leadership." Lumpkin interpreted this as a reference to the mostly white, mostly male union organizing committee. As a response, Lumpkin and her associates encouraged the workers to remain active and persistently attend meetings in order to address grievances directly to the organizing committee. By the end of the summer in 1937, Lumpkin decided not to return to college as the union's need to persist in facilitating cooperation became both "too important and too exciting."⁴⁶³ These kinds of sacrifices and commitments demonstrate the

passion the DeCaux emphasized about American communists that occurred in the streets and at the grassroots, typically among younger organizers.

World War II and the Erosion of the Communist Labor World

The announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the war in September, 1939 hit communist activism in the American labor movement hard. Prior to the pact, many union organizers such as Dorothy Healey from the UCAAWA emphasized the communist message of an antifascist crusade on behalf of the working people of the world for years. This message clashed with the reality of the Soviet Union's willingness to ally with Nazi Germany. Even under the auspices of preventing war and protecting Soviet national security, the Pact was difficult to accept. A few dedicated organizers such as Emma Tenayuca became so disillusioned by the Pact's meaning that they left the CPUSA and cut ties with communists. Party loyalists and ideologically committed organizers like Healey accepted that the Pact resulted from a struggle between European powers and the desire by the USSR to do something as a means of checking Hitler's expansionism. Other views built off the continuous fear that Western leaders desired Hitler to attack the USSR. After all, all sects of communists dating back to the 1928/29 split feared that war with the USSR by Western nations was inevitable. "I think the Soviet Union was probably justified, had no alternative," Healey explained, "there was no question that the main powers were trying to turn Nazi Germany solely toward attacking the Soviet Union."⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the labor world of American Communism fractured in 1939 and this fracture contributed toward a gradual breakdown of active communist unionists and unions up through 1946.

In late August, 1939, the dominant communist periodicals of the United States of each sect—the CPUSA's *Communist*, the Trotskyist *Socialist Appeal and Militant*, as well as the Lovestoneite *Workers Age*—all rushed to breakdown the grand significance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact for American labor activists. While the CPUSA reiterated the view that the Pact was evidence of peace assured by Stalin, the Trotskyist SWP and Lovestone Opposition groups viewed the event as a dichotomous moment for

American workers. The SWP desired to maintain an anti-war campaign among its constituent workers' locals, but also openly criticized the CPUSA for endorsing "a deal with fascists" while simultaneously trying to divide labor groups by labeling Trotskyists as "fascist."⁴⁶⁵ This move by the SWP would later prove a fatal error as anticommunist Smith Act trials began to target them after 1940. Jay Lovestone and the Oppositionists, on the other hand, shared both hesitation and optimism about the short-sightedness of the Pact's nature and the CPUSA's quick endorsement of Soviet actions. Lovestone hoped the event served as "a signal for a reawakening of revolutionary thought and action in many sections of the labor movement hitherto paralyzed by Stalinist ideological perversion," and thereby could assist organizational matters where the Oppositionists held significant sway, such as the United Mine Workers and the International Lady Garment Workers' Union.⁴⁶⁶ The political leaders of the organizations were handicapped, however, at preventing the breakdown of their organizers' legitimacy amidst the Pact's fallout.

A prime example of the slow breakdown of openly communist activity in the labor sphere as a result of the fallout from 1939 occurred in 1941, in Maryland at the Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA). As a CIO affiliate, the union began organizing with the efforts of Carl Bradley, Norman Dorland, and James "Scotty" Atkins in early 1938. By the summer of 1939, it was voted as the collective bargaining agent for the repair shipyards at the Maryland Drydock. Bradley previously spent time fighting the fascists in Spain, and he returned a well known and passionate communist activist. Dorland was an established CPUSA activist among labor groups. A machinist, he left home in Minnesota to engage in organizing work for Bradley. Both, by the end of the summer, established an aura of respectability and dedication to collective bargaining as blue-collared communists in the workplace. In August of 1940, Dorland was elected president of Local 31 of the IUMSWA, while Bradley was given the task of a business agent.⁴⁶⁷

In January of 1941, a year and four months into the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the IUMSWA passed a series of mandates that prevented active members from promoting or supporting "Nazism, Communism, or fascism" with the threat of expulsion for violators. Bradley and Dorland found themselves in a tough situation; both were known Communists, but they were also both established and popular organizers among the workers within the union. Despite their records of performance, William Smith, the IUMSWA regional director, preferred that charges be brought against the two. Smith then sought to revoke the autonomy of Local 31 until new leadership could be obtained. Dorland and Bradley resisted expulsion by organizing supporters from within the union and striking on the docks until they lost support by the National Maritime Union. Finally, the U.S. Navy requested an arrest of the men at the drydock due to a perceived "security risk" by their presence. When they asked for reinstatement in September, the convention committees refused to hear them speak. For the following year, Bradley's concern shifted from bargaining for a better workplace to defending his constitutional rights.⁴⁶⁸ The early war years convinced communist organizers on the shop floor such as Bradley and Dorland that their freedom of speech and right to be communists was far more significant than an effort to fight for a particular union.

Overall, the fallout from the Nazi-Soviet Pact affected the political world of American Communism more than it did community or labor. What filtered down into those spheres was the growing anticommunist sentiment of American politicians and increasing numbers of voters that served to slowly segregate active communists from their work and their unions. Those who faced direct expulsion for their ideology, like Dorland and Bradley, shuffled back into the Party atmosphere and looked for organizing work. Others, like Sugar, found ways to minimize their exposure as members and supporters of the CPUSA while continuing to pursue gains for workers during the war. Nationally, to signal its commitment, the CPUSA endorsed a no-strike pledge during the war effort after June, 1941. To the dissatisfaction of numerous local organizers, this also included muting efforts to ease race

relations in the workplace. When A. Philip Randolph pushed for a march on Washington to promote more racial equality in the workplace between blacks and whites, Browder and the national Party leadership scolded him. This is where grassroots American Communism pushed resistance to the upper Party functionaries. The CPUSA's efforts to maintain a positive image with the American government and union leaders simultaneously pitted them against some of their bread-and-butter issues, such as challenging racism. Still recovering from the Nazi-Soviet Pact, active communists in labor thus witnessed their decade-long built alliances and broad levels of support among workers fade in just three years.⁴⁶⁹

For many pro-active labor communists, the war and reemerging anticommunism did not negate the fact that American communists had been successful in improving the lives of American workers. Lumpkin obtained a more permanent job working through the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) hiring hall and finished up her final year of college during 1939, only to pack her bags and shift back to Brooklyn by the end of the year. By July, she was elected to the new local executive board as its educational director for ACWA Local 328, which organized for the workers of Spartan Laundry in the central part of the city. Working with 328, Lumpkin developed what she described as "comradeship" with her coworkers and soon developed her own circle of followers. It was under these conditions, and her popularity as a representative that earned her seat to the American Youth Congress (AYC) to meet with Eleanor Roosevelt.⁴⁷⁰

By 1940, the ACWA leadership began to respond to the growing anticommunist sentiment brought on by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Once the leadership honed in on Local 328, Lumpkin and her comrades organized an emergency meeting, where she was elected as a representative delegate to the ACWA convention, to which the Local was not invited. Lumpkin and her fellow supporters arrived at Rochester to attend the ACWA national convention after an arduous night car trip through the Adirondack Mountains, carrying extra supporters on the running boards of their cars. At only 21 years old, Lumpkin demanded to be seated as an elected delegate and charged that the ACWA leadership

unjustly "appointed" representatives of Local 328 without seeking approval of the workers.⁴⁷¹ Unfortunately, Lumpkin's pleas fell on deaf ears, as she never made it to the floor and more state-based concerns of the union dominated the convention.

The ACWA leadership subsequently chose to "rid themselves of the troublemakers of Local 328" by issuing charges against the business agents of the Local, George McGriff and Michael Coleman. To finalize the issue, the ACWA leadership bussed in numerous other Locals to the 328's membership meeting in March of 1941. Their presence drowned out the local workers' pleas to support McGriff and Coleman. By the end of spring, Local 328's leaders were put on trial in the ACWA as communists, effectively isolating Lumpkin as an active role model for the workers. The Local's board was shut down after the ACWA committee determined that "the local was under the complete domination of a small group of officers who respected only the policy and discipline of the Communist Party." Despite the setbacks, Lumpkin and her cadre collectively agreed that regardless of the ACWA's decision, their work won better working conditions. It set a precedent for a strong union community by effectively educating workers about their rights and possibilities under the context of the Wagner Act.⁴⁷² As the war continued, Lumpkin switched industries and began working as a drill press operator for Dictograph, a Queens machine shop, where once again her class conscious attitude landed her in a pitted battle against employers refusing to hire African Americans.⁴⁷³

Once the war became a "just war" for American communists following the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany during Operation Barbarossa⁶ in 1941, their activism in labor industries became more acute and embodied a more righteous sense of purpose. Lumpkin described American communists as "passionate" about winning the war against fascism both at home and abroad. Lumpkin linked the resistance fighters who fought in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade against fascists in Spain to the new effort, by 1941, to defeat fascism in Europe entirely.⁴⁷⁴ Russell Brodine gave up his position in the orchestra of

⁶ The code name of the Nazi Wehrmacht's blitzkrieg into Soviet Russia, which began in late June, 1941

Los Angeles with an associate, Phil Goldberg, to work for Calship building Liberty ships. Brodine trained as a welder as a side job while working with various orchestras during the late 1930s, but he viewed the job differently after the attack at Pearl Harbor.⁴⁷⁵ Blumberg, in Baltimore, encouraged the city's labor unions to pass "second-front resolutions," which stipulated the possibility of a general strike should Roosevelt rescind support for the Allies. These actions, though noble, met with "mixed" responses by labor leaders, who were more interested in maintaining existing gains than expanding the influence of organized labor on foreign policy. The Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA) hosted a staged rally, where heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey pushed the CPUSA's calls for unity and intervention, but it had an unexpected result. Rather than encourage other labor leaders and unions to accept the necessity of a second front, it evoked the notion that military decisions are best left to "experts" and that labor unions had little, if any, business in directing the affairs of the U.S. military.⁴⁷⁶

For Brodine and other working class communists after June, 1941, welding was more than just a side job. With the war in full swing, it became a duty and a means for becoming involved in the effort to defeat fascism.⁴⁷⁷ It was these tiny shifts in activity that had great meaning for individual communists like Lumpkin and Brodine, particularly if it meant setting aside one's personal ambitions in the workplace. The Party faced mixed results from its commitment to support the CIO's no-strike pledge. The pledge tacitly suggested that efforts to integrate African Americans into the workplace and to secure living wages and sustain families were contrary to the needs of the nation. Many workers believed that the time was "ripe" for striking, even while working for war-related industries like Calship. For communists like Brodine, such an endeavor was more than serving the nation in its time of need. It was simultaneously supporting one of the most dominant communist ideals of all—defeating ultra-right fascism.⁴⁷⁸ While five years prior, the CPUSA would have leapt at the opportunity to strike amidst a national danger, the Party and its organizers after 1942 directed workers to the War Labor Relations

Board with grievances and pressured workers to maintain production. Despite this ongoing commitment to patriotism and the war, the Party's stance nevertheless created more problems than it solved.⁴⁷⁹

The war saw the decline of some large unions dominated by communist activists, such as the UCAAWA and Conference of Studio Unions (CSU). By remaining committed to production and pushing grievances through the War Labor Relations Board, communists also lost prestige in their local union halls.⁴⁸⁰ While the War Labor Board maintained labor peace that allowed unions like UCAAWA to make collective bargaining agreements, it also limited how much power these unions had in their agreements. Wage formulas and adherence to them further limited the possibilities of gains throughout the war period. The CPUSA regional district in California and its affiliates, along with the independent, but allied, union groups agreed to the no-strike pledge and a limitation on slow downs for the UCAAWA locals. This move, however, demanded conformity among the workers and upkeep on individual worker productivity, especially since UCAAWA workers were involved in the production of agricultural goods. The stances of the Party and the desires of the workers quickly made it easy for union members to pinpoint who was and was not a communist organizer, and it served as a barometer of how much an individual sided with the union over the Party's ideals.⁴⁸¹

While Healey and other union leaders gained some levels of traction in the early stages of the war, such as organizing an agreement for Val Vita workers in 1942 and the integration of non-discriminatory policies into union hiring practices throughout Southern California, they also faced negotiating difficulties as the communist organizers became more visible in the wake of the Party's actions regarding the Nazi-Soviet Pact.⁴⁸² Brodine faced similar scrutiny while working with the CSU in 1945, which supported the no-strike pledge but was publicly condemned as "communist dominated." As the war approached its end, the CSU sought to maintain its strength against a rising rival, the International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE). It abandoned its no-strike pledge

and engaged in an illegal drawn-out strike against the production studios of Los Angeles—a risky move, but a successful one. Before the year was done, the CSU successfully won the contract over the IATSE. The win came with a downside as it proved to be "an early indicator of what happened after the war," particularly the amplification of worker grievances previously "muted during the war on behalf of national unity." As workers took advantage of the union's abandonment of the no-strike pledge, "a wave of militant strikes" broke out in early 1945 and exposed deep seated fears of communism in the responses by public officials and union leaders.⁴⁸³

As the need for national unity in the war effort waned in the early months of 1945, workers began to question just how useful their communist organizers were given that they sidelined worker grievances for the sake of a war effort they supported only *after* the Soviet Union faced annihilation. By 1944, the negative portrayal that had plagued the UCAPAWA since the pre-war period as "communist dominated" forced Henderson to change the name of the union to the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture, and Allied Workers of America (FTA) and broaden his constituency of union memberships. Henderson and the FTA would later face CIO expulsion and disintegration after the passage of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which stipulated that bargaining unions could not have communist ties. In the years after the war, the labor world of American Communism faced a new working class, one that was both aware of its needs as well as the limitations that prevented workers from achieving them, particularly partisan and ideologically-committed activists.⁴⁸⁴

Throughout the Popular Front and American Communism's 'Moral Crusade' for the hearts and minds of American workers, individual communists displayed an expert capacity for leading as well as a handicap against further gains once public sentiment began to turn against Communism as an ideology. Leading strategists, such as Donald Henderson, Dorothy Healey, and Maurice Sugar, created a legal strategy tailored to the specific industries they sought to organize. The strategies relied on the successful activism of organizers more than it did on the approval of local communist groups. Individual

American communists in clubs across the nation such as Lumpkin, Brodine, and Healey, did not need instruction from their local Party nucleus on how to properly engage with workers of the machine, orchestra, or agricultural industries. To active communist labor organizers, the CPUSA and the ideals of communism represented a framework and an outlook on the world; not a determinist schematic for how to develop a communist republic. Communists throughout the labor world also found themselves creating a wedge between workers' needs at home and their ideological commitments abroad. Some activists, such as Lumpkin, did indeed go above and beyond the normal requirements of an organizer and it often served as a basis for their subsequent roles as leaders in the labor movement. The majority of communists active in labor by 1945, however, found themselves facing an uphill battle against unions who no longer desired to feel constrained by the ideals of Marxism-Leninism.

Conclusion

The "heyday of American Communism" in the years between 1928 and 1945 has formed the focus of research done by historians, due to the movement's "special relationship to the Soviet Union." This relationship is canonized in the historiography after Theodore Draper and Davis Shannon's works in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Historian Harvey Klehr later admitted that this depiction didn't obscure from the fact that many American communists were ordinary people who "came out of all environments, had all sorts of motives for becoming members, and differed greatly in their commitment to the cause." Even "ex-Communists," Klehr contended, was a term that applied only to those who left the CPUSA and did not imply leaving ideological or organizational affiliation.⁴⁸⁵ Many American communists, like Lumpkin, Charney, Dennis, Healey, Davis, and Sugar demonstrated the capacity to act independently in their own particular spheres of labor influence while remaining committed to communism as an ideology. However, this does not negate the fact that these Americans worked with and were active members in an organization that held allegiances that extended beyond the United States. It is precisely here where the uniqueness of American Communism surfaces—but not as

American exceptionalism, rather as movement that was dedicated to both upholding the virtues of American political ideals, such as free speech, as well as dedicated to reforming elements of American society viewed as detrimental to societal needs.

In the labor world, communists experienced the aforementioned political shifts as broader engagements with the labor community and a more militant fight which utilized protections garnered by the Wagner Act's section 7(a). The rise of industrial unionism coincided with the Popular Front to create by 1935 a fertile nesting ground for American communists like Lumpkin and Sugar to implement their interpretation of Marxism-Leninism within the confines of the American legal justice system. Much like Lenin argued how the international labor movement took on many principles of Marxism after the publication of *Capital* in 1865, American communists found that the labor movement of the United States by 1935 was sympathetic to much of their strategic and abstract philosophical goals. While 1939 put a stain on the political image of the movement, the activism and organizational work of communists in labor continued. The labor world of American Communism was the only of the three dominant spheres of influence where political organizational strategy found a home, but commonly found itself adapting to local conditions. Communist labor organizers like Hudson and Healey were more concerned about the practical and regional limitations of their activities than they were the ideological approval of their actions.

The community world of American Communism differed from the labor world in that community-based organizational activity had the tendency to influence the direction and perspectives of the national CPUSA, CLA, and SWP leadership more than labor organizers. The success of a particular strike for the UCAAWA, or the organization of the UE, paled in comparison to the hunger marches of the early 1930s and the efforts by Alabama Party members to get African Americans registered to vote. Whereas the labor world's limits of success were defined in the specifics of a strike or a bargaining agreement, the community world's limits of success lacked a clear definition and the gains made after a

particular event, such as marching for unemployment relief, typically only led to more desire for continued change. The CPUSA was fond of measuring the levels of their acceptance among the American masses in the pages of *The Communist* and *The Daily Worker* by looking at the levels of broad support within the communities, as opposed to the levels of support seen for a specific strike or labor grievance. While successes in labor organizing were certainly a pillar of American communist efforts during the Moral Crusade, it was ultimately the communities that communist leaders sought affirmation from. These conditions changed as World War II ended and the social acceptance of communists in communities switched almost overnight.

CHAPTER 4: COMMUNIST ACTIVISM IN THE COMMUNITIES, 1929-1945

In the mid-1930s, as communist community activism reached a peak, Birmingham organizer Hosea Hudson concerned himself less with organizing unions, and more with organizing churches and civic groups throughout the city. The local district CPUSA was given orders from other districts in Detroit, New York, and Chicago to get active in "mass organizations." The way Hudson saw it, white Birmingham citizens "didn't have no mass organization to go to, only into the unions." Black citizens, however, had their churches, their singing groups, their book clubs, and their local NAACP; many of which had cross membership. Activists like Hudson understood that to be an effective political force, American communists needed to direct their attention not just into organizing workers but also into rallying communities behind specific issues. The community world of communism was distinguished from the labor world through its emphasis on local politics, culture, unemployment relief, and ending racial discrimination.⁴⁸⁶ Communist community organizer's fight against evictions promoted large progressive reform and activism through the lens of grassroots community politics. More importantly, only by examining the individual experiences of communists in their respective communities, removed from the organizational politics of the CPUSA, CLA, CPO and WPUS, can we see these varied experiences and how it links grassroots organizers together instead of separating them ideologically.

This chapter explores the complex web of community-based organizations, councils, fronts, book clubs, and meeting groups that composed the community world of American Communism. This world, unlike the previous two, was not limited to a union hall or a political party district headquarters. More importantly, communist activism in American communities throughout the Third Period and Popular Front differed fundamentally from the mission of communist organizing in labor. Community-based communist activism attempted to link the logic of Marxist claims about the inability to sustain capitalism with the deteriorating conditions of high unemployment and the perpetuation of societal racism. Communists depicted social discrimination and inequality, ranging from lack of protections for

unemployed to racism and sexism, as the natural byproduct of capitalism exposed of its weaknesses in the midst of the Depression. Whereas the political world attempted to create a framework for its constituents to understand the nature of capitalism in the Third Period and subsequently the Popular Front, communists in local communities channeled their efforts into combating specific incidences of racism and discrimination against the unemployed as grassroots challenges to the status quo. While the labor world worked to radicalize and organize working Americans and provide them with the tools necessary to secure favorable bargaining agreements with employers, community-driven communists sought to organize their wives, their children, their husbands, and their neighbors to "bring misery out of hiding in workers' neighborhoods."⁴⁸⁷

The slogan throughout the Third Period from 1929 to 1934 was "organized the unemployed," which served as the early foundation for communist activism in American communities and centered on grassroots resistance to evictions as well as demands for unemployment relief. By organizing the unemployed, American communists meant something more than just getting people jobs. It meant resisting efforts at the community level by employers, landlords, and city officials to dictate and control the lives of working class citizens. It also meant rallying citizens to address the needs of the poor so as to make unemployment an *undesirable* situation for employers and politicians. As one of the dominant political tenets of Third Period American Communism, the unemployed masses were seen as a "reserve army" that capitalists utilized to keep wages low, and provided logic to Marxist-Leninist ideology about the need to organize such a mass. In communist philosophy, the reserve army of unemployed was understood a critical element in wage labor systems since it kept people dependent on employers while simultaneously pitting workers against one another in competition for jobs. To American communists at the time, organizing the unemployed through community-wide resistance took on the meaning of organizing the one vestige of wage labor that sustained class relations. It was also one of the few issues that the grassroots organizers of the CPUSA, Communist League of America (CLA), CP (Opposition) and

Socialist Party of America (SPA) could agree on during a period of deep political mistrust among the organizations. Not less than three weeks after joining the CPUSA in 1930 did Hosea Hudson get his first work in the Birmingham unemployed community. Witnessing the establishment of unemployment councils at age 15 gave Beatrice Lumpkin insight into social ways to address poverty as an early YCL member. As with numerous civil rights and social unemployment battles throughout the early Depression, the YCL and ILD facilitated most of the early meetings of unemployment councils from 1931 to 1932 and ushered in a wave of young, passionate activists.⁴⁸⁸

At sixteen, Christine Ellis joined the Chicago district CPUSA, along with fellow Croatian activists, not long after the stock market crash. Ellis landed a job at Chicago-based medical equipment supplier, Bauer and Black, which managed to survive the crash. She described the Chicago-based Croatian communists as "cultured, educated, kind, [and] devoted people" who were interested in bettering the lives of those affected by the Depression.⁴⁸⁹ Ellis began organizing for the Chicago Unemployment Council in May, 1931, in an all-black neighborhood on the West Side. At her first meeting, Ellis watched as the local communist organizers explained the goals and procedures of the unemployment council until one man spoke up. The man asked what the Council intended on doing about an African American family who was evicted that day at the corner of 13th and Loomis. The council responded: "very simple; we'll adjourn this meeting, go over there, and put the furniture back in the house." The meeting quickly ended, and the entire council walked the block until they found the family still sitting on their furniture in the street. Ellis helped the organizers break the lock on the door, haul in chairs and beds, rig the gas stove to work, then afterward return to the Council Hall. When they returned, the hall was jammed with dozens of other city members looking for assistance. Over the course of six months, Ellis and her local communist cohort helped more than two dozen families resist efforts by landlords to slowly remove working class families from housing. For communists like Ellis, squaring off with landlords and police through the unemployment council was necessary as efforts to uproot working-class families

could not continue "unchallenged." By July, 1932, at age seventeen, Ellis was promoted to district organizer for Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa.⁴⁹⁰

Unemployment councils like those Ellis worked with became staple fronts within the community for grassroots communists and other radicals in the early years of the Depression, particularly for those looking to turn their rhetoric into action.⁴⁹¹ Between 1932 and 1933, Carl Winter presided over the Unemployment Council of Greater New York and organized a series of national hunger marches with the goal of attracting radicals and incorporating them into a grassroots movement against landlords and city officials. Winter was not new to the CPUSA, but he was new to organizing masses of unemployed city workers, as were most communists in the early years of the Depression. Winter viewed the 1929 Stock Market Crash as "a crushing blow to the self-serving promises of the ruling class" while the subsequent rise in unemployment went hand-in-hand with "the rising tide of protest and resistance." As with his other New York City comrades, Winter viewed rising unemployment as a growing reserve army of the unemployed. With regard to solutions offered by the Hoover administration, Winter believed that the President's policy of "reassurance" was meant to merely "pacify the people" and ignore the "glaring examples of human wreckage" left by the market. Winter referred to the March 6th demonstrations of 1930 as origin of the CPUSA's new program for the unemployed. The purpose of the Unemployment Councils after 1931 was to organize "workers most determined to combat the new calamity which had befallen them and their families."⁴⁹²

Like most communist organizers in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Detroit, Winter desired an inclusive community. He wanted black workers, first and second generation immigrants and—above all—women involved in council proceedings as well as in decision-making committees. In this sense, Winter had more flexibility than did Maurice Sugar in the auto unions of Detroit and more than Lumpkin in the needle trades of Manhattan. Whereas communists in trade unions had to accept certain workplace demographics as a reality when organizing workers, communists in the community such as

Winter attempted to target demographics excluded on other fronts. In 1932, the councils began to circulate their own newspaper, *The Hunger Fighter*, with a manual that encouraged dedicated activists to "organize and conduct united and militant resistance" to "those who own and control the wealth and government." Its draft program called for unemployment insurance equal to full wages for all unemployed "regardless of race, sex, age, or nationality."⁴⁹³ Once established, the councils began their work in the city by mimicking the CPUSA's efforts in Chicago and physically halt eviction efforts. Winter viewed the evictions as a combined result of speedups and reduced pay in the workplaces, which led to workers' inability to pay city rents. Squads of mostly educated working-class councilmen became adept at moving furniture, restoring electric and gas services, and keeping watch on city police to know when they could act.⁴⁹⁴

Certain Unemployment Councils, such as the Detroit Unemployment Council, succeeded at building bridges with local unions like the Auto Workers' Union and student clubs to organize some of the most effective and nationally impactful hunger marches. The Ford Hunger March on March 6th 1932 not only impacted the political world by giving agency to William Foster and James Ford's presidential campaign, it also generated sympathy for families of the victims throughout the working class community of Detroit. The four men shot and killed by Dearborn police and Harry Bennett's hired guards were Joe York, George Bussell, Coleman Leny, and Joe Blasio. Their public viewing and funeral procession began on March 12th, at the Michigan District CPUSA headquarters with over twenty-five thousand in attendance. The procession's slogan of "Smash the Ford-Murphy Terror" was aimed at Henry Ford and Detroit Mayor Frank Murphy, viewed as passively actors the killings to occur. Murphy did, however, blame Harry Bennett for instigating further violence out of the crowd and questioned the legal differences between the Dearborn police department and Ford's private guards. Three months later, a fifth marcher who participated on March 6th died from internal bleeding. While the event ended in upset, it became a lasting memory for activists to fuel their further motivation.⁴⁹⁵

Although the unemployment councils sought inclusion, their efforts typically existed during a period where masculine responses to activism equated to the ideals of the communist movement. Stella Nowicki remembered how many women "felt the union was a man's thing because once they got through the day's work they had another job." While men were "competing for positions," in unions and the councils, many women "were brainwashed" into accepting a socially-defined role in their workplace activism. To work around this tendency, women organizers such as Nowicki created women's groups and organized dances as a means to bringing people within the circle of community organizers and bringing women into the movement.⁴⁹⁶ Communist recruitment tactics followed gender lines as well: to sign individual activists up, councilmen organizers went to "flophouses, shelters, and breadlines...hop[ing] to transform the migrants into a disciplined unit." Many male organizers found themselves attracted by the chance to infuse radical politics into the unemployed masses, while just as many were looking for the moment to physically challenge employers and landlords. The result was a "romantic image of male struggle" that transformed street fighting from a simple brawl "to a political statement."⁴⁹⁷ There is a continued theme of this idealism of inclusion and the practical outcomes of community-based activism across the American communist movement well into the 1950s.

One of the main reasons the councils succeeded so rapidly was that CLA district leaders in New York shared Carl Winter's views on Hoover and the CPUSA's stance on racism as an obstacle to the efforts all working people. In February of 1931, chief editor of *The Militant*, Arne Swabeck, described Hoover's supporters as "gullible" to "optimistic promises" despite the growing increase of "an industrial reserve army."⁴⁹⁸ At the district level, community activists in the CPUSA and CLA began to work together to circulate papers, build clubs, and maintain the urban unemployment councils throughout the mid-1930s. While the socialists occasionally organized their own alternative councils for unemployment, the CLA stuck with their fellow CPUSA organizers in many cities to promote a unified resistance effort to evictions and high rents. Their efforts could not be sustained indefinitely, however,

as all the councils nationwide suffered from high turnover. Part of the reason came from the vast differences experienced by the councils, such as those between Northern and Southern districts, which "undermined the more successful block clubs by diverting time and resources to the transient population."⁴⁹⁹ To the grassroots communists who stuck with the effort, turnover rates and difficulties did not devalue the significance of the fight.

In 1934, Beatrice Lumpkin finished up her last year of high school on the debate team. The hot topic of the year was unemployment insurance and whether or not it constituted a "communistic" policy for Americans. According to her, the teachers' attempt at red-baiting the students backfired. Since most students sided with the idea that unemployment insurance was a good thing, many found themselves accepting—as opposed to rejecting—the label of "communist." Lumpkin then read in *The Daily Worker* that CPUSA representative Louis Weinstock attempted to gain the attention of AFL delegates and direct their attention toward unemployment insurance by leaping from a balcony onto a chandelier. Tim Wheeler, an employee of the *Worker*, recanted the story about the effect Weinstock's actions had on him and fellow comrades in 2016. For both Wheeler and Lumpkin, unemployment compensation rectified many of the problems they saw in their communities between the years 1930 and 1934. When the Social Security bill passed Congress in August of 1935, Lumpkin saw it as less a solution provided for by the New Deal coalition and more as a struggle fought for by American labor leaders.⁵⁰⁰ Communist activism in the community carried with it the ideals and goals of the political and labor worlds, but the community-based movements that resulted did not echo the CPUSA national leadership and instead typically influenced it.

In specific states, such as New York, Michigan, Minnesota, California, and Wisconsin, the issue of unemployment insurance became a staple reason for linking up labor organizers in unions with community-based organizers in unemployment councils. Communists focused their attention on the Unemployment Insurance Bill, H.R. 7598 proposed by Ernest Lundeen (Farmer-Labor Party, Minnesota)

in 1934. The Bill authorized the Secretary of Labor to establish "a system of unemployment and social insurance for the purpose of providing insurance for all workers and farmers unemployed through no fault of their own." Communists at the time saw the bill as the culmination of efforts promoted by the unemployment councils and trade unionists such as Weinstock dating back to 1932 agreements to push for unemployment insurance.⁵⁰¹ C.A. Hathaway, writing in 1933, also urged that "nothing short of *full* social insurance" for the masses were a "necessity for the entire working class." Hathaway wanted his readers, particularly those below him reading at local communist clubs and those above him at the National Committee, that the predominant attitude toward unemployment insurance aimed "to cut down the cost to the bosses of maintaining the unemployed" and institute a system to "transfer the burden of caring for the unemployed millions from themselves to the toilers." In the years leading up to the proposition of H.R. 7598, communist commitment to pushing social services and social insurance programs heightened significantly in urban communities.⁵⁰²

Social insurance as a concept was not so much debated between communists in the CPUSA, CLA, and CP(O) as much as they were critical of existing state-level legislative attempts at the concept. Hathaway described the communist perspective as the "insurance principle," which called for "setting up a common unemployment insurance fund...out of which all workers who are unemployed for any reason whatsoever, are regularly to receive an amount each week equal to their average wages for the entire period of their unemployment." Hathaway called this principle a theory of "social responsibility" whereby the public assumed the maintenance and security of unemployed American families. To contrast this view, Hathaway pointed to the more common state-level "reserves principle" found in Wisconsin law that "approaches the question of unemployment from the viewpoint of capitalist individualism" by rejecting a common fund in favor of separate funds for each individual employer.⁵⁰³ Writing just a few months later in July of 1933, *The Communist* author I. Amter declared that the aspirations and actions of the Roosevelt administration had not solved the plight of the unemployed and

that conditions for unemployed workers had worsened since the start of the Depression, but that the militancy and tenacity of unemployment councils demonstrated unity among those who require relief. Amter linked relief efforts to marches against forced labor in Washington, Oregon, New Jersey, Minnesota, Rhode Island, and Ohio, to efforts resisting evictions in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and New York, to hunger marches in Detroit, Chicago, and New York, to fights against social racism as evidence of a broad contingent of Americans all pushing for relief. For communists such as Amter and Hathaway, all of these battles rested on a general need for relief from the conditions of the Depression, the predominant condition being unemployment. Furthermore, the lack of unemployment insurance and social welfare in many ways amounted to an *exacerbation* of systemic problems, such as racism, forced labor, and homelessness in the eyes of American communists.⁵⁰⁴

By the start of the Popular Front, communist support for social insurance at the federal level reached new heights and was in more ways than one an evolution of Hathaway's "insurance principle" from 1933-1934. The *Western Worker* reported in January of 1935 that relief to the eighteen million individuals on relief rolls averaged "less than one dollar a person for each week;" the result of relief councils headed by "business interests and reactionary labor leaders." In response, dozens of organizations rallied together in Washington D.C. to elect delegates to the National Congress for Unemployment Insurance, electing Teamsters organizers, delegates from the Bethel AME Church, the Burks County local of the SPA, Branch 10 of the American Federation of Hosiery Workers, and the Detroit Conference of Italian Organizations. H.R. 7598, the *Worker* contended, was "the only effective national measure proposed" to handle social insurance by "providing for payment of \$10 a week to every person unemployed and \$3 a week for each dependent."⁵⁰⁵ In addition to support for H.R. 7598, California communists looked forward to State Assembly Bill No. 791, the Workers State Unemployment Insurance Bill, which called for the same provisions as H.R. 7598 at the state level. California

communists also linked the effort to push this bill with an effort to repeal the Criminal Syndicalism Law, which they believed specifically targeted military community organizers.⁵⁰⁶

While State Assembly Bill No. 791 did not pass, it served as the premise for California Governor Frank Merriam's subsequent enactment of the alternative Unemployment Reserves Act, which began in August, 1936 on the basis of the reserves principle. The Act did not extend all the demands put forth by the unemployment councils, particularly due to its exemption of small businesses as well as agricultural laborers, domestic servants, and officers of crews or vessels.⁵⁰⁷ While the California Act can be seen as merely an addition at the state level of the programs established by the 1935 Social Security Act, passed just over a year prior to Bill No. 791, communists saw it as the development of a social safety net for American workers that originated with their demands for broad unemployment insurance in 1932. At the local level, communist activists such as Lumpkin and Hudson viewed both state and federal enactments of social security as responses to the actions of unemployment councils.⁵⁰⁸

To stay connected with their national movement and other state-based struggles, Lumpkin, Wheeler, Hudson and countless other young communists benefitted the rather substantial educational program setup by the CPUSA throughout the early-1930s. The program rotated speakers and distributed the various regional versions of *the Daily Worker* as a means to keeping members aware of other struggles. Herbert Aptheker, at the time a student and scholar of African American history at Columbia University, regularly taught courses on U.S. history and racial discrimination through the CPUSA's New York Workers School. Elizabeth Lawson helped develop African American history courses that were "intended both to appeal to black workers and to combat prejudice among whites."⁵⁰⁹ In some regions, like California, the "labor-Left" culture existed as a framework extended well beyond the CPUSA, but also served as a means to educate citizens on radical philosophy and politics. The California Labor School attracted students and activists from across the state, teaching social science courses that were "Marxist" in nature. Additionally, much of the school's popular courses were artistic and

humanities classes that offered "little ideological content" and instead focused on the creativity of Left culture in America.⁵¹⁰

When major cases developed, such as that surrounding the Scottsboro Boys, educators such as Lawson took over CPUSA publications to direct publishing efforts toward the plight of African Americans while the California Labor School educated its students on understanding the matter as tied to racial discrimination. Aptheker and Lawson regularly contributed to *Economic Notes* a Labor Research Association publication to raise community awareness of labor-related developments. Communists across New York City attended Aptheker's courses on American history regularly and helped provide a foundation for members of the YCL, the CPUSA, and even the CLA to direct their attentions toward improving social relations within the community.⁵¹¹ Efforts such as these, far more than the political dictums published in *The Communist*, facilitated the awareness of social issues for American communists and directed their community activism.

On August 16th, 1930, the CPUSA released its first edition of the *Southern Worker*, a regional version of its *Daily Worker* published in New York. Perhaps no paper better encapsulated how communists viewed the significance of race by geographic location. Communist organizers depicted the *Southern Worker* as "the voice of the Negro and white workers and farmers of the South crying in united protest against the state of starvation, suffering and persecution to which they have been subjected." Claiming to be "neither a 'white' paper nor a 'Negro' paper," the *Southern Worker* set out to delineate the class struggle as the dominant social issue for Southern communities, one that perpetuated and necessitated racial discrimination. Although the *Southern Worker* was a regional paper, it regularly published mirror articles from the New York *Daily Worker*, and vice versa, as did other regional CPUSA publications such as *The Michigan Worker*.⁵¹² To Hudson, this was a positive development, as other regional bodies of the CPUSA became exposed to the "anger against the conditions [of the South]" by Southern communists. By linking together a network of periodicals to discuss the regional experiences

of similar issues, communists facilitated a radical Left culture that rallied behind the unemployed councils and condemned Jim Crow.⁵¹³

As with most communist periodicals, the *Southern Worker* always contained the framework of the political world's ideological spectrum. The newspaper carried the Third Period political message of a "dispossessed nation" and advocated the right of African Americans to "self-determination." For activists like Hudson, this message linked racial oppression to class oppression and provided a solution for struggling African Americans. The *Southern Worker* did so by publishing stories of racial discrimination from across the nation, including reports about discriminatory federal employment hiring practices against African Americans, such as on the Hoover Dam in March, 1932. The paper actively tried to frame the context of racial oppression within the theoretical view of the Comintern. At the same time, the paper accepted the unique fight against racism in the United States in comparison to other communist parties around the world and reminded its readers that physical violence against people of color was a routine component of American society.⁵¹⁴

Writers for the *Southern Worker* pointed to the Scottsboro case and numerous incidents where the law failed to protect those accused of crimes, such as when two young boys from Alabama were "brutally lynched" after being "framed for a murder which they did not commit" in August of 1933, as the evidence of their ideological solution.⁵¹⁵ The result was a fusion of racial and class theory that would resurface in the works of Malcolm X in the 1960s. Many African American communists viewed their actions as parallel to taking back the fruits of slave labor and concluded that in order to combat racial discrimination, the various community-based organizations had to take practical steps to address issues with the courts, police forces, and ultimately align with the masses of unemployed. The motivation derived from this ideological vision served as a tremendous source for the appeal of communist organizing in the South as the *Southern Worker* continuously spoke to the interests of those desiring an end to Jim Crow, both white and people of color.⁵¹⁶

In terms of community activism unrelated to unemployment, no issue was of greater significance to the southern communists in terms of fighting racial discrimination than Jim Crow. Promoting an end to racial segregation and challenging the concept of "separate but equal" throughout the nation was not only one of the most successful efforts on the part of communists during the 1930s; it was a watershed moment in the history of civil rights in the United States. A staple issue in the communist political world, rationalizing racism as systemic was easier to ideologically-committed activists than it was among grassroots communists in American communities. It became even more popular outside the upper-echelons of the CPUSA after the Third Period. Newer scholarship shows that the fight against racism in communities attracted far more attention between 1935 and 1937 than the issue of unemployment insurance from 1933 to 1934. It also facilitated a steady increase in membership in the African American community into the CPUSA. Between Foster and Ford's 1932 presidential election and the opening of the Popular Front in 1935, communists were among the most outspoken critics of so-called "white chauvinism," the idea of social superiority embraced among some white working class communists and the predominantly white membership of the CPUSA in urban areas. One historian described African Americans by 1935 as "predisposed to be receptive to the Communist Party." They tended to view the CPUSA's "emphasis on white chauvinism more favorably than others who saw it as exaggerated or as an error."⁵¹⁷ For Hudson and CPUSA City Councilman for New York Benjamin Davis, the experiences of racism were both personal and political and rationalized socialism as a solution to racism prior to ever reading a single text by Marx or Lenin.

The main reason the fight against racism did not attract more attention until 1935 stems from the fact that communist anti-racist activism came slightly late to the Third Period once the Scottsboro case became international news. This came two years after the Party solidified its end to factionalism in 1929 and three years after the Comintern accepted theories of national self-determination and the sentiments of African American communists such as James Ford. Communists began to speak on the

issue by attacking perceived "white chauvinism" from the ranks of various communist-backed union locals, community clubs, and workers' schools. The campaign against white chauvinism would take on various distortions throughout the 1930s and 40s, but in the middle years of the Third Period it grounded communist locals in a general fight against arbitrary discrimination, including within the CPUSA and its constituent clubs/meeting groups. In January of 1931, these efforts coalesced around the trial of August Yokinen, a Finnish communist living in New York City. Yokinen attracted negative attention to his CPUSA local after refusing three black workers entry to a local Finnish Workers' Club dance in Harlem, a regularly scheduled affair to facilitate communists meeting with one another.⁵¹⁸ Essentially an internal show trial by the New York district CPUSA leaders, the trial's jury consisted of seven white and seven black Party members. Presiding over the court was Alfred Wagenknecht, a long-term Party leader in the city. Over 200 elected delegates of the CPUSA from over 110 different city organizations attended the event. Wagenknecht explained that the purpose of the trial was to avoid the biased courts and to bring Yokinen forth as an example of unacceptable conduct unbecoming of an American communist. Occurring just as communists were beginning to target racism in the communities at the onset of 1931, the trial set the limit of tolerance for subsequent years with regard to the way in which local communists handled organizing groups, which for years had been split into a variety of language-speaking sects.⁵¹⁹

The 1931 trial of Yokinen demonstrated the seriousness with which urban communist leaders took the circumstantial significance of racism in the United States. It also showed how Party leaders and local communists desired an end to the ethnic and language-based factions of community. Party leaders also attempted to use the trial as an appeal to the interests of the New York City's African American working class and adhere to the dictums of Third Period policies on building an American Negro Labor Congress. According to International Labor Defense (ILD) lawyers who conducted the initial portion of the trial, Yokinen's guilt rested with his expression of "white superiority." This "ideology" of racial

discrimination was explained to "[serve] as a ruling class excuse for the acts of suppression and persecution of the Negro workers and farmers," and that this function was unique to the situation of the American working class. Failure to recognize this was thus considered tantamount to approval of racial divisions. Yokinen subsequently faced expulsion on the grounds of "violation of the fundamental program of the Party" and the division of regional CPUSA clubs, reading groups, and community dances by ethnicity or language were banned.⁵²⁰ Through Yokinen, the CPUSA attempted to set an example because they wanted to show what was socially unacceptable for communist activism in the communities. Yokinen's trial was a rallying cry, an attempt to show the earnestness communists held toward ending racial divisions in communities. The trial also served as a basis for understanding how and why individual experiences of racism, exclusion, and discrimination such as anti-Semitism led numerous activists into the orbit of their local communist club.

As the CPUSA and ILD attempted to set standards for socially acceptable behavior among activists, some youths drifted toward the orbit of communist organizing due to experiences of discrimination in their hometown. Danny Rubin grew up in the Northeast side of Philadelphia along the Delaware River. His father worked in a local lumber yard while attending night courses to practice law while his mother was active in the SPA. Before Rubin joined the CPUSA during World War II, he dealt with routine discrimination in his neighborhood promoted by the local land and property owner, the Disston family. The Disston's owned one of the largest manufacturing plants of saws and wood equipment and from 1871-1945 transformed the small area of Tacony into an industrial town.⁵²¹ According to Rubin, the predominantly white, Catholic community rallied behind the Disston's restrictive city covenant of "No Negroes, No Jews, No Dogs, No Bars," in order to further define the exclusivity of the neighborhood.⁵²²

By the mid-1930s, when swastikas and graffiti regularly appeared at Rubin's local synagogue, his parents stepped in to explain that they, as Jewish members of the city, were unwelcomed by the

Catholic population. Rubin also witnessed anti-Semitism firsthand at school as he was the only Jewish student in his classes. He found friendship and acceptance among other marginalized groups—African Americans and Italian Americans. At first, the actions against him and his religion prompted Rubin to join organizations in Philadelphia to combat such discrimination. This led Rubin to the American Youth for Democracy and exposed him to the works of Marx and Lenin. It also led to CPUSA publications that covered the Yokinen trial and emphasized how it was an effort only capable through the Party. In his own words, Marxism and the Party's stances on white chauvinism helped Rubin gain an understanding of how and why people were anti-Semitic and to what ends they served in terms of homogenizing a populace. Learning the philosophy of communist views on racism, in particular the Party's critical inward stance toward members rejecting white chauvinism and ethnic divisions, reaffirmed what Rubin already knew—that racism and anti-Semitism were directly correlated and to combat one meant to combat the other. More importantly, Rubin found that the only people waging such a fight were in some manner affiliated with a local communist club.⁵²³

To communists like Lumpkin, Brodine, Rubin, and future national committee member Benjamin Davis, community-oriented struggles were a reflection of their commitment to communist ideals and the principles of Marxism. Sometimes, as was the case with Rubin, this commitment existed even before they became open communists or joined a communist organization.⁵²⁴ While the need to combat racism in the workplace was understood by communists as necessary to "lay the groundwork for organizing the CIO" in Southern mining and textile industries, organizing against racism in local communities took on a moral dimension. It was understood as "central to bringing about peace, democracy, and justice."⁵²⁵ CPUSA leaders and grassroots organizers experienced this in both indirect and direct ways. The Yokinen trial remained an iconic message to communists across America, and some took that message with them to the courts to reject the legal system as bias and discriminatory.

Ben Davis grew up in Dawson, Georgia, a city racially segregated by the railroad tracks. He described the so-called 'peace' of Jim Crow as "the peace of the master's domination over the slave; the kind of peace that white supremacists say is disturbed when Negroes become restless for their rights."⁵²⁶ Like many African American communists throughout the 20th century, Davis developed an acute sense of power struggles in communities based on his experiences growing up. When he directed his studies into law and anti-racist activism, Davis did so "with mixed motivations—idealistic and humanitarian aspirations, as well as the need for a career." He recognized the limitations of his career choice due to segregation and the general racial bias of southern courts, but he pushed forward. In the early 1930s, during the Scottsboro case, Davis joined the CPUSA and the ILD. In June of 1932, he landed his first major case after the ILD informed him about a young boy named Angelo Herndon who was in jail for trying to organize industrial African American and white workers in Atlanta.⁵²⁷

Herndon was a 19-year old African American communist charged in Atlanta with "attempting to incite insurrection," a charge which carried the death penalty. Davis viewed the death penalty statute in this case as an archaic remnant of the pre-Civil War period, in which it originally applied to slave rebellions.⁵²⁸ Working through the ILD, Davis got the opportunity to represent Herndon in what would become arguably the most significant civil rights case backed by the communist movement in the U.S. Davis' approach was radical and poignant. Rather than argue the citizenship rights held by Herndon, Davis instead argued that "the jury system of Georgia in 1933 was illegal and unconstitutional, and had operated for twenty years in accordance with a policy of premeditated and deliberate exclusion of qualified Negro citizens." Davis thus charged that the courts and judicial system, not Herndon, was to blame for Herndon's situation. When Judge Lee B. Wyatt tried to dismiss Davis' opening statement, Davis retorted by emphasizing he'd like to see the case elevated to the Supreme Court. When asked about his motivations for taking on the case, Davis explained that they revolved around the defendant's

race and the way courts approaches cases on a racial basis. Although a questionable legal strategy, Davis remained committed and pushed concerns to the state-level before the appeals process began.⁵²⁹

Davis took his concerns about the court to Governor Eugene Talmadge not long after the initial court proceedings. Talmadge centered his concerns on "meddling outsiders" and questioned Davis' northern education as a possible bias against his own state. Davis explained to the Governor that his support for the law and the Communist Party were not due to him "knowing much about communism" but because "[he'd] vote for any party that offers [him] and [his] people a square deal."⁵³⁰ Quickly, public opinion shifted against Talmadge as the widespread news about the Herndon case coincided with the publication of Robert E. Burns' book, *I'm a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain-Gang*.⁵³¹ The state of New Jersey went so far as to refuse to extradite a known Georgian fugitive after reports of Georgia's mistreatment of prisoners, including Herndon, made national headlines. In the spring of 1934, the Herndon case shifted to the Georgia Supreme Court while a separate case began to build against the Georgia penal system.⁵³²

At the Georgia Supreme Court, Davis requested additional aid from the ILD and added a second legal representative, Carol King. The two presented their appeal in a 50-minute presentation about the history of Georgia law and its relevance to Herndon's case. According to Davis, the Fulton County Court "cut the guts" out of the original court transcript, replacing words such as "nigger" with "darker" or "negro" and "expung[ed] the very substance of the prejudiced conduct of the trial." After his protest fell upon deaf ears, Davis accepted the transcript as it was, in order to retain his appeal in court. In May, however, the Georgia State Supreme Court handed down the same verdict given by Fulton County. Chief Justice Richard B. Russell, after delivering the verdict, spoke to Davis directly and ordered him to "never refer contemptuously to the arguments of the state's attorneys" and to "try not to become involved in such cases" again. Davis turned to his strategists at the ILD and secured Whitney Seymour, former U.S. Solicitor General, and Walter Gellhorn, a Columbia University law professor, to take the case

to the Supreme Court. After the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Herndon, the young activist was voluntarily released to the Georgia state court in order to file a writ of habeas corpus, which led Georgia District Court Judge Hugh M. Dorsey to declare the state's law unconstitutional.⁵³³ Davis, performing much of the background work that facilitated the eventual decision, became the movement's silent hero.

According to the ILD and Davis, the subsequent victory over the Georgia court rested on the "mass movement" that followed them throughout the trial. *Time* magazine printed an article highlighting the alleged communist conspiracy that surrounded the trial and the subsequent Supreme Court's defense of supporting such views.⁵³⁴ To Davis and his fellow communist activists in the ILD, Herndon's acquittal "was a triumph for free speech, free press, and free assembly." The trial put Davis on the map and into the spotlight, but not favorably. Prior to the case, Davis was treated with "benign cooperation" by city courts. After the case, he was met with "suspicion" and viewed as "a rooshan-inspired Bolshevik." For weeks, Davis faced death threats from the local KKK. At one point, the Klan placed a note in the sawed-off barrel of a revolver outside his office door, requesting his suicide. Experiences like Davis demonstrate that it took conviction and courage on the part of many communists to defend civil rights within the context of Jim Crow.⁵³⁵

The lasting effect of the Herndon trial, combined with the Scottsboro case, was a subsequent rise in civil rights activism. In Davis' words, the aftermath of the Herndon case demonstrated that "what had become clear to the class-conscious Georgia officials had also become clear to large sections of the Negroes on the street." The sentiment was no longer something that had to be pushed by groups like the ILD or the CPUSA; it had become a self-sustaining civil rights campaign.⁵³⁶ Because of ideological influences coming from the CPUSA, communists like Davis addressed specific issues, such as Herndon's case, as a much larger and more systemic problem within the United States that coincided with a fight

for better wages and against unemployment. As such, they saw their subsequent community support as emblematic of support for communism in general though this tended to not always be the case.

Other communists helped draw in the attention of numerous working-class blacks, especially in the South, by emphasizing the precedent of discrimination as a norm and actively attempting to fight it. Hosea Hudson faced a choice in 1932 of joining the CPUSA and publicly endorsing communist ideology or simply joining local leagues for racial justice around Georgia. While family members and friends pressured him to avoid the communists and, more importantly, avoid the stigma of supporting communism, Hudson believed that his economic suffering was "like all the rest." The only way to better his own condition was to "get conditions better for other people." Because of his outlook, Hudson had little trouble working with white communists. He saw their depiction in the newspapers as "red agitators" as parallel to the previous treatment of abolitionists, Jewish salesman, and Northerners throughout the South. The choice to join the American communist movement for southern African Americans like Hudson was a difficult one that built on an individual's perception of whether or not their activism would amount to meaningful gains. It didn't take long for him to see communists as organizers and activists for what could be seen as the little man, or the underdog.⁵³⁷

Between the fall and winter of 1932, Hudson lost his job at the Alabama Stove Foundry, which prompted his work organizing for the local YCL in Birmingham. The goal, however, was neither strictly labor-focused nor exclusively political. Hudson's task was to rally masses of Birmingham against the surrounding pillars of racism, particularly within and against the local African-American neighborhoods. To convince fellow community members, Hudson presented a program that demanded immediate action by the state government to address the existing grievances of African American southerners. Hudson's team of organizers included Henry O. Mayfield, Joe Howard, and Birmingham YCL official Ted Horton.⁵³⁸ To push the CPUSA's stance on Jim Crow and ending racial discrimination, the organizers split into two teams to distribute leaflets containing the Party's 15-point program for the southern states. It

included confronting police brutality against people of color, federal housing, an end to poll taxes, and voting rights for all citizens. Hudson's efforts, much like most community-organizing activists at the time, avoided overtly presenting their views and identity as "communist" in order to prevent rousing the suspicions of Birmingham police. When push came to shove, and citizens responded to the activism by supporting policies or signing petitions, the ILD took over efforts to address grievances individually.⁵³⁹

In November of 1932, Hudson and the Birmingham CPUSA local were organizing their first of many public meetings to promote the defense of the Scottsboro boys. For their first demonstration, they chose the Masonic Temple and filled it with over three hundred citizens. Outside the meeting, numerous city police officers stood with shotguns and rifles to "'protect' the meeting from the Ku Klux [Klan]," which had made threats to sabotage the event. For subsequent meetings, Hudson's group chose churches such as the Negro Congregational Church. To address the city's unemployment, Hudson's YCL local organized a meeting at the courthouse steps. Within hours, the city mayor, Jimmie Jones, ordered the police to forcibly remove individuals on the courthouse lawn. As police moved in, they had "scuffles" with bystanders, typically white, who "didn't know what was going on" and weren't involved in the protest. The scene impressed upon Hudson the idea that average whites "were no more than Negroes in the eyes of the ruling class of Birmingham and their police." Throughout the rest of 1932 and the first half of 1933, Hudson's YCL local worked to build unemployed block committees that linked with section committees in a larger city committee. This final committee became the Unemployment Council of the city of Birmingham.⁵⁴⁰

As a close associate of the ILD, Maurice Sugar's campaign for Recorder's Court and the Detroit District Common Council in 1935 replicated the experiences of Davis and Hudson. Sugar's campaign represented an "example of the cross-fertilization that fed new crowd politics" throughout the labor organizations and Communist groups in urban areas like Detroit.⁵⁴¹ Representing "organized labor" and building off support from Detroit's black community, Sugar was the only candidate for Council who

questioned the plans of other candidates about the "interests of black Detroiters." Despite losing the election, Sugar had supporters that extended to the NAACP local, as well as Reverends R.L. Bradby and Dr. O.H. Sweet during the campaign and "demonstrated the reach of black protest politics by the middle of the thirties." Similarly, Sugar's campaigns utilized the broad, cooperative strategy of linking community organizers with civic leaders found so effective in organizing labor. The subsequent result was a redirection of the localized politics "from one based on accommodating to the interests of the industrial elite to demanding equal participation in economic and civic affairs."⁵⁴² Sugar's public endorsement of communists and organizers throughout the city "was trumped [only] by his commitment to fighting for the interests of black Detroiters." Sugar's efforts, however, were merely a continuance of the local Party's "vision of interracial unionism among foreign-born men and women as well as among black workers" that extended back as far as 1924. From the mid-1920s up through the start of Sugar's campaign, African Americans in Detroit had worked with the League of Struggle for Negro Rights "hoping to introduce revolutionary and nationalist ideas within the political discourse."⁵⁴³ For broad levels of community-based support, regional campaigning wasn't enough.

In terms of culture, communists were attracted to music and theatre that complimented working class community organizing, with notable examples Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. The two folk icons led an inspirational culture that dominated leftist circles throughout the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Lumpkin considered them "a prominent part" of the Progressive Party in 1948 and part of a large "cultural movement" of working class activism during the early Cold War.⁵⁴⁴ The two artists, who would go on to influence the work of Bob Dylan and other postwar folk singers, participated in what scholars refer to as a "folk revival" led by sections of the CPUSA. Ronald Radosh wrote about the revival of interest surrounding the Popular Front and the folk-style music that characterized leftist circles, particularly those in and within the orbit of the CPUSA. Radosh, along with Martha Bayles, concluded that "although there is much to be critical of in the communist political tradition, these very

same people helped save a rich musical legacy from extinction."⁵⁴⁵ Lauren Weiner also discussed the nature of 1930s coffeehouses and working class music halls, shaped by the influence of communist politics and the music of folk. Much like the experience of the CPUSA's political front, which experienced heightened popularity due to the economic crisis more than the power of communist ideology, Seeger and Guthrie were "carriers of a superannuated ideological minority [who] found themselves celebrated as the leaders of a mass movement."⁵⁴⁶ Most suburban Americans who came to adore Guthrie's celebrated classic, "This Land is Your Land," knew little about his background. Even fewer knew about his work as a columnist for the CPUSA's *Daily Worker*. Communists and their fellow travelers commonly saw music "as a weapon in the class struggle" to be used as "social documents, often stretching the most innocent of songs to have a subliminal political message."⁵⁴⁷ In Guthrie's popular classic about sharing America, the phrase "this land is your land" was a direct response to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," a song which Guthrie found "complacent and cliché-ridden." His original music notes included verses to denounce private property rights, but he altered them to mimic the hymn of a Baptist gospel.⁵⁴⁸

Starting in 1929 but throughout the 1930s and early 40s, Grace Hutchins became the CPUSA's "authority on working-class women." She published books, articles, and distributed pamphlets to argue the effects of capitalism on women in American society. Hutchins studied at the New York School of Social Work attending lectures that grew from the roots of the Progressive era. In 1934, as the CPUSA was beginning its major political shift for the subsequent year, she published *Women Who Work*, which became the Party's central text on women's roles in the class struggle.⁵⁴⁹ Her main argument built off of Marx's dissection of alienation between work "at home" and work "in the workplace," suggesting that women suffered exploitation in both social spheres. Historian Lynn Shapiro pointed out that this use of Marx's alienation argument "placed women at the center of the historic confrontation required to

achieve socialism." More importantly, Hutchins' publications asserted an "area of concern" for communists "beyond the (mostly male) industrial labor force."⁵⁵⁰

By 1936, Hutchins and her associate Anna Rochester worked their way into the CPUSA's inner circle; but according to Shapiro, they never held any official rank or status within the Party. Tasked with managing a fund for ill activists and serving as an outside treasurer for the 1936 electoral campaign, Hutchins continued her work for the CPUSA without ever officially joining it. She later used her status as a trustee of the Civil Rights Congress bail fund to post bail for numerous activists and Party leaders during the 1950s.⁵⁵¹ Hutchins' written works and activism for the CPUSA helped to "popularize the Communist notion that wage-earning women of the working class faced a 'double burden.'"⁵⁵² This was later adopted by the Women's Liberation Movement and subsequently became a major component of Second Wave Feminism by the 1960s.⁵⁵³

Margaret Cowl canonized the communist perspective on women and the Popular Front with an article to *The Communist* in 1938. Referencing a history dated back to the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention in 1848, Cowl argued that courage and mass organizing was the means to breaking the barriers that "kept [women] from equal participation in the public life of the country." What proved the effective answer, Cowl suggested, was the ability and willingness to "link up the women's movement with other progressive movements of the day." Referring to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as "utopian," Cowl and other communists believed legislation alone did not suffice. Rather than create a standard by which equality was enforced, Cowl desired to see an expansion of "special legislation that fits the needs of women." This was indicative of how the CPUSA needed to address the women question if it wanted to further integrate itself into the community.⁵⁵⁴

To accomplish her goals, Cowl and communists like her turned to the Women's Charter, a Popular Front women's organization that "recognize[d] that the demand for equality [was] inseparable from the demand for higher standards of living for women." Cowl reiterated the stance of the CPUSA

Central Committee that women were desired in pro-active positions throughout the Party and its auxiliaries throughout the Popular Front.⁵⁵⁵ While these narratives of women's' experiences in Party life were vibrant to those in the movement, they rarely make note in historical narratives. The nature of women's rights movements in U.S. history after Suffrage dictated that the CPUSA "situate itself" with that history by pushing broad national goals but maintaining "a decidedly local or regional focus." Without more narratives that examine the acute, community-specific differences, the actions of communist women amalgamate under the broad analysis of communist politics; drawing attention away from the link between feminists of the interwar period and feminists who became communists during the Third Period and Popular Front.⁵⁵⁶

Of particular concern to grassroots organizers after the summer in 1937, a post-New Deal recession hit American working families. Initially, families looked to community-based organizations advocating immediate relief. Hosea Hudson, again without a job, collected unemployment relief for ten weeks before he began rallying friends to form a voting club in Birmingham, bridging the political world into the local community. Starting the following spring, Hudson worked with two activist friends, Cornella Hibbard and Mack Coad, YCL organizers Hazel Stanley and Jimmie Hooper, and a local minister to organize a voting committee at the city's Masonic Temple. Equipping their activists with pamphlets of the U.S. Constitution, the club encouraged members and citizens to fill out voting applications and bring them to the club meetings for further instruction. Using an old-style mimeograph, the club mass printed registration cards and freely distributed them along with their leaflets. Each week, the club instructed eligible voters on the process of application and helped clarify the requirements of constitutional knowledge by explaining elements of the Constitution and the history of the United States. This was due to the fact that, despite the Board of Registrars never requiring direct knowledge of the Constitution in Alabama state law, board members routinely asked African American applicants more questions than whites. After only a few meetings, the club got an article in the Birmingham *World*

and began to attract teachers, steelworkers, coal miners, and everyday service workers, all of whom sought eligibility to vote.⁵⁵⁷ To draw in broad support, Hudson got active in the city's Workers' Alliance and created a bridge between the poor whites seeking relief and the black workers seeking rights. Hudson's strategy met its test in the summer, when he organized both the voting club and the Workers Alliance to collectively apply to vote.⁵⁵⁸

Hudson gathered four white members of the Workers Alliance and marched to the Board of Registrar's office in June of 1938. He watched as all four white workers obtained their cards, filled out their information, and quickly received voting registration cards. When Hudson applied immediately after, they handed him a blank card with questions about U.S. history ranging from the names of Presidents to the meaning of certain clauses in the Constitution. After turning in the forms, the Registrar told Hudson he would hear back from the office after "investigations" and received no card that day. From there, the five men went to attorney Arthur Shores' office to file a formal complaint against the board for discrimination. Weeks went by. Numerous club members applied for voting cards, but all were turned down. After waiting a few weeks to let the petitions mount, Shores picked six of the cases, five school teachers and Hudson, and presented the case for a court hearing. At the hearing, Judge McEleroy refused to call into question the tactics and motives of the Board of Registrars, but he agreed to overlook the applications personally. At first this caused a panic among those applying for voting cards as the newspapers put the names of those who contacted Shores on their front pages. By the following week, all six citizens received voting registration cards in the mail. The tactic proved successful, if only marginal. Before the end of the summer, the Birmingham district of the NAACP joined in on the meetings and mass applications.⁵⁵⁹ Hudson's tactics demonstrated the clear power of grassroots organizing and prefigured subsequent efforts in throughout the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

Unlike in northern urban areas such as Chicago and Detroit, and western regions such as Southern California, a southern communist's engagement with their local community did not necessarily require involvement in a union or political action club. While Hudson devoted almost all of his time to Party work between 1932 and 1938, he also remained heavily involved in the local Birmingham church network by participating in quartets and relied less on union meetings to attract new members. Once he started his regular singing quartet, the Smithfield Vocal Singers, Hudson toured the predominantly African American churches along 23rd Street near downtown Birmingham. There was methodology to Hudson's community engagement; in his words the church functioned as a "mass organization" for the non-whites of the community. White Birmingham workers, on the other hand, had the unions and their local political committees. The African American community, instead, had churches and family gatherings. These tactics were found in other areas as well, such as Virginia where black voting drives came about from "the rise of a Southern black 'organizational repertoire' of elite leadership and political-civic voluntarism."⁵⁶⁰ In Birmingham, Hudson used the opportunities provided by his quartet to urge church members to register to vote, and to encourage civic participation within the African American community. By 1938, Hudson encouraged community members to join the local NAACP, although he believed that the organization was not for "ordinary" African Americans. Younger activists looking for community organizational work were directed to the CPUSA.⁵⁶¹

While the CPUSA's Popular Front methodology dictated supporting involvement in mass organizations like the NAACP, for communists like Hudson, the organization held a stain due to its history of anti-radicalism and its attempt to thwart the efforts of the International Labor Defense during the Scottsboro case. As was usual during the Popular Front, these issues were not blamed on the organization as a whole per se, but on specific leaders such as Walter White and William Pickens. As such, organizers like Hudson were not deterred by their involvement but rather saw the NAACP as an effective organization in need of radicals; a valuable vehicle for progressive change that merely needed

new officers and captains. At first, Hudson and his fellow Birmingham communists remained quiet and inactive at NAACP meetings. Eventually, Hudson felt the need to speak his mind and recommend certain new approaches to recruitment and organizing tactics. He argued that they should become more outspoken about community-specific issues including police brutality against non-whites and the ongoing horrors of lynching. Hudson and his fellow African American communists promoted an anti-lynching bill in late 1937, early 1938, which the pages of *The Communist* declared to be “an inseparable part of the fight for progressive legislation.”⁵⁶² In the context of the segregated South, where most African Americans lived under segregationist politics, the communist message of political justice resonated with those who sought to undermine the power of Jim Crow ordinances.

It is of no small significance that Hudson and the CPUSA did not depict resistance to the anti-lynching bill as an extension of localized, systemic racism, but rather “Wall Street,” which pulled the strings of a “reactionary minority” of Republicans. In contrast, the working masses of the South, white and non-white, were depicted as “awakened” and unified in their quest to destroy “the age-old barriers of sectional and racial hatreds, which served reaction so well in the past.”⁵⁶³ The sometimes over-romanticized idea of a Southern working class ready and capable of action, only held back by the politics of reactionism, was a common theme in communist publications throughout the Popular Front. Communist writers such as Theodore Bassett went through numerous rhetorical hoops to link the communist message in the South to the writings of Lenin and an emphasis on mass involvement against reactionary forces. Although mistaken in its assessment of how to break down racial barriers, the rhetoric and idealism of communists such as Hudson kept them engaged in their communities and drove them to continue a focus on racial divisions as the basis for building organizations such as the NAACP.⁵⁶⁴

In other cases, the specific aspects of an individual's engagement with social activism depended on the individual's perception of discrimination in their local community contrasted against the oppression and discrimination of fascism. Many efforts to resist social discrimination involved rejecting

conditions thought to be too similar to, or a reflection of, growing racism and anti-Semitism in European, fascist nations. Russell Brodine studied at the Curtis Institute for Music in Philadelphia from 1932 to 1939. There he met with musicians who struggled during the economic depression to not only find work but also to find a home. While studying, Brodine met Fred Batchelder, a bass player and fellow activist. According to Brodine, Batchelder promoted peace in radical and sometimes dangerous ways, including disrupting the path of warships with a canoe during a U.S. Navy flotilla. Actions such as these were not viewed as inherently communist by Brodine, but supported the general worldview extorted by communist philosophy. Brodine and Batchelder frequented discussion groups covering current events with other students at Curtis as Hitler came to power in 1933 and the Scottsboro case became worldwide news. Watching the Scottsboro case and comparing it to the rhetoric of the Nazis helped Brodine conclude that "the fight against racism was central to bringing about peace, democracy, and justice."⁵⁶⁵

At Curtis, Brodine was instructed to both learn from and respect his teaching conductors. This did not prevent him from speaking up when he felt it was necessary. After watching one conductor yell at a student, causing him to leave school, Brodine committed himself to resisting the "domineering" attitudes of the Curtis instructors. One of his teachers, Anton Torello, was a personal friend of deposed King Alfonso of Spain. Once Torello became aware that Brodine was considering playing in a concert dedicated to Spanish democracy, he informed Brodine that "[he] was following the wrong side."⁵⁶⁶ When the Roosevelt Administration announced the National Industrial Recovery Act and subsequent relief for Americans, it confirmed dedication to a pro-worker, anti-racist world view years before joining his first communist club in 1937. Community activism and the tangible reality of it producing results drove Brodine into the communist orbit.⁵⁶⁷

While communist activism in the communities leaned on resistance to racial and gender discrimination, they were not the only battles fought. Many communists linked the existing elements of

discrimination, both class-based and racial-based, with other world events. Witnessing the rise of fascism from Hitler in Germany and Franco in Spain, Brodine used his musical talents to express his view that fascist oppression mimicked the oppression of minorities in America. In 1936 he helped organize a concert "to raise money for North American Aid for Spanish Democracy" at the Philadelphia Music Center; a hot spot of the "flourishing left cultural movement" at that time for the city. Brodine remembered the Music Center as "organized by progressive musicians with communist leadership" and used charity donations to "give low cost instruction to students who could not afford to study elsewhere and to organize musical performances for progressive causes." The concert included professional and popular Jewish musicians of the period, such as Eudice Shapiro, Phil Goldberg, Victor Gottlieb, and Sol Kaplan. Working with active communists inside and outside the Party to arrange the event, the concert represented to Brodine the moment when his musical and social/political influences unified to form his ideological view. In just two years, Brodine joined the Philadelphia district of the CPUSA.⁵⁶⁸ It was the kind of organizing the CPUSA managed to succeed with in urban and middle-class communities. By linking together class-based and racially-defined struggles around the world, progressives were exposed to the kind of international uniformity of identity desired by communist philosophy.

Brodine's work with the Philadelphia concert organizers exposed him to many of the city's YCL activists and leaders. He frequented political meetings that centered on the issues of "rising fascism in Germany, its smashing of democracy, its persecution of Jews, communists, [and] trade unionists" and economic concerns such as the recession of 1937-1938. These meetings also captured members' disillusionment with the idea that capitalism could resolve the depression. Brodine's participation led to the organizing of the Communist Musicians Club at Curtis, where Brodine invited speakers and scholars on Marxism to provide educational seminars. In effect, Brodine copied what the CPUSA had done with the Philadelphia Music Center, but it was important that he not damage the Party's approach. As such, the Party was not involved in the creation of the club. After organizing some of his fellow

students, Brodine met with the city's CPUSA district organizers, who, in turn, emphasized how important it was that the students not "jeopardize [their] education or [their] careers in music" and downplay their activism as openly 'communist.' The club's presence and ideological commitment in the music community spread as students reported some of their music teachers instructing students to avoid "that crowd," referring to Brodine and his comrades. Brodine remained active with the club, promoting seminars and money-raising rallies, until his final school year at Curtis in 1938-1939.⁵⁶⁹

During the political conundrum of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939, communist musical work displayed a link between the ideologies of the political world and its influence on those who saw themselves as cultural representations of that ideology. In late 1939, Guthrie wrote an ideologically-charged song intended to "defend the fruits of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and [depict] the division of Poland and the Soviet takeover that was part of the pact as a favorable development welcomed by the Poles." The lyrics described Russia's involvement as beneficial since Stalin would "give the farm lands back to the farmers." Guthrie was soon labeled a "dyed-in-the-wool Stalinist" by moderate progressives who "believed, along with the CP[USA], that FDR was at best an imperialist and the savior of American capitalism."⁵⁷⁰ Brodine, on the other hand, felt "no confidence that [the war] would be an anti-fascist war."⁵⁷¹ But unlike the image they presented to their fans, Guthrie was hardly a proponent of Marxism. Throughout the 1940s, artists attended New York City district CPUSA leadership meetings because, in his own words, he "trusted the communists to know generally the right thing that [they] should be pushing for, whether it was peace or war." The German invasion of the Soviet Union aided folk artists like Guthrie and Pete Seeger by making the message of defeating fascism popular again. "Almost overnight," writes Radosh, "the once shunned folksingers were singing on behalf of the Allied war effort, urging the labor movement to put strikes on pause until victory was won." Other figures such as Paul Robeson made the shift as well, and their lasting memory in American culture derives from this later shift in perspective.⁵⁷²

Brodine spent the first few years of the war on the road after graduating from Curtis, pursuing a long-term career as a bassist. After landing a temporary position in the Seattle Symphony, he met his soon-to-be wife, Virginia, who organized local domestic workers through the Pension Union. Russell's union and Party contacts put him in direct association with Virginia, as he rarely went to a single city without visiting a known local Party outlet. Virginia spent the previous years studying Suffrage movements with her friend Cecelia Corr. She came to work with the Pension Union to advance women's rights in the industry.⁵⁷³

After the symphony season of 1940, Brodine studied welding through the National Youth Administration (NYA) to make himself useful in the booming war industry. Brodine believed that as a communist his efforts to fight fascism were better suited in the war industry than in music. Convinced that the U.S. would soon enter the war, and unable to leave each other, Russell and Virginia married on October, 1941, before setting off for California in search for employment and organizing activities. Shortly after arriving in Los Angeles, Virginia got employment at the local bureau of the *Daily Worker* while Russell used his new welding experience at the shipyards, taking home \$52 per week.⁵⁷⁴ Teaming up with a fellow musician, Phil Goldberg, the Brodines rented a house on Crenshaw Boulevard, in the west-central part of the city. After the attack at Pearl Harbor, the shipyards became an ideal place to earn quick money for seasonal musicians such as Russell and Goldberg, who played the violin. The only musical positions available between late 1941 and early 1942 were through the Janssen Orchestra in Hollywood. Things changed in June of 1941, due to shifts in the war. Not long after, Brodine and his fellow musicians found better outlets for their musical talent in local CPUSA fundraising drives.⁵⁷⁵

In the early summer of 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union with Operation Barbarossa. The move shocked some international leaders, but it was consistent with the agenda of the Fascist regime in Berlin, which was known for overstepping its bounds on sovereignty and repudiating previous agreements. An even larger shock occurred back in the United States, when American communists such

as Lumpkin and Brodine heard news that the Nazis had invaded the Soviet Union, the birthplace of modern communism. Some of these members were already in a state of disillusionment from the Nazi-Soviet pact, as discussed in Chapter 2. As the political world realigned itself for the war efforts in the wake of the Nazi invasion, so too did the community world see a public about-face by numerous groups and individuals. There was, however, almost no mention of the change in attitude throughout personal testimonies. Instead, communists reoriented their newly-infused resolve to defeat fascism and secure peace with the Soviet Union. In part shaped by anti-interventionist sentiments among the American Left, Guthrie revealed his biases once again after the Nazi invasion of Russia. A series of songs, such as *Songs of John Doe*, recorded in mid-March of 1941 and which emphasized peace with Germany, never left the recording studio once news of the Nazi invasion became public. The decision to rescind albums and songs likely faced pressure from New York City district CPUSA and national Party leaders.⁵⁷⁶ To accomplish the goal of rallying their base and community support to defeat fascism with the USSR, regional communist clubs such as the Communist Musicians Club of Los Angeles and the Third Ward Party Club of Baltimore promoted events hosted by talented artists to organize support for intervention, fund relief efforts to Russia, and promote military enlistment.⁵⁷⁷

After leaving Seattle to return to Los Angeles, Russell Brodine regularly organized violinists, violists, and cellist players to liven up *People's World* benefits while his wife, Virginia, distributed the *Daily Worker* at the Communist Musicians Club and local Los Angeles community town centers.⁵⁷⁸ In Baltimore, the Communist-led Third Ward Party Club reorganized itself into the Club Convoy located on 1603 Bank Street to dedicate itself to the supply efforts for Britain throughout the late summer and into the fall of 1941. The new organization reprinted membership cards in red, white, and blue, rather than the standard red; and it organized citizens to register for the draft. Pedersen noted that the Baltimore clubs were so successful, in fact, that they imported activists and coordinators from other areas of Maryland to make up for the deficit. By the end of summer in 1942, over 200 Baltimore communists

signed up into the U.S. Army and Merchant Marines.⁵⁷⁹ To promote the war effort and secure ongoing support, the Baltimore clubs hosted gatherings for the CPUSA that displayed Russian film, song, and art. Additionally, funding was gathered for the Russian War Relief Incorporated (RWRI), which caught the attention of the FBI as a possible communist front. The Soviet Union sent Ivey Litvinoff, wife of the Soviet ambassador, and Ludmilla Pavlichenko, a Red Army sniper, as delegates to the RWRI's charity banquets and managed to raise over \$25,000 of relief aid for Russian citizens.⁵⁸⁰ The Party's regional clubs across the nation conducted similar drives, but the actions of the organizations rarely capture the full impact of the war effort on individual communist activists.⁵⁸¹

Other communists benefitted from similar associations and relationships that derived from their political activism. After graduating from Hunter College at CUNY, Lumpkin relied on comrades and activists in Brooklyn to provide employment opportunities and a union position in the ACWA Local 328 chapter. Within a month, her fellow workers at Spartan Laundry elected her to the shop committee.⁵⁸² Davis also relied on community-based support during the war from progressive and labor-oriented activists to succeed with his candidacy for New York City Councilman in 1943. With a "jubilant" following and a "people's progressive coalition" that emphasized the unity of labor and African American struggles, Davis captivated the black community of Harlem with the prospect of electing the first communist and the first African American to the city council.

For many American communists, the war was not as fruitful or beneficial for labor as it might have been. Brodine remarked how, although the no-strike pledge and price controls established by the War Labor Board protected the livelihood and daily employment of the American people, the "patriotic duty of business to put the nation's needs before their profits was honored more in the breach than in the observance."⁵⁸³ When the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU) went on strike, Brodine hesitated to support it, due to the war-time pledge. As the war edged on, the communists within the CSU and Brodine caved and rallied support for a strike outside the Warner Brothers' lot in March of 1945.⁵⁸⁴

Unconvinced that his father's efforts in unemployment councils were sufficient to help the people of Chicago, Armando Ramirez turned to the American Youth for Democracy (AYD), which masked the CPUSA's YCL. He attended courses intended to educate Mexican-Americans in the Chicago area to organize in solidarity.⁵⁸⁵ In Birmingham, Hosea Hudson and the local district CPUSA liquidated their Party organ and reconstituted as the Alabama People's Education Association. They sought to disassociate with the label of "communist" and work toward more collective support for the war effort. Even then, the new organization faced racial discrimination and political scrutiny. Regionally, each of these communists were affected based on the conditions of their local communist work in the community, but overall the war proved to be of little assistance in resolving the struggles held most dear to community active communists: socially reinforced racism, workplace discrimination, and unemployment.⁵⁸⁶

The second half of the war was more routine for American communists than they were turbulent and divisive, like the previous decade. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and witnessing the expulsion of a union leader from the ACWA, Lumpkin rotated jobs throughout New York City until landing a position at Dictograph machine shop in Queens under a local chapter of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE). She went from hammering terminal boards to operating the shop's drill press within a matter of months, but had issues with her foreman that referred to women by their employee numbers rather than their names.⁵⁸⁷ Lumpkin's future sister-in-law, Jonnie Lumpkin, got a job working for Bell Aircraft, where she continued communists' commitment to fighting racial discrimination in the workplace. Bell hired African Americans for primarily clean-up and maintenance work, while white women were given preference in production jobs. Jonnie described how at first "black folks were eating outside at the railroad tracks [while] white folks ate inside at the lunchroom." Jonnie teamed up with the Buffalo division of the YCL, the Buffalo Urban League, and the NAACP to organize a formal conference. There Bell company leaders were accused of segregating the

dining commons and hiring white workers exclusively for production employment. Jonnie also got the opportunity to meet Letha Cloare from the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). Although the company denied the accusations, by the next day the company upgraded 140 jobs for African Americans to full-time production.⁵⁸⁸

Communists traveling the country and living together like the Brodines carried on with the understanding that "what one of us could not do alone we could sometimes do together." Russell worked in the shipyards up through 1945, when the music industry began hiring more actively. He then secured a seat in the Los Angeles Philharmonic in the spring.⁵⁸⁹ When the Carpenters' Union, a subdivision of the CSU, went on strike in March of 1945, Russell's attention and work moved toward the labor world. Russell and other musicians from his union joined with the carpenters' picket line to face company-hired police, who used intimidation and violence to clear a path for scab workers. When the Burbank police arrived, they forced the crowd into the Warner Brothers' side lot, where striking workers were held in a make-shift police quarantine. Guitarist Earl Robinson was present supporting the workers. He led the various supporting unions in a series of labor ballads, particularly "Joe Hill" and "Ballad for Americans."⁵⁹⁰ Although his part in the strike was "very small," and he was not part of the union, Russell saw supporting the striking carpenters as part of his duty as a communist in the community. "I believe," Russell states, "that unity and solidarity are important principles, and, practically speaking, the only way unions can maintain the strength to stand up to the power of corporations."⁵⁹¹

In his mind, this kind of sacrifice, which included risking to his employment at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, gave Russell purpose while dictating the limits of his activism. When the picketers were arrested outside the university, the local police used the campus grounds as a staging area to contain detainees. The willingness of the state university to accept the actions of local police, in Russell's eyes, demonstrated the "abandonment of the fiction that the government was an impartial dispenser of

justice." Although the musicians union representatives warned Russell and his fellow musicians that they were pushing the limits of the leadership's tolerance, most of their warnings were ignored. By the end of 1945, the CSU strike was won. The post-1945 atmosphere of anticommunism, however, quickly undermined the effectiveness and social acceptance of studio craft unions. Intolerance of communist presence compounded after Walt Disney testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee on the ongoing presence of communists in the media industry. Subsequent community organizing, particularly by members of studio unions, faced public ridicule and possible indictment under the Smith Act.⁵⁹²

Not all experiences for the community world were progressive during the war years. The seeds of the political breakdown were in place as early as 1939, but continued efforts to transform the political core by the national CPUSA leadership limited ongoing efforts of regional CPUSA locals. In Alabama, Hosea Hudson made preparations to liquidate the local Birmingham district of the CPUSA in 1943 and replace it with the Alabama Peoples' Educational Association (APEA). Although the APEA downplayed communist rhetoric, it did not abandon the ideological foundation of Marxism-Leninism and continued to seek the democratic-centralist organization of community members. As such, the APEA presented itself as a community-based educational group that desired broad inclusion of Alabama citizens, regardless of race, gender, and geographic location. In practice, Hudson saw the APEA as a renaming of the CPUSA's Alabama district local that caused more confusion than results. The difficulty surfaced when the APEA sought to gain assistance for striking steelworkers and instructed Hudson to downplay his talk about workplace justice for African Americans. Hudson concluded that the orders came from the top, particularly Earl Browder, and that the fundamental change between the pre-1944 era and the post-1944 era was that communists were to "cease rigid criticism...in order to have more unity" with other members of the political and social community. It wasn't until nearly a year after the war that organizers like Hudson would look back on their support for Browder's decision as a mistake.⁵⁹³

Perhaps no greater example of the growing distance between the community world of American Communism and its political core was the response by regional members of the CPUSA to the liquidation of the Party in 1944. Most communists throughout the 1930s were supportive and flexible with Browder's innovative approach to local communist politics. Many grudgingly supported the move to create the Communist Political Association (CPA) as a "pressure group within the existing political structure." Simultaneously, community-based communists such as Hudson, Lumpkin, and national leaders like John Gates, all questioned the purpose of the move. The creation of the CPA, which amounted to a quasi-community based, quasi-political front that might compare today with a political action committee. The goal of the CPA to make the politics of socialism mainstream was by far Browder's "boldest proposal." This goal was in part the result of growing anticommunism after 1941 and the lack of electoral appeal previously experienced in the Third Period. Although he never overtly mentioned it, Browder's proposal meant something that many American communists found uncomfortable: The idea that there was no more need for a communist *political* movement. In just a matter of years, the community world of American Communism responded by rejecting Browder's proposal at the political level and, in their communities, siding with Progressive coalition forces and Presidential Candidate Henry Wallace in the years leading up to the 1948 general election.⁵⁹⁴

Conclusion

It is easy to miss the significance of regionally difference experiences in American Communist history. Personal testimony and the actions of activists in their communities demonstrate that countless American communists, both inside and outside the Party, looked for social recognition, support, and acceptance based on the Constitution and American political values, rather than through the lens of ideology. Many did so not as individuals or with the help of the CPUSA organ, but rather via the complex network of associations, clubs, and community centers that created space for American communists to be vocal about their views. This is not to say that communist ideology played no role in

the lives of community organizers, but rather that it did not define their lives. Davis and the ILD would have had a difficult time arguing the legitimacy of communist doctrine instead of the civil right of Herndon as an American citizen to practice whichever doctrine he preferred. Brodine's shift into the CPUSA did not rest on his acceptance of theoretical Marxism, but rather on the practical experiences of working with communists in his career and community to work toward a more peaceful world. Lewis' CIO hired "communist sympathizers" as general counsel during the early days of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee because of the strength and cohesion that resulted from the "unanticipated political alliance" of communists and progressives.⁵⁹⁵ This approach was not some rigid Party-defined strategy nor was it doctrine via the Comintern. It was one of the ways that American communists engaged with their community and what separated their movement from the communist movements of Europe and the Third World at the same time.

Throughout the Third Period and Popular Front, American communist activism in the communities targeted elements that were both socially advantageous to leftist organizing efforts on a broad scale as well as seen to be critical elements in the coming fight for civil rights. In a manner similar to the Labor World, the communist organizing in the communities differed from region to region and organized on the precept understood as most effective for cultivating membership in the CPUSA, CLA, and WPUS. Unlike the Labor World, communists in the communities were not required to organize with the consideration of workplace racism and hostility toward working women; rather, they were able to take the fight against racism and fight for social equality in a manner that could not be waged in the workplace. Understanding the similarities and differences between these two worlds is essential for understanding American Communism as a broad radical movement, and as a movement that was capable of affecting the lives of individual Americans in a myriad of ways.

Many communists, such as Lumpkin and Brodine, were involved in both their communities and their labor organizations. These individuals experienced a duality; one where their organizing efforts in

unions directly affected their careers and livelihoods by fighting against workplace discrimination and inequality, and another where their efforts directly affected others in their community who were suffering from targeted discrimination. In certain instances, friction between the two worlds caused activists to choose one over the other; by 1945 Lumpkin was organizing almost solely in the community while Brodine was organizing principally in the Musicians Union locals. Some, such as Woody Guthrie and to some extent Hudson, had a deeper connection with their community-based experiences of communist organizing than they did their labor organizing efforts and as such developed a community-oriented understanding of communist practices. The chief concern of communist community organizing was raising class awareness, which in terms of practical work meant raising awareness of inequality and discrimination and directing individuals toward that end.

Nearly all of those who participated in the community world of American Communism held ties to the political world, but these experiences differed far more than they did with the labor world. Communists met together in small groups, and communication between upper echelons of the CPUSA and lower district clubs was so mute that decisions made at the local level did not necessarily reflect the sentiment of the national Party. As the political world fractured after 1944 and increasing fears of anticommunism purged numerous activists from the labor movement, the community world became the dominant expression of communist ideals by the end of World War II. The post-1945 community world reacted to the suspicion of a rollback on ideals: fears of rising unemployment, fears of racial discrimination, fears of losing the gains for women, and fears of social repression. Without the CPUSA to dominate the narrative, the community world of American Communism slowly shifted into the emerging civil rights movement.

CHAPTER 5: HANGING IN, 1945-1957

As World War II came to a close, so did the temporary wartime peace accord netted by American communists between themselves and the majority of American society. Numerous changes had occurred during the moral crusade era of 1928 to 1944 for American communists. The most notable changes were the re-centering of the political sphere around cooperative, yet critical, centrist politics, an accord in labor to promote a link between workers and the effort to defeat fascism, and a shift to combat issues of racism and discrimination within the community through legal strategies. The years saw an emphasis on community leaders as opposed to nationally-led agendas. These developments were in part a result of Comintern discussions about the need for communist parties to act more independently and avoid schemas for revolutionary activity. They were also a result of American communists pursuing avenues of action and organization that proved more effective in the labor and community spheres than they had been prior to 1934.

The attempt by communists such as Maurice Sugar and Benjamin Davis to engage in a legal strategy for social reform was precisely the avoidance of schematic approaches desired by Moscow. Further, it was their attempt to focus on the legal context of American courts, negotiation tables, and the needs of working Americans. Browder's decision to run a platform in 1936 that resisted Republican attempts at New Deal reform helped direct attention to the utility of Roosevelt's programs while simultaneously pushing on the Democratic voter base further Left, and thus indirectly put pressure on the Democratic Party. In both of these examples, American communists adhered to the dictums of the Comintern while engaging more directly and practically with their own society than they had prior to 1932. After World War II, American Communism, unlike during the period of the moral crusade, diffused its community activism into a broad spectrum of Progressive and Democratic alliances, and it faced condemnation and purge for its continued involvement in labor and political activism.

This chapter explores the darker period of American communist history, where its three worlds fragmented as a result of the failure of class-collaborative strategies for the CPUSA and their allies, a return of party factionalism, and a growing fear of Communism as a political ideology. The CPUSA lost its influence on domestic politics after it displaced itself in a power shuffle during the final years of the war while the FBI, along with the House Un-American Activities Committee and numerous anticommunists in labor unions, worked to "immobilize and ultimately destroy the Party and its support groups."⁵⁹⁶ The shortcoming of the class-collaborative approach established during the Popular Front became clear as communists' involvement with labor organizations quickly became suspect in the emerging Cold War decade. Some labor organizers and union leaders, facing renewed hostility from the Right, viewed communists as a general threat. A great many also believed the ongoing presence of communists in organizing efforts threatened to undo the years of success made under the banner of solidarity. There were thus both a political and a social dimension to the breakdown of the political world of American Communism.

Just how did American Communism as a movement continue while the CPUSA handled internal factionalism and a reassessment of political theory? How did anticommunism transform American communists into more passive political activists? To what extent did the "worlds" of the moral crusade continue throughout the postwar period? What new fields of engagement surfaced in the wake of McCarthyism? Could Americans be communist and yet not be members of the CPUSA or any particular Leftist organization? Much of the postwar period saw former communist ideals, such as combating racism and discrimination, shift to a general fight for civil rights in the United States that did not seek assistance from communist organizations like the CPUSA as during the Third Period and Popular Front. It is the goal of this chapter to explain how and why the American communist movement experienced a shift away from its political core and toward a broader, community-based world where communists like

Lumpkin, Charney, Davis, the Brodines, and others found practical avenues for their ideological and political proclivities.

Between 1945 and 1957, the political world, particularly the CPUSA, eroded as a dominant player in the pan-Socialist Left of the United States. Its ideals, ideology, and practical gains made throughout the course of the moral crusade resulted in large part from abandoning the sectarian and ineffective methods of the early and mid 1920s. Now they were carried on under new paths of engagement and under new leaders unassociated with the CPUSA and SWP. Many American communists dropped their identity, but they remained passionate activists, earning them the title of "ex-communist."⁵⁹⁷ Others continued to carry the label while newer recruits took it on, but most were forced to accept the new players such as the NAACP, the ACLU, and civil rights organizations who were leading the struggle and dedicated to reform through the courts. Some of these organizations, including the ACLU, had come into existence through the help of communist organizers, but they did not remain under communist leadership after the Popular Front. They also were in no direct way subsumed beneath the CPUSA in the postwar era. This created space for new ideas and new communist activity to thrive, which facilitated the transition of the movement through the 1960s. It also signaled the moment when the liberal Left, associated with civil rights reform and the labor movement, became publicly anticommunist and sought to sever its ties with the CPUSA, SWP, and other communist organizations.

Although this was an era of decline, it would be inaccurate to describe it as an era of termination, as some scholars have done. This view, as historian Edward Pintzuk described it, "omit[s] a detailed examination of Party community and organizational activity in that period."⁵⁹⁸ The CPUSA continued, despite a tremendous loss in both membership and political clout, while individual communists inside and outside the Party worked with civil rights groups to create change. By the end of the 1950s, American Communism would find itself folded into a new radical tradition led by younger Americans. As a political party, the CPUSA emerged out of the mid-1950s a genuinely different political

organization, one that returned to class collaborative policies due to their popularity but rarely succeeding in making practical gains for American workers, as they had during the Third Period. Although some could describe it as a betrayal of the revolution, one might also see it as an evolution of localized communist philosophy based on practical necessity. The outcome of political fracturing and anticommunist repression was not the dissolution of the three dominant worlds of American Communism, but rather the rapid and broad diffusion of the American communist movement into various forms of civil, social, and political action that led into the 1960s.

The End of an Era: The Breakdown of the CPUSA's Grip on the Political Sphere

As Chapter 2 explained, much of the CPUSA's displacement as the political core of American Communism began with the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and the subsequent reversal of policies following the invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany. The final blow, however, came in the final year of World War II, as the communists held onto high hopes for the future of US-Soviet relations. Misreading moves made by Stalin to dissolve the Comintern and uphold agreements between the Allied Powers at the Tehran Conference, Earl Browder, still effectively in command of the CPUSA, pushed to dissolve the organization in 1944. Browder emphasized what he called the "spirit of Tehran", dramatizing the supposed postwar peace between capitalist and communist nations. Building off the strategies of political cooperation between 1936 and 1940, the Party leaders, following Browder's lead, reorganized into the Communist Political Association (CPA). Their goal was to broaden the Popular Front into the postwar period and directly influence politics at local and state levels.⁵⁹⁹ Other leaders—particularly Foster, Ben Davis, and Eugene Dennis—viewed Browder's shifts as subsuming the theory of class struggle to "right opportunism" by "sacrificing principle for the sake of mass popularity."⁶⁰⁰ Grassroots members like Lumpkin described the "spirit of Tehran" as coinciding with the tremendous achievements of the war, particularly the defeat of European fascism and the inevitability of Japan's defeat. The

circumstances of the war's end allowed Lumpkin to, in her own words, "swallow the silly theory that some capitalists could be so smart that they would stop exploiting workers."⁶⁰¹

Condemning Browder's decision, the French Communist Party (PCF) issued a staunch criticism in April of 1945 by Jacques Duclos. Duclos attacked Browder for abandoning Marxism-Leninism and praised Foster's minority camp for resisting the efforts at reform.⁶⁰² Both at home and abroad, Browder's move manifested discontent among active communists and signaled that the cohesive political atmosphere of American Communism during the prewar years was crumbling. For Duclos and other European Communist leaders, Browder's conclusions on the significance of Tehran lacked "a Marxist analysis of the situation," particularly with regard to a "false concept of the ways of social evolution in general." Simply put, Duclos' article charged that Browder had succumbed to idealistic fantasies and purported tremendous assertions about rather insignificant outcomes. The specific part of Browder's conclusion that Duclos rejected was the assumption that Tehran implied "peaceful coexistence and collaboration in the framework of one and the same world." Duclos asserted that Browder must explain and justify the need "to reconstruct the entire political and social life of the United States," including his decision to change the Party's name to one that implied "conformity...with the political traditions of America." This new organization, the CPA, would "not intervene as a 'party'" nor "propose candidates in the elections," but rather "will work to assemble a broad progressive and democratic movement within all parties."⁶⁰³

Browder's decision implied three major ideas that could only be understood by outsiders like Duclos, but in the moment reflected real perceptions by numerous communists. First, it overemphasized the significance of cooperation between the Allied Powers during the war. The decision assumed, falsely, that the wartime alliance to defeat fascism would mean the sort of postwar peace accord promoted by Woodrow Wilson at the end of World War I and that the Soviet Union's presence in the United Nations would suffice for this process. Second, the decision assumed that the

Roosevelt's New Deal coalition could be sustained, long-term, after the war without Roosevelt himself. Unlike his fellow communists Eugene Dennis and William Foster, Browder believed in the effectiveness of New Deal policy as opposed to the identity behind it. He assumed Republicans would give up efforts to combat New Deal legislation and that the Democrats were united under liberalism. Finally, it neglected the living conditions American workers, who for the most part were happy about winning the war and fearful for the future of postwar labor relations. What Browder and the Communist Political Association (CPA) did not consider was that since 1930, the communist political world used "the mindset of people in the United States [to] determine the effectiveness of that line."⁶⁰⁴

Nevertheless, the CPA attracted more members in the first few years of its inception than the CPUSA did from its peak in 1942 until early 1944. The case could be made that Browder was simply caught up in the war's ending and the collapse of Hitler's regime. To many, regardless of their ideology, it was the beginning of a new era and the decline of an older one.⁶⁰⁵ Browder's conclusions also could be viewed as a revision of communist theory and excessively hopeful of postwar relations; but they were not unrealistic. Some members romanticized the postwar changes in attitude as visible reflections of a more prosperous world. When Saul Wellman, a communist from Detroit, returned from active duty, he went on a political action tour on behalf of the CPA. Wellman later reflected to future Party leader Eugene Dennis that "an enormous transformation in the 'newly changing labor movement'," such as the introduction of vacation pay, indicated that "a new America [had] emerged."⁶⁰⁶ Other perceptions about a hopeful future for US-Soviet relations, admittedly preemptive and naive, started as early as April of 1945, when reports about the meeting of Soviet and American troops at the Elbe River Crossing depicted a peaceful end to the European theatre.⁶⁰⁷ Browder's "Spirit of Tehran" coincided with a short-lived feeling of peace that reflected the aftermath of a major military victory. There was admiration for the Soviet Union and its effort in the war, from the Battle of Stalingrad up through the

seizure of Berlin. All of this contributed to "a change in attitude" about the public appeal of not just communist ideals but of its rhetoric about the victory over fascism.⁶⁰⁸

Coinciding with the reorganization of the CPUSA was a reversal of theoretical strategy for civil rights activism, which up until 1944 helped build significant followings in predominantly black communities. Browder's decision further distanced the CPUSA's assessment of race relations from the political consciousness of minority Americans. He declared that, "the Negro people had chosen the path of integration" and rejected the long-standing theory of "self-determination" for African Americans that stemmed back to the Sixth Comintern Congress of 1928. By "integration," Browder meant the ability for African Americans to become part of the political consciousness of America, with an equal say in voting. This alone would not have sufficed to effectively distance the CPUSA from its cohort of dedicated African Americans, but Browder advanced his theory beyond acceptable limits for civil rights activists when he asserted that "the fight for [civil rights] had already been largely won, and would be finally achieved rather effortlessly and painlessly in the postwar period."⁶⁰⁹ This latter belief brought tension within the ranks of the Party leadership and alienated some African American activists, the majority of whom were not convinced that the battle was over. Anticommunism within the black community continued to build on decades of personal and political experiences with communists, most of which were divisive and uncooperative with organizations African American activists participated in, such as the NAACP. Anticommunism had its own effect on African American engagement with communism as an ideology in the postwar years. For now, it is important to recognize the *political* aspect of the CPUSA's theory of civil rights and how it distanced numerous activists that originally found purpose and direction by the CPUSA's and ILD's staunch fight for young people of color, such as the Scottsboro Boys and Angelo Herndon in the 1930s.

A few African American communists were willing to consent to the concept of integration through electoral and legislative reform, but just as many denounced the idea that integration had

"been largely won." Hosea Hudson, accustomed to working with white organizers in the Alabama CPUSA, remained suspicious of Browder's decision until the Duclos disclosure changed his assessment. Hudson spent the following six months rebuilding the Alabama and Louisiana Party contingents with support for Foster's emerging minority camp.⁶¹⁰ John Gates, who saw his role in the CPUSA skyrocket from a regional organizer and war veteran to within the close circle of leaders by the 1950s, attended the 1946 Party conference in New York to review work "on behalf of civil rights." At the conference, the Party's leaders conceded the point that African Americans desired to remain citizens of the United States, but a cohort of "left-sectarians"^h sought to reinstate the self-determination theory. From 1928 until 1944, communists had operated on the theory that African Americans represented a "nation within a nation" and deserved sovereignty should they desire it. Party leaders and grassroots organizers challenged the vote on the basis that integration of African Americans into the political mainstream had not been "largely won." Gilbert Green, a leader in the YCL, and Doxey Wilkerson, an African American teacher who worked for the Party on civil rights initiatives, spoke out against reinstating the Stalinist concept of an oppressed nation, including "the right of separation from the United States if the local population so desired." Green and Wilkerson believed that the theory was "wrong and unrealistic" for African Americans and did little to advance civil rights in a practical manner. Despite their protest, the argument that blacks sought their own nation became once again the ideological prism through which the post-Duclos CPUSA viewed civil rights activism. Those who disagreed, such as Green and Wilkerson, were labeled guilty of "white chauvinism." It quickly sent the CPUSA, in the words of John Gates, "off in a direction opposite to that of the influential [civil rights] organizations."⁶¹¹

The reaction by the "left sectarians" to Green and Wilkerson's objections were endemic of American communists' tendency to be fickle about abandoning principles and concepts if there were no one to blame for the mistake in theory, or, if the Comintern did not explain the mistake as a

^h This is a term used by American Communists to refer generally to hyper-militant policies ranging from violent action to the theory of national self-determination for the black belt.

misinterpretation of theory. With the case of racism in the United States, pointing out that integration had yet to succeed yielded little room for a *new* interpretation of organizational theory because at the core of the theory was a dimming of class antagonisms. This appeared paradoxical in contrast to the CPUSA's depiction of class antagonisms as heightened at the end of the war. African American communist leaders like Ben Davis disregarded the significance of Browder's conclusion, stating that no amount of political agreement made at Tehran could change the fact that African Americans were "still the victim[s] of a system of national oppression and segregation." To identify the lack of substance in Browder's assertions and civil rights, Davis pointed to the mass lynchings that occurred in Monroe, Georgia, in the summer of 1946, and the tremendous effort put on local committee organizers in trade unions and Party clubs to raise awareness of the brutality of the murders. It became easy, then, for organizers like Davis and Hosea Hudson to side against Browder and push a more radical interpretation of what needs to be done for civil rights.⁶¹²

To national leaders like Eugene Dennis, Foster, and Green, Duclos' criticism of Browder, combined with the slow devolution of communist work in civil rights organizations, undid many of the relationships communist grassroots organizers had with their communities and their political leaders. Many leaders, particularly Dennis' camp, accepted the criticism of Green and Wilkerson but rejected "the public form it had taken." Quickly, factions formed and committees assembled. Dennis believed that Duclos' critique denied the CPUSA its own voice and that subsequent policy changes would be viewed "only as a result of pressures from abroad." The aftermath was "a recriminative explosion" that alienated local activists and civil rights supporters, particularly those who joined the CPUSA's political movement in the 1930s because of its emphasis on civil rights. The Party's base membership "turned against all leadership with anger and criticism," and citizens holding active Party positions across the nation resigned. Party unionists, like Lumpkin, felt reassured by Foster and Dennis' efforts to reform the CPA back into the CPUSA, but less trustful of the Party to resolve long-standing and complex issues such

as racial exploitation.⁶¹³ By the time Dennis and district leaders such as Robert Thompson and John Williamson rationalized the need to "examine together where and why we were wrong" in early 1946, it was too late for the CPUSA. After Browder's expulsion in February of that year, Dennis took charge of the Party with the blessings of Foster and long-time Party advocate Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. He did so under the context of "a difficult healing process" where he spent days trying to rationalize the future of the Party. Peggy Dennis remembered the subsequent skepticism of Party leaders as "healthy" for the movement at the time, but negative for her husband, as it placed him in a vulnerable position should he fail.⁶¹⁴

As the Party began to implode internally throughout 1946, the position held by the CPUSA within the political spectrum of the United States shifted. As over 200 bills went through congress attempting to limit bargaining powers for unions, abolish union shops, end the right to strike, legalize labor injunctions, and modify the National Labor Relations Act. This coincided with a strike wave in 1946 that saw more than five million workers went on strike in the largest coordinated strike effort in American history. Tangential to responding to labor, however, was an effort to alienate communists from the scene altogether. Anti-New Deal Republicans banked on anticommunism as a political tool since it was effective against the labor movement and simultaneously created difficulties for communists in the public sphere. The end of the CPUSA's fortunes were also subject to forces outside of its control, specifically developments internationally between the Soviet Union and the United States. It is equally important, however, how communists like Dennis and Foster viewed these developments as unfavorable to a positive public image. As the "spirit of Tehran" faded, the grim realities of Stalinist diplomacy in the postwar era acted as a mirror against the desires of the CPUSA and other communist organizations. From 1928-1941, American communists were seen as agents of a foreign power, but one that merely lacked legitimacy and sought to undermine the productivity of American industry. During the war, from 1941-1945, these same communists were welcomed as allies of a global fight against

fascism. By 1947, communists were representative of a new enemy; one that did not seek to improve the conditions of Americans along their own political philosophy, but rather desired to usurp the entire American way of life.⁶¹⁵

This well documented end of Browder's control of the CPUSA, and, in theory, the decline of the American communist movement by 1945, helps explain the diffusion of communist political work in the United States to the local level. District level communist politics, however, acted earlier than international communist leaders. Although Browder's faith in the Tehran Conference resulted from his desire to reform the CPUSA, communist Al Lannon from Maryland's district took steps to reorient the local communist politics and labor organizing practices not long after Stalin announced the dissolution of the Communist International on May 22nd, 1943. Lannon ordered local members to abandon their work in industrial clubs and integrate into existing neighborhood clubs, in addition to ending the practice of members-only meetings. The idea, in Lannon's view, was to become "community centers where everyone of a progressive bent could come and discuss the issues of the day." This came with a downside. After noting high numbers of recently recruited black members, Lannon banned the recruitment of African Americans in eastern Maryland while also ordering western districts to continue to attract black members from AFL unions in order to meet quotas. When Lannon explained the purpose of the shift, he told his fellow organizers that the workshop nuclei and closed meetings "acted as magnets for anticommunist cliques in target unions" and that "the Communist Party is now fighting for its legality." Lannon, like Dennis a year later, recognized the uphill battle against anticommunism in the final years of the war and did not want his local clubs bringing unwanted attention to local unions.⁶¹⁶

The "spirit of Tehran" had been more of a spirit of victory against fascism and imperialism than it was a hope for the future to many grassroots communists. Lumpkin knew well the importance of remaining active in her workplace, and she and her comrades took the war's victory as a signal for continuing their work, not as a sign of completion.⁶¹⁷ Lumpkin returned to her union hall for waiters in

New York City to find it empty and the union collapsed. After a few months of searching, Lumpkin landed a job at Western Electric's North Tonawanda plant, north of Buffalo. Faced with a company that almost exclusively hired younger black women within a predominantly white suburb, Lumpkin felt that union bargaining and workplace collaboration proved at the onset nearly impossible. Consistent oversight and loud machinery forced Lumpkin to try a new approach. To earn respect from her new fellow workers, Lumpkin became a "model of efficiency." In doing so, she simultaneously avoided scrutiny from the company's "efficiency experts."⁶¹⁸ John Gates, whose role in the CPUSA continued to amplify after 1945, watched as the Party gradually "reverted to policies similar to those of 1939-41" during the immediate postwar years. As the Soviet Union sought allies and friendly governments in the East as a buffer against Western encroachment, Gates saw France and Italy go to great lengths to reduce the powerful influence of their communist parties.⁶¹⁹ Both Lumpkin and Gates recognized the limited capacity for action while simultaneously refusing to give up their dedication to Marxism-Leninism as an ideology. Individual communists thus faced a decision of remaining stalwart Party adherents, or remaining active organizers for peace and justice. Many chose the latter.

The labor world of American communism saw tremendous changes from just a few years prior. The period from 1945 to 1949 reflected the growing weakness of communist activism in unions as the postwar strike wave, which to some seemed "favorable to American Communism," developed without significant involvement by the Party or any other communist organization. Two large series of strikes, in the winter of 1945 and the summer of 1946, spanned across "almost every segment of the trade unions" and captured national attention for the first time in the postwar era. First, the CIO's auto workers struck outside General Motors for nearly 120 days. The Steel Workers and Electrical Workers union, predominantly staffed by communists, assisted in negotiations while John L. Lewis led the 1946 strike of coal miners. The labor movement appeared to be "on the move." Till, the CPUSA misjudged the character of the strikes, and active communists involved began to prioritize identity with their union

over their political ties. In many cases, business employers and union leaders called out segments of the labor movement as communist.⁶²⁰ The government depicted communism as “the main obstacle” to the postwar world, going so far as to charge that “communists already influenced if they did not actually run the NLRB and the Labor Department.”⁶²¹ Political relationships were put to the test as confrontations between the government and the CIO intensified debates over wages and the legal ability for unions to recruit new members. After years of participating in a coalition with the Democratic Party, unions across the nation now found themselves at odds with President Truman and his centrist attitude toward labor. He made agreements with anti-New Deal Republicans and supported for anti-labor legislation. When communists hesitated regarding a response, their power and utility as effective organizers faded from the consciousness of American workers.⁶²²

Donald Henderson, still in command of the UCAPAWA (by that point renamed to the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture Allied Workers of America, or FTA), criticized the CIO's leadership, particularly Walter Reuther, for supporting the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. By Fall of 1950, the CIO mounted raids to purge the leadership of various FTA locals in California such as 78 in the Salinas Valley and 7 of Stockton. Most of the locals merged with the ILWU to form the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union (CWFLU). At the end of the year, the CIO's national leadership won an NLRB election to become the sole bargaining agent for the CWFLU locals while Henderson and the rest of the FTA faced expulsion from the CIO on the basis of "following the purpose and program of the Communist Party."⁶²³ The union's tumultuous history with the CPUSA ended after that fateful moment, and the increasing pressure of Taft Hartley Act to provide loyalty oaths resulted in deportation for many of the union's key organizers until finally the union itself was expelled from the CIO.⁶²⁴

George Charney returned to Harlem from the war in the summer of 1945 and within hours was confronted with the positive news of his reassignment to county organizer for Manhattan as well as the bad news that his long time friend, Bill Lawrence, was expelled from the Party. Lawrence was an

inspiration to Charney ever since he joined the CPUSA, but no amount of Party history could turn the tide “against the frenetic mood that engulfed the Party in the period of crisis and changeover.” As someone who experienced the fight against fascism first hand, Charney returned "eager to resume work in the [CPUSA]," but was shocked at how the Duclos article so radically altered temperament of his district. Bob Thompson, at the time the district Party leader in Manhattan, reminded Charney that his new position within Party leadership had to embody "all the wisdom of the class struggle," and that abandoning his ties with his old friend were necessary.

District leaders like Thompson evolved during the war to become "the personification of the vanguard," and as a veteran of both the Spanish Civil War and the Pacific theatre of World War II, represented the epitome of the Bolshevik tradition in the eyes of many New York communists, especially younger and more militant activists prone to the fiery rhetoric of Duclos and Foster. Thompson’s ascendancy to power over the New York district, however, was less the result of his work in the war than it was the Party's reconstitution under Foster and Dennis. Thompson was a dedicated supporter of Foster and viewed his role in the New York district as similar to Foster's in rescuing the Party as a whole. Even though the Comintern was dissolved and the previous standards of the Popular Front over, Thompson asserted control over the Manhattan district where organizational discipline, class and Party loyalty were measured "in international, Soviet terms." To long-time members like Charney, this was neither new nor radical. Only in hindsight does Charney admit that there existed the “bitter truth” that most “[communists] believed in the spirit of Tehran and postwar unity” but nevertheless “instinctively clung to the Party.”⁶²⁵

It is also important to note that middle-ranking leadership did not overlook nor misunderstand that Duclos’ criticisms spoke on behalf of Stalin. Charney watched as the attacks laid down against Browder served as the basis for a more general assault on Browderism “as a species of revisionist philosophy that was rampant in Communist Parties everywhere.” Duclos and Foster’s insistence that

capitalism was inherently reactionary, expansionist, and imperialistic matched the attacks later made against Josep Tito, resulting in Yugoslavian expulsion from the Cominform. In addition to Tito, Charney noted similarities between the treatment of Browder and László Rajk in the Hungarian show trials in 1949 conducted by Mátyás Rákosi. By 1950, it appeared as if the frame-up trials in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia “were actually the climax of the campaign originally unleashed by the Duclos article against Browder and the [CPUSA].” At the time, however, Charney also felt expectant of criticism for the United Front; that the CPUSA perhaps was guilty of going “too far” in its class collaborationism for the sake of defeating fascism and that “now the time had come for readjustment and correction.” In this sense, Duclos’ link to Stalin was ignored and Charney as well as his fellow middle-ranking leaders accepted the idea that it was time to end peaceful relations with liberals and progressives and refocus on the international class war.⁶²⁶

Joseph Starobin pointed out that the postwar developments in politics and labor raised new questions about organizing and ideology to which communists were incapable of forming an effective response. As a result, many turned away from the CPUSA, or simply stopped attending meetings, rather than outright reject the Party or communism as an ideology. Subsequently, the labor and community worlds of American Communism diffused to the grassroots as individuals began to focus and emphasize on their own answers to societal ills. These answers, in turn, did not require the authority of groups outside their immediate spheres of influence, let alone approval from a national Party committee or newspaper. Among the questions they asked were the extent to which government should be involved in bargaining processes, particularly with regard to whether or not this constituted a form of industrial nationalization, what role unions should take in national economic affairs such as price controls, and above all the union's influence on political foreign policy. With the CPUSA involved in its own internal breakdown at the national level, pro-active communists at the local level rallied support behind Henry Wallace in the 1948 Presidential election.⁶²⁷

The 1948 election represented the decisive moment when a large contingent of American communists turned toward the Progressive Party and the ideals of social democracy, in contrast to the Stalinism of CPUSA leaders and the more hyper-Left communism of the SWP and the Workers' Party of America (WPA). At the upper stratum of the CPUSA and SWP, support for Wallace was based on his stances against the U.S. Economic Recovery Program; the Marshall Plan. At the same time, communist leaders and editors of the *Daily Worker* were estranged by Wallace's "harmful remarks" about the Soviet Union regarding political purges. It took clarification by Eugene Dennis to explain that the his comrades "failed to grasp" that Wallace represented their only option against the "get tough with Russia policy" of the Democrats and Republicans.⁶²⁸ Some, like Russell Brodine, viewed the election as a means to an end like the CPUSA's support for Roosevelt during the Popular Front. Brodine saw the Wallace campaign as beneficial for the Left in general since it "forced Truman...to woo former Democrats by taking over some of the main planks of the Progressive platform."⁶²⁹ In this manner, Wallace was continuing what the CPUSA had done in the late 1930s; acted as a leftward gravitational pull on Democratic policy. Brodine's cultural icons also supported Wallace, such as Katherine Hepburn, who spoke at a pro-Wallace rally in Los Angeles in 1948. Having film celebrities and folk stars on their side likely fueled enthusiasm, but Brodine suspected it wasn't enough to deter supporters from voting Democrat in order to resist Republican encroachment on power.⁶³⁰

Others, like Lumpkin and George Charney, favored Wallace and his program as a continuation of "FDR's policy of peaceful coexistence with the Soviet Union and other New Deal policies that benefitted working families." Lumpkin described Wallace's campaign as "the most important third-party campaign of [her] lifetime" that set a precedent for her growing understanding of the American political spectrum.⁶³¹ Ben Gold, president of the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union (IFLWU) and proud Party member, believed that Wallace and the PP ticket was "the hope of the nation for peace, progress, and prosperity....in this critical period."⁶³² For Charney, the Progressive Party's origins in the

"shifting trends of New Deal groups within the Democratic Party" overtly countered the Truman administration's perpetuation "of unrest, confusion, and fear." As unions and working class community organizations became increasingly "at loggerheads" with the direction Truman took after the war, communists in communities across the nation "stepped in to embrace" Wallace and his political program as the "historic fulfillment" of the ideals of the Popular Front. Many, like Charney, for the first time saw the future of their movement in more social democratic politics than Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory.⁶³³

At initial New York district CPUSA meetings in the early part of 1948, Charney noted an "overwhelming support" for Wallace and the PP. This was in part due to the "dim" awareness most of the New York City membership had of the factionalism at the national Party level, but also of a lack of acceptance among many members that gaining broad approval from the labor movement was a necessary precursor to rallying behind a new political organization.⁶³⁴ Numerous communists who performed political action duties joined the Wallace-supporting Progressive Citizens for America (PCA) to counter the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), which supported Truman. Their goal was to build a political faction to sway liberals away from the center. These more politically-oriented communists looked to long-time Party historian and writer Herbert Aptheker, who described the purpose of the pro-Truman ADA as an attempt "to prolong the life of an obsolete social order."⁶³⁵ Communists in labor unions and the organizers who acted as mediators between the Party districts and union shop nuclei, however, insisted on supporting whomever labor supported. UAW President Walter Reuther and CIO President Phillip Murray hesitated to support Wallace, in part because of the tremendous amount of political support initially shown by communists, even as Foster publicly advocated a "wait-and-see attitude."⁶³⁶ Murray ultimately refused to support Wallace, and threw his support and that of the CIO behind Truman. By 1948, labor viewed Truman as the man who attempted

to halt the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act, which threatened to limit the bargaining power of unions. The President's opposition to the act factored heavily into the decisions of Reuther and Murray.

Charney witnessed the slow evolution within the New York CPUSA district of support for Wallace despite early requests to wait for a response by labor. Those who were, in the spring of 1948, decisively pressing for labor's general support, by the summer "argued that Reuther, James Carey, and others could not stem the rank-and-file upsurge in favor of Wallace." Those who remained critical of Wallace pointed to his speeches at Madison Square Garden, where he lashed out at postwar Soviet diplomacy. Much of the negative communist press coverage of Wallace came from the WPA's *New Militant*, which from 1946 up through the election published a series of articles depicting the ex-Vice President as a warmonger who sought to use the atomic bomb against the Soviet Union. As the summer of 1948 went by, however, their criticisms became muted by increasing numbers of pro-Wallace Party members. At the end of the summer, communists in New York and Chicago became convinced that "the [Progressive Party] would achieve broad labor support in spite of its 'misleaders.'"⁶³⁷

Communist support for Wallace, while understandable through the lens of grassroots Party members such as Lumpkin and Charney, ultimately drew a line in the labor world that could not be undone. As the political leaders in New York and Chicago increased emphasis on their support for Wallace throughout mid and late-1947, communists staffed in labor unions throughout Detroit, New York, and Berkeley were not as supportive. At a New York district meeting held in December, 1947, the communist unionists were skeptical over the political wing's desire for a full push behind a third party movement. Unionist Mike Quill charged that forcing support for Wallace would divide the CIO and threaten to undo past gains. Party representative Robert Thompson, on the other hand, argued that such a split was negligible if it meant getting Wallace into office. After the meeting, numerous communists still active in unions "quietly" left the Party scene, while others from the meeting reluctantly accepted support for Wallace. In some circumstances, the popularity and support of

communist organizers, such as the leading board of UAW Local 600 in Detroit, permitted the union to remain outspoken Party members while simultaneously defying the CIO's national leadership and its support for Truman. This, however, was one of few exceptions to the general rule that the decision to support Wallace saw labor communists either leave the Party, or leave the union.⁶³⁸

What became continuously clear in the early years after World War II was a return of the divisive factionalism that had marked the pre-Third Period eras. It began with Browder, but exacerbated with the Wallace campaign. While the policies of communist governments after 1947 hardened into the strict division between Eastern and Western spheres of influence, Foster and his faction within the CPUSA "increase[d] pressure" on the New York and Chicago membership to resist Dennis' attempt to continue a coalition-style approach to public action. Dennis believed that the CPUSA's real purpose remained in a Popular Front-style alliance with progressives. Dennis and his faction used the pages of the *Daily Worker* to emphasize resistance to Foster, who desired to see a return to the Third Period's approach of contrasting communist groups *from* progressives. Opposition originated around Foster's removal of Jack Stachel from the position of trade union director because he lost the race for president of the United Auto Workers to Walter Reuther. As a response, Dennis' faction fired the editor-in-chief of the *Daily Worker*, and elected Gates to the position.⁶³⁹ After eighteen years of ending factional disputes, factionalism once again became a dominant feature of the American communist political sphere, effectively limiting the leadership at the national level in 1947.

The manifestation of renewed postwar factionalism took on two main issues: "self-examination" on the part of reemphasizing "scientific socialism" across all districts starting with drawing the line on Yugoslavian independence, and a campaign against perceived "white chauvinism" within the ideological ranks of the Party. These efforts surfaced during debates about Yugoslavian independence and were endemic of a desire to emphasize "scientific socialism" as the most effective and rational way to understand the human experience. The concept originated with Frederick Engels with a pamphlet on

scientific versus utopian socialism, but by 1938 came to represent the Soviet Union's pseudoscientific attempt to assess everything ranging from "the study of social life" to "the study of society" through the lens of Marxist materialism.⁶⁴⁰ Starobin suggested that one of the difficulties faced by the CPUSA in trying to avoid the return of factionalism was ironically the increased governmental and public repression of the postwar period. The "most repressive aspect" of the Smith Act trials from 1949 to 1953, Starobin states, were not the threats to personal liberty, but rather the shift in public opinion against communism to the point that moderate leftists found themselves in a situation where "unless they cooperated abjectly with these committees they faced not only prosecution but also ostracism." Self-examination in an era of societal judgment thus became a function of the CPUSA. Above all this period of self-examination sought to understand the cause of political dilemmas "in the make-up, behavior, and capability of Party members" as opposed to question the palatability of the ideology with the American people.⁶⁴¹

The Yugoslav-Soviet split, which began in 1948, further increased factionalism within American communist circles, as it reflected basic opinions about the sovereignty of nations and amplified concerns about possible ideological differences. Yugoslavia, having been occupied by the Nazis throughout World War II and assisted only minimally by the Red Army, recognized Josip Tito as the provisional Prime Minister in early 1945. In the aftermath, Soviet diplomats focused their complaints on Tito's nationalism and resistance to becoming a Soviet satellite. Following Stalin's application of scientific socialism to social development, Tito emphasized national sovereignty and resisted joining the USSR. This appeared, to the leaders of the Soviet Union and other European communist parties, as counterrevolutionary and utopian in its assessment of postwar possibilities. How could a communist place the abstract *nation* over the proletarian revolution? For American communists, this question came to be a measurement of one's tolerance for Soviet philosophy and differences among factionalist camps following Foster, Dennis, and Davis.⁶⁴²

Another test for American communists in the search for scientific socialism was the "campaign on behalf of Lysenko" to reject "all schools of psychological thought except Pavlov's." Trofim Lysenko worked throughout the 1930s and early 1940s in Soviet agriculture studying theories of environmentally acquired genetics. Lysenko's theory of soft inheritance from external conditioning rejected the hard inheritance theories of Mendelian genetics. Lysenko's work had a profound effect on American communist leaders who debated the issue not in terms of legitimacy but rather of using it to draw the line for members. After Lysenko's theories were accepted in the Soviet Union, he was made director of the Institute of Genetics at the Soviet Union's Academy of Sciences. Numerous Soviet scientists who refused to renounce Mendelian genetics faced forced resignations, and support for Lysenko back in the United States "became the test of Marxian orthodoxy" for American biologists and geneticists. Within the CPUSA, a wedge between members with and members without knowledge of Freud and Mendel widened as committees and subcommittees were held. Even long-time Party leaders, such as Avrom Landy, who attempted to relate Marxism scientifically to the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century and thus place it within the context of the United States, faced judgment for refusing to accept the Soviet pseudoscience. Although Landy's conclusions might be seen as an attempt to mend the theory to existing Marxist philosophy, Party leaders were more interested in conformity than they were rationalizing of theory.⁶⁴³ As the Party leadership's obsession with Soviet philosophy intensified divisions, so too did it further alienate educated communists and activists, such as Landy, from their more ideological comrades.

The conclusion drawn by many CPUSA leaders was that if "treachery" in "powerful" communist states such as Yugoslavia was real and if treasonous scientists were confirmed in the communist motherland, an "inexperienced and vulnerable" Party such as their own was bound to have its own cohort of subversives working under the radar. Quickly, and without hesitation, CPUSA districts across the nation began a slow criticism of former prominent members and supporters via the *Daily Worker*

and *Political Affairs*. The staunchest critics at the time were John Gates and Gilbert Green, who, between October 1949 and March 1950, criticized numerous Party members and fellow travelers over support for Yugoslavian independence. Among the most popular activists singled out were playwright Lillian Hellman and Progressive Party activist and former Party lawyer O. John Rogge. The Party condemned their publication of Yugoslav theories on independence in their works. Louis Adamic, a long time Party supporter and writer, lost his public standing as a progressive among Left circles, once his support for Tito became known.⁶⁴⁴

Arguably a more blatant example of increased Party factionalism was the ill-planned political campaign against perceived "white chauvinism" from 1948 to 1953.⁶⁴⁵ The term's use as a pejorative against racism previously referred to socialists and activists unwilling to accept the national self-determination theory for African Americans during the Third Period, but by 1948 was an effective tool for denouncing deviants of the Party line. In 1949, Pettis Perry, CPUSA Chairman for the Negro Commission, issued a staunch call for communists to stand up against "chauvinist moods and themes" within American society and within local ranks of Party districts. Although masked as a positive way for the CPUSA to reassess itself, the campaign examined "everyday language for signs of racism" among members. It quickly saw numerous high-ranking district leaders demoted for "real or alleged insults to black members." Specific terminology, such as using the phrase "whitewash" or "black sheep," was deemed inherently chauvinist, and its usage became suspect to demotion in and in some cases expulsion from the Party. Over a short period of time, the "motivations became blurred" as both blacks and whites in unions and the CPUSA began "to take advantage of the enormous weapon which the charge of 'white chauvinism' gave them to settle scores, to climb organizational ladders, [and] to fight for jobs." Simultaneously, it gave numerous black communists the chance to check the tendencies of their white comrades. Organizers and activists spread out into the AFL, CIO, and Progressive Party, and the same "search for heresy" manifested across leftist circles all over the nation.⁶⁴⁶

Grassroots communists viewed the national campaign against white chauvinism much differently from their Party leaders. They viewed it as a practical effort to combat community racism in the postwar era that could not be done a decade prior. Sherman Lebovitz in Philadelphia directed the local CPUSA clubs to rally to the defense of an African American who was fired once returning white soldiers came home from the war. Lebovitz and his district comrades distributed leaflets door-to-door and engaged enlisted troops to consider supporting those who helped maintain the local economy during the war. While ultimately a failure “in an atmosphere that guaranteed returning veterans priority and preference for jobs,” Lebovitz believed that the local communist effort to combat white chauvinism represented a continuation of efforts to combat localized racism while “an inordinate number of blacks” faced convictions in “frame-up rape trials.” Lebovitz cited his “witness to the executions of the Martinsville Seven in Virginia as well as the execution of Willie McGee in Mississippi” as the primary trials formed his concern over racism in the postwar era.⁶⁴⁷

As American activists around the country geared for a fight in the face of McCarthyism, Foster and Dennis instead decried American postwar domestic policy as a rise of fascism unparalleled even to that of Nazi Germany and "militarist Japan." Although hyperbolic and divisive, Foster and Dennis' were not altogether unrealistic, given the atmosphere of politics and tensions within the labor movement. Similarly, growing concerns about the federal government's plan to scale back wartime fixed price controls convinced many inside the labor world of American Communism that the war had offered the domestic labor movement only temporary relief. In 1946 strike wave seemed to confirm this hypothesis as more than 5,000 strikes in steel encompassing over 4.5 million workers demonstrated that the gains made prior to the war and secured through the war would not be easily relinquished by American working families.⁶⁴⁸ To Dennis and Foster, the federal government's response to strikes, particularly the US Chamber of Commerce's condemnation of communists influencing labor, mirrored the passive approach to repression done by the National Socialist Party of Germany and necessitated “an anti-fascist

peace coalition” by the Left.⁶⁴⁹ In the fall of 1948 at the CPUSA's fourteenth convention, fascism was declared to be a virtual reality throughout the United States.⁶⁵⁰ If, during the Third Period, the CPUSA's claims about the imminent danger of capitalism's collapse seemed somewhat convincing with the Great Depression, their conclusions in 1948 must have appeared as a complete reversal in the logic of Party leadership, regardless of how rational their concerns may seem in hindsight. The Party's language about fascism in the United States directly conflicted with the views of grassroots organizers, who displayed more hope for future efforts based on the war's outcome. Activists like Lumpkin saw the postwar strike wave as a continuation of previous efforts, not an effort to combat fascist policies of the federal government.⁶⁵¹

Historians Irving Howe and Lewis Coser argued that communists and the CPUSA pushed a policy emphasizing the fascist nature of the Truman Administration. They pointed to the psychological effects of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 and the Marshall Plan one year later. While both were policies of anticommunism that sought to contain communist activity outside the borders of the United States, the two doctrines came late to communist criticisms and were viewed as fascist initiatives to sow divisions among CPUSA members. As early as March 1946, TUUL organizer John Stachel worried about fascism when he suggested that the labor movement's frustration lay with a forced acceptance of a wage freeze during the war coupled with a no-strike pledge that made it impossible to negotiate working conditions and pay. With the removal of price controls "the wage movement," Stachel stated, "embraced the majority of organized workers" and "large sections of the AFL" to turn against business "monopolists" who sought to undermine trade union legitimacy.⁶⁵² By ignoring the emphasis on labor concerns in the aftermath of the war, historians tend to think about communists in relation to abstract cultural polemics, such as the idea that a culture of fear and paranoia, mixed with Truman's expansion of the Federal budget and the inability to get civil rights reform through the Republican-dominated Congress, "prevented [communists] from comprehending or relating to postwar American life" as they had

prior.⁶⁵³ This was true for specific communists, such as members of the national CPUSA leadership, but false for many grassroots communist organizers active in the mid-to-late 1940s, including Lumpkin, who got divorced from her first husband after the war. As the Truman Administration passed policies denounced by CPUSA leaders as fascist, Lumpkin focused her organizing efforts on the Wallace campaign for the Progressive Party and her engagement with African American activist Frank Lumpkin. Based on the continuity between her wartime activism and postwar engagement with progressives, Lumpkin appeared to have no need for the Party's ideological conclusions about Truman's policies. Instead, she and other grassroots organizers took their lead from the demands of their community.⁶⁵⁴

Communist leaders such as Foster became enamored with Churchill's depiction of a world divided on March 5th, 1946.⁶⁵⁵ With the economic power of unions effectively creating political power, relationships between the labor movement and the business community became politicized. Communists viewed the 1946 strike wave with disdain and a "settlement" that organized labor in the United States could reshape class relations.⁶⁵⁶ They also typically blamed the settlement on the business community's anticommunism. George Morris depicted the business community's negotiations as an attempt to politicize unionism in the same manner that Truman politicized the Cold War and support for Europe. Targeting individuals for their refusal to support the Marshall Plan and refusal to support Truman in 1948, the House Un-American Activities Committee pushed a public policy of loyalty.⁶⁵⁷ This prompted businesses to take a defensive stance toward organized labor. With passive support from the Truman administration, all tactics including violent strikebreaking were considered "justified." To grassroots communist labor organizers, all that was built over the past decade appeared to be coming undone.⁶⁵⁸

In some cases, communists fought back at the local level and relied upon circulated CPUSA periodicals for public support. Communists in the IFLWU fought against House Un-American Activities Committee attempts to discredit the union based on their political affiliation in the fall of 1948. Battling

condemnations of his union run by communist thugs, IFLWU President Ben Gold exposed the criminal nature of corporate attempts to coerce and bully workers away from the union. After testimony given by Irving Potash, two known gangsters, who went by the pseudonyms "Lepke" and "Gurrah," were arrested for the suspected murder of Morris Langer, manager of the IFLWU Newark Local.⁶⁵⁹ During a debate over charges of conspiracy made by company leaders, Gold reminded Texas Representative Wingate Lucas and Missouri Representative Max Schwabe that he never hid his Party affiliation and that "communists will fight to the death any fascist conspiracy to overthrow our democratically-elected government." Gold insisted that the notion of illegal practices that undermined the nation were "organized by the employers and gunman," not by the Communist Party. After the debate concluded, Gold declared that "Congress has opened up a new phase of undemocratic and un-American activities aimed at destroying the rights of the people."⁶⁶⁰

Armando Ramirez, at the time 17 and looking for a job, signed up for work with the American Youth for Democracy in his hometown of Chicago while attending classes at the city's Abraham Lincoln School—named after the communist brigade that fought in the Spanish Civil War. Ramirez's disconnect with postwar American life, however, resulted less from estrangement from politics, and more the result of witnessing continued persecution of his fellow Chicago based Mexican-Americans.⁶⁶¹ Rita Verna, a third generation communist from Philadelphia, believed the division between her openly communist mother and more sympathetic but hesitant father created friction as far as her understanding of the tolerable limits of her public activism.⁶⁶² Danny Rubin, while not a formal member of the CPUSA until 1953, kept active in the Labor Youth League of Philadelphia to promote resistance to the Korean War between 1950 and 1952.⁶⁶³ Much like the various worlds of American Communism, there was enough complexity in the levels of social activism among communists during the late 1940s to question the idea that political estrangement prevented communists from relating to their communities. While the CPUSA's leadership most certainly faced handicaps in pushing its national domestic policies, this did not

necessarily translate into an inability to "comprehend" or "relate" to postwar American life by grassroots CPUSA activists and communists without affiliation to the CPUSA.

By 1950 and the outbreak of the Korean War, the CPUSA's fracturing had reached its ultimate limit as responses to the growing effects of McCarthyism continued to be understood as an increase in domestic fascism, causing unions and civil rights organizations to break any remaining ties with the Party's leaders and top organizers. Prominent communists in the unions believed they could swing the membership against McCarthyist tactics, but were routinely disappointed. Most unions, including those where communists held significant presence, were unwilling to sacrifice the gains made for the sake of defending specific individuals. In the CIO, resistance to the CPUSA's active members was conducted on a "less democratic and principled basis" in some unions than it was in others. The National Maritime Union had a long and passionate history with its communist activists, dating back to its ties with Homer Brooks and his leadership between 1937 and 1938.⁶⁶⁴ These unionists banked on continued support from the largely African American and Puerto Rican workers who were "not easily frightened by association with communists." Nevertheless, the NMU broke with the Party in 1946. Over the course of the next four years, it refused to participate with the Party's plan for a unification of maritime unions. Communists within the union faced accusations of romanticizing Stalinist policies while doing little, if anything, for the union organizationally in the postwar period.⁶⁶⁵

Throughout the 1950s, the efforts to disrupt the local political efforts of the CPUSA evolved into a methodical routine pushed by the FBI and its Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). CPUSA members were accustomed to FBI "tails" and "informants" attending nearly all major events across the country if it was actively promoted by the national Party. The designers of COINTELPRO intended for their presence in local spheres of radicalism to "increase factionalism, cause disruption, and win defections" among the CPUSA membership. One way of doing this was to nurture factionalism between CPUSA locals and the SWP by having informants deliver CPUSA meeting information and membership

lists to local SWP outlets. The SWP would then distribute leaflets, attend CPUSA meetings, and tried to sway members into their organization. The FBI also instructed Detroit informants to purchase copies of the SWP's *Militant* and deliver them to the state leadership of the CPUSA. This methodology removed the FBI from the burden of having to ideologically combat domestic communism at all; instead, the resurgence of factionalism rooted in the political divisions of American Communism from 1928/29 helped assure Washington that domestic communism would never regain the traction it once had.⁶⁶⁶

While anticommunism rattled the politics and social acceptability of communist presence in domestic American society, the CPUSA managed to keep a majority of its supporters as well as a large portion of its postwar membership up until 1951.⁶⁶⁷ At the same time, Foster and Dennis made little progress on reassessing the direction and course of the movement. Regional leaders also made few effective efforts to combat anticommunist persecution, other than take a stand for free speech.⁶⁶⁸ Between the disconnect of the upper and lower Party stratum, there was a desire to ask questions and seek historical explanations about/for the setbacks and defeats, but there was little effort to question the Party line of following the guidance of Foster and Dennis. Many likely disliked the notion of bringing back factional strife, particularly as leaders and organizers were hauled off to court for their political ideology.

Making Due: Communist Activity and Life 1945-1957

The Smith Act, passed in 1940, by 1945 stipulated that advocacy of Marxism-Leninism amounted to conspiracy to overthrow the government. The subsequent Smith Act trials and escalating Cold War that came to dominate the narrative of postwar America did not collapse the overarching ideology or the will of individuals that claimed allegiance to it.⁶⁶⁹ Furthermore, it did not see the end of new membership in the CPUSA and constituent organizations, albeit at lesser numbers than during the Popular Front. Just like the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991 did not destroy the ideals of communism, the diffusion of the collaborationist, Popular Front-motivated political world did not

destroy the ideals of those who continued to identify as communist, nor those who held communist principles such as abolition of private property. Issues such as racism and the Party's resistance to social concepts like "white chauvinism" remained attractive features of the communist movement. Since the late 1920s, those who identified as *communist* in the United States had a political refuge, a cohort of like-minded individuals, and a bandwagon of "fellow travelers." This political refuge came in many forms: The SPA, the CPUSA, the CLA, the SWP, and the WPUS. By 1957, being communist had become socially estranged and politically discredited by the ideological front of the Cold War and the failure of class collaborationist policies after the Popular Front. For those who valued communist ideals, expressing them became a consistent battle of countering charges of radicalism and logically asserting them within the boundaries of the American judicial system.

After the war, the communist movement maintained strength by attracting a cohort of activists passionate about militantly challenging racial discrimination. For communists who remained home, such as Brodine and Lumpkin, the fight against Nazi tyranny and the aggressive military policies of Japan reinforced their support for the CPUSA despite the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Some believed that fighting against Nazism and Japanese aggression set standards that would then be brought home. Others' experience fighting in the war created a new understanding of social relations that conflicted with the long-standing racial discriminatory practices in the South. One Mississippi war veteran recalled how he witnessed, first hand, the quick and immediate return to Jim Crow normalcy and its effect on his subsequent joining the communist movement after returning from his tour of duty in the Pacific in the summer of 1945. Mr. "M" grew up the son of a Jewish clothing merchant; one of the few merchants in his county of Mississippi who employed African Americans.¹ At age 17 and prior to learning about communism, M understood a link between racial discrimination of Jews in Europe with the discrimination of African Americans in the United States. Because of his religious upbringing, M felt emotionally attached to the

¹ Mr. "M" preferred to remain anonymous.

development of conditions in Europe. On December 8th, 1941, one day after Pearl Harbor, M found his local recruiting station and joined the Army Air Corps. By 1944, he was promoted to Captain at the start and given an agitate role in a unit tasked with building and maintaining a flight echelon airport for supply missions on New Guinea. At the time, African Americans were placed in segregated "Army engineer" units and tasked with the harsh effort of destroying jungle and building expansive airstrips and bunkers under the command of the Army Air Corps. In October of 1944, preparing for the Marines invasion of the Philippines, M's unit was reassigned to a staging area on the island of Layte but arrived a week before their equipment. They were ordered to bunker in with one of their units of Army engineers. Since the engineer units had their own segregated sergeant commanders, this was M's first time witnessing African Americans hold positions of authority. This "life changing" moment would prove to be impactful on his next major experience with civil rights one year later.⁶⁷⁰

Once victory in the Pacific was assured, M's unit was directed back to San Francisco to begin the process of returning troops home. Upon arrival, a troop train picked up hundreds of soldiers as they came into port and organized them by car to be dropped off at specific locations as the train made its trek across the nation. M's car was organized for the soldiers of Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and was made up entirely of African American GIs. As the only officer of the car, M was assigned command and directed orders for the men "for the purposes of travel." Over the course of the two week-long train ride to St. Louis, M and his travel unit bonded over celebratory drinks they had stocked into their car prior to leaving the coast. Their car was detached in St. Louis and reattached to the Southern train line, The City of New Orleans, to make its way South. Lacking a mess car on the new train, the Army issued M and his car meal tickets backed by the U.S. government for use when the train stopped.⁶⁷¹

A day later, the train stopped in Memphis. The Memphis train station had two levels, the lower of which housed shops and a diner while the trains arrived on loading platforms above. M led his men into the diner, sat down, and prepared to order breakfast. Not long after they were seated, the

manager addressed M directly, and informed him that the restaurant "cannot serve niggers, it's against the law." Though M was not a victim of Jim Crow, he knew well how it functioned in his home state of Mississippi. He also recognized that although many of the men of his train also came from a background of Jim Crow, most had been away from it for at least two years and, more importantly, they "won the war" for the purposes of protecting the very restaurant that refused to serve them. M informed the waiter that if they couldn't be served, his men would "bust up his store" and he would do nothing to prevent it. Turning the situation into a confrontation ultimately worked: M and his unit got their government-paid meal and they did so on their own terms. The event proved "transformational, in retrospect," for M, as he subsequently sought out civil-justice seeking organizations after leaving Camp Shelby.⁶⁷²

The idea that African Americans put their lives on the line for the rights enjoyed by citizens during World War II, only to be faced with discrimination and inequality upon return, defined the civil rights movement for soon-to-be communists such as Mr. M in the postwar years. M's confrontational "political act" with the diner's manager resulted in new attitudes about civility and citizenship, but at first he decided to take advantage of the GI Bill and attend college at Tulane University. There, he met Joe Blum, who came from New York, as well as former GIs who, like him, were inspired by left-wing politics and social justice. Blum became M's roommate and introduced him to the local New Orleans district CPUSA. Not long into his first year at Tulane, M joined the American Veterans Committee (AVC) after he heard about its reputation as a veteran's organization working to support local communities.

The AVC had "propped up" in various parts of the community, and targeted universities such as Tulane to attract returning GIs. M became a prominent member of the New Orleans chapter, which was separate from but worked with the Tulane campus chapter to organize events. Unlike other veterans organizations, the AVC offered full membership to all those who participated in the war, including women and people of color, and served as a tether for left-leaning GIs seeking to further their

involvement in civic activism.⁶⁷³ At first, the CPUSA discouraged its members from joining or participating in AVC events. After the American Legion banned communists from membership in 1946, the CPUSA changed its position and encouraged communist veterans to join the AVC and attract left-leaning GIs such as M. This continued until the AVC ousted its communist membership between 1947 and 1948, decreasing national membership by almost 80,000.⁶⁷⁴ The decision to oust communist members was made by referendum at local levels, but nationally the choice was made to avoid any individuals supportive of "totalitarian parties." For M, however, the limited amount of time he had exposure with communist organizers was sufficient to gravitate his activism outside the orbit of the AVC.⁶⁷⁵

The New Orleans AVC chapter worked with the Tulane campus chapter and the local district CPUSA to organize voter registration drives for non-whites and challenge local Jim Crow ordinances. M described this as an "incipient movement" to the later voter drives of the 1960s, where M and his local communists and students went door to door to promote civil equality and social acceptance. M and his team also attempted to bridge the segregated atmosphere of the Tulane campus by inviting African American scholars from nearby colleges to speak. Eventually, they settled on attracting sociologists from Fisk University and campaigned for over a year at Tulane to gather support, but failed to get permission from campus administration. Not wanting to be deterred, the AVC rented a local hall in the city and had speakers come meet with students and discuss civil justice reform. Between fall of 1947 and spring of 1948, M transferred to the University of Michigan to study law. There, he linked up with one of the largest national CPUSA districts and continued to organize students and community members against social injustices, even after he left the Party to pursue his career practicing civil rights law in the early 1960s.⁶⁷⁶

For the communists remaining active in labor, the political world appeared shut off from new developments after 1945. Once president Truman ordered loyalty oaths extended to workers in

defense industries, Senator Robert A. Taft and Representative Fred Hartley worked in June of 1947 to pass the single greatest handicap legislation for labor organizing: the Taft-Hartley Act. Although the act was unpopular across nearly all sections of the American labor community, it was fueled by business opposition to the National Labor Relations Board. As a political idea it, it was viewed as a way to bridge postwar centrism between New Deal Democrats and moderate Republicans.⁶⁷⁷ Not enough attention is given, however, to the lack of CPUSA attempts at raising awareness of the issue and organizing against anticommunism as they had done so in the 1930s. Leftist leaders in organized labor faced a forced "Hobson's choice" of organizing the rank and file to their defense and denying charges of being communist, or to accepting the oath and disavowing communist ideology. It "was only in rare cases," such as that of UAW Local 600 in Detroit, that communist organizers could rally enough support from the rank and file to keep their jobs. Overall, the Taft Hartley Act caused the loss of numerous influential leaders in the labor world who would have otherwise likely remained stalwart Party organizers and shop stewards. American communists then watched the escalation of factionalism in both the political and labor world following the passage of Taft-Hartley, until Foster pulled the CPUSA from active political organizing in June after the passing of the act. Foster insisted that future initiatives could not be supported unless the Party had the backing of the labor movement, which to the contrary was showing signs of distancing efforts. This ended the remaining elements of the political world that held ties with the labor world previously held from 1934 to 1946.⁶⁷⁸

Taft-Hartley expanded Left factionalism into the labor world after 1946 by creating the need for a "defensive consolidation" of left-led unions within the CIO. In one case it prompted an exodus from the labor congress entirely. Numerous prominent figures resigned, such as Ben Gold of the Furriers' Union, as smaller left-led unions were incorporated into larger ones. The UCAPAWA, which after the war changed its name to the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture, and Allied Workers of America (FTA), was still led by Donald Henderson as conditions once favorable to his kind of leadership changed. Henderson

watched his political associates face charges of violating the Smith Act and his labor organizing associates quit political organizing altogether. He eventually left the organization and quit professional organizing work entirely. A leading example of the aforementioned consolidation, the FTA was absorbed with the Distributive Workers Union and the Marine Cooks and Stewards into the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union. The loss of jobs, the ruined career of those outcasts for refusing to give up their ideological ties, all caused political strain in the communities. The United Electrical Workers (UE), still by the late 1940s one of the largest left-led unions, attempted to preemptively avoid the CIO purge by walking out as a rival union, the International United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (IUE), started getting representation. The UE's actions amplified the rifts between CPUSA political organizers and their labor organizing comrades, as the Party never endorsed or called for such action, and communists became more divided over the autonomy of their labor sphere of organizers. Eventually the UE's leaders agreed that the only way to rid themselves of organizing issues was to informally sever their ties with the CPUSA by ending cooperative meetings and gatherings, which they did by 1952.⁶⁷⁹

At the individual level, the broader societal changes occurred in the background while the daily struggle to maintain employment, uphold political ideals, and work to improve the community took primacy. In the fall of 1949, Russell Brodine and his family received another, more stable, job opportunity in St. Louis. For the fourth time in less than two years, the Brodines packed up their 1934 Chevrolet and moved to another city. Based on previous experience with FBI investigations, Brodine thought his orchestra contract would be another single season deal. Fortunately, when he received his first paycheck, he also received his full contract. Not only would he take in more money per year but he was assigned a standing position in the orchestra as the assistant principal chair for the bass section. Believing this was likely to be their new home, Brodine sold their house in Los Angeles and prepared to enroll his daughter in school for the Fall 1950 semester. Brodine, along with numerous other

communists connected with local associations and clubs while the nation around them began to change, knew that a secure job did not necessarily mean stable living conditions. Finding secure employment and a new life amidst postwar America did not mean a cessation of activism, nor an abandonment of socialist ideals. Under a new context and an era of suspicion, communists like Brodine began to direct their work more passively into civil rights and pro-peace advocacy.

The slow erosion of communist political and labor activity in the United States between 1945 and 1956 did not equally erode the effort by individual communists to combat systemic social racism. At the local level, the CPUSA's national depiction of a resurgence of domestic fascism was convincing to individuals who experienced systemic racial injustice as a day-to-day reality. Benjamin Davis recalled as many as 40 lynchings in the South between the end of World War II and the summer of 1946. The brutal murder of four African Americans, two of whom were war veterans, in Monroe, Georgia on July 25th, heightened Davis' concern of racial injustice. Two married couples, George W. and Mae Murray Dorsey and Dorothy and Roger Malcolm, were fatally shot on Moore's Ford Bridge, then subsequently hung by local members of the Ku Klux Klan. Davis called the murders "one of the most barbarous, cold-blooded crimes every committed." He rejected the FBI's claims to "investigate" the events since the suspects were known to be members of the local KKK. Throughout the rest of the year, Davis assisted his Harlem city council members to work with Congressman Adam Clayton Powell in pressuring state and federal officials to pass an anti-lynching bill and raise awareness of the ongoing "terror" that plagued the South.⁶⁸⁰ Although Truman responded by creating the Committee on Civil Rights to introduce anti-lynching legislation and attempt to jump-start a defense of civil rights at the national level, he failed to convince southern Democrats. The incident would remain a stain on the early civil rights movement until in 1992 a witness, Clinton Adams, admitted to the FBI that he had been on the run for 45 years even since the afternoon at Moore's Ford bridge on July 25th, 1946. The event enraged communists

across the nation and sufficed to convince civil rights activists that "the war against Hitler was won in Berlin, but lost in Monroe, Georgia."⁶⁸¹

In 1949, now married to Frank Lumpkin and formally taking her current surname, Beatrice Lumpkin assisted the Communist Party district local in Buffalo in resistance against Lake Erie cruise ships' racist admissions policy. At the time, the cruise ships coordinated dances, but they routinely refused admission to African Americans, regardless of their previous war status and labor union affiliation. As a mixed family, the Lumpkins believed they were ideal candidates to help end this struggle at the docks. In the summer of 1949, they teamed up with members of United Steelworkers' Local 2603 to try and draw attention against the cruise ships by attempting to obtain admission for three African American workers. Within an hour, the police were called by the docks. When Frank Lumpkin attempted to block a police officer from "rough handling" a student in attendance of the protest, the officer clubbed him in the face, causing permanent physical damage. Another officer pulled out his pistol and was ready to shoot Frank until his pregnant sister, Jonnie Lumpkin, jumped in front of the line of fire, begging the officer not to shoot. Beatrice and Jonnie took Frank to the hospital where he received five stitches and faced charges of "interfering with a police officer making an arrest."⁶⁸²

To resist the charge laid against Frank, his mother, Hattie Lumpkin, organized a joint labor-community committee to continue to organize resistance against the admissions policies of the docks. The committee sent a letter to the state attorney signed by fifty local clergymen urging that Frank's charges be dropped and pressure be placed on the cruise ship company to prevent disorder and violence at the docks. Under pressure, the cruise ship company agreed to end their discriminatory policy, but Steelworkers Local 2603 stated its intent to continue monitoring the docks to ensure that the company adhere to its agreement. James Annacone, candidate for Buffalo mayor by the American Labor Party, commented that Frank Lumpkin's "blood-stained shirt [was] a warning that Jim Crow must always be upheld by the nightstick and the lynch rope."⁶⁸³ Experiences like these mixed with the

national sentiment of CPUSA leaders about the fascist nature of post-WWII America to create, for grassroots communists like the Lumpkins, an equation of police brutality and racism with the perpetuation of fascist tendencies seen in the Hitler regime.⁶⁸⁴

In Michigan, the CPUSA supported the ongoing use of the Civil Rights Congress (CRC) as a means for combating racism. While the CRC was not formally part of the CPUSA, it carried a history of presence within the American communist orbit shared by the ILD prior to 1939 and the wartime Civil Rights Congress. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover depicted these fronts as "an integral part of the communist apparatus." He stated that the domestic communist movement was handicapped without the assistance of these fronts, because they rely on non-communists "to do the work that communists themselves cannot do" such as engage with the broader public. Historian Edward Pintzuk argued, however, that while these depictions compartmentalized and exemplified the dominant postwar idea of communism as a monolithic, pervasive, and deceptive political force, there was no actual need for "control" over individuals "when both organizations have largely the same views, as did the Michigan District of the [CPUSA] and the CRC." Pintzuk also pointed out that the CRC was largely staffed by the local CPUSA and that its creation after the war "was the result of a decision and [the] help of the [CPUSA]. In this sense, the CRC was neither a front of the CPUSA nor a parallel organization with similar goals; it was "an arm of the CPUSA."⁶⁸⁵

Pintzuk's analysis of the CRC in the postwar years helps break down the idea that American Communism was solely a political force. It is with this analysis that understanding the movement as split into various worlds becomes more important and necessary. The diffusion of American Communism out of the CPUSA and into broader social elements of reform within the United States was neither planned nor predictable based on the conditions of the postwar period. Instead, it became the natural by-product of organizations such as the CRC continuing the CPUSA's traditions against racial injustice under the banner of Civil Rights. The repression of anticommunism contributed to the constraining nature of

postwar civil rights activism, but it never fully removed the ideals of social equality embraced by organizations such as the CRC. Eugene Dennis considered the CRC "one of the main organizations in the fight for democracy" in the postwar period and proudly asserted his ongoing desire to see American communists commit themselves to an external organization in order to help "shape its outlook, its approach, its tactics and everything."⁶⁸⁶

In areas outside of Michigan and the CRC's orbit, individual communists such as the Lumpkins took on civil rights concerns that directly affected their local community. In 1950, the Lumpkin family had their second child near the start of spring. The Lumpkins was at odds with the postwar recession and the unavailability of jobs for women, especially recently expectant mothers, and they lacked a more coordinated organization such as the CRC to address grievances. Beatrice and Frank applied for welfare benefits, but they were rejected for failing to meet residence requirements in Chicago. The family turned to the Salvation Army and local communist friends for financial assistance and made due throughout the summer and fall. When Frank Lumpkin obtained a job at the Wisconsin Steel Chippers near the end of 1950, the family began to enjoy some of the fruits of postwar consumer society. With no job to continue shop floor organizing and a sustainable income from her husband, Beatrice directed her efforts against racial discrimination in her neighborhood housing districts. At the time in Chicago, realtors in the downtown and South Side area routinely used "scare tactics" to push whites out of the urban zones and into the suburbs. As non-white families came in to replace the former tenants, landlords and realtors increased rents with the support of the city government on the basis of combating "shortages of housing."⁶⁸⁷

Housing discrimination was a common facet of the early 1950s, and Lumpkin's experience in Chicago exemplified the mentality of communists in terms of how to rationalize it. In a "frenzy for quick profits," landlords of the city targeted apartments in low-income areas and subdivided them into three or four separate units. White families who lived in the apartments were forced out through higher

rents, and the new units were sold to African American families. Apartment units that were left undivided were then sold to the remaining poor white and second-generation Japanese immigrants; the latter having escaped California and the persecution of Japanese Americans during the war. The Lumpkins watched landlords collect rent but make little to no repairs, slowly turning the neighborhood into a "slum." Subsequently, the landlords blamed African Americans for ruining the neighborhood and forcing them to lower rents. This process convinced Frank and Beatrice Lumpkin that not only were the landlords "racist," but the city "found nothing illegal in the destruction of communities." This led many to believe that the city's housing inspectors were corrupt and in league with the landlords to make a profit. The only solution, in the eyes of the Lumpkins and other Chicago communists, was to wage a fight for tenant's rights.⁶⁸⁸

The CPUSA's Lake Park Avenue club served as the local resource for Chicago-based communists to fight against discrimination in the city. Their first fight involved the Illinois Institute of Technology, who was trying to expand through "an excuse of 'slum clearance'" authorized by the city despite numerous tenants still living in the building. Landlords responded to resistance by tenants by cutting water and heating to the building during the winter of 1950, forcing many tenants to leave and abandon their belongings. Those that remained found support from the CPUSA Lake Park club, including the Lumpkins. When communists arrived on the scene, they found surviving families using dangerous space heaters to keep warm while numerous other families crowded outside of city hall demanding assistance. The space heaters at one point caused an electrical fire, destroying a poorly remodeled garage used by two single mothers and killing five children. City officials blamed the mother of the children for using dangerous equipment, while "nothing was said about the landlord collecting rent on an illegal structure, or the city inspectors who never condemned it." The response by local communists was to create a coalition of civil rights activists and city tenants to "prevent future fire tragedies and end the racist rental policies" of the city's landlords. The CPUSA quickly assembled the Committee to Safeguard the

Home against Fire (CSHF) to work with citizens across political lines and depict the battle as between haves and have-nots. When landlords refused to budge on issues of maintenance, and in some cases locked furnace rooms so they could not be started, the CSHF called for a rent strike. The strike lasted only a week, but involved entire apartment complexes on Lake Park Avenue. At the end of the week, the landlords' legal representatives, Farr and Associates, called the CSHF to settle demands which amounted to nothing more than tolerance of the existing tenants and the right to heat the building.⁶⁸⁹

It didn't take long for the next fight against discrimination to occur for the Lumpkins. In November, 1952, an African American couple reported to the CPUSA's Lake Avenue club that the Metropole Theatre on 31st Street refused to sell them tickets. The CRC took the charge seriously and organized an effort to confront the theatre directly. Since the Lumpkins were a mixed couple, they were chosen as one of seven couples tasked with trying to challenge the theatre's practices. While the seven couples were allowed entrance to the theatre, within minutes the other viewers left the room. Once Beatrice and Frank left the viewing hall to see what the commotion was about, they found over 500 people blocking the street exit. While Beatrice remembered Frank as being stalwart in the face of oppression, she herself felt "scared" and "worried about how to get out without being beaten by the mob." Other prominent CPUSA organizers soon arrived, some under police escort. One such member was Arlene Brigham, who later became a champion for defending civil rights and the remembrance of Emmitt Till after his murder in 1955. When the film was over, rather than break up the mob and prevent further harassment, the city police backed up wagons to the theatre entrance and carted off the seven couples, as well as Arlene Brigham, "like convicts."⁶⁹⁰ While the incident served as a moment of resistance for Chicago communists, it also had the negative result of driving African Americans back across Wentworth Avenue as a result of the fierce passion of the anti-black mob, keeping the city firmly divided.⁶⁹¹

Nationally, American communists' commitment to fighting incidences of racism during the postwar period, such as that of the Chicago Lake Avenue Club, was sustained by the continued harsh punishments for African Americans guilty of crimes similar to that of the Scottsboro Boys. The Willie McGee case of 1946 to 1951 was similar to the Scottsboro and Herndon cases of the 1930s in that it combined not only a fight for the defendant's innocence, but also a charge of unequal treatment under the law. The CRC took on McGee's defense in 1946 after hearing about the nature of the charge and utilized elements of its Michigan-based CPUSA organizers to draw in national attention. McGee was charged with rape after being caught having an affair with a married woman, Willet Hawkins, for over a year. The case coincided with the development of new nations in Africa and the Third World, many of whom were watching the case "to see if [the United States'] words of democracy and freedom would apply to its black citizens."⁶⁹² Rosalie McGee, Willie's wife, corroborated her husband's story, stating she knew of the affair as early as 1944, as did the Hawkins' pastor, Reverend G.L. Tucker. Rosalie's testimony in particular was emotional; she stated that although she was aware, the affair continued because both she and her husband feared that Mrs. Hawkins would cry rape if McGee tried to end the relationship. In court, the defense attorney offered "no defense at all" and put up little resistance to the prosecution, including not calling Willet Hawkins to the stand, before the all-white jury returned a guilty verdict.⁶⁹³

Pintzuk noticed a legal shift that developed between the local lawyers in Mississippi and the CRC lawyers who appealed the convictions and how the McGee case highlighted the importance of legal battles waged by communists in the fight for racial equality. Although the circumstances of the case seemed to mimic the legal treatment of African Americans in previous cases, the trial itself was quite unusual. The trial resembled the "lynch and military atmosphere of the first Scottsboro case," with an all-white jury, a quick and speedy verdict, and state militia surrounding the courthouse. Machine guns and rifles with bayonets lined the court room and Mr. Hawkins carried a pistol into the trial, threatening

to use it if his wife was defamed. Previous decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court, Pintzuk noted, had ruled that a fair trial in which African Americans had representation on juries was mandatory. In the second appeal for McGee, the CRC noted that there was little information to explain why no potential black jurors were available. In response, on February 9th, 1947 the Supreme Court of Mississippi ordered the prosecution to prove that African Americans were not excluded from the jury process, in effect reversing previous trends by the courts to place the burden on defendants.⁶⁹⁴ In total, the CRC spent \$19,500 on the case, with the Michigan district taking on the bulk of fundraising.

From 1948 to 1951, the CRC threw all of its efforts at rallying defense for McGee. In some instances this meant relying on local CPUSA districts to go door-to-door and persuade citizens of McGee's innocence. The *Daily Worker*, as well, urged its readers to "plea for McGee" as hundreds descended upon Washington D.C. to chain themselves to the Lincoln Memorial. Anne Braden, a civil rights activist present at a few of the demonstrations for McGee outside the White House, noted that "the CRC pioneered the idea of whites working in white communities to combat racism" and managed to bring together numerous groups who would otherwise avoid collaboration. Though the CRC did everything they could to delay court action, McGee was executed on May 8th, 1951. UAW Local 600 in Detroit organized a memorial for McGee from Grand Circus Park to City Hall, where the Sojourner Truth monument stood. Afterward, both the CPUSA and CRC were accused of manipulating the case and delaying it for their own benefit, particularly the politicization of racial issues. The efforts by communists within the CRC, however, demonstrate the dedication American communists retained to fighting racial discrimination at the national level in the postwar period.⁶⁹⁵

Conclusion

The internalization of Party issues, such as French Communist criticism, Soviet genetics, and Yugoslav nationalism, and the inability of Party leaders like Foster and Dennis to relate better with their community base effectively disabled the CPUSA as a political party by 1949. While the Party was

reorganizing, rethinking, and reassessing its role in the United States, other non-communist activists pushed for civil rights reform. In doing so, they attracted communists in labor and community activism who had little interest for Party factionalism and political conflict. In 1946, Dennis' leadership within the CPUSA looked to the possible economic outcome of the war and predicted "an economic downturn of massive proportions." Coinciding with this view was the idea that, much like during the Third Period, a large radicalization of the American working class would occur. Dennis then steered the Party back toward the left while the Truman Administration shifted toward the Right in order to counter threats of being soft on communism. Although there was a slight recession during 1948, it was overdramatized in the pages of *The Daily Worker* and Dennis was ultimately proven wrong. This rhetoric continued until 1950, when it was not only clear that an economic recession was not inevitable, but that anticommunism began to target CPUSA members and leaders across the nation.⁶⁹⁶

For grassroots communists like Brodine and Lumpkin, the postwar period amplified support for progressive politics and labor legislation while also displacing the significance of the organizations that previously swayed their views. In most cases, grassroots organizers settled for any opportunity they could find they could put their organizational capacity to use. Lumpkin's fight against racial discrimination in the late 1940s and early 1950s was fundamentally different from her efforts in the YCL during the 1930s in that they were not linked to Party doctrine or coordinated Party efforts. For these organizers, it mattered little if the fight was waged personally like Lumpkin, if it was organized by a CPUSA club such as the Lake Avenue Club, or if it was promoted through a non-Party organization such as the CRC. Communist postwar battles against discrimination were the product of an evolved understanding of social activism that began with the Party in the late 1920s but was nurtured by years of working with grassroots organizers and workers throughout the 1930s and 1940s. By 1950, activists like Lumpkin and Brodine simply no longer needed the Party in ways they did just a decade prior.

CHAPTER 6: THE GRIM WORLD OF AMERICAN ANTICOMMUNISM

After the turbulent late 1940s, the dominant issue for American communists became the widely pervasive atmosphere of anticommunism. National Party leaders, public icons, intellectuals, and even non-Party members faced an uphill battle after 1949. Their national identity was now put up for judgment. Much of the negative perception of communists built on an argument that characterized all communists and anyone in a progressive organization as one and the same. Coinciding with this was the perception that it was impossible to support ideals of communism while simultaneously remaining loyal to United States. For communists with and without membership in the CPUSA, SWP, or AWP, the internal fragmentation of communist politics had only been the beginning. Now they faced fragmentation and stigma for their pro-Soviet and pro-neutral stances while the American politics moved to the Right. After the CPUSA reformed under the leadership of William Foster and Eugene Dennis, communism became a more credible domestic threat. Through weaponized rhetoric and proactive legislation that sought containment of communism abroad and at home, the once radical yet cooperative Populist CPUSA became a foreign agency bent on usurping American values and institutions. This transition helped mute the various worlds of American Communism by oversimplifying the various dimensions of communist activity (political, civil, and labor) into a singular strawman: as treasonous to the United States.

This chapter addresses the issue of anticommunism; a topic that dominates most of the written scholarship on the CPUSA, its leadership, and the overall American communist movement between 1945 and 1957. Historian James Barrett depicted postwar American communism as a movement in decline "largely by government repression and the conservative political climate of the McCarthy period."⁶⁹⁷ Historian Edward Pintzuk described the entire conditions of American Communism's postwar history as a history of "covert actions taken against the targeted organizations by state and private agencies to accomplish their objectives."⁶⁹⁸ Although anticommunism affected the lives of American communists, it

is important to recognize the differences between prewar and postwar eras of anticommunism and avoid getting trapped in what Barrett described as "the preoccupations of the Cold War;" thereby limiting the narrative in the 1940s and 1950s to a discussion of spies, subverts, and high ranking officials of the CPUSA exclusively.⁶⁹⁹ Other scholars have taken note of this tendency, such as Eric Arnesen who argued that historians have misinterpreted the "full-throated embrace of anticommunism" by numerous African Americans in the postwar years as "an unfortunate development of the early Cold War," instead of a long, documented tradition within the black community to avoid socially-antagonistic political groups.⁷⁰⁰

While acknowledging certain facets of postwar anticommunism, this chapter seeks to understand this social phenomenon as a world *of* American Communism, as opposed to an external force that would have been present, regardless. Anticommunism has a common tendency to be discussed in both the classroom and research as a product of the postwar resolutions and Soviet intensions in Eastern Europe. As such, it avoids clear links between antiradical efforts in labor, politics, and within civil rights organizations over a broader chronological context, dating back to the founding of the NAACP and federal investigations of radical labor organizations in the late 1920s. A central question to understanding this world is: how did anticommunism develop in the prewar years, evolve during the Popular Front, and emerge at the end of World War II as a cultural milieu of postwar political and social morality?

At war's end, the continuation of anticommunism took on newer forms both politically and culturally. To discuss the postwar period, this chapter examines four specific cases spanning across the worlds of American Communism, as opposed to attempt an all-encompassing visage of the anticommunist experience. One of the hard truths about American Communism is that its existence prompted the trampling of constitutionally-protected individual rights. The subsequent fight to protect those rights exposed the biased nature of American politics and culture. The heyday of anticommunism

in the United States must also factor in the international dimension, with regard to *particular* aspects of its development within the national dimension; especially the case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Their case arguably set the limit for the extent of anticommunist fear and influence within the American justice system. American anticommunism took advantage of the desires of business leaders, the fear of average Americans and the unknown, and the postwar goals of the U.S. State to create, by 1953, an ideological scapegoat comparable only with the concept of a “terrorist” in the 21st century.

When her father faced trial in 1949 in Foley Square with other leading figures of the CPUSA, Michele Artt stood proudly with her mother outside the courthouse to protest the judgment of the jury. Artt grew up in the outskirts of Detroit, the daughter of Helen and Carl Winter and granddaughter of first generation CPUSA members Allison and Alfred Wagenknecht. The Wagenknechts helped build the Party from its origins as a left faction of the Socialist Party. By 1919, they were charter members while the Winters helped build the Party's base throughout Michigan. Artt's parents both experienced anticommunist repression firsthand when they received indictments between 1949 and 1953 under the Smith Act for their involvement as leading Michigan district officials of the CPUSA. Carl Winter was charged at the 1949 Foley Square Trial in New York City, along with William Foster, Eugene Dennis, and other prominent Party leaders. Helen Winter faced charges three years later during the Michigan Six Trial of 1952, along with other prominent Michigan branch leaders: Nat Ganley, Thomas Dewitt Dennis Jr., Saul Wellman, and Philip Schatz. Winter's role in the Michigan branch of the CPUSA by 1949 involved organizing the local activists around acute issues, such as the expansion and protection of existing labor legislation and the sustenance of existing community relations between civil rights groups and unions.⁷⁰¹

During the Third Period, Carl Winter was a disciplined and highly active activist; he promoted numerous hunger marches throughout Detroit and played a role in William Foster's local presidential campaign in 1932. Helen Winter joined the YCL at the behest of her mother in the midst of the 1926

Passaic textile workers strike in New Jersey. At the time her father faced prosecutors arguing that he was guilty of attempting violent overthrow of the federal government, Artt was 7. Artt's grandmother took on guardianship responsibilities and assisted with young Michele's upbringing as her parents faced conviction. Artt didn't see her father again until she reached the age of 12. To Artt, the era of anticommunism from 1945 to 1957 shaped and defined the way she understood democracy and social life. It also prompted her subsequent involvement in the CPUSA and activism therein, as it did for a whole new generation of activists who grew up during the second Red Scare.⁷⁰²

For publicly active communists in the state department like Carl Marzani, the transformation in the public eye of communists after the war from allies and citizens to traitorous felons was primarily "perceptual." Marzani faced indictment for perjury while working for the State Department after lying about his CPUSA membership. Marzani's employment in government ended specifically due to a shift in the social understanding of 'communism' as a threat. This new, "demonized image" of domestic communists filtered into the public's perception of communism as an ideology. Fueled by rhetoric that associated communists as foreign and subversive, it became impossible, in the minds of many citizens, to be both 'communist' and 'American.' Historian Ellen Schrecker identified how "most [scholarly] treatments of McCarthyism overlook this transformation" of the idea of communism and the perception of individual communists representing the idea. Instead of seeing a shift from a more passive and political anticommunism into a cultural and national security issue, studies of McCarthyism often assumed that "the Cold War automatically led to the repression of American Communists." The transformation was not a matter of circumstance resulting from the end of World War II, but rather from an effort to convince "policymakers and the public...that Communism was so bad and dangerous that it had to be driven out of American life."⁷⁰³

Although anticommunism dominated the political culture between 1945 and 1957, it was not a homogenous social force in American culture. According to Jennifer Luff, what we think of as "popular

anticommunism" was a mix of decades-old "labor anticommunism" stemming from antiradical unionists between 1921 and 1939 and anti-New Deal Republicans from 1936 to 1952.⁷⁰⁴ Prominent American communist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn dated the early beginnings of what Luff described to around 1907, when workers and organizers faced public attempts by employers and city officials to deny basic constitutional rights, such as the right to free speech, to assemble, and to bear arms. Flynn was charged with conspiracy in 1910 after gaining nationwide attention for addressing injustices against members of the Industrial Workers of the World. Flynn later faced trials for her role as a CPUSA leader in 1952.⁷⁰⁵ It was only much later that anticommunism took on the more dominant form common in public memory. Stalin's speech to declare postwar relations between the East and West as "incompatible," the breakout of civil war in Greece between rivalist social democratic and communist forces in mid-1946, and the successful overthrow of the Czechoslovakian government by communist revolutionaries in February, 1948, stirred new fears. Anticommunism served as a prominent foundation for politicians to exploit for political advantage, best evidenced by anticommunism's more politicized title of 'McCarthyism,' but also present in the domestic political program of the Truman Administration from 1946 until the election of Eisenhower in 1952.

This political purpose extended from the national level to the local level, where town halls could be rallied together behind the cause of preventing "reds" from gaining control in the communities. Both politicians and political parties went to extensive lengths to "recklessly [smear] their opponents with false accusations," thereby swaying the public in one direction or another.⁷⁰⁶ The hysteria, which was neither strictly political nor cultural, knew few bounds. It targeted civil activists, union organizers, politicians within the Democratic Party, academics, and religious leaders. Because the investigative efforts sought a broad and detailed analysis of domestic communist presence, membership in the CPUSA was not required to deem an individual suspect. Most arrested faced judges who routinely ruled

in favor of the idea that demanding knowledge of membership in a communist organization or of knowing individuals who held membership "did not violate witnesses' constitutional rights."⁷⁰⁷

Due to the Cold War's effects on political consciousness, the assessments of the courts only now seem obscure and irrational. Despite the international scope of the Cold War and the escalation of tensions from 1947 to 1950 with the rise of the Iron Curtain, communist China, and the Korean War, American communists did not pose a serious threat to the United States government. At the time, the negative depiction of communism was enough to justify the treatments communists faced in the courts. It was the "pervasive image" of the CPUSA as a "lethal foreign conspiracy" that allowed anticommunism in the United States to ferment as it did by the late 1940s.⁷⁰⁸ Schrecker argued that there existed "many McCarthyisms, each with its own agenda and modus operandi." Among these were public, "ultraconservative" activists, and centrist liberals who "supported sanctions against Communists, but not against non-Communists." Adding to this range, there were moderate socialists and anti-Stalinist communists who supported the persecution of "traitors to the socialist ideal," starting with the CPUSA's support for the persecution of the SWP via the Smith Act in 1941.⁷⁰⁹ The situation presented American communists across the spectrum, from passive advocates such as Russell Brodine, to passionate activists such as Lumpkin, to inner-circle Party leaders such as Dennis and Gates, with a decision: To take a stand in supporting the ideology on the basis of constitutionality, to continue with their work and activism as silent supporters, to condemn or support those charged, or to abandon the political element entirely.

Most communists who spoke about their experiences place emphasis on the 1940 Alien Registration Act, or Smith Act, as the source of political and social discrimination against communists and other known "undesirables." Others credited most of the witch-hunt work to President Truman for crafting a "strong anticommunist policy with domestic fallout" that included executive orders and efforts to contain communism internationally.⁷¹⁰ Sherman Labovitz, a local district organizer for the CPUSA in

Philadelphia, pointed to the November 1946 Congressional election, where moderate Republicans used the "threat of communism" to displace the Roosevelt coalition and secure a GOP victory in Congress.⁷¹¹

Unbeknownst to communists such as Labovitz in the 1940s, the roots of anticommunism stem back further than the Great Depression and even the formation of American Communism's political world in 1928. Labor anticommunism found root among conservative caucuses of organizations where communists, socialists, and left radicals held significant influence. Some of these developments were culminations of antiradical organizers and an increasing desire to be free from the ideological constraints that later surfaced with the Nazi-Soviet Pact.⁷¹² Others were the result of localized corporate pressure against CPUSA activities in large industrial cities. They used privately-hired spies to infiltrate known communist clubs and reported on agendas, meeting times, and the extent of communist involvement in workshops.⁷¹³ While the world was at war, Congress passed the 1940 Smith Act to prosecute individuals or organizations that "advocate, abet, advise, or teach the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety" of violent overthrow of the government. The mechanisms to find, arrest, and associate such individuals with radical groups, however, were already in place by the time the Smith Act became law.⁷¹⁴

For the FBI, investigations of perceived radicals by 1940 were more than a routine; they were methodical. The FBI's predecessor, the Bureau of Investigation (BI), had, as early as 1921, conducted regular checks on known Workers' Party associates as well as non-Party communists involved in syndicalist groups and within the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The acting attorney general, Harry M. Daugherty, opened investigations on the AFL for suspected radicals and directed his work through the BI. Foster's Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) caught the attention of the BI to begin open investigations of the burgeoning communist movement in the late 1920s, which added them to the list of primary suspects.⁷¹⁵ Among the first targets the BI investigated and detained were radicals in immigrant communities. Although the BI existed as its own sub-division of the Department of Labor, the

Secretary of Labor was responsible for determining if known suspects had the right to an attorney. In the "bifurcated" procedure for investigating undesirables, deportation was the "instrument of choice" by the Department of Labor in such matters. Based on the bill which introduced the BI, it did not matter if the "undesirable alien...had an American wife and ten American children, or whether he'd lived in America for forty years." Civil libertarians protested the procedure of the BI, but the Department of Justice viewed it as "the best way to avoid the snail's pace of the courts" and allowed the investigations to continue throughout the late 1920s and 1930s.⁷¹⁶ In more ways than one, the BI set the stage for the FBI by creating the means to further investigate communists during the postwar era.

One way the Bureau of Investigation succeeded in localized operations was by relying on private companies that already had the means of infiltrating unions and shop committees. Among the oldest of organizations that offered infiltration of union services to employers, the Corporation Auxiliary Company (CAC), also sometimes called Corporation Auxiliary Services, hired private investigators and former policeman to infiltrate local shops and factories for the purpose of reporting conditions to company employers and obtaining information so as to best prevent the rise of union committees. The CAC had a reputation dating back to 1913 when labor organizers blamed its infiltrators for the failure of the Akron rubber strike, who made up almost half of the charter members of the Akron Rubber Workers Union.⁷¹⁷ In the 1930s, the CAC's two largest contract holders were Chrysler and Ford Motor Company. In most cases, Detroit factory managers were unaware of the presence of CAC employees in their workforce since it served the interests of the employer to keep knowledge about spies to a minimum. Such was the experience of William Gernaey, hired in 1927 to infiltrate a Chrysler plant and report worker conditions to his own CAC boss, independent of the local shop boss. Gernaey was the son of a tool and die maker; but after he graduated High School and took courses at Detroit Business University, the CAC hired him to perform "efficiency work" at oil companies near the city—Shell, Wayco, Sun Oil, Texaco, Greenslade, and Indian Refining. After performing with an exceptional record for over a year, the CAC

tasked Gerney with infiltrating the Highland Park Chrysler plant. Gerney's job was so secretive that not even shop management was informed of his real duties. He was even laid-off in the spring of 1929 due to the confidential nature of his employment. It was this particular moment, however, that brought Gerney into the communist movement.⁷¹⁸

Gerney's loss of employment at the Highland Park plant did not end his contract with Chrysler. Rather, the company decided to place him in a more useful position and instructed him to get involved with the local Detroit communist scene. He was told to "hang around communist halls" and "safeguard the interests" of both the Chrysler corporation and the CAC. Gerney frequented bars and dance halls along Woodward and Cas for week until he noticed a flier advertising for workers to meet to discuss political work. At his first meeting he met Max Shapiro, a local representative for the CPUSA, and Joe Siroka, district organizer for the YCL of Michigan. They offered him a meal, some money, and the address to their next Party meeting. After only one night, Gerney felt he "was in." The CPUSA subsequently tasked him as a unit organizer for the YCL's section committee for organizing in Detroit shops, where he "worked as a communist is supposed to work; keeping in the background, not get[ting] arrested and safeguard[ing]" himself.⁷¹⁹ Gerney not only was expected to passively report on local communist activities, he was encouraged to seek leadership positions in the local Party "since very few carry out their tasks" and the Party was "always looking for stool-pigeons." Leadership roles and heavily-active commitment helped secure trust between Gerney and his local communist organizers.⁷²⁰

Infiltrators such as Gerney, however, typically engaged in more conspiracist-like investigation than one would expect out of a professional investigative organization attempting to unveil the seriousness of communist infiltration. In the early years of the Third Period, Gerney met with Mike Webb, Larry Gossman, and Nat Ganley to discuss his work as a YCL organizer out Hamtramck, near the Highland Park Ford plant. Webb and Gossman worked at Ford Motor Company in the Amtorg Trading department. Amtorg was a semi-private joint-stock company owned by the Soviet Union during the

1920s and by the early 1930s served as the administrative wing of importing goods such as lumber, fur, and, through Ford, car parts. Gernaey's interest was "booming" about whether or not Webb and Gossman's presence at Ford indicated that the Ford Motor Company might actually be working for the Soviet government; falsely assuming that the presence of communists in trading departments and the shipping of parts to Russia amounted to some level of conspiracy. Upon further investigation, Gernaey was disappointed to learn that all Ford was selling to Russia was "obsolete machinery and tools." In addition, Gernaey eventually learned that his concerns about Ford's involvement with the Soviets were unrealistic since the Amtorg Trading Company forbade its employees in the United States from participating with and associating with known CPUSA members. While it is obvious that Webb and Gossman were in questionable violation of this standing order, Gernaey also found no evidence to link them to Amtorg the company directly; they remained identified as employees of Ford Motor Company and envoys to the Amtorg Trading department within Ford.⁷²¹

When trying to fully understand their case studies, infiltrators also occasionally exaggerated the extent to which Marxist philosophy mixed with emerging groups such as the CIO. When talking about the significance of strength in the CPUSA's organizing methods, Gernaey falsely attributed Marx's quotes, "Workers of the World Unite!" and "Workers have nothing to lose but their chains" to Vladimir Lenin and incorrectly asserted to his superiors that the communist philosophy of "in unity there is strength" fit toe-in-step with the emerging political program of the CIO.⁷²² Gernaey also depicted Ganley's shift from an active organizer for the Hamtramck CPUSA into his organizing position within the CIO in 1937 as evidence of commitment by Party leaders to "bring about a collaboration of communists within the AFL and the CIO." Gernaey likely contributed to the illusion that communists were trying to use the CIO in Detroit as a means for securing gains they could not otherwise achieve through the AFL. As was made clear in Chapter 3, communist organizing in labor was built more on practical necessity than it was ideological intuition and Gernaey likely did not consider organizational differences by

geography. Gernaey, however, insisted that increased communist presence in the CIO from 1935-1936 was the result of efforts to "avoid any spies" and secure leadership positions in factory nuclei before any other group could succeed. In 1937, Gernaey was found out and his role as a communist spy compromised. He went on to testify to before the House Un-American Activities Committee after World War II.⁷²³ As for the CAC, their remaining infiltrators at Chrysler were identified by Johnny Andrews at a La Follette Committee meeting held in November 1936, and the organization began to lose contracts.⁷²⁴

By 1941, the federal government, after dealing with oppositional groups within the ACLU, AFL, TUUL, and CIO, generated the "legal architecture of federal anticommunism" and set the stage for the first victims of the Smith Act, the SWP, on June 27th in Minneapolis and St. Paul. There, U.S. Marshalls and FBI investigators, on orders from the Department of Justice, seized documents from Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky and two red flags. The evidence gathered was then used in subsequent weeks to indict twenty-nine socialists working with the Teamsters Local 544. Among those arrested were SWP leaders Max Goldman and Edward Palmquist for their involvement in a Works Progress Administration strike two years prior. In addition, James Cannon, now fully independent of the CPUSA but still active as a political organizer, faced indictment as the unpronounced figurehead of the SWP. In total, the twenty-nine accused Americans made up the legal, labor, ideological, and grassroots organizing capacity of the SWP in Minneapolis. Only twenty-eight of the accused made it to the court on October 27th, as Grant Dunne had tragically taken his own life on the 7th. After the trial on November 18th, the presiding Judge, Matthew M. Joyce, issued a verdict of not guilty for five of the defendants on the grounds of a lack of sufficient evidence to prove they were aware of a conspiracy. By December, the jury had delivered a final verdict of not guilty for the remaining twenty-three accused on the first count of organizing armed revolution. For James Cannon and seventeen other top SWP leaders, however, they faced a verdict of guilty for violating the Smith Act and subsequently sentenced to a year in prison.

After hearing about rumors of J.R. Oppenheimer's past, including his previous romantic relationship with a known communist, Jean Tatlock, and his sister-in-law's membership with the CPUSA, the FBI began investigating the Manhattan Project scientist in 1941, not long after the SWP trial.⁷²⁵ The FBI, under the direction of Herbert Hoover, was concerned with the possible leaking of information via ideologically-committed intellectuals. Hoover's obsession with incidents of possible espionage, and speaking publicly about it, had the effect of "convincing most Americans—public officials and ordinary citizens alike—that the [CPUSA] was breeding spies." Although the FBI did find links between CPUSA members and Russian agents, most of the records released reveal little information about the actual transmission of sensitive data. The mere idea of communists spying on behalf of Russia, mixed with the SWP's trial, was sufficient to establish a social fear of communism during the war that would prove tremendously influential after the war.⁷²⁶

The case against the SWP in 1941 served as a litmus test for future indictments leading up to the Foley Square of 1949, Michigan Six trial of 1953, and numerous other trials in cities like Los Angeles and Philadelphia.⁷²⁷ Federal prosecutors and the FBI studied the SWP case carefully to see where the limitations were in the overall goal of exposing the organization as a danger. During the early months of the postwar period, the legal aspect of anticommunism mixed with cultural fears about Soviet aggression and developed into a "carefully nurtured" and "unparalleled hysteria." By 1945, the using the Smith Act to prosecute individuals had changed with the breakdown of the US-Soviet wartime alliance. The Smith Act did not exclusively target CPUSA or SWP members, as membership or leadership in a communist organization was "never specifically prohibited by [the] legislation." Instead, suspected targets included "advocates of any ideology that openly challenged the wisdom of maintaining a capitalist economic social system."⁷²⁸ The hysteria and trials allowed the Truman Administration to publicize communism as a "menace" and over-exaggerate the extent to which communists actively subverted American national security. By downplaying, or ignoring, the sectarian

differences between various regional sects of the CPUSA and SWP, the state prosecution conducted the trials in a manner that put the entirety of communist ideology, not just the CPUSA or SWP leaders, up for public judgment. This judgment was not contained to the high-ranking members of the CPUSA or SWP; but also to their friends, their families, and their community organizations—further sowing mistrust and division in labor communities that only a decade prior embraced unity.⁷²⁹

The Smith Act stipulated particulars such as "knowingly or willfully advocat[ed]," which allowed flexibility on the part of prosecutors to simply determine that someone's political outlook *suggested* or *tacitly approved* of revolutionary theory. Additionally, the act stipulated that to "print, publish, edit, issue, circulate, sell, distribute, or publicly display any written or printed matter" which advocated overthrow of the government violated its secondary statute.⁷³⁰ Not only did the CPUSA and SWP have their own publishing companies, newspapers, and journals, they also regularly distributed Marxist literature printed in the Soviet Union and by European communist parties. With the widespread acceptance among American communists of Leninist and/or Trotskyist theories about the necessity of seizing control of the nation-state, the Smith Act's subsequent depiction of radical leftism amplified a culture of fear that conjured "visions of communists under everyone's bed" by the end of the war. The 1941 trial of the SWP set a standard that the Smith Act's designers could not have predicted, which was to settle an accord between free speech and national security that, after the conclusion of World War II, quickly came to justify atrocious violations of citizens' personal rights.⁷³¹

The SWP managed to survive the initial trials as well as the period of incarceration of its leadership, mainly due to the work of women such as Rose Karsner, Grace Carlson, and Dorothy Schultz. Carlson and Karsner were essential to maintaining a semblance of solidarity while Cannon and his comrades sat in jail; frequently sharing letters written by Cannon to the remnant of active SWP organizers and maintaining a connection between the SWP and the Civil Rights Defense Committee (CRDC). Women performed the functional role of facilitating meetings, fund-raising, and selling

subscriptions to the SWP's *Militant* newspaper. When Cannon and his comrades were released in 1945, they quickly returned to the party ranks; but they could not displace the now dominant role played by the organization's female members. Based on letters, the women organizing for the SWP had to make a difficult balance of organizational work and the "continued demands of their lives as wives and mothers."⁷³²

Rather than succeed at dismantling the SWP, the Smith Act trial had the opposite effect of bolstering civil rights support for the organization and its membership. By the end of the war, the SWP had swelled to a membership of over 3,000 and continued to denounce the Smith Act as unconstitutional and a sweeping violation of personal liberties. Additionally, the CPUSA began to openly denounce support for the SWP as it became a more popular topic among trade unionists. They, along with the FBI, were concerned about the rising influence of Trotskyists within the unions. The condemnation of the SWP and its supporters by the CPUSA expressed the clear disconnect communists such as Foster and Dennis had with the broader elements of the pan-Socialist Left.⁷³³ Rather than see the Smith Act as a threat, the CPUSA initially viewed it as an effective means to silence the opposition. This perception changed as the postwar political climate shifted rapidly with new questions about the sustainability of the United States' wartime alliance with the Soviet Union.⁷³⁴

When discussing the postwar development of the Smith Act's usage, Labovitz described the political climate in 1945 as one where "it did not really matter if the so-called evidence was slight, or doubtful, or irrelevant or even downright dishonest." From this perspective, communists believed that the Smith Act prompted aggression "against the constitutionally guaranteed rights of speech and assembly."⁷³⁵ To prosecute individuals after 1945, investigators and state attorney's focused on two questions: First, they asked witnesses if they "are or ever have been a member of the Communist Party." The second question was to ask who else was a member.⁷³⁶ The second question was to build off the first. If the prosecution could obtain a verbal testimony that they had been "taught" or were "schooled"

in Marxism, they fit neatly into the Smith Act's indictment of those who "knowingly advocated" the philosophy and created a legal basis for guilt by association. If witnesses refused to answer the second question, the prosecuting attorney's knew the presiding judge could throw them in jail for contempt. Together, the questions served to validate the Smith Act's focus on collusion and conspiracy as federal investigations sought to "set the judicial precedent that...the Communist Party as an organization is illegal."⁷³⁷

The subsequent threat of a 'communist menace' in the public's view was not just a postwar anomaly intensified by the Cold War. Instead of being understood as a new threat to national security, as Schrecker pointed out, "policymakers and the public had to be convinced that communism was bad and dangerous" in a process that involved "partisan politics, bureaucratic infighting, intellectual conversions, legal proceedings, [and] congressional investigations." The nature of the questions asked and the means of the FBI's investigation fueled suspicions about the danger of communism in American communities as treasonous activities. Within just four years, the CPUSA came to realize the reasoning of the SWP in resisting the Smith Act. By the end of the 1940s, criminal activity and communist subversion had become nearly synonymous terms. Crimes such as petty theft and murder could, in some way, be seen as parallel to subversion promoted by communists. In most cases, "the specific crime was irrelevant," and "communism" as a term became more abstract and negative. Under this context, the "plausibility" of the threat described by the FBI made it "possible for so many Americans to adopt anticommunism so quickly."⁷³⁸

Making the matter more difficult was the issue of guilt in matters of espionage among suspected communists during the investigative process between 1945 and 1949. Some communists passed information to Moscow while others lied under oath about their membership in the CPUSA, both adding to their indictment under the Smith Act and making claims of free speech less convincing to prosecutors and judges. SWP members and non-communists who took a stand on the issue of free speech faced the

same judgment, including those who had no reason to take such a stand. President Truman's Executive Order 9835 expanded the concept of anticommunism into a broad policy of anti-liberalism by employing a loyalty-based security system within federal branches of government. The order barred communists, fascists, and "anybody guilty of 'sympathetic association' with such undesirables or their organizations." By 1949 the Smith Act succeeded in stoking fear of subversion that, for many politicians and employers in the state department, could only be fixed by pushing forward with prosecutions.⁷³⁹ Regardless of the outcome, there was no turning back by 1949. Within under a decade, communists went from being proponents of a radical labor agenda to enemies of the state with a goal, motive, and foreign governments to bankroll them. This shift also threatened other political agendas that advocated for civil and legal rights and labor laws to manifest an overall political atmosphere of conspiracy and subversion.

Anticommunism existed within African American communities during the interwar period, but it was fundamentally different from the postwar, public policy of anticommunism. Anticommunism among African Americans built upon decades of anti-unionism and anti-radicalism. Eric Arnesen, pushing back against the historical argument that civil rights and the pan-Socialist Left were inherently linked, traced African American anticommunism to the years following the Great War after the Socialist Party split, when blacks weighed in the merits of the communist movement.⁷⁴⁰ Kelly Miller, dean of Howard University in 1920, declared that communism would find few converts among African Americans, particularly because of the notion that the "seed of destruction and discord" would never resonate with the majority of the black community.⁷⁴¹ Although the CPUSA's American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) attracted few dedicated and long-term black members, it generated significant publicity and prompted black elites to respond in the mid-to-late 1920s. Despite this, Arnesen contends that throughout the early stages of American Communism "neither black nor white elites need have worried about [the CPUSA's] inroads into America's black communities."⁷⁴²

Their real number of recruits "remained insignificant" prior to the Scottsboro case. For an explanation of the continued lack of popularity within the African American community from 1928 to 1932, Arnesen points to the Party's Third Period conclusion on "self determination in the Black belt," which not only "had little attraction for black Americans" but also only sought to attract radical-minded black youths, like Hosea Hudson. The Party's theoretical stance on civil rights for non-Whites and political engagement forced them to treat "as enemies virtually all liberals and other progressives, seeing them as 'social fascists,' 'labor fakirs,' and the like."⁷⁴³ The Scottsboro case proved to be the critical moment when NAACP spokesman Walter White lost his grip on the sentiments of most black Americans, while the CPUSA, teamed up with the International Labor Defense (ILD), came out on top by promoting a message that resonated with the African American community.

Walter White had been the de facto head of the NAACP throughout the late 1920s and into the 1930s. During the Third Period, White and his associate A. Philip Randolph did little to distance themselves from communists, because they felt it unnecessary. In White's own words to Randolph, the NAACP was "neither procommunist nor anticommunist."⁷⁴⁴ By the early 1930s and the opening of the Scottsboro case, White and the NAACP changed their stance as criticism from communist community organizers sought to curb recruitment toward local communist clubs. Communist organizer and activist Robert Minor charged that the NAACP represented a "reformist" and "bourgeois" institution that would never succeed at liberating African Americans from racial oppression. When the ILD and CPUSA began their campaign in the fight to free the Scottsboro brothers, the NAACP's reputation got "a bruising" and the organization took a back seat role in civil rights organizing throughout the Popular Front. White steered the organization to a more passive role, including avoiding a possible alliance with grassroots insurgency organizations nurtured by the National Negro Congress. Toward the end of World War II, "communists' renewed sectarianism" and Browder's conclusions about Tehran distanced African Americans from the CPUSA and American Communism in general.⁷⁴⁵ As the Cold War ramped up,

already-existing anticommunism within civil rights organizations like the NAACP became more dominant and served to convince the public that civil rights reform did not require communist theory or the Communist Party. Similarly, the rising discontent over the acceptability of communists in the United States made it easier for civil rights activists to turn to an organization like the NAACP.⁷⁴⁶

Working communists across America dealt with the idea of "unacknowledged blacklists" once employers caught wind of communist presence in their workforce. During the symphony seasons in 1948 and 1949, Russell Brodine made only \$756 as a bassist and blamed his short rate of pay on blacklists that targeted him and numerous other "progressive" musicians. While Brodine's union fought for issues like residual pay for reused recordings, neither the union nor Brodine could avoid the studio hiring freelance, non-union musicians willing to work for low rates. In desperate times, Brodine turned to fellow communists in building trades and industrial work. He found help from communist organizers in Local 634 of the Carpenters' Union, whom he met while participating in strikes throughout California. It took less than two months for Brodine to become an active participant in the union. After joining, he became part of the "progressive caucus," which resisted efforts by more conservative unionists advocating avoidance of strikes and instead appeal toward concessions with company owners. Still, his desire to play music forced Brodine out of the union efforts and pushed him toward Saint Louis, where the local symphony director was looking for new bassists. The extent of these "unacknowledged blacklists" in terms of their scope of targeting individuals like Brodine is uncertain. Communists, however, found ways to get by and hang in as the national development of an anticommunist culture created the perception of unacceptance.⁷⁴⁷

Communists in large cities like Lumpkin found ways to hang in and navigate around the atmosphere of anticommunism during the mid-to-late 1940s. Living in Chicago, Lumpkin noted how communist parents in nearby Michigan faced discrimination in summer camps and social programs for children as they did not want "reprisal from the FBI." Having two children of their own, Lumpkin and her

husband Frank feared that their kids would be excluded from basic childhood activities for their parents' views. To avoid such scrutiny and maintain a public image separated from her political identity, Lumpkin continued to pass out fliers and pamphlets for her CPUSA local in Chicago; but she hid the paperwork in the carriage of her infant. In this way, Lumpkin remained committed but prevented her children from facing direct discrimination. She believed that perseverance in an era of repression and finding ways to work around systemic anticommunism amounted to a defense of "peace, jobs, democracy, and socialism." At the same time, Lumpkin realized that such defiance had to remain mature and non-aggressive so as to avoid agitation of local and state authorities.⁷⁴⁸

The pretext set by the wave of anticommunism after 1945 took on a greater legal significance during the Foley Square trial between November 1948 and October 1949. William Foster, Eugene Dennis, Artt's father Carl Winter, legislative committee chairman Benjamin Davis, YCL leader John Gates, National Committee members Gus Hall and John Williamson, National Board advisers Gil Green and Henry Winston, editor of *The Daily Worker* Jack Stachel, and New York district leader Robert Thompson all faced charges of conspiracy and treason by federal prosecutor John McGohey. The trial represented the "outward expression of the increasing governmental and extragovernmental repression" of the postwar period. While the SWP trial in 1941 created the foundation to prosecute radicals, the Foley Square trial "set a precedent and laid the basis for arrests and prosecutions of the second-echelon leaders" of the Communist Party and its constituent organizations. The trial was made for the new age of media as nearly four hundred police officers surrounded the Foley Square courthouse, and press coverage of the trial was updated daily. Presiding over the trial was Judge Harold Medina, a Mexican-American law professor, who taught at both Princeton and Columbia. Known for being easily agitated, Medina faced defense lawyers that "tried to make him lose judicial composure with 'guerrilla tactics,'" such as continuous motions to delay court proceedings and accusations of a prejudiced court. The defense tactics worked in part. With continuous motions to delay proceedings

and appeals to Foster's ailing health, the defendants did not actually face the judge until March 7th, 1949. To make their case for treason and conspiracy, the prosecution focused on the "reconstitution of the Party" in 1945 after Browder's attempt to dissolve it. It argued that the dictums of Marxism required communists to commit treason. For evidence, the prosecution cited the works of Marx and Lenin; particularly the pamphlet *State and Revolution*, which implicitly referred to the seizure and "violent overthrow" of the state apparatus as the basis for socialist revolution.⁷⁴⁹ Foster was blamed for the reconstitution of the Party, which prosecutors argued was done with the sole aim of "overthrowing the government by force and violence." Foster's role in the Party was of particular importance to the government, who believed he was the motivation behind the CPUSA's postwar political line.⁷⁵⁰

In terms of building their defense, Foster and Dennis argued against the prosecution in what became a standard defensive approach used by communists in subsequent trials, even though it failed to persuade the jury in most cases. In a document praised by the CPUSA as Foster's "climatic testimony," he challenged the claims of the prosecution line by line, starting with the claim that the Party's existence and basis in Marxist theory necessitated a method of "force and violence." His approach became known as the 'labor defense,' but it might be more properly understood as a philosophical defense, since it rested on a defense of Marxism, rather than an appeal for free speech or the right to assemble. Foster asked the government to provide evidence that the CPUSA advocated a policy of violence and encouraged prosecutors to take the actions of the Party during the Popular Front into consideration, such as the communists' support for Roosevelt while Trotskyists rejected cooperation. Rather than push for revolt, Foster argued, the communists advocated "the practical theory that has become possible...to regularly elect peoples' governments in the capitalist democracies." Foster requested that the court take into consideration the changes understood by the CPUSA between the Third Period and the Popular Front. He elucidated what he described afterward as "the premier presentation of the parliamentary road to socialism in the United States."⁷⁵¹ Unfortunately

for Foster and the rest of the CPUSA leadership in 1949, the courts cared little about the ideological differences between Popular Front communists and Trotskyists, let alone the suggestion that the Party favored democratic socialism.

Some have suggested that Foster's approach and its endorsement by the defense lawyers was directed at politicizing the trial and swaying public opinion against Judge Medina.⁷⁵² This argument, however, overlooks the components of the trial where certain defendants, such as John Gates, who refused to answer prosecution questions on the grounds of the Fifth Amendment, instead invoked constitutional rights. Appeals like Gates' were hastily denied, but they did distinguish certain defense approaches from others in this early trial. Because of their actions, Gates and other defendants who invoked their constitutional rights served thirty-day sentences for contempt of court. A more accurate assessment of the CPUSA's defense should take into consideration the political fallout *within* the CPUSA between 1944 and 1946. Still struggling to maintain a hold over their own political world, CPUSA leaders such as Foster, Dennis, and Gates not only faced rising anticommunism but also the deterioration of conditions favorable to communist organizers that existed only a decade prior. In many ways, the CPUSA's defense at Foley Square was an attempt to rationalize communist activity *for themselves* in the newly hostile political climate. The CPUSA, more than the prosecution and the FBI, knew they had little to gain from politicizing a trial in an era they overtly described as "fascist." Instead, CPUSA leaders tried to rationalize Marxism through the legal apparatus of the court on behalf of their declining domestic base and the international communist movement watching intently.⁷⁵³

Despite Foster's efforts, the court returned a verdict of guilty for all eleven members accused. Foster's argument failed in part because Herbert Hoover and the FBI had already made it clear that the court's goal was to set a precedent that "the [CPUSA] as an organization [was] illegal."⁷⁵⁴ Although the court system did not enforce prison sentences until two years after the trial, the "repressive atmosphere went beyond the legal issues and quickly affected tens of thousands of rank and filers." Card carrying

members like Dorothy Healey and Donald Henderson and fellow travelers accused of association with CPUSA members were aware that they, too, could be targeted. Investigators and prosecutors in subsequent trials gave defendants two options: admit loyalty to the CPUSA and name other individuals, or refuse to testify. Those under investigation could not hope to use the Fifth Amendment to support their case, since the Supreme Court had denied witnesses this protection in 1948.⁷⁵⁵

Contrary of the CPUSA's actions in 1941, the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) rallied support with the Civil Rights Defense Committee (CRDC) for those indicted in the Foley Square trial to publicly condemn the Smith Act as unconstitutional. In the eyes of FBI investigators and the House Un-American Activities Committee, the SWP and CPUSA were virtually the same organizations in everything but name. To the SWP, the CPUSA were political enemies but still American citizens, who retained the same constitutional rights they sought to defend in their own experiences under the Smith Act. Writing about the trial in early 1949, *The Militant* described unionists who supported the Smith Act's condemnation of communists as guilty of "the precedent set by the Stalinists in Minneapolis [in 1941]."⁷⁵⁶ The SWP's lawyers also were aware that the prosecution's strategy in 1949 mirrored the 1941 approach. Attorney General Tom Clark worked with Victor Anderson, the lead prosecuting attorney in the 1941 trial, to depict the case as combating the "historic mission" of radical political parties: "adherence to the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism automatically obligated [them] to seek the overthrow of the government by violence and force." After the trial, SWP lawyers pushed for an appeal but met no success.⁷⁵⁷

Overall, the SWP's support did little to sway public opinion or to influence the decision of the courts. In 1950, by a 5 to 2 vote, the Supreme Court upheld the 1949 decision. The court upheld it again in the 1951 trial of *Dennis v. United States*. Finally, the Court ruled that those convicted did not have the First Amendment right of free speech to protect them, if the exercise in question involved a plot to overthrow the government. The decisions ushered in a wave of anticommunist repression at the state and local levels. The FBI treated the result of the appeal "as a green light to smash the Communist

Party by hitting it everywhere it had any remotely significant presence."⁷⁵⁸ Subsequently, state prosecutors proceeded with indicting "second-tier" CPUSA leaders in three successive waves in 1951, 1954, and 1956. The trials were spread out across the nation in cities such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Detroit, Seattle, Denver, and New York.⁷⁵⁹

State prosecutors used the approach of the Foley Square trial at the state level to indict dozens of CPUSA district-level organizers and leaders, including Dorothy Healey, Claudia Jones, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. To identify targets, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover instructed federal agents to round-up individuals mentioned by witnesses who worked for the State Department or had close ties with federal agencies. Although Hoover and the FBI worked with the limited data obtained from the trial, two other sources of evidence existed about individuals known to have participated in spying activities; Venona transcripts and declassified KGB files. The Venona transcripts were obtained starting in early 1943, when the U.S. State Department was unsure about the possibilities of the Soviet Union making a pact with the Nazis. U.S. codebreakers began cracking Soviet transmissions to reveal a deep network of covert activities inside and outside of Europe. All of the evidence confirmed what at the time likely understood as a serious threat. Roughly five hundred CPUSA members had transferred information, sometimes knowingly and sometimes unknowingly, to the Soviet Union during the 1930s and throughout the war.⁷⁶⁰

Perhaps no trial represented the extent and brutality of the federal government's response to covert communist activities and the legal precedent set by Foley Square than the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg from March 6th to 29th, 1951. Julius Rosenberg had been a member of the CPUSA since he joined the YCL in the mid-1930s while attending electrical engineering classes at the City College of New York. Ethel met Julius at a YCL meeting in 1936. By the start of the war, they were married. Beginning in 1940, Julius began work for the Army Signal Corps Engineering Lab at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. He worked there as an engineering inspector until 1945 when the U.S. Army terminated his employment

for his membership in the CPUSA. By then, however, Julius already had recruited numerous spies in the Army's research and development teams under the KGB codename "Antenna." He created, according to historian of Cold War espionage Steven Usdin, "one of the most effective industrial espionage operations in history."⁷⁶¹ Between 1944 and 1950, Julius transferred various blueprints of "radio, sonar, military electronics, and jet engine technology" that historian Lori Clune believes aided the Soviets in keeping up with the United States during the Cold War. The FBI and prosecutors ignored most of the data forwarded to the Soviets during the opening trial. What concerned them the most was the possible transference of information on the atomic bomb.⁷⁶²

To build their case, federal prosecutors honed in on two individuals hired by Julius to deliver information on atomic weapons: Russell W. McNutt, an engineer at the uranium processing plant in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and David Greenglass, Ethel's brother and a mechanic employed at Los Alamos, New Mexico. McNutt was a concern due to his high level security clearance access, which likely made Julius a much more valuable contact to the Soviets than other individuals working undercover. Greenglass was arrested in June, 1950, on the charge of espionage based on data gathered by military codebreakers as seen in the Venona transcripts. Just a day prior, codebreakers alerted the State Department that information about the atomic bomb was transferred to individuals outside of Los Alamos. In less than eight hours, FBI investigators obtained Julius and Ethel's names from Greenglass in a personal testimony. More recent historical evidence confirms that the specific details of the atomic data gathered and reported by Greenglass was relatively insignificant. According to Lori Clune, the data amounted to little more than "corroborated material already forwarded by physicist spies" outside of Julius' ring, such as notorious KGB agent Klaus Fuchs. In order to bring Julius to trial the Justice Department insisted that Julius and Greenglass had jointly given of "the secret" of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. Ethel was charged on the grounds that, as Julius' wife, she was both aware of his espionage activities and acted as "an accessory and a coconspirator" on the charge of conspiracy. The

extent of Ethel's involvement remains unclear, with some claiming she engaged in no espionage activities. They point out that she had no KGB codename, while others say she acted as a messenger between Julius and his various contacts and thus had tacit knowledge of the information being transferred.⁷⁶³ In either case, the prosecution lacked the very same evidence historians lack to accurately understand Ethel's overall involvement.

The context of the Cold War and the appeals process after the Foley Square trial were critical factors to help explain *why* State Department prosecutors sought the death penalty with regard to the Rosenberg case. In late 1946, when Truman ordered investigations of loyalty among federal employees, former CPUSA associates like Benjamin Gitlow commonly acted as witnesses before congressional hearings and prompted FBI investigation into suspected atomic spies, which led them to Greenglass and Julius.⁷⁶⁴ Truman's subsequent domestic and foreign policy "assum[ed] that the Rosenbergs gave the atomic bomb to the Soviets." The Foley Square trial's outcome allowed state prosecutors to charge Julius and Ethel Rosenberg for conspiracy solely on their membership in and association with the CPUSA. Together, the Truman Administration assembled what they assumed were the actual course of events. First, they concluded that the Rosenbergs, as a couple, "gave 'the secret' to the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union," and that this led toward Stalin's desire to push for a more "aggressive" policy in Korea.⁷⁶⁵ Second, that Kim Il Sung and the North Korean Communist Party were subordinate loyalists of Stalin, who simply "obeyed the Soviet leader's order to invade South Korea." Finally, the Truman Administration concluded that the United States' role in the postwar world was to act as "the leader of the free world." This necessitated the use of containment with regard to Northeast Asia. Truman overtly attempted to "prove his tuff anticommunism" to the American people by sending troops off to Korea to fight against the expansion of communist forces, but politicians and citizens sought justification for getting involved in another fight just five years after the conclusion of World War II. For that answer,

Truman pointed to the Rosenbergs and instructed the Justice Department to prosecute Julius and Ethel "to the full extent of the law."⁷⁶⁶

It is important to note that while the Rosenberg trial, and the Venona transcripts that facilitated it, focused on the act of espionage as an escalation of the threat of domestic communism after the Foley Square trial, the data also shows little signs of any large conspiratorial plot on behalf of the KGB and the CPUSA. The majority of the high-profile subjects charged with espionage and identified by FBI records were skilled professionals in fields such as engineering, chemistry, physics, and research of subatomic particles. More importantly, very few of those identified as Soviet agents were unionists, civil activists, or in any way involved with the CPUSA's broad network of union organizers.⁷⁶⁷ Luff identified the one exception to this rule was the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians (FAECT). However, FAECT members who were identified as Soviet agents were also "highly skilled" and each "had privileged access to sensitive information" while the vast majority of the union's rank-and-file "had far less opportunity to collect such information."⁷⁶⁸ If the CPUSA and the KGB were in fact coordinated in a large espionage project, they avoided utilizing some of their most effective and broad-reaching organizations. More likely is the scenario that the KGB was interested in professionals with access to data, and sought out ideological loyalists such as Julius, Fuchs, Greenglass, and Alger Hiss in order to merely transfer information as opposed to gather it.

During the initial trial procedure, prosecuting attorney Myles J. Lane reiterated Truman's view by asserting that if the crimes had not occurred, the nation would not be in the situation it was with Korea. Under the circumstances, Lane asked the court for a one hundred thousand dollar bail and rejected a plea from Ethel to see her children on parole while the trial was ongoing. Because the majority of the prosecution's evidence against Julius' spying came from the Venona transcripts, which in 1950 remained classified as top secret, Lane needed Julius' personal testimony and used the arrest of Ethel to gain leverage. Although the weak evidence against Ethel "prove[d] to be problematic for

government officials long after the trial concluded," it served the effective purpose of obtaining Julius' testimony in court. Lane cited the period of June 6th, 1944 through June 16th, 1950 as the range of dates during which top secret information made its way through the Rosenbergs to the Soviets. To reiterate the function of the Espionage Act, passed in 1917 by Woodrow Wilson and allowed the government to prosecute individuals for sharing information during wartime, the Justice Department clarified that espionage implied "spying on the United States to aid a foreign power;" *any* foreign power, allied or not.⁷⁶⁹

The trial took place in March, 1951, from the 6th until the 29th. Unlike the defendants at Foley Square, Julius and Ethel jointly used the Fifth Amendment to assert their right to avoid incriminating themselves. Like Foley Square, however, the prosecution had already deemed the Rosenbergs guilty through their association with the CPUSA and merely sought an affirmation of the evidence they had in secret through Greenglass. As for the outcome of the trial, Clune suggests to look no further than the development of the Korea War between October, 1950 and January, 1951. While American forces held a stable line of defense along the Yalu river in the months leading up to the new year, the surprise attack by the Chinese Red Army on October 19th "changed everything" about both the war and the way Americans at home felt about dealing with domestic communists. Once the "quick and easy victory" promised in August of 1950 turned into an unpredictable and seemingly unwinnable conflict, "the Truman administration adjusted how to sell the Korean War to the American people." Once victory in Korea appeared unattainable, the Truman administration "saw a way to strike at communism through the Rosenbergs." The Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Foley Square convictions in May gave prosecutors all they needed to continue with the case, and on March 29th, 1951 the couple were convicted of espionage. On April 5th, presiding Judge Irving Kaufman sentenced the couple to death by electrocution.⁷⁷⁰

The Rosenbergs represented less than 10% of CPUSA members involved in espionage, which alone accounted for less than 1% of the estimated 43,000 to 50,000 CPUSA members between 1945 and 1950. Regardless, their trial and execution remain the height of anticommunist fear and the response by the Justice Department to perceived domestic threats despite plenty of evidence to suggest otherwise. Clune suggests that while the facts remain clear that Julius committed espionage, he did so for ideological reasons, citing his KGB handler, Alexander Feklisov, who referred to Julius as taking on a "religious calling." Rather than see his actions as betraying the nation and the values of the country, he viewed his actions as a sort of "military intelligence Robin Hood," who "[took] from the wealthy capitalists and [gave] to the poor communists." The most significant piece of data transferred by Julius to the KGB was a prototype proximity fuse that was later used to shoot down Francis Gary Powers in 1960. As a committed communist, Julius Rosenberg likely shared the view of CPUSA leaders that fascism had survived World War II. Ethel Rosenberg's case proved to be the most damning for American judicial history, particularly after prosecutors admitted years later that, in seeking the death penalty against her as a means for obtaining more names, "she called [their] bluff." In 2001, Greenglass recanted on his testimony against Ethel's involvement, admitting that he didn't fully remember who was involved in transferring documents.⁷⁷¹ In 2008, Morton Sobell, a member of Julius' spying and engineer for General Electric, admitted to committing espionage; but he stated that Ethel took no part in Julius' activities.⁷⁷² The question of Ethel's innocence aside, the Rosenberg case ultimately provided the FBI and the Justice Department with the necessary fuel to continue with Smith Act trials and investigate other possible cases of espionage.

Of the vast selection of trials that followed Foley Square and the Rosenbergs, two stood out as examples of both the continuing auspice of fear that surrounded American culture over the idea of communism as well as the overt trampling of personal rights done by the Smith Act: The Michigan Six trial of 1951 and 1952, and the trial of the Philadelphia Reds between 1953 and 1954. In both trials, the

issue of constitutionally-protected free speech surfaced as the replacement argument for Foster's labor defense and the Rosenbergs' use of the Fifth Amendment. To those who were defendants in these later trials, their efforts represented "a historic defense of the Bill of Rights" and a mission to defend traditions and values considered the right of all Americans. Despite living through "a period of ultra-conservative reaction," communists found meaning in the trials as legitimacy not for their ideology but for the work they had done in the name of that ideology.⁷⁷³

The trial of the Michigan Six, also known as the Smith Act trial of the Detroit Six, occurred not long after the Rosenberg trial. The trial appeared to be a continuation of the ongoing legal effort against domestic communism in the media's portrayal and the federal government's goal of making communism seem like a pervasive danger. A range of other factors also became more topics of discussion by 1951. The Michigan Six trial occurred during an escalated period of tension caused by the Korean War and Western fears of Soviet expansionism mixed by the rise of Maoist China in 1949, the Soviet detonation of an atomic weapon in the same year, a communist revolt in French Indochina, and various independence movements who obtained political and financial support from Moscow. While the Foley Square and Rosenberg trials appeared as an alleviation of fears about domestic communist activity, the development of the Cold War and the continuation of trials well into 1954 fueled the fear and cast doubts on the ability to combat communism domestically.⁷⁷⁴

The Michigan Six included Detroit district organizer Helen Winter, Detroit correspondent for the *Daily Worker* Billy Allen, editor Nat Ganley, Ford Motor Company CPUSA organizer Philip Schatz, Michigan district CPUSA organizer Thomas Dennis, and Saul Wellman, who by 1950 became the acting chairman of the Party's Michigan district. The charges laid against the defendants were the same as in Foley Square: conspiracy to overthrow the government by violence and force. Unlike at Foley Square, however, the issue of "advocating" force and violence became a target of attack for defense lawyers. The use of the word, "advocate," was important because, as the defense lawyer Ernie Goodman pointed

out, it referred specifically to speech. The prosecuting attorney, William Hundley, admitted in hindsight that his participation in the trial rested on his acceptance of "the common belief that the American Communist Party was very bad, a threat, and a clear and present danger." Goodman met with the six defendants prior to the proceeding of the trial, when they informed him of their belief that "fascism [had] come to America," and that they could never expect a fair trial. Goodman refused to accept the view that fascism had taken root in the United States. Instead, he took on the case specifically to prove to the defendants that their claims of "fascism" were not true and that their innocence fit within the parameters of the existing legal system. The goal had to switch from a defense of communist theory to the right of an American citizen to speak it and assemble for it. Three defendants reluctantly accepted Goodman's strategy, but the others maintained their desire to expose "fascism in the courtroom."⁷⁷⁵

The Michigan Six trial began with an almost identical opening proceeding as at Foley Square, with the defense emphasizing that the prosecution's depiction of the CPUSA was distorted. Rather than seeking to overthrow the government, Goodman and the three independent defendants argued, the CPUSA in Michigan existed to organize and advance their political objectives. Similarly, the prosecution recognized the uphill battle with presenting a case against the defendants' constitutionally protected rights and the complex involvement of the FBI with regard to investigations and evidence gathered through the Venona transcripts. Hundley spent numerous weeks preparing for the trial by reading through FBI informant reports and deciding which individuals to put on the stand. Hundley reported reading testimonies that emphasized "civil rights, unemployment, and socialism," and the process of finding ways to fit the six defendants into the charge of conspiracy to overthrow the government.⁷⁷⁶

In the process of finding key witnesses, Hundley came across meeting minutes where a CPUSA member in Detroit stood up in a meeting and asked 'when are we going to start the revolution?' Hundley asked the FBI to use the individual on the witness stand, but the FBI responded by informing him that the individual in question was an undercover agent and that his involvement was top secret.⁷⁷⁷

Hundley dug deeper until he found two kinds of key witnesses: company informants within unions such as UAW Local 600, and individuals who had operated for numerous years as "professional witnesses" or "professional informers" for their testimonies in previous Smith Act trials and HUAC investigations. One of the latter, John Lautner, served as a "significant internal functionary" of the CPUSA. By 1949, he became a crucial government resource for data and names during investigation and prosecution procedures. Informants such as Lautner gave tremendous detail to CPUSA meetings, organizing drives, and the internal Party factionalism, most of which became the basis for charging individual Party members. When the six defendants took the stand to be asked the two critical questions of the Smith Act trials, Saul Wellman and Philip Schatz were among the most outspoken of the six who refused to name other names. Upholding the standard of refusing to allow witnesses to avoid the question, Judge Picard ordered Wellman and Schatz to sixty days in prison for contempt of court, but Hundley didn't feel the need to press it any further in order to avoid creating negative stigma around the nature of the case.⁷⁷⁸

When the case came near its end, Judge Frank A. Picard instructed the jurors to remember that the federal government had already set a precedent with the Foley Square trial: that membership in the CPUSA was enough evidence to prosecute the six defendants. On the morning the Jury was expected to deliver its verdict, Judge Picard expressed concern to defense attorney Ernie Goodman that the six defendants might be acquitted; clearly showing that he was worrisome about the possibility of the Jury siding with the defense. Goodman recalled that he reassured Picard that there was no possibility that the defense would avoid conviction. One hour after they talked, the Jury returned with a verdict of guilty for all six charged defendants. In Picard's final statement on the case, he stressed that the defendants were guilty of "one of the gravest offenses of which a citizen may be guilty," and that he was willing to alter sentences within sixty days if defendants requested to move to the Soviet Union. To make it clear to the public his reasons for offering such a reprieve, Picard stated that the defendants

were "not martyrs," but rather "Russian goats." After the defendants refused the offer, Picard sentenced the Michigan six to four to five years imprisonment, and \$10,000 in state fines each. The case then went to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, Ohio, where the appeals court upheld the convictions.⁷⁷⁹

Michele Artt's and Vicki Wellman's oral histories reveal the more personal side of federal anticommunism and the culture it fostered as the two young American women faced the possibility of never seeing their parents again because of the political party they affiliated with. Vicki Wellman was ten when her father, Saul, was arrested and watched as her father's name filled the local newspapers. She attended the final trial as well when the verdict was returned, and unfortunately watched her father leave the courtroom in handcuffs. During the appeals process after the trial, Vicki received an American Legion award for citizenship as the daughter of a convicted communist to validate her "Americanism" and reject the idea that she was some kind of foreign element in the community. Despite being recognized, she still felt that her childhood was "very difficult" as a result of the trial. In an interview about her memory of the Michigan Six trial, she explained that alienation and a general sense of indifference was a common experience throughout her social and public life as a young adult. The common belief that the United States stood against the Soviet tradition of punishing "political prisoners" clashed with the Wellman's experience that "[she was] part of a political prisoner family."⁷⁸⁰

During the two separate trials of her parents, Michele Artt's grandmother, Allison Winter, teamed up with the family members of others on trial to organize discussion groups and support networks for the children of affected parents. Artt participated with her mother in 1949 to protest the impending imprisonment of her father, Carl, while the Foley Square trial unfolded in New York. Once Michele's mother, Helen, faced charges as well in 1951, Allison Winter assumed parental duties on a regular basis and moved the family's core to Michigan from the West Coast. Allison graduated with a degree in psychology and believed that maintenance of the Winter family through the trial period was

essential if Artt was to grow up in the United States without feeling like an outcast or victim.⁷⁸¹ Michele's mother, Helen, had phlebitis throughout the Michigan Six trial and had to be taken to court by ambulance occasionally since she was unable to walk. On the first day of the trial, ambulance assistants brought Helen into the courtroom on a stretcher with the commonly-given "red blanket" for comfort and warmth. Judge Picard dismissed the defendant's health concerns and ordered the red blanket out of the courtroom, insisting that it was a "political maneuver" on behalf of the defense.⁷⁸²

From prison, Carl kept in contact with Artt regularly; sending letters and giving her advice on homework that she would send to him, as well as visitation rights twice a year for one hour. Artt found acceptance and support from teachers, who, although avoided political discussion in the classroom, did demonstrate support for her predicament. Both in school and public spheres, Artt rarely faced agitation; but at home, in private, the FBI subjected the family to routine surveillance activities. Throughout the 1953 trial, Artt and her grandmother kept watch and logged the various unmarked government vehicles whenever they left the home. When the family attended annual Party bazaars and fundraising drives, "everybody was photographed going in, license plates [were] taken down," and the general atmosphere of fear descended.⁷⁸³ Although Artt met up with her parents before the close of the decade and the Smith Act trials were subsequently reversed by the *Yates* decision, as a young American girl she lost critical years of her childhood with her parents as a result of what amounted to an irrational cultural fear. Like Ethel Rosenberg, Artt and numerous children of American communists faced the experience of rejection at a societal level even though their involvement amounted to little more than familial and moral connections.

Following the Michigan Six trial, anticommunism became an even more open-ended platform for politicians big and small to take advantage of. By the end of 1952, the House Un-American Activities Committee had 185 of 221 Republicans in Congress applying for seats when only a few years prior the assignment was unpopular and considered a trail to nowhere.⁷⁸⁴ Part of this was built on the larger

shifting trend in American politics, as anticommunism developed into a kind of centrist glue that helped unify politicians across the aisle and facilitated Truman's expansion of the federal budget by framing domestic, progressive legislation as necessary to combating communism both at home and abroad. In terms of practical results, the aftermath of the trials was dismal for membership. While Party leaders and high-ranking cadres remained stalwart in the midst of the crisis, the CPUSA and SWP dropped in numbers significantly. Likewise, it was not the Smith Act trials alone that contributed to the exodus; it also included "government hearings, loss of jobs, some violence, and deportation threats" that spanned across the nation.⁷⁸⁵ By 1952 it was simply impractical for any activist to be in public association with a known communist organization on the basis that it threatened potential progress in the organizational fields communists previously made headway: civil rights, political reform, and trade unionism. Considering the difficulty set forward by civil rights organizations in the early 1950s, one might think that rallying behind the major cases of mostly all-white communists could have prompted civil rights legislation earlier than 1962. However, it was precisely the issue of standing behind communists, amidst the Korean War and the escalating tensions between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, which civil rights activists *had* to avoid in order to maintain momentum with their own goals.

On July 30th, 1953, the FBI and local police arrested Sherman Labovitz and five other CPUSA leaders from Philadelphia on the same charges as those in the Michigan Six trial. Lebovitz could remember being under surveillance as early as June, 1950, and suspected that the time between his initial awareness of being watched and his arrest three years later was the effort of the FBI to "develop a scenario" that built off the backs of previous trials such as the Michigan Six.⁷⁸⁶ Within days, Lebovitz's face was on the cover of *The New York Times* and the bond for the defendants set at \$350,000. The Philadelphia trial unveiled new secrets about the means by which communists organized their defense in addition to demonstrating that the Michigan trial's efforts to focus on free speech were promising.

Not only did the prosecution seek to uproot the CPUSA's local leadership, they also sought a precedent that would remove the organization altogether.

While aspects of the common Cold War myth of "Moscow gold" ended up partially true after the availability of sources in the Russian archives, Lebovitz and his Philadelphia comrades had no monetary support from the national CPUSA, let alone from Moscow, throughout the trial. Instead, they relied on initial support from Jack Zucker, executive director of the Philadelphia Civil Rights Congress Fund and Sol Rotenberg, a communist organizer for the Jewish Peoples' Fraternal Order. Even then, support was limited to bail and came with demands. Zucker and Rotenberg desired public support, and withheld their offer to bail out those charged until their wives "set about doing the leg work" of getting the city's Bar Association to provide counsel.⁷⁸⁷ Some believed the cost of the bail was set with the secondary intent of bankrupting the local CPUSA. Fortunately for them, the Party's Philadelphia treasurer, Ben Weiss, kept contacts with an anonymous beneficiary to a portion of the Horace Dodge estate. Weiss and his associate would "loan out" reassignments from the estate which were generally "worth more than double the value of the loan." When the appeals process began, the defense attorneys bought into the plan and kept the case moving along.⁷⁸⁸

Continuous appeals after the Michigan Six trial and the Philadelphia trial coincided with numerous other state-level appeals for communist leaders, in particular the trial of Oletta Yates and 13 other California communists. In each of these cases, the issue of constitutionally-protected free speech was used as the standard defense. Yates went on to appeal the trial until it reached the Supreme Court in 1957. The case, *Yates v. United States (1957)*, was the second and last Smith Act case to reach the Supreme Court. The decision reached in October, 1957, dismantled the legal architecture of the Smith Act by reassessing the interpretation of the word "organize."⁷⁸⁹ In a tremendous reinterpretation of the Smith Act after the Foley Square appeals had failed, the Supreme Court determined that while the Smith Act could "constitutionally be applied to advocacy of action," its provisions did not include "advocacy in

the realm of ideas." This then forced the Supreme Court to reverse the decisions of all previous cases where the Smith Act was involved in the indictment of individuals on the basis of their advocacy of communism as a political ideology, which included the Foley Square and Michigan Six trials. The rationale for the court's decision in 1957 is speculative, but some believe that the federal court desired to remove itself from the "sense of embarrassment" that followed the Foley Square trial during appeals for freedom of speech. The *Yates* decision also required local courts to retry the convictions of certain trials, including the Michigan Six, but the courts never convened defendants and left the issue dead. When, by 1959, no further convictions were upheld and no further trials conducted, it was concluded by defense attorneys from Foley Square and the Michigan Six trial that the nation had "come to its senses."⁷⁹⁰

In 2010, the Historical Society for the United States District Court, Eastern District of Michigan, expressed their understanding that the Michigan Six trial "was really about free speech," and that the ongoing questions about the possible limitations of free speech in the nation find themselves rooted in the 1951 and 1952 trial. The trial remains as a primary example of when state governments, following the lead of the federal government, allow "constitutional issue[s]" to "come around and go around" with regard to its interpretation and usage based on the social context of the time in which the issue becomes predominant. For the Foley Square and Michigan Six trials, the social context allowed for the interpretation of constitutional rights to uphold convictions against prosecuted communists. Subsequent and future debates about free speech both hinged and continue to hinge on a decision of whether or not to uphold the precedent of the *Yates* decision in 1957, or to "do what they have done before" and "succumb to the kind of paranoia and fear that leads to terrible injustices."⁷⁹¹

Ending the legal foundation of anticommunism, however, did very little to neither end the predominant hysteria generated in 1948 nor did it immediately rectify the lives of those charged. In fact, some district courts were willing to allow a new trial using the newly interpreted language of the

Smith Act. When Shermon Labovitz heard the *Yates* decision in October of 1957, he and the 9 other Philadelphia CPUSA members also remembered that the court of appeals was looking into producing a case against 5 remaining defendants using the Smith Act's new terminology. It took six months for the court to make their decision and drop all charges.⁷⁹² The hysteria of anticommunism was most commonly associated with Senator Joseph McCarthy, but after 1957 it lost its political value. In subsequent years after the *Yates* decision, anticommunism remained a cultural norm independent of any legal framework that made it necessary to prosecute individuals.⁷⁹³ This was in part due to the ongoing nature of the Cold War; including but not limited to the detonation of a hydrogen bomb by the Soviet Union in November, 1955, and the launching of Sputnik in October, 1957.

The years of the Smith Act's dominance, 1940 to 1957, effectively transformed anticommunism from a legal/political tool to limit domestic communist activity into a predominant societal norm that could sustain itself through foreign affairs and diplomatic relations with Russia. This helps explain the difficulty faced by individual communists with regard to continuing their organizational work and activism, as well as the continued shift of civil rights movements away from the political world of American Communism. While the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the internal CPUSA factionalism, and strife with the SWP began the breakdown process of the political world, the wave of anticommunist repression from 1941 to 1956 effectively marginalized political communism in the United States to the fringe edges of social acceptability.

For Russell Brodine, the climate of anticommunism from 1948 to 1957 was sufficient to upset daily work and familial routines, but fell short at turning all communists into "witnesses" against their friends and comrades. Brodine maintained that those who named names on witness stands did so because there was something to gain from it, such as getting out of an unrelated but committed crime. Brodine and his wife Virginia witnessed the aforementioned transition of anticommunism through shifts in the attitudes of politicians more than in the attitudes of their comrades and fellow communists. The

once supportive public figures, who previously "spoke out for living together in the same world with socialist countries, now enlisted in the Cold War against the Soviet Union." From there, the Brodines witnessed anticommunism balloon into a "cancerous growth" that disrupted American Student Union activities on college campuses, pushed a "witch-hunt" throughout Hollywood, and directed the FBI to intervene in citizens' personal lives.⁷⁹⁴ In the middle of 1947, Russell faced a series of poor work seasons between 1947 and 1948 in Denver. Looking for work outside of California, Russell banked on an offer given by the Central City Opera Company. After trying to work with the orchestra's conductor, Russell saw his role sidelined by a former colleague of his alma mater; who knew of Russell's background as a communist and his involvement in union organizing.⁷⁹⁵

Russell then tried Seattle's music scene for a few months until a former personnel manager, Ross Beckstead, informed him at a lunch that an open file from the FBI on his activities had been preventing him from obtaining a secure position in the bass section of previous orchestras, including Central City and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Beckstead encouraged Russell to "straighten [him]self out with the FBI" in order to be hired. To Brodine, what Beckstead asked of him in order to join his orchestra, and what the FBI desired, amounted to "telling lies" about known associates in the CPUSA. Once again Brodine and his wife packed their car and moved, this time to Portland where the city's symphony proved open to new players; albeit with a wage cut and higher costs of living. Upon arriving at the Portland CPUSA district, Russell became aware once again that the FBI closely followed his activities. The district branch met a man using a pseudonym, "Taylor," who claimed to be an "old friend" of the Brodines and wanted to catch up. Russell knew of no such person, and was happy to learn that the district refused to give out personal information. Russell felt that the tactic was less of an attempt to gather genuine information and instead attempt to inform him that he "was being watched."⁷⁹⁶ After a poor season of employment from 1948 to 1949, Russell turned to his comrades in building trades for employment to pay the bills. Within a few months he joined Local 634 of the

Carpenters' Union, where he supported the progressive caucus in their effort to resist the union's "reactionary international leadership" and their attempt to remove locally elected union officers.⁷⁹⁷

Unlike the upper echelons of the CPUSA, the anticommunism of the postwar period did not completely disrupt youthful engagement with local communist groups. Young communist active like Danny Rubin and Armando Ramirez, kept beliefs and affiliations quiet as part of the routines of daily life throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s. As with the Brodines, however, remaining mute and underground as an activist dictated the direction of their careers and organizational work. Rubin began his work in 1949 for the Labor Youth League, a division of the CPUSA's youth organization in Philadelphia. Eventually working his way onto the organization's National Student Commission, he helped to organize campus demonstrations against the Korean War throughout 1950 and 1951. While working with the Labor Youth League, Rubin attended Swarsbourg college and worked with David Montgomery on campus for the Young Progressives of America, a youth branch of the Progressive Party. In 1953, Rubin officially joined the CPUSA to the dismay of his parents, who had hoped he would take over the family law business. Rubin's wife got a job for the Party's International Publishers while he went on to study law at the University of Pennsylvania. Despite passing the BAR exam and retaining membership with the BAR in the city of Philadelphia, Rubin avoided practicing law and kept his focus on community-based activism against social discrimination. Left wing lawyers throughout the city routinely warned him of the atmosphere, and while they hoped the Supreme Court would eventually overturn Smith Act decisions, they emphasized that Rubin avoid putting himself in the spotlight. Slowly losing interest in practicing law, Rubin turned to night classes for machine work and eventually got employed as the apprentice of a tool die maker by 1958.⁷⁹⁸

Ramirez worked with the American Youth for Democracy (AYD) based out of Chicago while attending the Abraham Lincoln School in the South Side from 1947 to 1956. The stigma of anticommunism affected Ramirez both publicly and personally. The AYD, despite trying to function,

faced difficulties in obtaining public demonstration rights and support on campus.⁷⁹⁹ The Department of Justice came after Ramirez's father in 1957, who was a block club captain and organized a store-front for Marxist literature in a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood. Only one witness was produced at the initial hearing to testify that both Armando and his father were present at various communist meetings, but the Justice Department never followed up with a trial. Instead, by 1960, the negative public image got Armando's father laid off from the Union while the packing companies he worked for slowly moved out of the city. The extent of Armando's active work declined to the point that he was only handing out issues of *The Daily Worker* to different plants while training to be a load operator.⁸⁰⁰ Although never leading figures or high ranking officials of the CPUSA, the Brodines', Rubin's, and Ramirez's experiences testify to the extent of which anticommunism penetrated everyday American life. It also provides explanation for why communist clubs in areas like Chicago, Seattle, and Philadelphia thrived in an era of political repression. Sometimes hearings were enough in particular neighborhoods to dismantle and break down the activism of American Communists. In other cases, social pressure from citizens kept people like Rubin from engaging in their desired careers and filtered them into other occupations entirely.

By 1958 the Smith Act was effectively broken in terms of its value to prosecuting attorneys. The period from 1948 to 1957, however, broke the political world of American Communism. Anticommunism sped up the process by which the political world diffused into other Leftist traditions, but some remained. Communist groups surfaced once again in the “new communist movement” only after the Civil Rights movement had altered public perception about social inequality by 1962.⁸⁰¹ This group included the CPUSA, the Students for a Democratic Society, Malcolm X, the Black Panthers, and the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). For all intents and purposes, the second Red Scare succeeded in its short term goal of disrupting and fracturing American Communist political and social organizations. It failed, however, to destroy the ideals of equality deeply sewn in communities a decade

prior where the CPUSA, CLA, and WPUS held significant influence: Detroit, Chicago, Birmingham, New York City, Boston, and throughout Southern California.

Conclusion

Throughout the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, anticommunism existed as its own world for two major reasons. First, as a movement that targeted specific individuals in society, anticommunism was the reason for the gradual breakdown of American Communism's political world and thus the ties held by community and labor activists who identified with communism. Second, anticommunism did not just affect the history and lives of American communists; it affected the lives of the entire Left and transformed the culture of the United States to fit the ideological lens of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations from 1945 to 1957. Furthermore, the context of the early Cold War from 1945 to 1953 form most public knowledge about the nature of anticommunism and is thus sometimes falsely understood as a postwar phenomenon.

American anticommunism had roots in conservative labor unions and business practices during and after World War I. When deportations and dilemma set in during the Palmer Raids, anticommunism was understood as the most effective means for demonstrating the idea that domestic radicals were just foreigners bent on usurping American democracy. Even during the Moral Crusade of the 1930s and early 1940s, communists who openly admitted their membership in a communist organization "risked losing their credibility and their jobs." Some labor organizers in the South, like Hosea Hudson, were conscious of these effects and worked to "promot[e] workers' welfare under existing conditions" by promoting involvement in alternative organizations such as the NAACP.⁸⁰² During the same time period, private companies utilized company spies such as William Gernaey to gather information on the strength, capacity, and organizational tactics of grassroots level communists involved in both community and labor organizing. Through the help of these key informants, organizations such as the Corporation Auxiliary Company and the Bureau of Investigation were able to develop decades-long surveillance and

research of not just communist leaders like William Foster, but also leaders within the AFL, the emerging CIO leadership under John Lewis, the Socialist Party of America, and numerous union locals across the nation.⁸⁰³

Future studies of anticommunism in the United States, sometimes called McCarthyism and The Red Scare, would do well to understand the importance of emphasizing the link between interwar anticommunism and postwar anticommunism. This link demonstrates that anticommunism did not start off as a political endeavor nurtured by the Truman Administration and then exploded by Joseph McCarthy. Rather, the link shows that in 1945, anticommunism was already a highly developed ideological movement with numerous individuals and organizations ready, capable, and, most importantly, willing to be utilized by state authorities to target radicals. Though anticommunism succeeded by 1957 at destroying the political world of American Communism, it failed at destroying the community and labor elements that would go on to help build the New Communist Movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

CONCLUSION: MANY PEOPLE, MANY WORLDS

From 1928 to 1957, American Communism defined the limits of radicalism for numerous grassroots political, labor, and civil rights organizers. This movement was not confined to one organization, but rather was made up of a multitude of groups that were ultimately shaped and defined by the individuals who took part in them. Most importantly, this movement was made up of people—many of whom gave up opportunities to engage in communist organizing by personal choice, sometimes knowing that such a choice could mean the end of alternative career opportunities. To fully understand a movement driven by ideology, one must connect the personal convictions and actions taken by people motivated by that ideology. As part of a broader tradition of radicalism in U.S. history, American Communism was a heterogeneous movement deeply integrated into American working class history, cultural history, and civil rights history.

It is important to remember that when talking about American communists we are talking about Americans who identify as communist, and not simply ‘communist party members.’ To do the latter is to remove personhood from those who value their identities as communist and their commitment to the idea regardless of their attachment or non-attachment to a communist political organization. More importantly, American Communism as a movement depended upon values and ideals held by working people since the 19th century, such as civil rights and feminism, in order to thrive in the 1930s. To see American Communism as a history of people, and not a political party, is the first step in developing a more sophisticated understanding of why individuals choose radical political ideals. Politically, communists tended to define themselves by what they were not: socialists, anarchists, and “left-wing” progressives. In the spheres of labor, however, communist organizers often found that political dogma served little use on the shop floor. More often than not, communist organizers such as Maurice Sugar and Emma Tenayuca were simply good at what they did and it had little to do with their political

leanings. Finally, in the world of organizing communities against unemployment and racism, grassroots communists applied methods that best served for what Robert Korstad called “civil rights unionism.”

The history of American Communism is complex because of the highly politicized nature of the historiography, the emphasis on certain groups over others, and the division between scholars on what to emphasize as the significance of communist activism in the United States. One of the unique features of this history is that the historiography also already reflects the various worlds of American Communism. The earliest studies of this movement began during the middle of the Second Red Scare and started their analyses with the assumption that communism was a *foreign* phenomenon. This set a standard of viewing the movement through political lenses. Building off these early assessments, subsequent scholarship developed an understanding of American Communism as a highly centralized political movement focused on the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). Labor scholars investigated the extent of communist involvement in labor unions while cultural studies and social scholars examined a link between communist activism and grassroots civil rights organizing.

This dissertation has sought to set a standard for understanding the way in which American Communism takes on a variety of meanings depending on which sphere of activity one examines. The many worlds of American Communism demonstrate that certain movements never have just one history. This includes the history that people *remember*, which many might argue carries the most significant meaning for future generations. American Communism was, as traditionalist historians describe it, a “world political movement,” but it was also a way for African American activists to identify with and organize individuals in their community for change. It was defined by the CPUSA’s clubs and committees, but it was also made up of smaller groups such as the Communist League of America, the Socialist Workers’ Party, and the Workers’ Party of the United States. At the top levels of Party groups, the movement was highly centralized and motivated by ideology; but at the grassroots it was a decentralized people’s movement that crossed over into a wide variety of civil and political activism.

As stated in the introduction, because of these variances in experience, source data, and interpretation of said data, the history of American Communism is best understood as a multi-faceted social movement. This movement, as well, existed as a sub-component of a broader pan-Socialist Left tradition in the United States that mixed 19th century anarchist, socialist, and unionist traditions. To best understand this complex movement, one needs to look at the lives of the people who lived it. While it is important to understand the ideological world that defined American Communism for its supporters, this should not retract from how individuals transformed idea into action and what they remember as impactful for their lives.

Assessing this history in political and social terms has important implications for future scholarship. Researchers are likely to find that there are many worlds of all social movements that exist throughout history and that a definitive history is not only unnecessary, it is impossible to achieve. American communists today do not define their history through a single organization nor a single aspect of their history; they define their history through the memory of what their movement helped achieve for working Americans. A multifaceted approach is necessary for such a history, and it shows that communists in the United States experienced complex and often interwoven struggles for political ideals, labor rights, and civic justice.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	American Federation of Labor
BI	Bureau of Investigation
CAC	Corporation Auxiliary Company
CLA	Communist League of America (1928 – 1934)
Comintern	Third Communist International
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPUSA	Communist Party of the United States of America (1918 – Present)
ILD	International Labor Defense
SPA	Socialist Party of America (1901 – 1972)
SWP	Socialist Workers' Party (1938 – Present)
TUUL	Trade Union Unity League
UCAPAWA	United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America
UE	United Electrical Workers
UAW	United Auto Workers
WPUS	Workers' Party of the United States (1934 – 1936)
YCL	Youth Communist League

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ABSTRACT**THE MANY WORLDS OF AMERICAN COMMUNISM**

by

JOSHUA MORRIS**May 2019****Advisor:** Dr. Elizabeth Faue**History:** American**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This dissertation examines the American communist movement between 1928 and 1957 by dividing up the narrative into worlds of activity; particularly political activism, labor organizing, and community organizing. It argues that American radicalism takes on features that distinguish it from a specific effort, such as civil rights legislation or collective bargaining agreements. As a radical tradition, American Communism has a difficult and sometimes contradictory history; conflated between questions about ideological motivation and the practical gains netted by American workers and citizens as a result of such motivation. American communist history is not a history of organizations, nor is it a history of how certain ideologies had effects on the actions of individuals. It is a history of people and how they chose to balance their lives on the virtues of American democracy and the ideals of Marxist egalitarianism. This research asserts that American Communism can be understood in a variety of ways depending upon the context from which the examined organizers and activists engaged with American citizens. Social movements take on meanings that are very personal to those who experienced them, as well as to those who examine them. When one examines the work of communist political activists, they will find experiences that unveil a deeply ideological political movement. By switching to an examination of communist labor activists, one reveals a much different narrative; one focused on legal strategies for obtaining collective bargaining rights and that cared less about the conclusions of a

political committee than it did the demands of local workers. Finally, if one examines the work of communist organizing in the communities against institutionalized forms of societal oppression, they will find a more emotional and cultural narrative that sees American radicals trying to balance the ideals of the nation with the ideology of Marxism.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I started studying history because of my father, who told me stories about his times as a submariner for the U.S. Navy. I graduated in 2008 from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a bachelor's degree in history, emphasizing courses from the Center for Cold War Studies. During my final year, I became fascinated by oral history after working with Dr. Harold Marcuse on a project to interview the oldest living descendant of Joseph Dietzgen, a contemporary and friend of Karl Marx. I obtained my Master's degree in History from CSU Pomona in 2010, where my MA thesis focused on the work of radical labor organizers in the agricultural industry from 1934-1945. I focused primarily on the UCAPAWA union and how they embodied the essence of grassroots communist organizing not always found in larger unions such as the UAW. Afterward, I began a project to collect the oral histories of living CPUSA members and their descendants. Today I continue to research American Communism as an important component to radical traditions in U.S. history.