

United States - The Popular Front: Rethinking CPUSA History

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THE COMMUNIST PARTY (CP) of the United States was the largest and most influential radical organization active in the tumultuous labor and social struggles of the 1930s and 1940s. While never a mass party by the standards of the French or Italian CPs, the U.S. CP had a real and significant impact on the mass struggles of industrial workers, the unemployed and African Americans before the anticommunist witch-hunts of the late 1940s and 1950s. Not surprisingly, the CP has been the subject of intense scholarly debate for the last half century.

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Until the late 1960s, most historians of the U.S. Communist movement tended to view the CP through the prism of the "cold war."⁽¹⁾ While Theodore Draper's work contains important insights into the CP's role in the labor movement and among African Americans in the 1920s, he focussed almost exclusively on the relationship of the top leadership of the party to the Soviet-dominated Communist International (CI or Comintern). His successor Harvey Klehr evaluated the CP's politics primarily in terms of how it advanced Soviet foreign policy, rather than the party's actual impact on social struggles and politics in the United States. Klehr trivialized the CP-USA's roots in the working class and oppressed communities. Rank-and-file Communists were, at best, honest progressives "duped" by a leadership completely subservient to the dictates of "Moscow" from the early 1920s.

In the wake of the African-American and student rebellions of the 1960s and the beginnings of the wave of wildcat strikes that shook U.S. industry between 1969 and 1974, a layer of New Left historians began to reconsider the role of the CP in the 1930s and 1940s. Grouped around the journal *Radical America*,⁽²⁾ James Green, Staughton Lynd, Nelson Lichtenstein, Marty Glaberman and others produced a series of pathbreaking investigations of the rise and decline of industrial working class militancy in this country. Inspired by the seminal work of the revolutionary socialist Art Preis,⁽³⁾ the *Radical America* school examined the links between working-class self-organization and struggle and political radicalism.

The New Left historians' assessment of the CP's role in the CIO was quite different from that of Draper and Klehr. They found that the CP bore major responsibility for both the explosive industrial struggles that created the CIO and the political maneuvering that bureaucratized the new industrial unions. The *Radical America* historians detailed how shifts in the policies of the Comintern shaped the workplace, union and community politics of CP members to the benefit and detriment of

working-class radicalism in the United States.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as the hopes sparked by the mass movements of the 1960s and the worker militancy of the early 1970s faded, most of the generation radicalized the decade before abandoned their revolutionary expectations for the classic politics of U.S. social-democracy. They sought to achieve reforms and to revive left politics more generally through forging alliances with “progressive” union officials and Democratic party politicians. The growth of a new social democratic politics on the U.S. left coincided with the rise and decline of “Eurocommunism” in Spain, Italy and France, sparking a new “left” assessment of the history of international and U.S. communism.

In this country, historians such as Mark Naison, Maurice Isserman, Franco Ottanelli and others(4) reject both Draper and Klehr’s claim that the CP was primarily a tool of the Soviet bureaucracy, and the Radical America school’s assertions that the CP’s politics in the late 1930s and 1940s helped consolidate a new bureaucracy in the CIO and undermine the possibilities of U.S. radicalism. For them, the CP’s “popular front” policies, adapted after the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, provide a model for U.S. radical politics both in the post-Depression years and today.

These historians argue that the CP faced some difficult choices because revolution was not on the agenda in the United States. As Maurice Isserman put it:

“The Communists faced stark choices in the mid-1930s. They could submerge their political identities and participate in the organization of the CIO on the terms John L. Lewis offered, or they could remain on the outside as principled but unheeded critics. They could accept the fact that, by the mid-1930s, most American workers believed that New Deal social programs were the only thing standing between them and destitution, or they could continue to denounce Roosevelt as a capitalist tool and lose all political credibility outside their own ranks. They could make anti-fascist unity their top political priority; or they could refuse to compromise, and risk sharing the fate of their German comrades who kept insisting in 1932 and 1933, ‘After Hitler, our turn.’”(5)

The CP’s “third period” (1928-1934) politics were hopelessly unrealistic and sectarian, argue Isserman and others. Fortunately, in this view, the Soviet-dominated world movement allowed the CPs in the capitalist democracies to adopt a more realistic perspective after 1935, a perspective that allowed each party to root itself in its “national realities.” Thus the popular front alliance between radicals and socialists on the one hand, and liberal Democrats and “progressive” trade union officials on the other allowed the U.S. CP to become ‘Americanized’ and reach the apex of its size and influence. In other words, the popular front was the only “realistic” and “practical” way the CP could help win and defend reforms and maintain and expand its political authority.

Unfortunately, the Soviet leadership again saddled it with a semi-sectarian line in the late 1940s, forcing the U.S. Communist movement to reestablish a “Leninist-type” party and break its alliance with the Democratic party and “progressive” CIO leaders, leaving the CPUSA vulnerable to the anticommunist hysteria of the post-war period.

This essay begins from a very different perspective about what was possible in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s, and comes to very different conclusions about the role of the CP in this period. The popular front strategy of the 1930s and 1940s, like the social-democratic strategy of today, is profoundly utopian. Based on unrealistic assumptions about the workings of capitalist accumulation and class struggle, strategic alliances with trade union “progressives” and “liberal” Democrats actually undermine the sort of organizing and struggles that are necessary to win reforms and build radical consciousness.

Specifically, I wish to argue that the CP's strategy after 1936-37 systematically undermined the mass struggles and independent organizations of industrial workers, the unemployed and African Americans that had won union recognition, unemployment insurance, social security and other reforms had shifted politics far to the left in the early 1930s. The demobilization of popular militancy and the scuttling of experiments in independent politics after 1936-37 prepared the ground for the right-wing offensive that began during World War II and culminated in the purge of the radical left from the organized labor movement in the late 1940s.

What could the working class movement in the United States have realistically hoped to achieve during the "turbulent years" of the Depression and second World War? While socialist revolution was clearly not on the agenda, I believe three important opportunities existed during these years.

First, it was possible to construct militant and democratic industrial unions. Such unions, like the CIO unions of the mid-1930s, could confront employers on the shop-floor and picket line, could promote the organization of the unorganized in all regions of the United States, could act across industry lines in solidarity with other groups of workers, and could bring together organizations of the unemployed, women and racial minorities to fight for such class-wide demands as unemployment insurance or an end to racist violence.

A "social" or "class struggle" union movement could have helped transcend ethno-religious, racial and gender divisions within the working class and promoted the development of what Mike Davis(6) has called a common proletarian "culture of struggle."

Second, the "New Deal-Fair Deal" cycle of class struggles created several important openings for independent working class politics. A labor party was a real possibility in the 1930s and 1940s. Such a party could have been both an electoral alternative to the Democrats and Republicans, and the vehicle for class wide struggles for the rights of workers, women and racial minorities.

Finally, the 1930s and 1940s presented the opportunity for building a mass, although minority, socialist and revolutionary current in the U.S. working class. While such a current would probably not have measured up to the criteria of "programmatic correctness" imposed by various sectarians on the revolutionary left, an organization of several tens of thousands of worker socialists capable of intervening in ongoing struggles in the workplace and the community would have had a positive effect on the evolution of both the new industrial unions and any independent labor party launched in the 1930s or 1940s.

None of these possibilities were realized. Instead of industrial unions committed to militancy, solidarity and democracy, the CIO by the late 1940s was thoroughly bureaucratized, obligated to the routinized processes of collective bargaining and grievance hearings, and had abandoned all attempts to extend industrial unionism to the "Open Shop/Jim Crow" South. Instead of a viable labor party that could have led a political battle against antiunion legislation like the Smith and Taft-Hartley Acts, the labor movement was the junior partner in the capitalist-dominated Democratic party.

Finally, instead of a small, mass socialist current in the labor movement, the 1940s ended with a purge of radicals and leftists from the unions and the historic divorce of socialist politics from the life of the U.S. labor movement.

It is my contention that the CP played a major role organizing and leading the struggles that opened these possibilities before 1936-37, but that its strategic reorientation after 1936-the popular front-contributed significantly to aborting these opportunities.

It would be unrealistic to claim that a relatively small group, whose working class core never exceeded 20,000 members, could have alone prevented the bureaucratization of the CIO, the subordination of labor to the Democratic party or the post-World War II witch-hunt. However, the CP's historic shift to the popular front facilitated this process enormously, removing a crucial obstacle to the emerging CIO bureaucracy's attempt to recast the labor movement in its own image.

As we will see, when the CP did not subordinate the organization of rank-and-file workers to the CIO officialdom, they achieved their greatest successes in the west coast longshore, automobile and electrical machinery and appliance industries. When the CP made its peace with Lewis and the CIO leadership after 1937, they suffered tremendous setbacks in the steel and Gulf coast longshore industries.

The CP's adaptation of the more "realistic" and "practical" politics of the popular front, its abandonment of independent mass action by workers, racial minorities and other popular forces, actually undermined popular radicalism and power in the United States. The late 1930s saw the end of industrial militancy and, with it, the impetus for the capitalist state to continue granting concessions to working people. The "second New Deal" reforms (Fair Labor Standards Act, Social Security Act, National Labor Relations Act, etc.) came to an abrupt halt in 1938-39, never to be resumed.

While the CP's membership reached an all-time high during the second World War, U.S. politics began a decided shift to the right in the 1940s that culminated in the purge of radicals from the labor movement and "McCarthyism" in the 1950s.

Strategy in a Non-Revolutionary Period

The CPUSA had played a crucial role preparing the ground for the rise of the CIO during the previous decade. Throughout the 1920s, the CPUSA built a small but significant membership and periphery of sympathizers among first and second generation immigrant workers in industries as diverse as the needle trades, coal and iron mining, steel, automobile and machine making. Communist workers in these industries were at the center of generally unsuccessful attempts to build rank-and-file reform movements in the existing, bureaucratized AFL unions (ILGWU and UMW) or to organize independent industrial unions in industries like auto.

At the center of the CP's work in the labor movement in the 1920s was the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), a national organization of militant workers in both organized and unorganized workplaces. Through TUEL, the CP labor activists helped to educate thousands of worker activists in the need to organize the unorganized into democratic and militant industrial unions, to fight the AFL officialdom, and to build an independent labor party.(7)

The TUEL was the U.S. CP's adaptation of the Communist International's "united front" strategy of the 1920s. The 1920s were a crucial period in the history of the Comintern. With the end of the wave of revolutionary workers struggles that swept Europe between 1917 and 1923, the Communist parties found themselves in an unexpected situation. The seizure of power, which revolutionaries believed was imminent in Europe after the Russian Revolution, was no longer on the immediate historical agenda in any major capitalist country.

The CPs, especially in France and Germany, organized the most militant and active workers (the "workers' vanguard"), while the social-democratic parties continued to command the political loyalty of the majority of the working class. The "united front" was the Comintern's attempt to formulate a revolutionary socialist strategy for a non-revolutionary period.(8)

The “united front” strategy rested on the understanding that working-class radicalism and power only emerge from militant mass struggles against the employers and the state. Only through direct confrontations with capital in the workplace and communities do workers develop the power to win improved wages and working conditions or state policies that benefit working and oppressed peoples. These struggles also open broader and broader layers of workers to radical, revolutionary and anti-capitalist ideas.

The Comintern viewed social-democratic leaders, parliamentary politicians and officials of the unions as an obstacle, not only to revolutionary struggle but even to effective struggle for reform, because of their particular social position. The fate of full-time union officials, party functionaries and parliamentary politicians is independent of the fate of workers on the shop floor or the people in communities they profess to represent.

While the conditions of workers and other oppressed people depend upon their ability to struggle against the employers and the state, the conditions for full-time officials of unions and “workers” parties depend upon the survival of the organizations that provide them a livelihood. As a result, the social democracy relies on election campaigns, lobbying and other parliamentary maneuvers, and routinized collective bargaining, opposing strikes and demonstrations that could lead to the destruction of the union and party apparatus that provide their livelihood.(9)

The “united front” strategy led the CPs to seek united action around wages, working conditions, social welfare and other reform policies with any and all forces willing to engage in mass action, including the leadership of the social-democratic parties and unions. In the 1920s, Communists stopped building “revolutionary” unions, which included themselves and those workers who already accepted their leadership.

Instead, they sought to organize within the existing, bureaucratic, social-democratic led unions. While promoting common struggles, Communists remained politically independent-presenting their own strategy for winning these struggles for reforms and criticizing the strategies of the social-democratic leaders. The Communists believed that the experience of mass struggle and open debate about strategy and tactics would undermine the reformist leaders’ hegemony within the working class and open broader layer of workers to the revolutionary socialist politics of the CPs.

In the case of countries with mass CPs (Germany and France), CPs sought to involve the leaders of the reformist parties and unions in common campaigns against the employers and the state. In these struggles, Communists argued for militancy, democratic organization, and no reliance on the institutions of the capitalist state (mediation of strikes, etc.), and pointed out the disastrous consequences of the social-democratic bureaucracies’ reliance on election campaigns, parliamentary operations and bureaucratic grievance procedures and collective bargaining.

Where the CPs were relatively small and did not organize the majority of militant, class-conscious workers (Great Britain and the United States), the “united front” strategy led Communists to work within the existing unions to build broad “rank-and-file movements” that promoted the organization of workers that could act independently of and, if necessary, in opposition to the labor bureaucracy.

TUEL in the United States and the “Minority Movement” in Britain built united fronts between Communists and other militant, radical workers around a broad “class struggle” program of workplace militancy, democratic unions, solidarity with other workers and independent political action.

“Revolutionary Unions,” Lost Opportunities

In the late 1920s, the Soviet bureaucracy, under the leadership of Stalin, consolidated its hold over the Soviet state and the Communist International. The Comintern leadership replaced the elected leadership of the CPUSA with a new leadership loyal to the Soviet bureaucracy in 1928. The installation of Earl Browder as the main leader of the CP and the dismantling of the last vestiges of internal party democracy, the ending of the formal right to present alternative documents to the membership in preparation for national conventions, coincided with a radical shift in Comintern strategy.

According to the Comintern’s analysis of the “third period,” capitalism was entering its terminal crisis, and socialist revolution was on the agenda in all major capitalist countries. According to the stalinist leaders of the Comintern, the only obstacle to imminent workers’ revolution was the “social-fascist” leaders of the social-democratic trade unions and political parties.

Throughout the capitalist world, the Communist parties launched sectarian attacks on the social-democratic and reformist leaders, refusing any and all united action with the social-democratic parties and unions. The most tragic fruits of the “third period” were gathered in Germany, where the Communists’ refusal to press for united action with the Social Democrats against the rising tide of fascism allowed Hitler to take power and smash the oldest and best organized labor movement in the world without any significant resistance.(10)

The “third period” had an ambiguous impact on the politics of the CPUSA. On the one hand, the CP dismantled the TUEL and created the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) in its place. The TUUL sought to build “red” or “revolutionary unions” in opposition to the existing AFL unions. The new “red” unions required workers to accept the entire Communist political program, not simply a commitment to democratic, militant industrial unionism.

The CP’s trade union sectarianism had particularly tragic effects in the steel industry. There the sizeable CP fraction refused to participate the growing rank-and-file movement in the Amalgamated Iron and Steel Workers (AFL) agitating for a general strike to win union recognition during 1933 and the first half of 1934. Instead, the CP maintained its relatively small “red union”-the Steel and Metal Workers Industrial Union -rather than entering and giving organizational and political direction to the insurgent Amalgamated “lodges” (locals)(11)

Without an effective left-wing presence inside their struggle, the steel workers’ rebellion was derailed into accepting federal mediation through the National Recovery Administration (NRA), and the promising strike movement of 1933 was dissipated. The CP’s abstention from similar movement of workers in the AFL “federal locals” in auto, rubber and machine making aided the Roosevelt administration’s and the AFL bureaucracy’s efforts to derail the movement for strike action in 1933, and prepared the way for the development of bureaucratic industrial unionism in the steel industry in the later 1930s.

Despite the disastrous effects of the “third period” policy on the CP’s practice in steel and a number of other industries, the CP did important organizing among the unemployed between 1929 and 1933. While refusing to build common unemployed organizations with other radicals, especially members of the Socialist Party (SP) and the formation led by A.J. Muste, the CP built the most important organization of the unemployed in various industrial centers.

The Unemployed Workers Councils organized militant, direct actions in defense of evicted tenants, sit-ins at relief offices, and mass demonstrations for unemployment insurance in Washington, DC and other cities. The successful struggles of the Unemployed Councils won immediate relief for the

unemployed and were pivotal to the establishment of federal unemployment insurance in 1935.

The unemployed struggles also prepared for the struggles that created the CIO. These struggles promoted pro-labor organizing among the unemployed—undermining the employers' ability to use the unemployed to break strikes—organized across ethnic, racial and gender lines, recruited new working-class cadres to socialist politics in key industrial cities like Detroit, Cleveland and Akron, and gave the U.S. working class its first experience of successful struggle since the defeat of the 1919 steel strike.⁽¹²⁾

The “third period” also saw the CP undertake serious work among African Americans both the North and South. Many on the left still argue whether the 1928 Comintern thesis on the “Negro Question,” that the Black struggle in the South was one for self-determination in the “Black Belt Nation” and in the North for equal rights and integration, was correct. Clearly, however, the Comintern thesis signaled the new priority the CPUSA gave to work among African Americans.

In the North, the CP organized multiracial Unemployed Councils, fought housing and educational segregation and built committees in solidarity with the anti-lynching struggles in the South.⁽¹³⁾ In the South, although the CP again refused common action with veteran Black and white Socialist Party activists, Communists built successful unions among sharecroppers and rural wage workers. TUUL unions became the beachheads of industrial unionism in the Southern industrial cities like Birmingham.

Communists agitated against “Jim Crow” segregation and disenfranchisement and organized armed self-defense against lynching. The high point of the CP's work among African Americans in the early 1930s was the campaign in defense of the “Scottsboro Boys.” The International Labor Defense (ILD) had become a predominantly Black, working-class “civil rights” organization in many parts of the South. Through the ILD, the CP mobilized millions of people throughout the country in defense of nine young African-American men falsely accused of raping two white women.⁽¹⁴⁾

The “United Front,” 1934-1936

In late 1933 and early 1934, a year after Hitler's seizure of power, the Comintern and the CPUSA began to abandon the ultra-sectarian policies of the “third period.” For nearly a full year the Comintern held onto the belief that the Nazis' triumph in Germany would be a brief prelude to a successful socialist revolution. Their slogan was “After Hitler, Our Turn.” When it became catastrophically obvious that the victory of Hitler would not be short-lived, the entire world Communist movement went into a profound crisis.⁽¹⁵⁾ This was an unstable, transitional period in the politics of both the Comintern and the CPUSA.

The profound confusion of the leadership of the world and U.S. Communist movements during these years allowed CP worker militants to return to the “united front” politics of the TUUL, to enter the AFL federal locals and to play their indispensable role in establishing the CIO in auto, rubber, electrical appliance, machine making and west coast longshore. During this time, CP worker militants, in an informal united front with members of the SP and other worker radicals, played a crucial role in the wave of mass strikes that established the CIO in the mass production industries.

In early 1934, the CP abandoned its policy of boycotting the growing AFL “federal locals.” Over the next year, the CP led its relatively tiny TUUL “red unions” into the rebellious AFL locals, where they returned to the politics they had promoted through TUUL during the 1920s. The CP, alongside “Musteites,” Trotskyists, left-Socialists and Wobblies, built rank-and-file movements in the AFL federal locals that agitated for democratic, industrial unions capable of taking industry-wide strike

action independently of the AFL leaders, whose reliance on “friends of labor” in the courts, among Roosevelt administration “labor mediators” and the Democratic party had led to disaster in 1933.(16)

The first fruits of the CP’s new policy was in the west coast ports. Essentially assuming the leadership of the revitalized International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) locals on the Pacific, the CP led the successful 1934 longshore strike which culminated in the San Francisco general strike.

The CP militants and sympathizers like Harry Bridges led this massive confrontation, which literally halted all shipping on the West Coast. They built democratic, workplace organizations of rank and file workers that could act independently of the ILA bureaucracy; linked these workplace organizations together in a highly democratic industrial union run by the membership with the aid of a small number of full-time officials; and promoted mass participation in strike decisions through elected strike committees that reported to mass meetings of workers.

The waterfront Communists relied on mass mobilization and militancy rather than capitalist state mediation and secret negotiations; educated workers about the need for independent political action; and resisted all attempts by Joseph Ryan of the ILA to sidetrack the workers’ struggles. The west coast longshoremen won union recognition and union regulation of the local labor market (“hiring hall”) in the fall of 1934.

The Minneapolis Teamster and the ToledoAuto-Lite strikes of 1934 were also city-wide general strikes led by revolutionaries-Trotskyists in Minnesota, “Musteites” in Toledo. Together, these three strikes set the stage for the rapid growth of the CIO during the next three years.(17)

In the auto, rubber, maritime, electrical appliance and machine making industries, Communist and other radical and revolutionary workers led a rank-and-file movement in the AFL federal locals to create new, industrial unions. The CP’s abandonment of “third period” abstention from the AFL federal locals was crucial to the success of the CIO in 1935-1937. Whereas the AFL bureaucracy had easily derailed the strike agitation in basic industry during 1933, the CP along with other radicals were able to provide an effective alternative leadership after 1934.

The CP was particularly successful in building a rank-and-file movement in the automobile industry. Together with other radicals, Communist workers like Wyndham Mortimer and Robert Travis agitated against the AFL leadership’s reliance on federal mediation and demanded democratic organization of the new federal locals whose officers were appointed by the AFL leadership. This powerful rank-and-file movement, which coalesced into the “Progressive Caucus,” led unauthorized strikes against individual plants and small producers in the auto industry in 1934-36.

The most important battle of this period was the Toledo Chevrolet Strike in May-June 1935, where a rank-and-file, elected strike committee of Communist and “Musteites” resisted attempts by the AFL bureaucrats to accept federal mediation, end the strike and return to work without union recognition. The partial victory at the Toledo Chevrolet complex set the stage for the creation of the United Automobile Workers (UAW).

The first international industrial union in auto, founded as an AFL affiliate at an August 1935 convention in Detroit, remained under the control of the corrupt and ineffectual AFL official Dillon. By the second UAW convention in April 1936, the “Progressives” threw Dillon out, elected a new militant leadership and affiliated with the newly created CIO.(18) The CP’s role in the automobile industry is clear evidence that, contrary to Isserman and others, Communist influence among

workers did not depend upon the patronage of John L. Lewis and the emerging CIO bureaucracy.

Working together with other revolutionaries and radicals to build a rank-and-file movement independent of both the AFL and CIO officials, the CP was in a position to elect its most prominent worker leader, Wyndam Mortimer, the first president of the UAW-CIO. Yet by the spring of 1936 the CP was on its way to cementing its "center-left" alliance with Lewis, and withdrew Mortimer's name from consideration at the UAW-CIO convention.(19)

The CP and other worker radicals were able to replicate this pattern of independent, rank-and-file organizing leading to the creation of new international unions out of rebel federal locals in the rubber, electrical and machine making industries in 1935-36. John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers (UMW) and the wing of the AFL bureaucracy he led feared the development of a "class struggle unionism" led by the CP and other revolutionaries and radicals.

Indeed, Lewis and other officials of AFL industrial unions formed the CIO only after the mass movement from below in basic industry began, with the objective of containing it within the norms of traditional "business unionism."(20)

The height of the CIO strike wave of 1935-winter 1937 also saw the beginnings of a real schism between the labor movement and the Roosevelt administration. The CIO's success would have been impossible without the practical break between militant workers and the federal government.

As we saw, the AFL officialdom was able, without significant opposition, to divert the first wave of industrial militancy in 1933 into the pacific and ultimately fruitless channels of National Recovery Administration mediation. By contrast, the CP and other radicals time and again convinced striking workers in 1934-36 to refuse to end strikes, sit-ins and other forms of direct action in favor of reliance on federal mediation.

This practical break with the Democratic party found expression in literally dozens of Labor Party experiments at the local and state levels. Labor parties were particularly successful in the midwest and New England where workers had confronted the police and National Guard dispatched by "New Deal" Democratic governors during the mass strikes of the mid-1930s.(21)

The high point of labor party agitation in the 1930s came during the UAW-CIO convention in April 1936. The Progressive Caucus, led by the CP, Trotskyist-oriented militants from the American Workers Party and the SP, and other radicals, held a secure majority at the convention of the largest CIO union. The convention adopted a program for "an industrial union, rank and file control, unity of all union forces, militant strike action, a repudiation of AFL leaders and policies, and support for the CIO,"(22) and a resolution giving "the strongest and widest support to the setting up of National, State, and Local Farmer-Labor Parties."

A large majority of UAW delegates initially refused to endorse FDR's 1936 reelection bid. The convention reversed its decision only after CIO representative Adolph Germer threatened to withhold a \$100,000 contribution from the new union.(23)

The "Popular Front"

In the summer of 1935, the Seventh World Congress of the Comintern adopted a new strategic perspective for the world communist movement. The call for united fronts with social democrats in the struggle against "fascism and reaction" legitimized the unofficial alliances, forged in common struggle, between Communist and increasingly radical Socialist workers in the United States,

France and Spain.

The Comintern also endorsed, however, a broader “people’s front” that would include political alliances with the leadership of social-democratic parties and unions, and indeed “liberal democratic” capitalists. This popular front strategy, motivated by the Soviet bureaucracy’s desire for collective security pacts with the democratic imperialist powers (United States, France and Great Britain) against the fascist powers (Germany, Italy and Japan), would have a profound impact on the evolution of the Communist Parties in the advanced capitalist countries.

The alliance with “democratic capitalists” led to the derailing of a proto-revolutionary strike movement in France, and the military suppression of the revolutionary upsurge that initially defeated Franco’s coup d’état in Spain. In the United States, the CPUSA’s popular front strategy provided the emerging CIO bureaucracy, led by Lewis and Murray, with a powerful ally in their struggle to deradicalize the labor movement.(24)

The U.S. popular front strategy was codified at the CPUSA’s 9th Congress in June 1936. The new strategy had two central components: an alliance with the democratic middle classes and capitalists through the Democratic party, and a long-term, “center-left” coalition with “progressive” trade union officials (Murray, Lewis) in the CIO. The CPUSA hoped that by becoming a loyal supporter of Lewis and other pro-Roosevelt CIO leaders, it would create the domestic class peace necessary to convince the Roosevelt administration to negotiate a collective security pact with the USSR.

Popular Frontism transformed the CP from the main current promoting self-organization, militant action and political independence among workers, African Americans and other oppressed groups into the emerging CIO bureaucracy’s “pointmen” in their drive to “tame” worker and popular militancy and to cement their partnership with the Roosevelt administration.

The impact of the popular front was evident first in the field of electoral politics. While many on the U.S. left predicted that 1936 would see the organization of a third party based on the newly created CIO unions capable of winning 20 to 30 seats in Congress, the CIO leadership instead launched Labor’s Non-Partisan League (LNPL).

Like the later CIO Committee on Political Education (COPE), the main purpose of LNPL was to mobilize the newly organized industrial working class for the Democrats. In the process of facilitating the Democrats’ biggest electoral victory in 1936, the CIO leadership undermined most of the local labor party experiments that had grown up in 1934-35.

The CP, having gone from portraying FDR as a “fascist” to a “friend of the common man,” played a critical role in expediting the subordination of local labor parties to the Democratic party. In New York, the CP was pivotal to ensuring that the newly formed American Labor Party (ALP) would serve as a conduit for the votes of left-wing workers to Democratic and “fusion” (Democratic and Republican endorsed) candidates like Roosevelt and LaGuardia.(25)

In the CIO unions, the popular front had even more severe consequences. In exchange for influence with Lewis, the CP progressively abandoned the independent organization of the rank and file and the promotion of direct action.

The first impact of the new strategy can be seen in the automobile industry. The sitdown wave reached its height with the strike at the Flint, Michigan GM plant in December 1936-January 1937. Lewis and Murray feared that the militancy of the workers would “provoke” the Democratic Governor to send the National Guard and destroy the fledgling CIO. They encouraged the left Socialists, Trotskyists, dissident Communists and members of the CPers leading the sit-in to end the

strike and evacuate the plants prior to winning union recognition from GM.

According to Genora and Sol Dollinger and Kermit Johnson, central participants in the strikes, Mortimer, Travis and other leading Communists in the UAW agreed to evacuate a series of plants in Detroit and Atlanta. However, the Flint sitdowners, under the more independent leadership of left Socialists, Trotskyists and others radicals, refused. They instead seized the strategically crucial Fisher #4 plant, where GM's engines were produced. The seizure of Fisher #4 brought the strike to a rapid and successful conclusion.(26)

The next spring, the Communists used their prestige among auto workers to help Lewis and the CIO leadership successfully block the spread of sit-down strikes to Chrysler and other non-union corporations. They also launched a campaign to end "quickie strikes," short work-stoppages over shop-floor grievances. Generally, the CP eschewed the militant tactics and forms of organization that had been crucial to the UAW's successes in 1935-36.(27)

The new "center-left" coalition had even more disastrous effects in the unsuccessful attempt to organize the independent "Little Steel" corporations in the spring of 1937. While hundreds of young Communists served as organizers for the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC), they never challenged Philip Murray's undemocratic and bureaucratic organizing strategy, which allowed "no conventions, no elections, no autonomous locals or districts."(28)

SWOC's strike against the "Little Steel" corporations involved no mass picketing, sit-downs or elected strike and negotiating committees. The strikers were restricted to routine picketing, which did not prevent the use of scabs. The day to day direction of the strike remained in the hands of Murray and the unelected organizers.

When the Chicago police opened fire on unarmed union members and their families during a union sponsored picnic in May 1937, Murray and the Communists called on Roosevelt to condemn the steel bosses, the Democratic mayor of Chicago and the Democratic governors of Pennsylvania and Ohio for the "Memorial Day Massacre." Despite the fact that the CIO's support had been essential to his reelection in 1936, Roosevelt called down a "plague on both houses" and refused to rebuke his Democratic party allies.

Having chosen to pursue collaboration with the Democratic administration and the new CIO officialdom, the CP was incapable of presenting an alternative strategy in the steel organizing campaign. The "Little Steel" strike was defeated, ending the CIO offensive in basic industry.(29)

Another example of the disastrous effects of the popular front on workers' organizing came in New Orleans in 1937-38. In the fall of 1937, the newly formed International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union (ILWU-CIO), one of the CIO's premier "left" (CP) led unions, attempted to expand beyond its Pacific coast strongholds and challenge the ILA-AFL for the organization of longshore workers on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

When ILWU organizers came to Mobile, Alabama and New Orleans, Louisiana, the two largest Gulf Coast ports, they found initially enthusiastic support among dock workers in both cities. The ILA in both cities functioned as "company unions" that kept the integrated port work force in segregated "Jim Crow" locals.

Yet rather than rely on the rank-and-file mobilization and organization that had been crucial to winning union recognition on the west coast, the "left" leadership of the ILWU relied on the newly formed National Labor Relations Board's (NLRB) election proceedings. The NLRB postponed the certification election until October 1938, allowing the local employers and the city police to unleash

a reign of terror against ILWU organizers and striking taxi drivers.

Committed to the NLRB process, the ILWU refused to organize the massive picketing and self-defense squads that had allowed them to defeat mass arrests, police attacks on pickets and the massive use of scabs on the west coast. Fearing the loss of white longshoremen's votes and wanting to avoid any confrontation with the local Democratic party power structure, the ILWU did not organize against segregation in New Orleans.

While they did organize integrated locals, the ILWU refused to confront segregation off the docks. Not surprisingly, Black workers became suspicious of the ILWU. Black workers began to respond positively to Black ILA organizers' arguments that only racial solidarity and segregated locals could protect the interests of African-American longshoremen in New Orleans.

The results of ILWU's reliance on the NLRB and its desire to avoid offending white workers by advocating full social, civil and political equality for Blacks in New Orleans came in the long awaited October 1938 NLRB election. The ILWU was trounced, and the ILA consolidated its control over the Gulf and Atlantic coast ports.(30)

While the popular front produced more Communists serving as union staffers and local officers, the demobilization of rank-and-file militancy in 1937-38 (along with a new economic downturn) ended the wave of successful union organizing in basic industry that had prompted the "reform" thrust of the Roosevelt administration's "second New Deal." In order to reassure their new found allies in the CIO officialdom of their loyalty, the CP publicly dissolved its own shop floor organizations.

The dissolution of party's "industrial fractions" and "cells" in 1937 freed Communists who had become union officials from any political accountability to their rank-and-file comrades, making CP membership less an opportunity to organize with other socialist workers to shape the life of the union, and more an opening to leave the shop floor and become a union bureaucrat.

The social composition of the CP changed in the late 1930s and early 1940s. While total party membership would grow to its all-time high of 100,000 in 1943, the percentage of members who were industrial, clerical or service sector workers fell, and the percentage who were semiprofessionals (teachers, social workers, nurses) and professionals (engineers, lawyers, doctors) grew quite sharply in the late 1930s.(31)

The popular front strategy also transformed the CP's role in the struggles of the unemployed. While unemployment began to fall after 1932, unemployed organizing continued to be an important arena for the CP and other radicals. As the CP abandoned its "third period" sectarianism for the brief, unofficial united front with other socialists and radicals, the party supported the merger of the Unemployed Councils with other unemployed workers' organizations to form the Workers' Alliance in early 1935.

While the Workers' Alliance continued to organize unemployed workers to support the CIO strikes in 1936-37 and helped promote unionization among those employed by federal public works agencies (WPA, CCC, etc.), the popular front strategy transformed the Workers' Alliance into a lobbying and "advocacy" organization by late 1936. More and more the Workers' Alliance, whose full-time staff was mostly members of the CP, acted as brokers between the unemployed and the growing social welfare bureaucracy during the 1930s.

In the words of Mark Naison, "[w]ith a core of veteran organizers and a virtual guarantee of sympathetic access to relief officials., the Workers' Alliance won a reputation as the place where Harlemites went first when they wanted to get on relief or have a grievance adjudicated."(32) Mass

demonstrations and other direct actions became less frequent, giving way to bureaucratic grievance handling and bargaining with local welfare officials.(33)

The popular front also had a profound impact on the CP's activities among African Americans. The initial break with "third period" politics led the CP in both the North and South to seek united actions around concrete issues with other forces in the Black community, including middle class elements in the NAACP and other organizations.

In this period, however, the CP continued to try to organize African-American workers and intellectuals independently of the "Black bourgeoisie" through the League for Negro Struggle, which mobilized massive demonstrations in Black communities North and South in support of the Scottsboro Boys, against "Jim Crow" and disenfranchisement, against lynching and in support of Ethiopian resistance to Italian invasion in 1935.

The popular front brought a different, dramatically less independent orientation toward the African-American middle class. No longer were Black professionals, small business people and Democratic politicians practical allies in the struggle against racism; they were now the legitimate leadership of the Black community.

Thus the League for Negro Struggle was abandoned in favor of the National Negro Congress, which brought together African-American trade union officials, intellectuals and Democratic politicians to lobby for anti-lynching laws and the end of "Jim Crow." By the end of the 1930s, Black Communists in Harlem had been transformed from organizers of street rallies and welfare office sit-ins into the most active cadre in the emerging Democratic party machine of the charismatic minister Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.(34)

In the best-studied area of CP activity in the South, Alabama, the popular front had similar effects. Leading African-American Communists in Birmingham became full-time officials of the CIO Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and the CIO regional bodies in the South. In the words of the veteran Alabama Communist Hosea Hudson, "everyone got soaked up in the union."(35)

As was the case with their northern, second generation European immigrant worker counterparts, many African-American Communists in Alabama left the CP when they became labor officials "because the CIO, in their opinion, offered better opportunities for personal and community advancement."(36)

The CP's support for Roosevelt's "New Deal" also led Alabama Communists, like their northern counterparts, to discourage direct action and militancy among workers and farmers in the South. In Birmingham, black Communists led the Workers' Alliance, which had become the union for workers in the federally funded Works Projects Administration (WPA). After 1938, the "Communist leadership (of the Workers' Alliance-CP) now discouraged wildcat strikes and walkouts on WPA projects,"(37) greatly limiting the ability of WPA workers to defend their wages, working conditions and jobs against the Roosevelt administration's cuts in the late 1930s.

In general, the Alabama Communists, "to ensure harmonious relations with organized labor, Southern liberals, and the middle class,"(38) discouraged workplace and community militancy and soft-pedalled issues of racism and racist violence. By the end of the 1930s, the CP in Alabama had been transformed politically and socially from an organization of African-American workers and farmers leading strikes, sit-ins and armed confrontations with industrialists, mine owners and landlords into an organization of middle class white liberals, African-American professionals and a handful of labor officials.

The Struggle Over the “No Strike Pledge”

On the eve of the Second World War, the working class and popular movements in the United States were at a crossroads. While important bastions of mass production industry in the North had been organized, attempts to complete the organization of key industries like auto or to organize the South had been stalled. Despite their unequal alliance with the Democratic administration, the new CIO leadership had been unable to win any significant new reforms after Roosevelt's reelection in 1936.

The new CIO international unions were increasingly bureaucratized, as Lewis and Murray either imposed top-down run organizing committees in steel and meatpacking or, in auto, rubber and machine-making unions, created a dual structure of field representatives and regional directors accountable to the new CIO officialdom.

While the CIO bureaucracy “worked hand in hand with New Deal officials to promote ‘responsible’ negotiated settlements and to suppress the rampant use of the sit-down strike” in the late 1930s,(39) rank-and-file workers continued direct action over day-to-day grievances in the factories and mines through brief, “quicky” work stoppages and sitdowns.(40)

U.S. entry into the war completed the transformation of both the CIO unions and the CP. Many of the new historians of the CP, Maurice Isserman in particular, see the wartime growth of the CP to almost 100,000 members and their public prestige and stature as the high point of American radicalism in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, when one scratches the surface and examines the actual membership and practice of the CP during the war, we find a very different reality.

The CP's rapid growth was primarily among white collar and professional employees, and their base among industrial workers continued to stagnate.(41) While the CP gained a great deal of public acceptance and behind the scenes influence at the State Department and the Office of Strategic Services (OSS-the predecessor of the CIA) from their wartime patriotism, their role as the main enforcers of the “no-strike pledge” in industry gravely weakened their and other radicals' influence among rank-and-file workers in the CIO.(42)

War provided the CIO bureaucracy with the opportunity to consolidate its control over the new industrial unions. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the CIO, now led by Philip Murray after Lewis led the UMW out of the CIO in opposition to the war, agreed to the “no- strike pledge” in exchange for labor representation on the War Labor Board and government enforcement of the “union shop” in war industries (“maintenance of membership”).

While the CIO leadership hoped that wartime cooperation would strengthen labor's position both in industry (labor-management councils to administer war industries) and the state (new social reforms), the CIO's position was weakened both politically and economically. The pledge, by making the union leaders responsible for the compliance of their members, enlisted the labor officialdom as active allies of capital in its renewed struggle to regain control on the shop floor.

The bureaucracy's role as cop at the point of production, undermining strikes over working conditions, resulted in massive centralization of the union apparatus, the imposition of a bureaucratic grievance procedure and a general weakening of rank-and-file democracy and activism.

Convinced that everything must be subordinated to the war effort and the defence of the USSR, the CP's cadre of union staffers, local officers and a shrinking number of rank and filers actively aided and abetted the CIO bureaucracy's drive to break the strength of working class self-organization and self-activity in the workplace. This policy extended the logic of the popular front alliance with Roosevelt and the CIO leadership. In the words of Maurice Isserman:

"All the lessons the Communists had learned since the early 1930s seemed to argue that the best interest of the labor movement (and of Communist influence within the unions) would be served by establishing the closest possible institutional ties with the government during the war, whatever short-term disaffection that might create on the shop floor... Communist unionists became the most enthusiastic enforcer of the no-strike pledge, and of labor-management cooperation for increased production."(43)

The CP did not merely condemn as "pro-Nazi" the 1943 UMW strike, they acted as the CIO officialdom's point men in opposing the rising tide of unofficial, "wildcat" strikes in the war industries. The CP advocated various schemes to increase the pace and intensity of work. They supported proposals to set up "industrial councils" in which union and management would cooperate to increase productivity. Later CP union leaders embraced "incentive pay," which would have reintroduced or reduced piece-work rates in a number of industries.

Anti-Stalinist revolutionaries in the Socialist Workers Party and the Workers Party had some success coordinating the wartime strikes and transforming the wildcats into a movement to end the CIO's endorsement of the no-strike pledge and launch an independent labor party. At its 1943 convention, the Michigan CIO passed resolutions demanding an immediate end to the pledge and calling for a break with Roosevelt and the formation of a labor party for the 1944 elections.

The CP condemned any and all attempts by workers to stop speedup or oppose the despotism of supervisors in the workplace as "fascist inspired," often collaborating with management and the CIO leadership in breaking wild cat strikes in the defense industry. As the only left current with mass weight in the labor movement, the CP's wartime strike-breaking doomed the movement against the no-strike pledge to defeat.

The Purge of the Left from the CIO

Although the CP's wartime patriotism won it temporary acceptance among the liberal middle classes and the CIO leadership, the popular front strategy during the war undermined the credibility of the CP and other radicals among rank-and-file workers in industry. The CP's opposition to attempts by workers to defend their working conditions during the war enhanced the popularity of conservative and anti-communist elements in the CIO.

Forces as diverse as the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists in the United Electrical Workers (UE) and the supporters of Walter Reuther in the UAW were able to posture as militant defenders of workers' immediate economic interests against the Communists, who had demonstrated their willingness to subordinate the needs of workers in the United States to the changing designs of the Soviet Union.

As the wartime "grand alliance" between the USSR Crates broke down, and the CP's politics shifted once again toward renewed opposition, anticommunists were able to use their new found credibility to purge Communists and other radicals from the labor movement in 1946-48.(44)

The post-war purge of the left from the CIO had a profound impact on the U.S. labor movement. First, the creation of a labor movement completely loyal to U.S. imperialism cemented labor's junior partnership with the Democratic party. The dismal failure of Henry Wallace's Progressive party presidential campaign in 1948, which the official CIO leadership condemned as a "communist front," closed the door on effective independent political action for nearly two decades.

Second, the purge crystallized divisions within the U.S. working class in the post-war period. The

triumph of anti-communism in the CIO served as a pretext for scuttling "Operation Dixie," an ambitious plan to unionize the South. Rather than launching an organizing drive that would have had to simultaneously confront the "open shop" industrialists, the "Jim Crow" landlords and their Democratic political representatives, the CIO leadership spent most of its time and resources raiding existing Southern unions, like the CP-led Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Birmingham, and appealing to the racism of white workers.

The purge divided and profoundly weakened the labor movement. By 1953, in the electrical manufacturing industry, there were some eighty different unions representing half the number of workers organized by the Communist-led United Electrical Workers in 1948.

Finally, the "civil war" in the CIO led to an historic divorce between the socialist left and the life of the U.S. labor movement. Gone was any substantial minority of socialist workers maintaining traditions of industrial militancy and radicalism within the increasingly bureaucratic unions.

Clearly, there is no guarantee that a different CP, which had continued to pursue the broadly revolutionary united front policy of 1934-36, would have made the outcome of the "New Deal-Fair Deal" cycle of class struggle substantially different. Even the best left-wing politics might not have been able to prevent the bureaucratization of the new industrial unions, or to have built a labor party or stopped the anti-communist hysteria that swept the labor movement in the late 1940s.

Yet democratic and militant unions, a labor party and a significant organization of socialist workers were all realistic goals in the 1930s and 1940s. The popular front strategy, adapted at the behest of the Soviet bureaucracy, facilitated the de-radicalization of the CIO, the scuttling of various attempts at working-class independent political action and the destruction of any substantial socialist current in the labor movement.

A CP that had continued its united front policy might have preserved, at the very minimum, a sizeable layer of socialist militants in the labor movement. Such a layer could have maintained traditions of working-class self-organization and self-activity in the workplace and the community, and helped educate the new layer of young, predominantly African-American workers who led the wildcat strike wave of 1969-74.

The fusion of "old" and "new left" in the workplace could have put in place a broader and more politically sophisticated workers' vanguard when the employers' offensive and austerity drive began in the early 1970s. This layer could have provided a coherent "class struggle" alternative to the bankrupt "business unionist" politics of the AFL-CIO leadership over the last twenty-five years.

The experience of the CPUSA is, therefore, not merely of historical interest. There are many lessons that socialists today can learn from the experience of the CP in the first half of the twentieth century. The CP's practice in the 1920s and in the years between 1934 and 1937 provide many positive examples of what revolutionaries can accomplish when socialist revolution is not on the immediate political agenda-building a significant "class struggle" current in the workers movement, and, when the opportunity presented itself, to build militant, democratic industrial unions and important experiment,, in independent political action.

Equally important are the profoundly negative lessons of the popular front strategy-the practical results of subordinating the struggles of working people to political alliances with labor bureaucrats and liberal Democrats.

Very simply, the legacy of the Communist movement in the United States points to the need for revolutionaries today to develop rank-and-file worker organizations independent of and opposed to

the labor officialdom; to organize independently of the Democratic party and promote independent political action; and to build a non-sectarian revolutionary socialist organization-without any pretense of being the "nucleus" of the revolutionary party-independent of any of the ruling bureaucracies in the post-capitalist societies.

Charlie Post

Notes

1. T. Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, 1957); *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York, 1960); H. Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984).
2. Some of the best of this work is collected in J. Green (ed.), *Workers' Struggles Past and Present: a Radical America Reader* (Philadelphia, 1983).
3. *Labor's Giant Step: Twenty Years of the CIO* (New York, 1964).
4. M. Naison, "Remaking America: Communists and Liberals in the Popular Front," in M.E. Brown, et al, (eds.) *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York, 1993), 45-74; M. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, CT, 1982); F. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991).
5. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* 12.
6. "Why the U.S. Working Class is Different," in *Prisoners of the American Dream* (London, 1986), 9.
7. R. Keeran, "The Communist Influence on American Labor," in Brown, et al, (eds.), *New Studies*, 164-166; Keeran, *Flick Communist Party and the Automobile Workers Union* (Bloomington, 1980), Ch. 2; I. Montgomery, *Flight of the Industrial Labor: The Workplace, Migration, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1975* (New York, 1987), 437-438.
8. For the C1 strategy of the united front in the 1920s see: V.L. Lenin, "Left-Wing" Communism-An Infantile Disorder in *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1971), III, 345-430; L.D. Trotsky, "On the United Front," in *The First Five Years of the Communist International* (New York 1972), II, 91-110.
9. For a contemporary presentation of the revolutionary Marxist analysis of reformism, see R. Brenner, "The Problem of Reformism," *Against the Current* 43 (March-April 1993).
10. F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (New York, 1975), 127-165.
11. Lynd, "Possibilities of Radicalism in the early 1930s : 'The Case of Steel,'" *Radical America* 6 (November-December 1972).
12. Keeran, *Communists and the Auto Workers*, Ch. 2; F.F. Piven and R.A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York, 1977), 41-76.
13. M. Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (New York, 1983), Chs. 2-4.
14. R.D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990), Chs. 1-5.

15. For a discussion of this crisis in the leadership of the Comintern and the openings it provided for Communist activism in Europe in 1934-36, see Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, 166-82.

16. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 57-60; S. Lynd, "The United back to text

Front in America: A Note," *Radical America* 8 (July-August 1974).

17. Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, IL, 1988), 127-155; Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, Chapter 4.

18. Keeran, *The Communists and the Auto Workers Unions*, Chs. 4-7.

19. See Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers*, 142-143 on Mortimer's withdrawal as a candidate for UAW President and the election of Homer Martin.

20. For a discussion of the differences between "class struggle/social unionism" and "business unionism" see Kim Moody *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London, 1988), Chapter 2.

21. E.L. Davin and S. Lynd, "Picket Line and Ballot Box: The Forgotten Legacy of the Local Labor Party Movement, 1932-1936," *Radical History Review* 22 (Winter 1979-1980).

22. Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions*, 144.

23. *Ibid*, 146-147.

24. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, 182-242.

25. K. Waltzer, "The Party and the Polling Place: American Communism and the American Labor Party in the 1930s," *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring 1980).

26. See Sol Dollinger, "Flint and the Rewriting of History," *Against the Current* 62 (May-June 1996).

27. Dollinger, *ibid*; Keeran, *The Communists and the Auto Workers Union*, Ch. 8; A. Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, Chapters 7-8.

28. B. Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, 1977), 100-101.

29. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 63-65; Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, Chapter 8.

30. Bruce Nelson, "Class and Race in the Crescent City: The ILWU from San Francisco to New Orleans," in S. Rosswurm (ed.), *The CIO's Left-Led Unions* (New Brunswick, NJ) 1992, 19-44. Nelson assigns primary responsibility for the ILWU's defeat in New Orleans to state repression, asserting that "the protective intervention of the state has often been an essential precondition for the success of insurgent social movements." (44) However, the experience of the CIO upsurge of 1935-37 contradicts this claim. Neither the Roosevelt administration nor "New Deal" Democratic governors provided "protective intervention" to the CIO. In fact, they often mobilized the National Guard and other forces of repression against insurgent workers in the automobile, rubber, electrical and other industries. However, the ability of workers under a very different "left" leadership to organize militant mass action and self defense before 1937 effectively defeated capitalist state repression. In the case of New Orleans, the ILWU's reliance on the NLRB and their refusal to organize direct

action allowed state repression to be effective.

31. N. Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York, 1961), 114-116.

32. Naison, *Communist in Harlem*, 258.

33. Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, 72-92.

34. Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, Chapter 9.

35. Cited in Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 147.

36. *Ibid*, 148.

37. *Ibid*, 156.

38. *Ibid*, 158.

39. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 61-62.

40. Preis, *Labor's Giant Step*, Ch. 9.

41. Maurice Isserman claims that the CP recruited approximately 5,000 industrial workers in the Spring of 1943—at the height of the wartime “wildcat” strike wave and the beginnings of the UMW’s strikes. While Isserman feels this is evidence that the CP maintained the support of the “most political workers,” he admits that the majority of recruits came from locals or internationals led by the CP and its supporters (UAW locals, UE, ILWU, NMU, etc.) where party membership was a prerequisite to becoming an official or staff member. M. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?* 164-166.

42. Our discussion of the CIO and CP during the second World is drawn from N. Lichtenstein’s *Labor’s War at Home: The CIO During World War II* (New York, 1983).

43. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?*, 138.

44. Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 86-93; S. Rosswurm, “The Catholic Church and the Left-Led Unions,” in S. Rosswurm, *The CIO’s Left Led Unions*, 119-137.

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