

Labor Unions - Communist problem  
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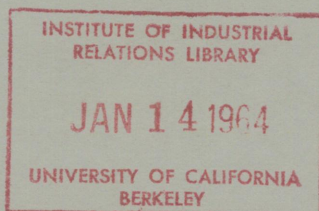


## TRADE UNIONISM AND THE COMMUNISTS: AMERICAN AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES,

by

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## INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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# Trade Unionism and the Communists: American and International Experiences

*John Hutchinson*

Every movement has its leader, and every doctrine its scriptures. The impact of Communist ideas and actions on the American and international labor movements derive largely from Lenin. He was a contemporary observer of the rise of the modern trade unionism and also, as Marx was not, the supervisor of a revolution. His ideas on trade unionism, developed in the crucible of experience, guided the course of Soviet labor organization, and remain of great importance today.

Trade unions did not become legal in tsarist Russia until 1906, long after Lenin had become a professional revolutionist. But they did exist in rudimentary form, and during the 1890's Lenin and other intellectuals participated in union activities in St. Petersburg, forming the "League for the Emancipation of the Working Class," helping to conduct strikes, and using such occasions to spread revolutionary propaganda. From these and later experiences he developed a clear and generally consistent view of the role of trade unionism in a revolutionary age.

"The workers' organizations for carrying on the economic struggle," Lenin wrote, "should be trade-union organizations. . . . Let every worker who understands the necessity for organization, in order to carry on the struggle against the employers and the government, join the trade unions."<sup>1</sup>

Trade unions should attract as many members as possible. "The wider these organizations are, the wider our influence over them will be."<sup>2</sup> Trade unions should not be doctrinally selective, since "it would be far from being to our interest to demand that only Social Democrats [that is, Leninists] be eligible for membership in

the trade unions. The only effect of this, if it were attempted, would be to restrict our influence over the masses." <sup>3</sup>

There was the question of function. "Trade unionism and strikes, at best, can only enable the workers . . . to obtain slightly better terms of sale for their commodity—labor power. Trade unions and strikes become impotent when, owing to a depression, there is no demand for this 'commodity.' . . . To remove these conditions, it is necessary to conduct a revolutionary struggle against the whole existing social and political system." <sup>4</sup> The contribution of trade unionism to the revolutionary struggle was marginal but important. "Trade-union organizations may not only be of tremendous value in developing and consolidating the economic struggle, but may also become a very useful auxiliary to the political, agitational and revolutionary organizations." <sup>5</sup>

They had their place, and must learn to stay in it. Lenin was greatly perturbed that both Russian and West European unions tended to operate as independent organizations, uninformed by revolutionary doctrine, regarding themselves as essentially economic institutions devoted to the pursuit of immediate and short-run gains. "Revolutionary Social Democracy . . . subordinates the struggle for reform to the revolutionary struggle for liberty and socialism. . . . Any degrading of Social Democratic politics to trade-union politics means precisely to prepare the ground for converting the labor movement into an instrument of bourgeois democracy." <sup>6</sup>

It was a long controversy between those who believed in trade unions as economic institutions concerned primarily with collective bargaining, and those who wanted them to serve a superior political purpose; between those who believed that the spontaneous or internally derived policies of organized labor best satisfied the needs of both its members and history, and those who believed that history makes its own demands; between those who held that unions should be led by their own, and those who believed in their guidance by the historically anointed. Lenin was an interventionist on behalf of a supreme cause.

The only choice is either bourgeois ideology or socialist ideology. There is no middle course . . . for the spontaneous labor movement is trade unionism . . . and trade unionism means the enslavement of the workers to the bourgeoisie. Hence our task . . . is to combat spon-

taneity, to divert the labor movement from its spontaneous, trade-unionist striving to go under the wing of the bourgeoisie, and to bring it under the wing of revolutionary Social Democracy.<sup>7</sup>

It was the work of an elite.

A small compact core, consisting of reliable, experienced and hardened workers, with responsible agents in the principal districts and connected by all the strict rules of secrecy with the organizations of revolutionists, can, with the wide support of the masses and without an elaborate set of rules, perform all the functions of a trade-union organization, and perform it, moreover, in the manner Social Democrats desire. . . . Our wisecracks cry out with the profundity of fools, "It is a bad business when the movement does not proceed from the rank and file."<sup>8</sup>

Stalin paraphrased it in later years. "Formally," he said, "the Party cannot give the trade unions any directives; but the Party gives directives to the Communists who work in the trade unions."<sup>9</sup>

Russian trade unions played an important role, without prompting from the professional revolutionaries, in the 1905 revolution. Over two million workers went on strike, forming in many cities the joint-action committees that bred the idea of the later city soviets. In response, Lenin made a temporary concession to the value of spontaneous action, but without giving up his position that trade unions must submit to the imperatives of the revolution and the discipline of the Party.

He also shifted ground slightly after the 1905 revolution on trade-union affiliation with the Party. Some Communists wanted both unions and Party to operate in secret. Others, when the government made some concessions on civil liberties, wanted open activity by both unions and Party. Lenin wanted open unions and a secret party, with the former acting as front organizations for the latter. He was no longer absolutely opposed to formal union affiliation with the Party, provided the unions admitted non-Communists and remained under Party control. It was a matter of tactical choice: the appearance of neutrality was acceptable; the reality was not.

Lenin also formulated more precisely at this time his concept of cell organization. Each factory must have a union cell, and each union must have a Party cell. Cells organized by trade must be joined to cells organized by territory, and Party policy must be followed by all Party members elected to union posts.

Thereafter Lenin wrote little on trade unionism until after the 1917 revolution. He returned to the subject in the early 1920's and disposed of three issues—the doctrine of increasing misery, the matter of Communist participation in reactionary unions, and the question of ethics.

It is Marxist dogma that, under capitalism, in the long run the poor grow poorer as the rich grow richer, or, according to some modern Marxists, that at least the relative share of workers in the national wealth always tends to decrease. Lenin, indeed, did not deny the possibility of limited or temporary improvements, but only fundamental ones. Important reforms could be initiated under capitalism, but revolution was needed to complete them. The danger was satisfaction, particularly in Western Europe. There the development of a bribed labor aristocracy, as Lenin called it, could corrupt the working class for a generation. "In countries more advanced than Russia," he wrote, ". . . the *craft unions, narrow-minded, selfish, case-hardened, covetous, petty bourgeois labor aristocracy, imperialist-minded, imperialist-bribed and imperialist-corrupted*, emerged as a much stronger stratum than in our country."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, limited gains and small reforms could whet the appetite for revolution. Immediate advances were good if they brought greater freedom of action, attracted recruits to the cause, and developed the revolutionary spirit. The revolution was the criterion.

We cannot and we will not in every way promote the improvement of the situation of the workers under existing conditions. . . . We struggle only for such an improvement of the situation of the workers as will increase their ability to lead the class struggle, that is, under which an improvement of the situation is not connected with a corruption of political consciousness. . . . We also struggle for reform . . . but . . . only in a revolutionary manner.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the greatest service Bolshevism could render the bourgeoisie would be to leave the reactionary trade unions alone.

The Party must more than ever in a new way, not only in the old way, educate and guide the trade unions, at the same time bearing in mind that they are and will long remain an indispensable "school of Communism."<sup>12</sup>

There was a final injunction on behavior.

If you want to help, you must not fear difficulties . . . but must imperatively work wherever the masses are to be found. . . . We must be able to . . . agree to all and every sacrifice, even—if need be—to resort to various stratagems, artifices, illegal methods, to evasions and subterfuges, only so as to get into the trade unions, to remain in them, and to carry on Communist work at all costs.<sup>13</sup>

The task did not end with revolution. Soviet trade unions, as Isaac Deutscher has observed, came to perform their tasks as “subsidiaries of the state administration, not as autonomous social bodies or working-class organizations in the accepted sense.”<sup>14</sup> Lenin found them useful and gave them praise.

In its work, the Party relies directly on the *trade unions*, which . . . are formally *non-Party*. . . . Thus, on the whole, we have a formal, non-Communist, flexible and relatively wide and very powerful proletarian apparatus . . . by means of which, under the leadership of the Party, the *dictatorship of the class* is exercised. Without close contact with the trade unions, without their hearty support and self-sacrificing work, not only in economic, *but also in military affairs*, it would, of course, have been impossible for us to maintain the dictatorship.<sup>15</sup>

In sum, Lenin believed that trade unionism is inevitable under capitalism and necessary to the revolution; that unions and Party might be separate in form but that the party must dominate in fact; that the political struggle always has higher priority than immediate economic gain, so that reforms achieved by union action must therefore be judged according to their contribution to revolutionary goals; and that this alliance of labor and Party is as essential after the revolution as before it. By organization or arms, by stealth or in the open, at home or abroad, there was work at hand and glory ahead. It was a powerful call.

## II

Lenin's ideas were soon translated into practice. The Third International, intended to be a worldwide revolutionary party, was established in Moscow in 1919. By formal action it assumed, among other duties, the responsibility for guiding the work of organized

labor throughout the world. "The class struggle . . . demands that the general guidance [of trade unions] be united in one central organization. Only a political party can be such a unifying and guiding center. . . . In the execution of this duty the Communists must practically subordinate the factory committees and the unions to the Communist Party." <sup>16</sup> The Party's agent was the newly created Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), which gave special attention to the United States.

In America as in no other country [its first conference report stated], the labor unions and their leading elements play the part of direct agents of capital. The American Federation of Labor serves as a most reliable tool in the hands of the bourgeoisie for suppressing the revolutionary movement. . . . Therefore the question of creating revolutionary cells and groups inside the American Federation of Labor and the independent unions is of vital importance.<sup>17</sup>

Communist infiltration came at an unfortunate time for American labor. During the 1920's trade unions were generally in decline; the temper of the decade, the open-shop activities of the employers, and a careless identification in some quarters of conservative trade unionism with revolutionary principles producing a substantial drop in union members and a defensive attitude by the leaders of labor. William Z. Foster, not widely known as a Communist but highly respected as an organizer of major campaigns in the steel and packing-house industries, launched the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), affiliated it with the RILU, and began to "bore from within" existing unions. By 1922 the TUEL could muster about one-quarter of the votes for the presidency of the International Association of Machinists, and additional campaigns were undertaken in the building, railroad, printing, textile and garment trades. The TUEL failed to dislodge John L. Lewis as president of the United Mine Workers of America, but the Communists continued for a number of years to be a source of friction in the union. The TUEL was most successful in the New York garment industry. It captured the leadership of the New York Joint Board of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and by its conduct of the long 1926 strike almost bankrupted and destroyed the union. At that time both labor and management in the industry used professional mercenaries. Benjamin Gitlow, then the



Party official in charge of Communist activities in the needle trades, later wrote of the Party's typical behavior:

While castigating the trade-union officials as gangsters and racketeers, we did not hesitate to negotiate with them and make deals that suited our purposes. While denouncing every agreement with the manufacturers concluded without our participation as a sell-out, the same sort of agreement concluded under our sponsorship was hailed as a brilliant victory for militant trade unionism. We savagely attacked the entrenched trade-union officials for resorting to the services of professional gangsters and drew the bitter moral that this was the morass into which reactionary leadership was leading the honest trade unionists, but when we hired gangsters and resorted to gangster methods, we pointed to the heroic achievements of the rank and file, glorifying in the revolutionary upsurge of the class-conscious masses. What venom we spilled on the heads of certain Socialist officials in the unions for alleged squandering of union funds on bribes to police officials, while at the same time some of our Communist officials far outstripped the Socialists in this branch of trade union technique!<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile Foster reaffirmed the Party's role in labor affairs.

The time is at hand when we must give much more attention than in the past to the organization of Party fractions [cells] in the trade unions. . . . At the recent sessions of the enlarged executive committee of the Comintern the question of building trade-union fractions was one of those stressed greatly. . . . Our Party must always act as a unit in the unions. This can only be accomplished through the fraction system. . . . The fractions are Party organs for working within the unions.<sup>19</sup>

The TUEL campaign, however, had only limited success; and in 1928 the RILU changed its American policy from boring from within to the establishment of rival unions. The Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), which took the place of the TUEL, set up separate unions in the mining and needle trades, and made plans for new organizations in other industries. Except for the Needle Workers Industrial Union, which had general jurisdiction in the garment trades and ultimately took over in the fur industry,<sup>20</sup> none of these adventures succeeded at the national level. They did, however, serve as a proving-ground for Communists interested in trade-union work. Their turn was to come.

Communist labor policy changed again during the New Deal. At first the Party was unsympathetic with the Roosevelt administration. The President was a "sly Fascist manipulator . . . [who] operates with all the arts of 'democratic' rule, with an emphasized liberal and social demagogic cover, quite in contrast with Hoover, who was outspokenly reactionary. Yet behind this smokescreen, Roosevelt is carrying out more thoroughly, more brutally than Hoover the capitalist attack against the living standards of the masses and the sharpest national chauvinism in foreign relations."<sup>21</sup> Even the effort to encourage the organization of trade unions through the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was "a movement toward the *militarization of labor*. This is the most direct and open part of the fascist features of the New Deal."<sup>22</sup>

But the NIRA and subsequent legislation facilitated the substantial increase in union membership, and a program was now announced for the creation of a revolutionary opposition within the AFL. The whole Party was to be mobilized, Communist-led unions were to affiliate as units wherever possible, and where this was impractical Communists were to join unions as individuals. Alex Bittelman gave recognition to the source of inspiration.

In short, at every stage in the development of the revolutionary trade-union movement in the United States . . . it was with the help of the Comintern that the American revolutionary workers were able to find the correct way to correct their errors and, through manifold changes in tactics, to press on to the goal of building a revolutionary trade-union movement in the United States.<sup>23</sup>

A substantial mark was made on AFL unions in only two industries: the film industry and the culinary trades.

Active Communist Party interest in Hollywood evidently began about 1925. In that year Willi Münzenberg—a founder of the German Communist Party and head of International Workers Aid, one of the first international Communist fronts—declared that the American film industry presented "tremendous cultural possibilities in a revolutionary sense."<sup>24</sup> Thereafter the Party's cultural committee began to concern itself with Hollywood.

In 1935, according to a variety of witnesses, the Party dispatched an agent named Jeff Kibre to organize the infiltration of the talent and technical unions. Considerable Communist influence developed

in one of the former, the Screen Writers Guild,<sup>25</sup> but the major success was among the technical workers. The International Association of Theatrical and Stage Employees (IATSE), the largest of the technical unions, was under the control of racketeers. George Browne had been elected president of the union in 1934 with underworld support. William Bioff, his chief assistant and the *de facto* leader of the union, had been a minor figure in the Capone organization in Chicago. Between them, Browne and Bioff extorted hundreds of thousands of dollars from the employers, but in return for limited collective bargaining demands received the support of their victims in organizing the industry.

Several opposition groups to the IATSE developed, influenced in varying degree by Communists or Communist sympathizers. In 1941 the rebel elements joined to form the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU), which for some years adhered to Party policy on most issues. The leader of the CSU, Herbert Sorrell of the Painters, always denied he was a Communist and in fact openly disagreed with the Party on a number of issues, but generally enjoyed its support. The tensions of the postwar years hardened the lines between the Communists and anti-Communists. The IATSE and the CSU fought each other in bitter strikes during 1945 and 1946. In 1949—now with considerable community as well as labor support—the IATSE defeated the CSU in an industrywide election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board. This election, together with a series of hearings on the industry conducted by the House Un-American Activities Committee,<sup>26</sup> put an end to effective Communist infiltration of Hollywood unions.

The only other AFL union seriously affected by the Communist drive of the 1930's was the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HRE). The Communist-led Food Workers Industrial Union (FWIU) was founded in the early part of the decade to fight racketeers in the New York area. With the decline of corrupt practices in the HRE itself, the FWIU was absorbed by the larger union in 1936. Objections in the HRE to the admission of a Communist-led group were passed over in the interest of a stronger organization and the need for combined efforts to eliminate the racketeers altogether.

Discontent with the alliance, however, remained and grew. The 1940 convention of the HRE took note of the dissemination of Communist propaganda in certain sections of the union, and ordered the expulsion of any member found to be fostering the Communist

cause. Because of the war, the next convention of the HRE was not held until 1947, by which time the anti-Communist sentiment in the union had crystallized. The HRE General Executive Board, declaring that substantial Communist influence existed among its New York affiliates, had previously ordered the local unions involved to clean house. No local action had been taken. The convention then passed a constitutional amendment barring Communists, fascists, and other extremists from elective or appointive office, and put the HRE Joint Executive Board in New York City into trusteeship. The trusteeship was challenged in the courts, which ruled in favor of the international union. Pro-Communist elements succeeded through a series of internecine battles in maintaining a foothold until 1951, when their last adherents were voted out of office. A few lodgements in other parts of the country were eliminated by 1953.

These were the only instances of important Communist influence among unions which remained with the AFL.<sup>27</sup> It was a different matter with its rival federation.

### III

John L. Lewis founded the Committee on Industrial Organization—which later became the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—in 1935. Its purpose was to organize mass-production workers by industry rather than by craft. This policy, however, ran counter to the dominant traditions of the AFL and clashed with the jurisdictional interests of a large number of craft unions. The Committee was told to disband, and when it ignored the order was expelled from the parent federation.

The CIO then launched a major campaign in the automobile, steel, rubber, textile, and other industries. The time was propitious and the drive phenomenally successful with no help from the Communists. In 1935 the Party, following the Comintern policy in favor of working-class solidarity against fascism, denounced dual unionism, dissolved the TUUL, and ordered a resumption of boring from within. For two years the Communists attacked the CIO; but the new federation succeeded, while the Communists failed against the AFL. In 1937 they turned again and moved into the CIO.

There was need for their services. The early campaigns of the

CIO were largely staffed and financed by the UMWA and a few other unions. But now the CIO claimed some three million members, with thousands evidently at the door. There was a great demand for men of experience. The Communists were available, and Lewis accepted their aid. "In a battle," he said, like Henry of Navarre, "I make arrows from any wood."<sup>28</sup> He believed he could control the Communists and discard them at will. It was a costly error.

Several Communists soon became senior staff officials in the national office of the CIO. They also moved into high elective or appointive posts in the United Electrical Workers (UE), the American Newspaper Guild, the National Maritime Union, the International Woodworkers of America, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), the Cannery Workers, the United Office and Professional Workers (UOPWA), the United Public Workers (UPWA), the United Farm and Equipment Workers, and other unions. By 1938, according to one estimate, they had partial or complete control over 40 percent of all unions affiliated with the CIO.<sup>29</sup>

There was, for a time, little friction on policy. The New Deal, in Communist propaganda, had been transformed from a fascist conspiracy into a bulwark against monopoly capitalism, and the Communists supported the alliance between Roosevelt and the CIO. In foreign affairs there was general agreement on the menace of Nazi Germany but also on the generally isolationist position of both American labor and the community at large. Later, when the non-Communist CIO leadership supported intervention, Lewis remained an isolationist and received the support of the Communists. The Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939 cemented this friendship, while aggravating the estrangement between Lewis and the non-Communists in the CIO. Roosevelt now became an agent for Wall Street and an advocate of imperialist war. There was a Communist rhyme of the time:

Old Franklin Roosevelt  
Told the people how he felt  
We damn near believed what he said.  
He said, "I hate war  
And so does Eleanor,  
But we won't be safe till everybody's dead."<sup>30</sup>

The 1940 CIO convention was the first test of strength. Lewis had endorsed Wendell Willkie for the presidency and promised to resign as CIO president if Roosevelt was reelected. In a skillful intervention Sidney Hillman, president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and a Roosevelt supporter, anticipated Lewis's resignation and urged the convention to elect Philip Murray of the Steelworkers as the new CIO president. The Communists counter-attacked with a move to draft Lewis, but failed. Lewis left, and Murray took his place.

The Communists dropped isolation and substituted intervention when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union.<sup>31</sup> The imperialist war became a struggle for democracy, and the isolationist allies of yesterday became appeasers, fifth-columnists, or enemy agents. Communist support for the war effort, however, did not entirely heal the breach within the CIO. When Soviet police arrested and eventually shot two prominent Polish socialists, Victor Alter and Henryk Ehrlich, the national CIO joined with many prominent Americans in condemning the Soviet Union; the Communists termed the campaign a deliberate move to create dissension among the Allies and to weaken the war effort. There was disagreement on conscription and permanent selective service; the non-Communists opposed both measures, the Communists supported them. The Communists also wanted to extend the wartime no-strike pledge into peacetime; the non-Communists did not.

The issues were joined after the war. The earlier policy differences, the fact that the Communist-controlled unions still represented some 15 percent of the total CIO membership, and the waning emotions of the Grand Alliance, moved the non-Communists in the CIO to more drastic action. Murray was at first hesitant to risk a further schism in the labor movement, but he presented to the 1946 convention a strong statement criticizing Communist activities in the CIO and allied himself unequivocally with the anti-Communists. The convention also acted to limit the political influence of the CIO's state and local councils, many of which were Communist-controlled. Anti-Communist revolts then broke in many councils with considerable success. A number of CIO international union presidents—Joseph Curran of the National Maritime Union, Michael Quill of the Transport Workers, Morris Muster of the Furniture Workers, and Frank McGrath of the Shoe Workers—broke publicly with their former Communist allies. Mus-

ter and McGrath resigned from office, but Curran and Quill retained their posts while driving Communist officials from their unions. CIO secretary-treasurer James B. Carey, ousted from the presidency of the UE by the Communists in 1941, organized in 1947 the "UE Members for Democratic Action," a dissident group which rapidly gained support and formed the nucleus of a new union. In 1948, after Murray and president Harry Bridges of the ILWU disagreed violently over the Marshall Plan, Bridges was discharged as West Coast regional director of the CIO. In the same year Murray dismissed CIO counsel Lee Pressman as a Communist, and ordered the Communist-dominated Farm and Equipment Workers to merge with the United Automobile Workers (UAW). Meanwhile the million-member UAW, under the presidency of Walter Reuther, was becoming one of the strongest advocates of disciplinary action against the Communists in the CIO.

The campaign of Henry Wallace on the Progressive Party ticket was a major catalyst in the final break. In 1947, a group of liberals formed Americans for Democratic Action, declared Communists ineligible for membership, and attracted the support of a number of CIO leaders. In the same year several Communist fronts united into the Progressive Citizens of America, promoted the presidential candidacy of Wallace, and enlisted the aid of the Communist leaders in the CIO. The division deepened, and the bitterness of the Wallace campaign brought new strength to the non-Communists.

Michael Quill, who had long worked with the Communists in his own union, later testified before the CIO investigating committee on his experiences. In October 1947, he said, he was invited to meet in New York City with Eugene Dennis, the general secretary of the Communist Party; John Williamson, the labor secretary of the Party; Harry Bridges of the ILWU; James Matles and Julius Emspak of the UE; and other CIO leaders. Eugene Dennis informed the meeting that "the national leaders . . . of the Communist Party have decided to form a third party led by Henry Wallace . . . [and that] the Communist Party was asking all the Left-wing-controlled unions to start to petition and campaign now, to start the publicity, to line up support for Wallace as soon as he announced himself on the radio." <sup>32</sup>

Quill later went to see William Z. Foster, then the national chairman of the Party. "I expressed to him," Quill said, "fear that this move will split the unions, and weaken our position locally and

nationally against the employers. He said the Communist Party . . . decided that all the unions it can influence within CIO are to go down the line behind Wallace if it splits the last trade union down the middle. He said, 'We have also decided to form a Third Federation of Labor in the United States carved out of the A.F. of L. and the CIO in order to implement the Henry Wallace movement.' " 38

Wallace's defeat was a victory for the anti-Communists in the CIO. The 1949 convention was decisive. The CIO expelled the UE and issued a new charter to Carey and his associates for the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE). It also passed a constitutional amendment authorizing a two-thirds majority of the CIO executive board to expel any union that followed the policies of an authoritarian political party. Committees were then named to hear charges against ten CIO unions. After hearings, a number of these were expelled: the UOPWA, and UPWA, the Food and Tobacco Workers, and the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers; and somewhat later the American Communications Association, the Fishermen, the ILWU, the Fur Workers, and the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards. A change in leadership averted the expulsion of the Shoe Workers.

That was the end of any important Communist influence in the CIO. There were further reprisals. The IUE raided the UE and now represents most of the latter's former membership. The Steelworkers have made major inroads into the membership of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers. Most of the other expelled unions either have been absorbed by other unions or eke out a marginal existence with little influence on industrial relations in the United States. Only the ILWU retains its former strength, due partly to the ability of its leadership and partly to the fact that it is an emotionally close-knit union with a limited jurisdiction and strong geographical concentration in membership. According to recent charges, Communist influences linger on in one or two former CIO unions, but if they exist they are not serious enough to prompt disciplinary action by the parent federation.

#### IV

The success of American Communists as union leaders, such as it was, derived from several factors. The Communist theory of trade



unionism was specific, authoritative, and evangelic. It was implemented usually by men of considerable ability, courage, and energy, who believed deeply in their cause, knew what they wanted, and were less restrained by consistency and candor than were their competitors. Further, the superior discipline of the Communists and their willingness to outsit and outtalk the opposition helped them to gain power over organizations whose membership in general had not the slightest sympathy with Communist aims. Their bargaining achievements were often impressive; and even when higher loyalties prompted them to engage in political strikes and other activities not in the interest of their constituents, their superior organization and warmer faith generally enabled them to hold their own.

There were other reasons. In the AFL, Communist strength grew largely from the existence of racketeering elements in various unions. In the CIO, the enormous and unanticipated victories of the new organization created a demand for specialized services the Communists were uniquely prepared to provide. The great prestige and authority of Lewis, once he had decided to use the Communists, sufficed to silence or nullify the misgivings of others. The miseries of the depression, the social criticism of the period, the popularity of antifascism, and the missionary quality of the CIO gave the Communists a natural setting for their rhetoric and a certain immunity against democratic opposition. The Nazi-Soviet pact was a setback, but the Communists gained a reprieve from the war, when the immediacies of battle were the *bona fides* of allies.

But in the end they failed.<sup>34</sup> They failed in the AFL largely because that organization, committed to business unionism and private enterprise, was a natural enemy; it had no taste for crusades, no large ambitions for obscure ends, and—because of its more stable membership—no need for armies of questionable friends. With the postwar disillusionments, the deep reservoir of American criticism for the radical, and the deadly investigations of Congress, the Communist embrace of the CIO might have become a mortal one. The Communists failed in the CIO because of public opinion, but also because of the private conviction of growing numbers of union leaders that, no matter how effective Communists might be as short-run allies, their true loyalties were to a system in which free trade unionism has no place.

Fraternity had become a luxury, but it was not simply a matter of safety at home. The lines of the cold war had been drawn, and

the leaders of American labor believed that democratic trade unionism had a major responsibility for the shaping of free societies. Victorious at home, they also looked abroad, where encouragement was harder to find.

## V

The Russian revolution had a direct impact on the international labor movement. Prior to 1917 there had been a general unity in international trade unionism, residing mainly in the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) and a number of trade secretariats for unions in particular industries. The RILU, as soon as it was formed, attempted to capture the leadership of existing labor organizations all over the world and gained ground in some parts of Western Europe, Latin America, and the Far East.

But neither the RILU nor the IFTU wielded great influence during the interwar years, particularly after the onset of the depression, the growth of military dictatorships, and the heightening of international political tensions. By the outbreak of World War II, both organizations had practically ceased to exist.

International trade unionism revived with the war. Formal and continuing relationships established between the labor movements of the Allied powers prepared the ground for a new international labor movement in peacetime. In 1945 the British, French, and Russian labor movements combined with the CIO to form the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), based on a comprehensive program of postwar reconstruction, social reform, national political independence, and international cooperation. The idea was popular, and within two years the WFTU claimed a membership of 67 million workers. The AFL, which had left the IFTU after World War I because of the latter's socialist orientation, refused to join the WFTU because of its Communist affiliates.

The WFTU was an understandable outgrowth of the military alliances of World War II and the desire for international peacetime cooperation, but it did not long survive the cold war and the fundamental conflict between Western and Soviet concepts of trade unionism. The break came in 1949, after several attempts at conciliation by the British and other West European labor movements had failed. The Western affiliates left the WFTU on three specific grounds: the conviction of the job-oriented trade secretariats that

the dominant Communist element in the WFTU was using the federation for political purposes; the anger of the Western labor movements at the violent opposition of the Soviet Union to the Marshall Plan; and the continuous opposition of the AFL to participation in an organization dominated by Communists. Negotiations were opened with the AFL; and in December 1949, the AFL, the CIO, the British and almost all other free labor movements joined to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which now claims a membership of some 65 million in over 100 countries.<sup>35</sup>

The primary emphasis of the ICFTU is on free trade unionism and democratic government. Its rules permit the admission only of those unions or federations which are voluntary in character, democratic in management, and not sponsored or controlled by political parties or governments; they specifically forbid the affiliation of labor organizations in Communist or fascist countries. Its general purpose is to encourage the development of free collective bargaining, the equitable distribution of wealth by democratic means, and the cooperation of free governments in world affairs. Programmatically it concentrates in five areas: resisting totalitarian ideas and organizations in the trade-union field; encouraging the growth of free trade unionism in the developing countries; rendering similar but naturally less-concentrated assistance to affiliated organizations in the more advanced industrial countries; supporting the United Nations as the most hopeful agency for collective security and world peace; and attempting to obtain effective labor representation in the various agencies of the UN and other international bodies.

For these purposes it engages in publicity and propaganda work throughout the world, gives financial and administrative aid to labor movements beset by Communist attempts at infiltration, maintains an International Solidarity Fund to help union officials harassed by their governments, and conducts training schools in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to train the future officialdom of the labor movements in those areas. It attempts to influence the UN General Assembly on such questions as self-government for colonial countries, racial segregation in South Africa, and the international control of nuclear weapons. Through the Economic and Social Council of the UN, it works for the elimination of forced labor and for full employment, higher labor standards, increased technical assistance,

the international financing of economic development, and the representation of labor on missions sent to underdeveloped countries. In UNESCO it is particularly concerned with both general and workers' education. It works in the International Labor Organization on such issues as the forty-hour week, higher productivity and wages, vocational training, and aid to migrants and refugees. It also maintains liaison with or is represented on various commissions of NATO, OEEC, the Council of Europe, and the European Coal and Steel Community. Regional organizations in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia, operating under the general direction of the ICFTU headquarters in Brussels, engage in specialized activities in their own territories.

The WFTU has not been idle, and enjoys a number of advantages. Since the affiliation of the mainland Chinese, it now claims a membership of some 95 million, and is probably much richer than the ICFTU.<sup>36</sup> Programmatically, it offers to uncommitted labor movements the prospect of a speed in economic and technological progress which, it avers, is impossible in non-Communist societies—an argument of some force for those who compare the ostensible progress of Red China with that of democratic India. It has exploited racial discrimination in the American and other Western labor movements, and has gained strength from the reluctance of various Western powers to surrender their colonial possessions.

It has also been more flexible than the ICFTU. The latter generally demands that uncommitted labor organizations make a clear choice between the two federations. The WFTU does not compromise where it is strong; but where its position is uncertain, especially in Africa, it demands no more than nonaffiliation with the ICFTU and the pursuit of a neutralist policy. Once disaffection with the ICFTU has been achieved, the WFTU has disbanded its own affiliates and merged them with indigenous and uncommitted organizations. Such self-effacement has been profitable. An increasing number of nonaligned labor movements and even ICFTU affiliates have been attending WFTU conferences; visiting the Soviet Union, Red China, and other Communist countries; accepting WFTU financial aid and policy guidance; and sending students to Communist labor colleges in various parts of the world.

The WFTU, of course, has its own problems. With the consolidation of non-Russian Communist regimes, particularly Red China,

the demand has grown within the WFTU for a greater degree of national or regional independence from the Soviet Union. The problem is serious enough already, and will certainly grow with any further estrangement between Red China and the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup>

But there is division within the ICFTU as well. The prevailing American view, as expressed by the merged AFL-CIO, is that the European labor movements—not to speak of the African, Asian, and Latin American—do not understand the need for an absolute choice between free and Soviet-style trade unionism. On the other hand, the Europeans and others—including many Americans—generally believe that the official policy of the American labor movement is too rigid in its anti-Communism and insufficiently sensitive to the variety of social reform and trade union structures needed to satisfy the needs of the emerging countries. The division is a serious matter. Whether conceived as a question of trade union organization alone, or of the contribution of free trade unionism to democratic political institutions, or of the protection of vital sources of raw materials, the odds are high.

The choice is real. If free trade unionism can embrace a variety of forms and policies, it is nevertheless committed to the principle of free association, to a system of decisive collective bargaining, to the right to strike, and to the self-conceived contribution of an independent labor movement to the welfare of a free society. The Communists have a different view. "In the Bolshevik system," Prime Minister Janos Kádár of Hungary has stated, "trade unions have become transmission belts: their role is restricted to the intensification of production, the organization and popularization of work competition, the affirmation of the leadership of the Party."<sup>38</sup> According to *Trud*, the official organ of Bulgarian labor, "It is politically incorrect to speak today in our country of defending the interests of the workers and employees as it was done in the past, and trade unions do not and cannot have such a task."<sup>39</sup>

Ernest Thornton, former federal secretary of the Australian Ironworkers' Association, informed the 15th National Congress of the Australian Communist Party, "The policy of the Ironworkers' Union is decided in consultation with the leaders of the Communist Party. The great achievements of our union in the last few years should be credited to the Communist Party. But they are not so credited. Because the Party does not appear as the Communist Party to the members of the union, the achievements of our leaders

are credited to individuals and not to the Party." <sup>40</sup> The advice of Lenin prevails: control, but hide the instruments of control.

The choice, once made, has political implications of the highest order. "The outlook for nonpolitical unionism in the newly developing countries," according to Walter Galenson, "is not bright." <sup>41</sup> In most such countries the indigenous labor movements have little economic power. Weak unions turn to politics, and can help to determine by their philosophical choices the political systems under which their organizations will live. The WFTU, by appealing to national unity and independence, to nonalignment in international affairs, and to the need for draconian reforms, has gained strong allies. "Political developments in Africa and Latin America," George Lichtblau has written, "now enable the labor organizations of the Soviet-bloc countries to contribute tactical and technical guidance, training of cadres, and financial assistance to a growing number of labor movements, helping them thereby to transform their societies into socio-economic structures resembling those of the 'People's Democracies.'" <sup>42</sup>

The Communist effort is formidable. The Soviet Union, according to one estimate, has trained a reserve of ten thousand experts on development available for service overseas.<sup>43</sup> There is already, in countries such as Indonesia and Japan, a substantial body of support for Communist causes. In Costa Rica, Brazil, Chile, and Peru, the WFTU has an estimated 447 full-time organizers, compared with the ICFTU's seven.<sup>44</sup> In Africa, the WFTU has helped to set up the new, nonaligned All-Africa Trade Union Federation, which has made inroads into ICFTU strength in many parts of the continent. The Confederation of Arab Trade Unions, partly due to WFTU efforts, vacillates between nonalignment and anti-Westernism.<sup>45</sup> In India, the mantle of respectability assumed by the Communist-controlled All-India Trade Union Congress has raised the prospect of alliance and merger with the ICFTU-affiliated Indian National Trade Union Congress.<sup>46</sup> Inroads are being made, exchanges are multiplied, and the lines are blurred. There is a final, ominous note. Red China, according to West African testimony, is now training foreign trade unionists in the arts of sabotage and guerrilla warfare.<sup>47</sup>

The obvious response is to expand free trade-union activities through greatly increased investments in men and money; but skill is demanded no less than scale. A commitment to free trade union-

ism does not preclude flexibility in application. Native soils produce different needs, and the price of cooperation should not be identity in institutions.

The final decisions, in any event, are not in our hands. They will be made by complex men who—exalted by independence, driven by nationalism, sensitive to discrimination, courted by giants, and pressed by their followers—are eager for achievement. In every case the choice between impatience and tolerance, between authority and consent, will be a crucial one. In almost every case the absence of a native democratic tradition, the hunger for status, and the absence of a native democratic tradition, will counsel discipline rather than dissent, the authoritarian rather than the democratic measure, the unitary rather than the pluralist state. The degree of transitional concession to the free society will depend in good measure on the quality of understanding which is given. There is, and can be, no assurance that the outcome will be in our favor.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> V.I. Lenin, "What Is To Be Done?" in Lenin, *Collected Works: The Iskra Period* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), p. 189. In general see Thomas Taylor Hammond, *Lenin on Trade Unions and Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> "What Is To Be Done?" p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lenin, "Novoe poboishche," in *Sochineniia*, 4:115, June 1901.

<sup>5</sup> "What Is To Be Done?" p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 172.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194, 196.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Hammond, *op. cit.*, p. 73n.

<sup>10</sup> Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952), pp. 58-59. Italics in the original.

<sup>11</sup> "Pismo 'Severnomu Soiuzu'," in *Sochineniia*, 5:129 (April 1902).

<sup>12</sup> *Left-Wing Communism*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 64.

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1950), pp. 135-136.

<sup>15</sup> *Left-Wing Communism*, pp. 52-53. Italics in the original.

<sup>16</sup> *Theses and Statutes of the Third (Communist) International* (Moscow: 1922), p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> *Resolutions and Decisions Adopted by the First International Congress of Revolutionary Trade and Industrial Unions* (Moscow: 1921), pp. 19, 31, cited in the testimony of Philip Taft, "Communist Domination of Unions and National Security," *Hearings*, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, 82d Cong., 2d sess. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952).

<sup>18</sup> Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess* (New York: Dutton, 1939), p. 339.

<sup>19</sup> William Z. Foster, "Party Trade-Union Factions," *Workers Monthly*, July 1925, p. 414.

<sup>20</sup> The Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, the Communist-led group, broke away from the AFL International Fur Workers Union (IFWU) in 1928. By 1932 it dominated the New York City fur market, the center of the industry. Following another change in Party policy, it reaffiliated with the IFWU in 1934 and brought that union under Communist control. The IFWU later joined the Congress of Industrial Organizations, was expelled in 1949, and after removing Communists from office was absorbed by the Meat Cutters in 1955.

<sup>21</sup> Earl Browder, "Why an Open Letter to Our Party Membership?" *The Communist*, August 1933, pp. 711-712.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715. Italics in the original.

<sup>23</sup> Alex Bittelman, "Milestones of Comintern Leadership," *The Communist*, March, 1934, p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in David J. Saposs, *Communism in American Unions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> However, according to one observer, no Communist propaganda ever reached the screen except in "possibly rare instances." See Dorothy B. Jones, "Communism and the Movies: A Study of Film Content," in John Cogley, ed., *Report on Blacklisting* (Fund for the Republic, 1956), p. 197.



<sup>26</sup> See House Committee on Un-American Activities, *Hearings* (on the motion picture industry), 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth repeating that in both cases the Communists gained a foothold by opposing racketeering elements, thus winning the support of a substantial minority of non-Communists.

<sup>28</sup> Max H. Kampelman, *The Communist Party vs. the CIO* (New York: Praeger, 1957), p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Herbert Harris, *Labor's Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1940), pp. 129-133. Most of these were small unions. The Party-controlled unions never represented more than 20 percent of the CIO's individual membership.

<sup>30</sup> Kampelman, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> See Joel Seidman, "Labor Policy of the Communist Party during World War II," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, October 1950.

<sup>32</sup> Kampelman, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>34</sup> On legislative measures taken to control Communism in American unions, see Benjamin Aaron, "Statutory Regulation of Internal Union Affairs: The Control of Communism," *Proceedings of New York University Fifth Annual Conference on Labor* (Albany: Matthew Bender, 1952).

<sup>35</sup> Arne Geijer, "The Tasks Ahead," *Free Labour World*, August-September 1962.

<sup>36</sup> Otto Pick and Andrew Wiseman, "Moscow and the WFTU," *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1959.

<sup>37</sup> See G. E. Lynd, "Workers Disunite," *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1962.

<sup>38</sup> Robert Gabor, *Trade Unions: Transmission Belts of the Party* (New York: Free Hungarian Trade Unions in Exile, n.d.).

<sup>39</sup> *Trud*, February 22, 1952.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert E. Weiner, "The Reduction of Communist Power in the Australian Trade Unions," *Political Science Quarterly*, September 1954, p. 398.

<sup>41</sup> Walter Galenson, *Labor in Developing Economies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> George Lichtblau, "The Communist Labor Offensive in

Former Colonial Countries," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, April 1962, p. 401. Among West European unions substantial Communist strength is confined to France and Italy.

<sup>43</sup> "The Soviet Bloc and the Developing Countries," *Forschungsstelle der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung* (Bonn: 1962), p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> A. Sanchez Madariaga, "The Communist Drive against Latin American Unions," *Free Labour World*, June 1961. For a historical review see Ben G. Burnett, "Communist Strategy in the Latin American Labor Movement," *Social Science*, April 1960. See also Robert J. Alexander, "Labor and Inter-American Relations," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, March 1961.

<sup>45</sup> Lichtblau, *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> Brij Moohan Toofan, "The Communists and Indian Labor," *Problems of Communism*, March-April 1959.

<sup>47</sup> *Sunday Telegraph* (London), July 23, 1961. According to various reports, Cuba is similarly engaged.

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