

# Reassessing The Historical UAW: Walter Reuther's Affiliation with the Communist Party and Something of Its Meaning — A Document of Party Involvement, 1939

Victor G. Devinatz

Volume 49, 2002

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/l1t49not02>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Devinatz, V. G. (2002). Reassessing The Historical UAW: Walter Reuther's Affiliation with the Communist Party and Something of Its Meaning — A Document of Party Involvement, 1939. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 49, 221–244.

# Reassessing The Historical UAW: Walter Reuther's Affiliation with the Communist Party and Something of Its Meaning — A Document of Party Involvement, 1939

Victor G. Devinatz

Walter Reuther's close connection to the Communists, including a possible brief membership, has a meaning and legacy that is of more than sectarian interest. To most of his conservative opponents, Reuther's sojourn in the Soviet Union and subsequent alliance with the Communists sustained the accusation that he was simply a red. To union activists this charge was something of an accolade in the mid-1930s, but a few years later, the suspicion among Reuther's left-wing rivals that he used the CP's influence to advance his fortunes in the UAW lay behind their frequent assertions that he was a political opportunist at the very birth of his union career. Nor did the issue fade even after his death more than thirty years later ....<sup>1</sup>

WALTER REUTHER AND JOHN L. LEWIS are undoubtedly the two greatest union leaders of middle 20th century North American labour history. Although both of these two labour titans were autocratic leaders of their respective unions and trail-blazing pioneers, their rise to prominence in the US labour movement is due to different, albeit interrelated reasons. Lewis, the president of the United Mine Workers (UMW), broke from the narrow, craft-oriented American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1935 to form the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), which immediately commenced to organize the mass of unskilled and semiskilled workers in basic industries, long ignored and neglected by the AFL unions. Reuther, who

<sup>1</sup>Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor* (New York 1995), 55-56.

Victor G. Devinatz, "Reassessing The Historical UAW: Walter Reuther's Affiliation with the Communist Party and Something of Its Meaning — A Document of Party Involvement, 1939," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 223-45.

achieved the status of a United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW) vice president by the late 1930s and was director of the UAW General Motors Department during the World War II years, emerged as the UAW president after achieving a razor-thin margin of victory at the union's tenth convention towards the end of March 1946. At the UAW's 1947 convention, Reuther solidified his hold on the union presidency with the election of a staunchly Reutherite executive board and he remained UAW president until a plane crash took his life in 1970. As UAW president, Reuther's prominence lay in his pioneering of a vast array of fringe benefits for autoworkers — from cost of living adjustments and pensions to supplemental unemployment benefits — that many North American unionists now take for granted in their early 21st century collective bargaining agreements.<sup>2</sup>

Although Reuther successfully eliminated the US Communist Party (CP) from the UAW beginning in 1947, which became a precursor to the purge of the eleven CP-led unions from the CIO in 1949-1950, Reuther's relationship with the CP in the early tumultuous years of the UAW is a topic that has generated controversy among UAW scholars and Reuther biographers for more than five decades. Reuther's earliest involvement with radical politics dates back to the fall of 1930 as a student at Detroit City College (DCC), now Wayne State University, where he helped to organize the DCC Social Problems Club, a League for Industrial Democracy (LID) affiliate, which was, in essence, a branch of the Socialist Party (SP). Considering himself a Socialist at this time, Reuther actively campaigned throughout the nation for the SP presidential candidate, Norman Thomas, in 1932. Reuther's first exposure to CP politics may have come while working at Ford in 1931 when he joined the Auto Workers Union (AWU), a radical group that functioned within the CP milieu. Beginning at this time, Reuther developed an enthusiasm for the Soviet experiment, which may have been originally inspired by his close friendship with John Rushton, an older tool and die maker who was a Communist and had traveled to the Soviet Union in 1930. This enthusiasm for the construction of Soviet socialism resulted in Reuther, and his brother Victor, traveling to the Soviet Union and working in the toolroom of the Gorky Auto Works from November 1933 until June 1935. Upon returning to the US in 1935, over a period of several months, Reuther spoke quite favorably about his Soviet experience at meetings sponsored by either the Friends of the Soviet Union or the SP.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the future UAW leader's sympathies and contacts with the CP upon returning from the Soviet Union in 1935, no Reuther biography until the 1990s admitted the serious possibility that he may have been a CP member in the mid-to-late 1930s. Early, and sympathetic biographers of Reuther, such as Irving Howe and B.J. Widick, who were members of Max Shachtman's Workers Party/In-

<sup>2</sup>Martin Glaberman, "Walter Reuther and the Decline of the American Labor Movement," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 11 (1997), 73.

<sup>3</sup>Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 25-46.

dependent Socialist League and Reutherites themselves by the late 1940s, noted in their 1949 book *The UAW and Walter Reuther*, that in November 1937, "it had become apparent that Reuther could not be sucked into the Stalinist movement." Continuing with their discussion of Reuther's relationship with the CP, the authors mention "the noticeable coolness that arose in early 1938 between the Stalinists and Reuther." Although a footnote in the book cites a *Daily Worker* article on "the days of 1936 and 1937 when Reuther was in alliance with the Communists," it further reports that Louis Budenz and other CP functionaries approached Reuther about joining the party but that he declined their offer.<sup>4</sup>

Written in 1958, nearly a decade after Howe and Widick's monograph, the conservative Eldorous L. Dayton takes Reuther at his word in his hostile biography, noting that Reuther claimed he was never a CP member. According to Dayton, "(Reuther) insists to high heaven he never was a Communist. A Socialist yes, but never a Communist, and he probably never was, in the technical sense."<sup>5</sup>

And in a Reuther biography published in the year of the UAW president's untimely death in 1970, Frank Cormier and William J. Eaton acknowledge "the working alliance between the Reuther brothers and the UAW's Communist bloc." However, Cormier and Eaton invoke the testimony of both Fred W. Frahn, the Detroit Police Superintendent in 1938, and Reuther himself to deny Reuther's membership in the CP. Frahn states, "Walter Reuther 'is not a Communist, but he associates with Communists at all times, and they work together'." In a telegram that Reuther sent to the Special Committee on Un-American Activities of the House of Representatives (Dies Committee) in 1938, Reuther stated unequivocally, "I am not and never have been a member of the Communist Party nor a supporter of its policies nor subject to its control or influence in any way."<sup>6</sup> In Gould and Hickock's biography of Reuther published two years later in 1972, the authors echo Howe and Widick's claim that Reuther turned down Louis Budenz's invitation to join the CP "when he learned that he would have to submit to Soviet discipline, especially on foreign affairs."<sup>7</sup>

In 1973, one year after the publication of Gould and Hickock's biography, an article written by Martin Glaberman provided "the first relatively 'hard' evidence" of Reuther's party membership although, according to Glaberman, it was not "absolute proof." While conducting research in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs (Wayne State University), Glaberman discovered two references to Reuther's CP membership in the Nat Ganley Collection. The evidence refers to typewritten notes that Ganley, who had been a leading CP activist in the UAW as

<sup>4</sup>Irving Howe and B.J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York 1949), 74.

<sup>5</sup>Eldorous L. Dayton, *Walter Reuther: The Autocrat of the Bargaining Table* (New York 1958), 60.

<sup>6</sup>Frank Cormier and William J. Eaton, *Reuther* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1970), 130.

<sup>7</sup>Jean Gould and Lorena Hickock, *Walter Reuther: Labor's Rugged Individualist* (New York 1972), 153.

well as a business agent of UAW Local 155 for several years, had made on a draft of Philip Bonosky's book, *Brother Bill McKie*. The book, published in 1953 by International Publishers, was a biography of a leading CP activist in Detroit who had been particularly close to Reuther in the early years of the UAW. Specifically, Ganley wrote:

p. 156. Propose to eliminate references to Reuther joining the CP, altho (sic) its (sic) true he was a member-at-large and I collected his dues. Reasons: We can't prove his membership, Reuther would deny it and possibly sue for libel — We take no particular pride in his membership in our Party and should avoid the charge of inverted red-baiting that Reuther would make against us.

Footnote (sic) this page should be eliminated. Its wrong factually. Reuther agreed to remain in Socialist Party and bore from within in agreement with us (course we were silly to do this).<sup>8</sup>

In evaluating the legitimacy of this evidence, Glaberman provides specific reasons for believing that Ganley's statements were plausible. First, Glaberman points out that Ganley's notes were written for fellow CP members and not for the public at large. Second, since Ganley was suggesting that Reuther's CP membership not be reported in the biography, Glaberman argues that it would hardly have been necessary for him to lie about Reuther's relationship to the CP. Thus, Glaberman concludes that while "(t)he dates of his possible membership remain unknown," it is probable that Reuther was a CP member, "although it can be assumed that the period involved was no more than parts of 1936 and 1937."<sup>9</sup>

The two family biographies of Reuther published after Glaberman's revelations neither address Glaberman's findings nor provide any additional insight into Reuther's relationship with the CP. In Victor Reuther's memoir, *The Brothers Reuther*, Walter's brother does not mention Reuther's CP membership but, by delicately skirting the issue, states:

All three Reuther brothers were accused, as were some others, of being Communists. A shady Lovestone friend named Maurice Silverman circulated a story in the Detroit and Flint locals that the entire CIO leadership was Communist, and made vicious verbal attacks on Brophy, Germer, Walter, Roy, and me.<sup>10</sup>

The other Reuther biography written by a family member, *Reuther: A Daughter Strikes*, makes no mention of Reuther's alleged affiliation with the CP or even working with the party throughout the late 1930s.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Martin Glaberman, "A Note on Walter Reuther," *Radical America*, 7 (November-December 1973), 114.

<sup>9</sup> Glaberman, "A Note," 115-116.

<sup>10</sup> Victor Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther And The Story Of The UAW* (Boston 1976), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Reuther Dickmeyer, *Reuther: A Daughter Strikes* (Southfield, MI 1989).

After Glaberman's revelations, Barnard's *Walter Reuther and the Rise of the Auto Workers* (1983) discusses Reuther's relationship with the CP between 1935 and 1938 as being based "on the Popular Front principle — the unity of the left against its common enemies." In spite of Reuther's cooperation with the CP during this period, Barnard concludes that "there is no conclusive evidence that he ever was or wished to be a member of the party." Nevertheless, two Reuther biographies, Carew's *Walter Reuther* (1993) and Lichtenstein's *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit* (1995) cite Glaberman's article and acknowledge the serious possibility that Reuther was a CP member for a brief period during the early years of the UAW. Although both monographs mention Reuther's possible CP membership, they discuss this within the context of the complicated relationship that Reuther had with the party in the UAW from the mid 1930s through the late 1930s.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly the most comprehensive and intellectually rigorous Reuther biography, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, discusses the issue of Reuther's possible membership in the CP in much more detail than other biographies. There Lichtenstein cites Nat Ganley's claim that he collected Reuther's membership dues when Reuther was in the CP, as outlined in the Glaberman article. In addition, Lichtenstein reports that in the fall of 1935, William Weinstone, the CP district organizer for Detroit, stated that Maurice Sugar brought Reuther to a weekly district CP meeting. Shortly thereafter, Weinstone asked Reuther to join the party, which he did. In January 1936, Reuther attended a twelfth anniversary commemoration of Lenin's death where CP leader Robert Minor spoke and Lichtenstein notes that Reuther made plans "to listen to an Earl Browder radio broadcast in early February 1936." Finally, at this time, Reuther began to speak on behalf of the Friends of the Soviet Union and he visited with Anna Louise Strong when she lectured in Detroit. In spite of these activities, Lichtenstein claims only that Reuther may have had "a possible brief membership" in the CP.<sup>13</sup>

In response to Lichtenstein's hesitancy of referring to Reuther as a CP member, Glaberman states, "He (Lichtenstein) cites the sources, but can't bring himself to say that Reuther was a member." In late 1996, referring to his discovery of Reuther's CP membership more than two decades earlier, Glaberman claimed, "At the time, I didn't think it was all that significant, but I have since modified that view." By the late 1990s, he was more definitive about Reuther's membership than in his 1973 article, and stated "In fact Reuther was a member of the CP."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> John Barnard, *Walter Reuther and the Rise of the Auto Workers* (Boston, 1983), 57-58; Anthony Carew, *Walter Reuther* (Manchester England, 1993), 23-31; and Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man*, 54-56.

<sup>13</sup> Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 54-56.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Glaberman, "Walter Reuther, 'Social Unionist,'" review of *The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit: Walter Reuther and the Fate of American Labor*, Nelson Lichtenstein, *Monthly Review*, 48 (November 1996), 53, emphasis in original.

What led to Glaberman's confidence that Reuther actually was a party member? This change in attitude was due, at least partially, to an event that occurred after the publication of his article in *Radical America*. According to Glaberman, Ann Ganley, Nat Ganley's widow, removed the documentary evidence concerning Reuther's CP membership from the Wayne State University Labor Archives. Fortunately, Glaberman had photocopied the Ganley material and restored the evidence at the Archives' request.<sup>15</sup>

Glaberman argues that he understands why both Reuther's friends and enemies would be interested in suppressing Reuther's affiliation with the CP. In his conclusion to the treatment of this issue, Glaberman states, "In the 1950s Reuther swore before a Congressional committee that he had never been a member of the CP, apparently sure that his former comrades would not betray him. He, of course, did not return the courtesy."<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to Lichtenstein's belief that Reuther may have joined the CP late in 1935, Kevin Boyle believes, based on a letter that Reuther had written to his brothers Victor and Roy in April-May 1936 concerning "his union and political activities," that Reuther was not a Communist in early 1936 but "in the left wing of the Socialist party." Analyzing the same evidence as Boyle, Michael Goldfield argues that this letter "shows him vividly as a leftist cadre with a clear strategic orientation toward the union" and claims, based on evidence presented by Lichtenstein, that Reuther being a CP member in 1936 "would be unsurprising, given his political trajectory and the times." Goldfield continues, "In any case, Reuther's early beliefs and activities seem those of a sincere leftist, who despite his personal ambitions, was not merely the political opportunist that he was later to be described. In the politics of the union, Reuther was one of the radicals."<sup>17</sup>

Goldfield provides another reason why Reuther might have joined the CP in the mid-1930s. According to Goldfield, the SP "by the 1930s was a highly fractured formation" that contained both "right-wing supporters of Homer Martin" and "leftist followers" of party leader Norman Thomas "who were to the left of the CP on the popular front and other issues." Lacking a coherent ideology, the SP, according to Goldfield, was no longer a "viable organization" and "had largely disintegrated before the 1930s." Because of the SP's problematic ideological nature in the 1930s, many SP members, including working-class leaders, joined the CP at this time. According to Goldfield, "One of these seems to have been Walter Reuther, although Nelson Lichtenstein equivocates on this matter more than the evidence requires."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Glaberman, "Walter Reuther," 53.

<sup>16</sup>Glaberman, "Walter Reuther," 53.

<sup>17</sup>Kevin Boyle, "Building the Vanguard: Walter Reuther and Radical Politics in 1936," *Labor History* 30 (Summer 1989), 435; and Michael Goldfield, "On Reuther: Legends and Lessons," *Against The Current*, 67 (March-April 1997), 33.

<sup>18</sup>Goldfield, "On Reuther," 32.

Regardless of the state of Reuther's affiliation with the CP, it is clear from the written histories of the UAW that Reuther worked closely with the party beginning in early 1936. It is also beyond dispute that Reuther cooperated intimately with the CP in organizing the Unity Caucus in the summer of 1937 in opposition to the Progressive Caucus organized by Homer Martin and Jay Lovestone's Communist Party Opposition (CPO). The CPO, or more popularly known as the Lovestoneites, played a disproportionate role in the UAW's top leadership when measured against the group's support among rank and file autoworkers. Because of the CPO's extensive political experience and vehement anti-Stalinism, Martin appointed fifteen Lovestoneites to key UAW staff positions, including Francis Henson, who became Martin's administrative assistant.<sup>19</sup>

Although the two caucuses concurred on many issues within the union, Martin's caucus called for increased centralization through "strengthening the authority of the president" while aiming to quash unauthorized strikes. The Progressive Caucus also sought to remove Wyndham Mortimer, a CP stalwart in the union since its formation in 1935, and other leftists from their official positions. The Unity Caucus, composed of leaders of the 1936-1937 General Motors sit-down strike in Flint, Communists, and Socialists, for its part advocated increasing the shop stewards' power within the plants and guaranteeing the members' "right to vote on strikes," although it did not seek the removal of its rivals from office.<sup>20</sup>

At the 1937 UAW convention, a split in the union was prevented when the delegates accepted CIO leader John L. Lewis' advice that the union keep its present officers in addition to establishing two new vice presidencies for Richard Frankenstein and R.J. Thomas, both Martin supporters. Even though Martin increased his executive board majority, he was unable to get the delegates to accept his proposals for increased centralization of the union. With respect to the Unity Caucus, it still exhibited a strong base of support in a number of local unions.<sup>21</sup>

The convention compromise failed to unite the warring caucuses. After the convention, Martin eliminated a number of key organizers who were instrumental in building the union and in leading the 1936-1937 strikes of the union. They were replaced with two different groups: more conservative unionists and Lovestoneites who had no direct auto industry experience. Martin's policies were increasingly attacked by secondary union leaders and the UAW president increasingly engaged in red-baiting of his union opponents.<sup>22</sup>

Martin's actions — negotiating a poor contract with General Motors, the suspending of local union newspapers and strong attacks on local union strikes —

<sup>19</sup>Robert J. Alexander, *The Right Opposition: The Lovestoneites and the International Communist Opposition of the 1930s* (Westport CT 1981), 56-59; and Sol Dollinger and Genora Johnson Dollinger, *Not Automatic: Women and the Left in the Forging of the Auto Workers' Union* (New York 2000), 48.

<sup>20</sup>Martin Halpern, *UAW Politics in the Cold War Era* (Albany NY 1988), 23.

<sup>21</sup>Halpern, *UAW Politics*, 23.

<sup>22</sup>Halpern, *UAW Politics*, 23.



upset many union members, which led to the Unity Caucus winning "most of the important local union elections in March 1938." In response to his loss of power within the union, Martin suspended five officials that led to an all-out struggle for control within the UAW. At this time, the majority of the union's executive board and most secondary leaders within the union opposed Martin. When it was learned that Martin tried to negotiate a secret agreement with the Ford Motor Company, the union split into two competing organizations.<sup>23</sup>

Reuther continued to work with the Unity Caucus, and to build this grouping, until Martin split the union in January 1939 by organizing a rival UAW-AFL union gathering in Detroit, pitted against the official UAW-CIO convention held in Cleveland in March 1939. At this time in early 1939, the CP enjoyed its highest level of strength in the UAW.<sup>24</sup>

On the eve of the March 1939 UAW-CIO convention, there were four challengers for the presidency of the autoworkers' union — R.J. Thomas, Wyndham Mortimer, Richard Frankenstein, and Walter Reuther. Thomas, who initially supported the Progressive Caucus when it was organized in June 1937 and became a vice president of the union at the 1937 convention, threw his support to the Unity Caucus after the 1938 local union elections were dominated by the Unity Caucus. Mortimer, one of the signers of the historic agreement negotiated between the UAW and General Motors upon the conclusion of the Flint sit-down strike in February 1937, and one of the key organizers of the Unity Caucus, was another vice president of the UAW. Finally, Frankenstein, initially a Progressive Caucus supporter, became a UAW vice president, like Thomas, at the 1937 convention. After the March 1938 union elections were decisively won by the Unity Caucus, Frankenstein shifted his support to the Unity Caucus when the CP promised to back him in his drive to obtain the UAW presidency.<sup>25</sup>

An eleven-page document, entitled "Communist," that I recently discovered at the George Meany Memorial Archives in Box 15, Folder 19 of the Jay Lovestone Files, sheds new light on Walter Reuther's relationship with the CP as well as Reuther's and the CP's role in the latter stages of the anti-Martin fight in the early months of 1939. The document, which is dated 16 February 1939, describes the proceedings of a 12-13 February meeting of the CP's Political Bureau (PB) and National Committee (NC) at the Michigan State CP headquarters in Detroit. Approximately 40 national, state, and trade union CP leaders attended this event. There they discussed a number of important political topics confronting the party,

<sup>23</sup>Halpern, *UAW Politics*, 23-24.

<sup>24</sup>Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 115-131. These pages discuss the major events concerning the UAW's internal politics from the formation of the Unity Caucus, including Reuther's role in it, and the Unity Caucus' battles with the Progressive Caucus through the selection of R.J. Thomas as the interim president of the union at the 1939 March UAW-CIO convention.

<sup>25</sup>Dollinger and Dollinger, *Not Automatic*, 30, 36-37, and 43.

including work both within Labor's Non-Partisan League and the Democratic Party in order to insure the continuation and survival of the New Deal past the 1940 elections, and the CP's problematic relationship with the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party. However, the major purpose of the meeting was to encourage CP members "to engage more vigorously in the fight against Homer Martin of the U.A.W.U." The CP leaders feared that the party would confront "a serious condition in the CIO" if it was not successful in the struggle against Martin's break-away faction of the UAW. Lack of success against Martin, they believed, would turn CIO leader John L. Lewis against the party.<sup>26</sup>

Reflecting this urgent priority, the first and primary issue that the meeting took on was the current situation within the UAW. Twenty of the 60 members of the CP's NC were present including noted party luminaries William Z. Foster, the CP National Chairman; Earl Browder, the CP National Secretary; James R. Ford, the head of African American work for the CP; Wyndham Mortimer, International Vice President of the UAW; and B.K. Gebert, assigned to work with CP members within the UAW. Besides NC and PB members, 14 additional secondary CP leaders attended the meeting and were identified, by name and position, including Stanley Nowak, a Democratic Party member of the Michigan State Legislature; Maurice Sugar, attorney for the anti-Martin forces within the UAW; George Powers, a Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) organizer from Pittsburgh; and Walter Reuther, the Detroit West Side Local President of the UAW. Besides the NC leaders and the secondary party leaders present, an additional six or seven leading CP activists in the UAW attended although they were not identified by name.<sup>27</sup>

The meeting opened up on the Sunday evening of 12 February with the presentation of Gebert's report on the current situation in the UAW. A good portion of this outline attacked Martin and provided a criticism of William Weinstone's (the former CP Michigan State Secretary) role in the UAW. Specifically, Gebert criticized Weinstone for not exposing Martin and his leaders in the election campaign and for holding many conferences with, and making promises to, Martin contrary to the best interests of party members in the UAW. However, Gebert remarked that CP members within the UAW had been particularly successful in swinging locals away from Martin and in favor of the newly appointed acting president of the union, R.J. Thomas. Party chair William Z. Foster followed Gebert's report with a strong attack on Martin arguing that because of Martin's "Red-baiting at the behest of Jay Lovestone," it was necessary to discredit Martin among the vast majority of auto workers. After Foster's comments, the meeting was adjourned so that PB members could meet with the various CP fractions in UAW locals on Monday morning, 13 February.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, Jay Lovestone Files (hereafter JLF), 1944-1973, International Affairs Department (hereafter IAD) RG18-003, George Meany Memorial Archives (hereafter GMMA), 11.

<sup>27</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 2-3.

When the meeting reconvened at 2 pm the next day, discussion continued on the current crisis within the UAW. After discussion of the PB members' meetings with the CP fractions in UAW locals that morning, discussion turned to strategy on who the party should support to succeed Martin for the union presidency at the coming UAW convention. Elmer Johnson, the Michigan CP State Secretary, stated that this was a good time to discuss such a strategy because "Comrades Wyndham Mortimer and Walter Reuther (both Vice President of the U.A.W.U.) are here."<sup>29</sup>

Johnson pointed out that there was "a four-cornered fight ... going on inside the CIO leadership of the U.A.W.U." According to Party Chair Foster's comments made a short time later, this fight was between R.J. Thomas, the acting president who was close to the party, and three CP members: Richard Frankenstein, Wyndham Mortimer, and Walter Reuther. According to Johnson, R.J. Thomas was not the best candidate from the CP's point of view, but since John Brophy, the CIO Director, and Sidney Hillman were in favor of Thomas' candidacy, the party should go along with this decision and not oppose him.<sup>30</sup>

R.M. Wicks, a CP member active in trade union work in Chicago, concurred arguing that "this four-way battle among Thomas, Frankenstein (sic), Mortimer and Reuther" could destroy the UAW and that the CP PB "should issue definite instructions that Mortimer, Reuther and Frankenstein (sic) ... should not become candidates unless they have the support of the CIO leadership." Wicks was concerned that it would be difficult for AFL local unions to work with the CIO's Labor Non-Partisan League if a political struggle emerged in the UAW between the four candidates. Although he was personally opposed to John L. Lewis, John Brophy, and Sidney Hillman deciding on who would be the next UAW president, Wicks said that the CP would have to make the best of the situation. Agreeing that a fight among these four UAW leaders "would utterly discredit the Communist Party," Party Chair Foster moved that a special committee be established to resolve this question of decisive importance to the party. This motion was carried unanimously and a special five-person committee composed of Foster, Minor, Elmer Johnson, Gebert, and Browder, was established.<sup>31</sup>

It was at this point in the deliberations that Reuther himself joined in. Addressing the meeting, Reuther stated that "he was ... willing to withdraw as a candidate" for the UAW presidency although he argued that there should not be any restrictions on fielding candidates for the election. Reuther reasoned that it would be better if there were a number of candidates competing for the presidency so that the argument could not be made that John L. Lewis had determined the appointment of the next UAW president. Wyndham Mortimer agreed, stating that "there was considerable merit in what Walter Reuther had said." However, NC/PB member

<sup>29</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 4-6. The quotation cited in the paper appears on page six of the document.

<sup>30</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 6-7.

<sup>31</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 6-7.

Clarence Hathaway, also editor of the *Daily Worker*, ridiculed both Reuther and Mortimer's comments. At this point, the afternoon session concluded. When the meeting reconvened in the evening, Maurice Sugar presented information concerning the legal issues involved in the split in the UAW before moving on to the discussion of other matters.<sup>32</sup>

In summarizing the variety of issues discussed at the conclusion of the two-day conference, Browder reiterated the importance of CP work in the auto industry because "(i)t is a primary war industry at present, and if the Communists do practical work in the next war they must sink the roots of ... (the) Party deep into the automobile industry." Furthermore, in a foreshadowing of the CP's strong and unqualified support for the World War II no-strike policy imposed on the unions, Browder emphasized that if the United States entered the war "on the side of the democracies," the CP would do everything possible to insure that there would be no interference with war-time production in the auto industry.<sup>33</sup>

Besides verifying Reuther's CP membership and demonstrating his active role in the party concerning certain critical decisions, this document is important because it helps to explain the CP's role in the selection of the UAW president in early 1939. The document offers no specific evidence regarding any decision reached by the special committee charged with examining the UAW situation. It can be inferred, however, that the party supported Hillman and Murray's choice for UAW president because it did not want to damage its relationship with the national leadership of the CIO. CIO leaders Sidney Hillman and Philip Murray favored R.J. Thomas for UAW president because he was personable and easygoing, a practical trade-unionist without ideologically committed followers within the auto union. When the UAW-CIO convention in Cleveland opened in March 1939, according to Lichtenstein, major UAW leaders were pressured to accept Murray and Hillman's presidential choice. The CP did its part, helping to sell Thomas' candidacy to the union, a choice that would preserve the CIO, the Popular Front and the labour-oriented New Deal as well as the party's growing acceptance within labour-liberal circles.<sup>34</sup> This document also helps to explain why Reuther did not fight for the UAW presidency at this convention, honoring party discipline at this time.

Furthermore, this document, combined with other historical sources, provides evidence on the length of Reuther's membership in the CP. If following Lichtenstein's research, we take the fall of 1935 as a starting point for Reuther's CP membership, then Reuther was in the party for a period of over three years, considerably longer than either Glaberman or Lichtenstein believed. More likely, Reuther was a CP member for a somewhat longer duration. Considering Reuther's subsequent behavior at the 1940 UAW convention, where he denounced the change

<sup>32</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 7.

<sup>33</sup>"Communist," Box 15, Folder 19, JLF, 1944-1973, IAD RG18-003, GMMA, 9-10. The quotations cited in the paper appear on page ten of the document.

<sup>34</sup>Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 130-131.

in the CP's line of dumping the Popular Front and collective security after the Stalin-Hitler deal and endorsed "a resolution branding the Soviet Union as an aggressor and totalitarian state,"<sup>35</sup> it may be surmised that like many other party members, Reuther left the CP as late as August 1939, after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact.

1939 was a decisive year in Reuther's changing status within the UAW and in his relationship to the CP. Appointed by Thomas as the director of the UAW General Motors Department at the March 1939 UAW-CIO convention, and with the elimination of Martin from the union, Reuther was beginning to gain the support of forces within the UAW that had been hostile to the Unity Caucus.<sup>36</sup> With the development of this independent base of support, Reuther probably felt that he would be able to thrive within the UAW even if he formally broke with the party and no longer had its support.

Two key questions are raised by this documentary record of the mid-February 1939 meeting: how the document came to exist and its authenticity. With respect to the first question, the listing by name and position within the CP of 34 out of the approximately 40 attendees, combined with the detailed discussion of the topics presented at this important PB meeting, does not indicate that this document was produced by the CP itself for any internal purpose. Rather, all indicators lead me to surmise that a Lovestoneite prepared this document. The factual internal construction of the document and the way the document's information is reported, combined with discovering the document in Jay Lovestone's files, is consistent with such speculation. I believe that this document was created by a CP member attending the meeting who was either extremely sympathetic to Lovestone's Independent Labor League (ILL), formerly the CPO, or who was a member of the ILL and was, in some sense, "boring from within" the CP. Considering that the Lovestoneites were the major force on the left supporting the Martin forces within the UAW in early 1939, this document appears to be a highly sensitive intelligence report, prepared for Lovestone, concerning the plans of the powerful CP opposition within the union at this time. This interpretation of the document's origins is certainly consistent with Lovestone's reputation as being highly proficient and interested in collecting crucial information with respect to his political opponents. In addition, the consistent misspelling of the names of Dick Frankenstein (spelled Frankenstein), Maurice (spelled Morris) Sugar, and Stanley Nowak (spelled Novak) throughout the document also leads one to believe that it was not produced by the CP.

The document is consistent with Lovestone's concerns of what was occurring within the autoworkers' union in early February 1939. It is clear that Lovestone felt that Martin's position within the UAW was rapidly deteriorating at this time. Four days before this important CP meeting, Lovestone turned to his mentor, Interna-

<sup>35</sup>Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 54; Glaberman, "A Note on Walter Reuther," 116; and Carew, *Walter Reuther*, 32.

<sup>36</sup>Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 131.

tional Ladies Garment Workers Union leader, David Dubinsky, for support and told him, "The high-water mark of Homer's support has already been reached. His big problem is to harness the rank and file. The argument of the other side is-Homer is alone-nobody is behind him." Lovestone was concerned that the defeat of Martin would lead to two things: "the Lewis dictatorship would become more arrogant than ever and the Stalinite stronghold would be strengthened in the CIO."<sup>37</sup> Such reasoning might indicate why Lovestone would be extremely interested in spying on the Detroit CP meeting of the NC and the PB.

Finally, there is little reason to doubt the document's authenticity or the veracity of any of the information presented within the account, in spite of its possible origins as a Lovestone report. Neither Reuther's membership in the CP nor his attendance at this meeting is emphasized, but is merely listed in the same manner as the other 34 named party leaders attending the event. This document was not prepared for public consumption or to smear any single individual by revealing his or her CP membership. It was merely a highly detailed account of what occurred at an important CP meeting, drafted by a possible party opponent. Crucially, the information contained in this document also appears entirely consistent with critical evidence in the historical record.

Reuther's membership in the CP, from the latter part of 1935 through (at least) the middle of February 1939, and probably later, provides important insight into understanding his political and trade union behavior during this period. With the discovery of this document, it is difficult to refute Reuther's dual membership in the CP and the SP in this period. It is also easy to understand the positions that Reuther took with respect to building a Farmer-Labor Party in 1936 and why his comrades in the SP viewed Reuther's positions as being much more similar to that of the CP than to the SP. Reuther's CP membership during 1938 also helps to explain why Reuther decided to resign from the SP in August 1938. His plan to break SP discipline centered on his backing Michigan's incumbent governor, Democrat Frank Murphy, for reelection rather than supporting the SP gubernatorial candidate in the November 1938 election. Apparently, Reuther was not willing to alienate his CP comrades and party strategy at the time by failing to support a New Deal Democrat in an electoral contest.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, while the standard historical interpretation has been that Reuther was an SP member with strong CP sympathies in the middle to late 1930s, it is probably more accurate to say that Reuther was a CP member who occasionally agreed with the SP on certain issues and was, as Ganley claims, "boring from within" this organization.

Still, the existence of this document does not fully explain all of Reuther's political behavior during the period when he was secretly affiliated with the

<sup>37</sup>Ted Morgan, *A Covert Life: Jay Lovestone, Communist, Anti-Communist, And Spymaster* (New York 1999), 130-131.

<sup>38</sup>Carew, *Walter Reuther*, 22-23; and Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 127.

Communists. In spite of being a party member, Reuther still exhibited an independent streak in response to various party decisions. For example, although the Unity Caucus nominated Victor Reuther for the Michigan CIO council secretary-treasurer at the state CIO convention in April 1938, Frankenstein, a new recruit to the Unity Caucus, huddled with the leading UAW Communists, who decided to abandon Victor Reuther in favor of Richard Leonard, a previous supporter of Martin's Progressive Caucus. Walter Reuther felt betrayed by this action and argued that these tactics of the UAW Communists would destroy the Unity Caucus. When Michigan CP State Secretary William Weinstone stated that they knew what they were doing, Reuther replied, "If you carry through this double-cross, then count me on the other side, not only in this fight, but from here on out!"<sup>39</sup> While a number of Reuther biographies indicate that this incident was decisive in Reuther's ideological break from the CP but not the Unity Caucus, Reuther's behavior may be explained, purely and simply, by family loyalty to his brother whom he felt had been mistreated by the party.

What is to be made of Reuther's membership in the CP? At the end of Glaberman's article on Reuther, he concludes, "I would suggest that this possible proof of Walter Reuther's membership in the Communist Party indicates, at the most, a kind of free-wheeling opportunism which is quite in keeping with Reuther's public character."<sup>40</sup> To the contrary, the new evidence presented in this paper indicates that Reuther's membership in the CP was more than simple opportunism. The estimated length of the time spent in the party, combined with what we know about his sympathies for the Soviet Union in the early to mid 1930s, indicate that Reuther's party membership was rooted in ideological beliefs, not on simple opportunist and careerist impulses designed to help him obtain personal power within the nascent UAW. Only the discovery of other primary documents similar to the one discussed in this paper may provide additional insight into this issue.

Reuther's secret affiliation with the CP provides evidence of a hidden history of Communism submerged within the US trade union movement that is just beginning to be explored. In fact, the document discussed in this article also reveals UAW leader Richard Frankenstein's party membership that, up until this point in time, also was unknown to UAW scholars. Even though we have many books and articles written about the CP's role in the CIO unions in the 1930s and 1940s, the complete story of this intricate and complex relationship has yet to be told. This essay demonstrates that domestic radicals active in the trade unions not only worked closely with the CP but often joined the party, at a time when being a "red" was not

<sup>39</sup>Lichtenstein, *The Most Dangerous Man In Detroit*, 124-125. Many Reuther biographies discuss this event as the decisive turning point in Reuther distancing himself from his relationship with UAW Communists. For example, see Cormier and Eaton, *Reuther*, 126-127; Gould and Hickok, *Walter Reuther*, 153; Reuther, *The Brothers Reuther*, 188-190; Barnard, *Walter Reuther*, 60; and Carew, *Walter Reuther*, 28.

<sup>40</sup>Glaberman, "A Note," 117.

uniformly denounced in all trade union circles. More than half a century after the dissolution of the CP-CIO relationship, we still have much to learn concerning its history.

*The author wishes to thank the editor, Bryan Palmer, and Richard Soderlund (Illinois State University) for their critical readings and comments on earlier versions of this article.*

Appendix 1  
COMMUNIST\*

Chicago, Ill.  
February 16, 1939

A very important meeting was held by the Political Buero of the National Committee of the Communist Party of the U.S.A. in Detroit, Michigan, on Sunday and Monday, February 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was held in the Michigan State headquarters of the Communist Party, 5969 – 14<sup>th</sup> Street, Detroit, and was in session from 8 P.M. to 11 P.M. Sunday evening and on Monday afternoon and evening, extending over until 1 A.M. Tuesday morning. The importance of the meeting to the Communist Party may be judged from the fact that the following 20 of the 60 members of the National Committee of the Communist Party were present:

Israel Amter, of N.Y.C., C.P. State Organizer for New York  
Max Bedacht, of N.Y.C., Secretary of the International Workers Order  
Ella Reeve Bloor, of N.Y.C.  
Fred Brown (correct name Alpi), N.Y.C., of the National C.P. Organizational Department  
Earl R. Browder, of NYC, Nat'l Secretary, C.P. of USA.  
Morris Childs (correct name, Chilovsky), of Chicago C.P. State Secretary for Illinois  
James R. Ford, (negro), of NYC in charge of negro work for C.P.  
William Z. Foster, of NYC, National Chairman of C.P. of USA.  
B.K. Gebert, of Detroit, assigned for work among members of the United Automobile Workers' Union.  
Clarence A. Hathaway, of NYC, Editor of "Daily Worker".  
Roy Hudson, of NYC, in charge of C.P. work among marine workers.  
V.J. Jerome (correct name, Israel Romaine), NYC, Editor of C.P. monthly magazine "The Communist".



Jack Johnstone, of Chicago, assigned for work among employees of the Stock Yards and steel mills in the Chicago district.

Charles Krumbein, of NYC, C.P. State Secretary for New York

Robert Minor of NYC, C.P. foreign correspondent.

Wyndham Mortimer (party name, Baker) of Detroit, International Vice President, United Automobile Workers' union.

Steve Nelson, of Pittsburgh, veteran of Spanish Loyalist Army, assigned for work among coal & steel workers in the Pittsburgh district.

Ned Spark, of Milwaukee, C.P. Secretary for Wisconsin.

John Williamson, of Cleveland, C.P. State Secretary for Ohio, and

Martin Young (correct name, Leon Platt), of Pittsburgh, C.P. Organizer in Pittsburgh district.

Of the foregoing, Amter, Bedacht, Browder, Ford, Foster, Bloor, Hathaway, Hudson, Krumbein and Minor are members of the Political Buro of the National Committee, the real steering committee of the Communist movement in this country.

In addition to the foregoing members of the National Committee, the following Communist Party leaders were also present:

Phil Bart, Indianapolis, State Secretary of Indiana

Emil Gardos, C.P. Organizer for the Upper Peninsula of Michigan

Anthony Gerlach, Detroit, C.P. Trade Union Organizer for Detroit

Elmer Johnson, Detroit, C.P. State Secretary for Michigan

Henry Johnson (negro), Chicago, Ass't. National Director, Packinghouse Workers' Organizing Committee (CIO)

James Keller (correct name, Carl Shklar), Akron, Ohio, C.P. Organizer for Akron area;

Stanley Novak, Detroit, C.P. leader and Democratic member of the Michigan Legislature

George Powers, Pittsburgh, SWOC Organizer, Pittsburgh district

Walter Reuther, Detroit, Pres. Detroit West Side Local of the United Automobile Workers

Beatrice Siskind Shields, Detroit, C.P. Organizational Sec'y. for Michigan and wife of State Secretary Elmer Johnson

Morris Sugar, Detroit, leading C.P. member and attorney for the anti-Martin forces in the United Automobile Workers' Union

Joseph R. Weber, Chicago, Organizer for the Farm Implement Workers' Organizing Committee and formerly C.P. and SWOC Organizer in South Chicago.

H.M. Wicks, Chicago, Active in trade union work in Chicago area, and

Carl Winter, St. Paul, C.P. State secretary for Minnesota.

A number of others were also present, among them six or seven members and officials of the United Automobile Workers' Union, whose identities were not learned. All present, however, were leading Communist Party members.

The evening session on Sunday, February 12, was almost entirely consumed by a report on the situation in the United Automobile Workers' Union submitted by B.K. Gebert. Most of his talk consisted of an excoriation of President Homer Martin of the U.A.W.U. and a criticism of William Weinstone, former Communist State Secretary for Michigan. Gebert charged that Weinstone had followed a wrong course of action in not exposing Martin and his coterie of leaders in the election campaign; that Weinstone had had many conferences with Homer Martin and made proposals and promises that reacted against the Communist Party members in the union. In the course of his remarks Gebert boasted about how the Communist Party members were swinging one local of the U.A.W.U. after another away from Homer Martin and in favor of the recently appointed acting President R.J. Thomas.

Anthony Gerlach stated that the whole fight in the Auto Workers Union was launched on a very poor issue and it was plain to many members that the Communist Party was simply trying to oust Homer Martin because he would not go along with the Party and with its subsidiary, the American League for Peace and Democracy, and the Communist collective security program. Gerlach said that since Martin came out in favor of the LaFollette-Ludlow constitutional amendment to permit the people of the United States to vote in the event of a threatened foreign war the whole Detroit Communist organization began to attack Martin. Gerlach said he did not know whether or not such Communist tactics were advised by the Political Bureau of the C.P. in New York. The Detroit comrades, he said, discussed these things many times and think that they should be advised by the Political Bureau as to whether or not the tactics used against Martin had its approval.

William Z. Foster, responding to Gerlach's inquiry and speaking for the Political Bureau, said that President Homer Martin's coming out against the American League for Peace and Democracy convinced the Political Bureau that nothing could be done to straighten Martin out and that he would have to be fought. This, however, did not mean that the fight had to start at a moment's notice and be carried out in a "dumb" way. The point now, said Foster, is that Martin and his Red-baiting at the behest of Jay Lovestone has made it necessary that he be gotten rid of, and this means that Martin must be discredited among the overwhelming majority of the automobile workers.

At this point Gebert proposed that the meeting adjourn so that the members of the Political Bureau might attend meetings of Communist fractions in the various locals of the Auto Workers' Union in Detroit on Monday morning. He said it will help immensely if these Communist Party leaders attend meetings with the Communist Fraction members and let them know the Party considers that they are doing the most important work now being done by the Communist Party anywhere. Thereupon a committee, composed of Foster, Gebert and Elmer Johnson, was

named to assign members of the Political Buro to meet the Communists in the several Detroit locals of the Automobile Workers' Union.

At 2 P.M. Monday afternoon, February 13<sup>th</sup>, the whole group reassembled. In the interim the Political Buro members had met with Communist representatives in the various Auto Workers' locals. Late Monday night Browder met with the Communist Fraction of Packard Local #190. This group met at the Cass Technical High School, and the meeting broke up in a fist fight before any vote could be taken. According to Browder, what actually happened was that the Communist Party packed the school hall and tried to put thru a vote against Martin — that is, against sending delegates to the convention called by Martin for March 1<sup>st</sup>. Many of those brought to the school hall by the Communists were not even members of the union, and when Martin's supporters came and found the hall full they started a fight which broke up the meeting.

Roy Hudson reported on a visit he made to a Buick local, and said that the C.P. group might be able to swing this local against Martin.

William Z. Foster attended a meeting of the Briggs Company local, and James R. Ford attended a meeting composed of negro automobile workers employed in a number of different plants.

After reports were received concerning the meetings with the several locals of the U.A.W.U. William Z. Foster took the floor. He stated that in his opinion the United Automobile Workers' Union was generally in a deplorable state; that there are actually less than 200,000 dues-paying members, and meetings are conducted in such a loose manner that anybody from the outside who is not too well known can get into the meetings/and even influence their deliberations. Foster then said that of course "our boys" (the Communists) are accustomed to meetings of that type and are trained to handle themselves. It means, however, that the Communists have to be on their toes to mobilize everyone they can get, even though not members of the union, to go to the Auto Workers' Union halls early, fill them up and then take a vote.

James Keller, of Akron, stated that these are the tactics used in Akron, and other parts of Ohio. Keller said that in Local #65 of Murray, Ohio, which has but 600 members, the Communists by crowding the hall were able to swing the local away from Martin's influence in spite of the fact that Martin's people were officers of the local.

H.M. Wicks, of Chicago, asked whether the officers of the Murray, Ohio local were full-time paid officers of the union or whether they worked in shops in addition to acting as local officers. Keller replied that all of them worked in shops and that none were paid for their union work. "That", said Keller, "is why it is so easy for experienced Communists to swing such meetings and that is also why Martin's talk about calling for a referendum must be ridiculed if he comes out openly for such a secret vote. Martin must not be given an opportunity to put over a referendum."

Earl Browder then made a statement to the effect that Robert Minor had recently had a talk with Sidney Hillman, President of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and John L. Lewis' right-hand man, in which conference Hillman stated that he as well as Phillip Murray, John Brophy and even John L. Lewis himself, were in favor of resisting any efforts on Martin's part to put over a referendum vote/at this time. The tactics to be carried out by the Communists and the CIO leaders are to carry on these open meetings and thereby endeavor to expose and "smear" Martin rather than take any vote in secret. This will also tend to drive the Martin supporters into the open. If there were a referendum vote taken, the Communists and the CIO would be at a disadvantage because most of the capitalist press is favorable to Martin and the election would really be decided by the enemy press inasmuch as all effective means of spreading information would be closed to the anti-Martin forces. Browder said that the Communist tactics, therefore, must be to continue to hold membership meetings in the various locals of the U.A.W.U.

Elmer Johnson, the Michigan State Secretary, stated that while the Communists were making advances generally in the anti-Martin campaign, there is serious danger of a blow-up in the ranks of the CIO leadership of the Auto Workers' Union and that he felt this matter might just as well be brought out in the open while the members of the Political Buro are in Detroit and while Comrades Wyndham Mortimer and Walter Reuther (both Vice President of the U.A.W.U.) are here. Johnson said a fight is growing over who is to succeed Martin at the coming convention of the U.A.W.U. It is clear that the Acting President of the union, R.J. Thomas, although close to the Communist Party, is not the most desirable candidate, but since John Brophy, Director of the CIO, and Sidney Hillman are for Thomas, the Communists ought not to oppose him. Johnson revealed that a four-cornered fight was going on inside the CIO leadership of the U.A.W.U. R.J. Thomas is Acting President, but Richard Frankenstein thinks he ought to be president, as former Communist State Secretary Weinstone had promised him that the Communist Party would support him (Frankenstein) for the job if he would desert Martin. Hillman and Brophy, with the support of John L. Lewis, have picked R.J. Thomas, who, while now close to the Communist Party, might also be used to start a drive against the Communists in the event John L. Lewis decides in the future to throw the Communists out of the union. Johnson also said that Wyndham Mortimer, Vice President of the U.A.W.U. feels that he should succeed to the presidency when Martin is thrown out. Walter Reuther is also a candidate for the presidency.

R.M. Wicks of Chicago, stated that this four-way battle among Thomas, Frankenstein, Mortimer and Reuther is an impossible situation and that such a conflict is all that is needed to complete the wreckage of the United Automobile Workers. It bears out, on the surface at least, the accusations that those who split away from the A.F. of L. are now busy splitting up among themselves. Wicks said that the Communist Party is to discuss legislation and elections soon and will have

to revert to the Auto Workers' Union struggle. It will be difficult to get A.F. of L. locals to work with Labor's Non-Partisan League (CIO) if there develops even the semblance of an open struggle among Thomas, Mortimer, Frankenstein and Reuther. Wicks said that he thought the Communist Political Buro should issue definite instructions that Mortimer, Reuther and Frankenstein (who is also a Communist Party member) should not become candidates unless they have the support of the CIO leadership. Wicks said that he personally was against arbitrary rule on the part of John L. Lewis, John Brophy and Sidney Hillman, but that they would have to make the best of that condition.

Foster commented that such a fight among the four U.A.W.U. leaders, three of whom are Communists and one a close friend of the Party, would utterly discredit the Communist Party and be a shameful exhibition of incapacity on its part. Foster moved that the whole question be placed in the hands of a special committee with power to act and that the committee work out the solution in Detroit as soon as possible. Foster's motion was carried unanimously and a special committee composed of Foster, Minor, Elmer Johnson, Gebert and Browder, was appointed.

After the appointment of this special committee, Walter Reuther stated that he was then willing to withdraw as a candidate for the presidency of the U.A.W.U. notwithstanding the fact that he could not see why any restriction should be placed upon anyone becoming a candidate. Reuther said that he thought it would create a better impression if there were a number of candidates, as then no one could say that John L. Lewis dictated the appointment. Wyndham Mortimer agreed and said there was considerable merit in what Walter Reuther had said. Hathaway ridiculed the claim of both Reuther and Mortimer and said that if they could not have better nominating speeches made for them before the coming convention than they themselves made before this meeting of the Political Buro they would not have any chance of election.

During the evening session on Monday, Morris Sugar, Communist attorney for the anti-Martin forces in the U.A.W.U. made his appearance and stated that he had just returned from the convention of the National Lawyers' Guild in Chicago. Sugar went into considerable detail over the legal matters involved in the split in the U.A.W.U. He said that he was doing all he could to keep the case out of the courts, but that the Martin elements are insistent on using the most reactionary course. Concerning the question of funds, Sugar said this was not a pressing matter because many of the UAWU locals had turned over their treasuries to George Addes, anti-Martin Secretary of the U.A.W.U. Sugar said that through B.K. Gebert's handling of the Communist fraction in Dodge Local #3 that local had sent \$25,000 to Addes; that one of the Hudson locals had sent \$8,000, in dues, which they had been holding pending a decision on the stand they would take in the inter-union fight.

At the suggestion of Browder (who was acting as Chairman on Monday evening in the absence of Foster, who was ill), the meeting then discussed several

organizational questions. It was decided that Elmer Johnson should go to Lansing, Michigan, to line up Reo Local #650 and Oldsmobile Local #652 against Martin; that Gebert should continue to work with the Communist Fraction in the Packard plant local and also handle Plymouth Local #51; that William Z. Foster is to remain in Detroit a few days to handle the fight in a directive capacity; thereafter Foster will spend sometime in Chicago aiding in reviving Communist Party work in the steel mill locals and helping to devise policies for the organizational campaign in the Stock Yards. Foster will later go to Minneapolis to try to straighten out the Farmer-Labor Party's quarrel with the Communist Party, inasmuch as he personally knows many of the Farmer-Labor leaders who have permitted themselves to be involved in the fight against the Communist Party. Roy Hudson will proceed to Chicago, where he will spend several weeks preparing for an organizational drive among lake seamen in order that the CIO union might be in a strong position when the lake shipping season opens..

The meeting next took up the consideration of serious work in the way of "boring within" the A.F. of L. connection with the building of Labor's Non-Partisan League. On this matter Browder reported that in many places the Communists can work effectively in the L.N-P League but in other places they have to set up new organizations on a local scale. However, Browder said, the Party must mobilize every Party unit and every branch of the Party-controlled mass organizations, such as the International Workers' Order, the American League for Peace and Democracy, and the International Labor Defense — to participate in the local machinery of the Democratic Party. Much of this will be done through the CIO, but the Communists must be sure that their sentiments are represented in the plans of the 1940 Democratic convention and that that convention chooses a New Deal candidate. Browder said that the Communists must make it impossible for the reactionary supporters of Vice President John M. Garner to drive out the New Deal elements — as the Taft forces drove Theodore Roosevelt out of the Republican Party in 1912. If the New Deal can drive out the reactionary Democrats, he said, the New Deal can win the 1940 election, but if the New Dealers are beaten in the convention it will mean a Republican victory. Hence, said Browder, every Communist State Secretary present and everyone engaged in Communist mass work in the trade union movement should realize the need for determined work inside the Democratic Party.

Browder said that in Chicago good work is being done by Communists in getting the CIO unions to endorse Mayor Kelly of Chicago for renomination and that many Communists are active in the ward organizations and will thus be able to play a leading role because the workers, small-business men and professionals — and especially school teachers — have confidence in the work of the Communists. He said the real problem for the Communists is in the American Federation of Labor unions, because President Green of the A.F. of L. and President John Fitzpatrick of the Chicago Federation of Labor have been openly fighting Labor's

**Non-Partisan League.** Because of this, Communists in the A.F. of L. will have to work to build up a real bloc of progressives. Where the A.F. of L. will not cooperate with the CIO, Communists should try to get the AFL independently to adopt policies that coincide politically with the CIO demands even though there is no organic unity between the two labor bodies.

Browder concluded his long speech by summing up the two days' conference. He said it would require the most careful but determined action to avert a split in the Auto Workers' Union. In view of the fact, however, that President Homer Martin of the U.A.W.U. has become the symbol of reaction it is most important that Martin be utterly discredited. Browder said that much crude work had been done by Communists in getting people into the U.A.W.U. meetings in smaller communities who are not really employed in the automobile industry. In larger places such things may be done unnoticed, but in small Ohio and Wisconsin communities such tactics are very bad and Communists must concentrate their efforts on enlisting auto workers and must keep the other Party groups in the background. Communists must not forget that the auto industry is politically basic for them inasmuch as the motor industry is paramount in any war. It is a primary war industry at present, and if the Communists do practical work in the next war they must sink the roots of their Party deep into the automobile industry. Browder stressed the importance of the auto industry in war time and said that if this country were in war on the side of the democracies the Communist Party would be vigilant against those who were interfering with production. While he did not say as much, the inference to be drawn from this last remark is that the Communists would be used for strike-breaking and volunteer counter-espionage activity in the event the United States were engaged in war on the side of Democracy, but that the reverse would be true if the United States were engaged in cooperation with authoritarian states.

At the conclusion of Browder's remarks, many others present at the conference made short talks to point out what they could add in a practical way to put the Communist program into effect in their respective communities, especially as that program has to do with penetration of the Democratic Party.

Carl Winter entered into a rather long discussion of the fight between the Communist Party and the Farmer-Labor Party in Minnesota and expressed the hope that Comrade William Z. Foster, when he goes to Minnesota, would be able to settle some of the complicated problems facing the Communist Minnesota organization. Winter said that one of the bad features about the Farmer-Labor Party is that it keeps progressive elements out of the Democratic Party; hence Minnesota cannot be expected to contribute much support to the New Deal through Democratic Party channels.

Stanley Novak, of Detroit, member of the Michigan Legislature, stated that the Michigan Democratic delegation could be counted upon to be unanimously in favor of the New Deal at the 1940 Democratic convention.

Joseph R. Weber, of Chicago, stated that already the Communists had been securing good response from Chicago steel and packinghouse union locals in boring into ward and precinct organizations of the Democratic Party and that the present municipal primary campaign was affording Communists a splendid opportunity to get these organizations and establish influence in the steel and packinghouse neighborhoods.

Israel Amter, James R. Ford, and Charles Krumbein discussed the favorable situation in New York, saying that Communist Party members had been active for a long time in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, in Washington Heights, and in the Bronx, all of which have large Jewish populations, and in Harlem, where there is a heavy Negro vote.

It was obvious that this meeting was held in Detroit in order to put life into the Communist organization in Michigan, which had become somewhat demoralized. The idea is to try to save the face of the Communist Party by peppering up its members to engage more vigorously in the fight against President Homer Martin of the U.A.W.U. The Communist leaders realize that their party will face a serious condition in the CIO if they do not make good in their campaign to eliminate Martin. They fear that Chairman John L. Lewis of the CIO will turn against them if they do not deliver in the anti-Martin campaign. Some of the leaders are also apprehensive about too openly boasting of their success in penetrating the Democratic organization in many sections of the country. They fear this might react against that party. They also fear that President Dubinsky of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and some of the other leaders in New York are preparing to start a campaign to eliminate Communists from that organization.

\*Permission to reproduce this document is granted by the George Meany Memorial Archives (Silver Spring, MD).



# RETHINKING MARXISM

VOLUME 13  
NUMBER 3/4,  
2001

## DOSSIER ON EMPIRE

### COMMUNISM IN THE GRAND STYLE

Abdul-Karim Mustapha and Bülent Eken

### ONTOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION

José Rabasa, Timothy S. Murphy, Jason Read,  
Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, and Mahmut Mutman

### LABOR, CLASS, AND TECHNOLOGY

Stephen Resnick And Richard Wolff, Nick Dyer-Witheford,  
and Alex Galloway

### GLOBAL SOUTH

Kenneth Surin, Pramod K. Mishra, David Moore,  
and John Hutnyk

### MULTITUDE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Saverio Ansaldi, John Beverley, Jon Beasley-Murray,  
Laurence Cox, Josefina Ludmer, and Imre Szeman

### POLITICAL OPENINGS

Slavoj Žižek, Mohammad Bamyeh, Brett Levinson,  
Alberto Moreiras, and Stany Grelet

### RESPONSE OF THE AUTHORS

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri

## Subscription Information

ISSN 0893-5696, Volume 14, 2002 (4 issues)

Individuals: \$40.00; Outside U.S.: \$52.00 (surface mail); \$68.00 (airmail)

Institutions: \$145.00; Outside U.S.: \$173.00 (airmail)

Students: \$20.00 (must send copy of valid ID);

Outside U.S.: \$27.00 (surface mail); \$37.00 (airmail)

Single Issue: \$17.50

Also available in better bookstores.

Guilford Publications, Inc., Attn: Journals Dept.

72 Spring Street, New York, NY 10012

Call Toll-Free: 800-365-7006, 9 AM to 5 PM EST

CALL: 212-431-9800 FAX: 212-966-6708

Visit Our Website: [www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)