Labour/Le Travailleur

Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States,1928-1935

John Manley

Volume 56, 2005

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt56art01

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)
1911-4842 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Manley, J. (2005). Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States,1928-1935. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *56*, 9–50.

Résumé de l'article

Dans le débat toujours passionné entre les historiens « traditionalistes » et «révisionnistes » du communisme international, les premiers se montrent enclins àargumenter que la clé de compréhension de l'expérience communiste dans n'importe quel pays est la reconnaissance de la subordination fondamentale de chaque parti national à la volonté de « Moscou », exercée directement ou parl'intermédiaire de l'Internationale communiste (Komintern), alors que les seconds,bien qu'ils nient rarement l'influence déterminante des rapports avec Moscou, prétendent que les partis nationaux jouissent d'un degré remarquable d'autonomie dans là résistance ou l'adaptation des demandes du Moscou. Les révisionnistes américains en particulier ont mis l'accent sur l'engagement créateur de CPUSA vis-à-vis de la culture politique américaine, en percevant ce phénomène même dans la période que la plupart des traditionalistes regardent comme la capitulation des partis nationaux au stalinisme - la «Troisième Période » (1928-35) de « lutte des classes », ultra-gauchisme, « fascisme social », et la catastrophe politique en Allemagne. En utilisant l'outil étonnamment sous-utilisé de l'analyse comparative pour évaluer la conception, la mise en œuvre, révolution, et la « liquidation » de la Troisième Période aux États Unis, en Bretagne et au Canada, cet article offre un certain secours aux révisionnistes, mais beaucoup plus aux traditionalistes.

ARTICLES

Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928-1935

John Manley

Introduction

FROM THE 1950S UNTIL THE 1970S, historians of British and North American Communism tended to emphasize the political subservience of the British, American, and Canadian parties [CPGB, CPUSA, CPC] to the Soviet Union and the "line" of the Russian-dominated Communist International [Comintern]. "Perhaps the most compelling reason for studying the CPC," historian William Rodney observed, "is to be found in [its] subordination to Moscow through what can only be termed moral control exercised at a great distance, surely a fascinating phenomenon, and one of the most extraordinary political relationships of recent times."[1] At no time

[1]Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York 1957); Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York 1960); Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History, 1919-1957* (Boston 1957); Joseph Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis, 1943-1957* (Cambridge, MA 1972); Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton 1977); Henry Pelling, *The British Communist Party; A Historical Profile* (London 1958); William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto 1968), iv.

John Manley, "Moscow Rules? 'Red' Unionism and 'Class Against Class' in Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1928-1935," *Labour/Le Travail*, 56 (Fall 2005), 9-49.

did that relationship seem more overt than in the "Third Period" (1928-34), the years of the "New Line," "Class Against Class," and "Social Fascism." Most "traditionalist" historians regard this as the Comintern's darkest hour, the moment when Stalinism triumphed in the International and Moscow's intrusions politically disabled the working-class movement.[2] According to this characterization, Communist industrial work — and for all Communists, the workplace remained at this point the crucial site of class struggle — was driven less by workers' needs than by a need to provide Moscow with evidence of fidelity to the line, and whether in Britain or North America they achieved this *via* "spectacular gestures" and "prestige strikes, the need for which was not understood by the members (though [they] looked impressive in ... reports to Moscow)." The sad outcome was a "heritage of violence, martyrdom and misery" and the "isolation of thousands of left-wing labour militants from the mainstream."[3]

Since the 1970s, American historians have led the way in establishing a more sympathetic orthodoxy.[4] Often viewing the CPUSA from the broadly radical per-

[2]Fernando Claudin, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (Harmondsworth 1975); Roderick Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions, 1924-1933: A Study of the National Minority Movement* (Oxford 1969); Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991* (London 1992), 44-50; Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 147-58; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London 1977), 4-5, 33, 50. For a useful overview of this debate, see Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism from Lenin to Stalin* (Basingstoke and London 1996). American traditionalists, including several with first-hand knowledge of the Party, have *always* been skeptical of revisionist claims. Aileen S. Kraditor, *"Jimmy Higgins": The Mental World of the American Rank-and-File Communist, 1930-1958* (New York, Westport, and London 1988), 18-19, n. 11, dismisses revisionist work as "apologetics," but unfortunately fails to elaborate. For a more considered response, see Theodore Draper's *New York Review of Books* reflections on the "new historians of Communism" in *A Present of Things Past: Selected Essays* (New York 1990), 117-72.

[3]Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York 1984), 42-8; Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Toronto 1990), 142-45; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 274; Brian Pearce, "Some Past Rank and File Movements" and "The Communist Party and the Labour Left, 1925-1929," in Michael Woodhouse and Brian Pearce, *Essays on the History of Communism in Britain* (London 1975), 122-25, 190-92.

[4]According to Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *In Denial: Historians, Communism & Espionage* (San Francisco 2003), 79, the "gatekeepers of the historical profession" in the United States have excluded "traditionalist" views from the major journals. They themselves, however, have managed to raise that banner in numerous publications, including Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*; Klehr and Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York 1992); Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago 1996), and their various works in the Yale University Annals of Communism series. Other historians highly

spectives of the "new social history," they depict a party creatively engaged with national political culture and as much or more a part of national labour tradition as a creature of Moscow. For the most part, this image is derived from the Popular Front years, when the CPUSA proclaimed its essential American-ness and clearly was a vital component of a broad-based, native radicalism centred on the industrial unions of the CIO (Committee for Industrial Organisation/Congress of Industrial Organisations).[5] Many revisionist historians accept the traditional view of the Soviet origins of the Third Period.[6] Recently, however, some have recognized this Party in the Third Period, where they see much that is positive in Communist contributions to anti-racism and mass organizing among unskilled workers and the unemployed, emphasize the "indigenous" sources of the sectarian "New Line," and question whether its impact was disastrous.[7] In recent articles, Rosemary Feurer, Randi Storch (whose work has been publicly commended by James Barrett), and Robert

---

critical of the CPUSA have published major works with prestigious publishers. See, for example, Guenter Lewy, *The Cause That Failed: Communism in American Political Life* (Oxford 1990). Recent works by James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa 1997) and Vernon L. Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919-1957* (Urbana and Chicago 2001), reinstate the determinacy of the Comintern.

[5]Early revisionist James R. Prickett argued that the policies of the American party were always at least as much a product of domestic as international factors. See James Prickett, "The Communists and the Communist Issue in the American Labor Movement," PhD dissertation, UCLA 1975; "New Perspectives on American Communism and the Labor Movement," in *Political Power and Social Theory: A Research Annual*, 4 (1984), 3-36. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York 1998) is the apotheosis of what might be called "classic" American revisionism. Other examples are Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Middletown, CT 1982); Paul Lyons, *Philadelphia Communists, 1936-1956* (Philadelphia 1982); Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions* (New York 1986); Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick, NJ 1991).

[6]Lyons, *Philadelphia Communists*, 22-3; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana and Chicago 1990), 79-80.

[7]Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*; James Barrett and Rob Ruck, "Introduction," Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh 1981), xiv; Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson 1998) (this is true of Solomon despite his description of the Third Period line as one of "mind-bending nastiness and sectarianism," xxiv); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill 1990). For recent British work, see Kevin Morgan, *Harry Pollitt* (Manchester 1993); Nina Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-1945* (Aldershot 1995); Andrew Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow,1920-1943* (Manchester 2000); Matthew Worley, *Class Against Class: The Communist Party in Britain Between the Wars* (London 2002).

Cherny accept that Moscow and New York exercised central control over the districts, but that local and individual agency ensured that the Communist *experience* was not, in Storch's words, "singular, totalitarian, or heavy-handed." Moscow's influence "made its way into [Chicago's] Communist publications, meetings, and slogans," but it was mediated by the "sense of justice, honesty, and reality" and "elastic notions of local party discipline" exhibited by members of the city's Control Commission, who "had a large part in determining Chicago's Communist character" and creating "an elastic party culture where a diverse set of behaviors passed in the name of Communism." Cherny, in his account of the California party, detects a "significant degree of resistance to some Comintern policies ... considerable autonomy in developing tactics ... a significant degree of autonomy in policy making by both national and local leaders ... [and] important limits on such autonomy."[8]

Since the late 1980s, interest in the CPGB has ballooned, and several British historians have produced work strongly influenced by American revisionism.[9] Recently, some have gone beyond the Americans in challenging the traditional consensus on the dominant-submissive stereotype of Moscow-CPGB relations and the origins and character of the Third Period. In detailed monographs Andrew Thorpe and Matthew Worley have posited a British variant of what Theodore Draper terms the "blend" theory of the determination of party policy, with the new line an intricate mixture of indigenous and external forces. Worley, for example, argues that the CPGB was moving left because of the conditions that prevailed after the 1926 General Strike and that internationally the "'new line' was determined in accord with prevailing socio-economic and political conditions, and, initially at least, understood in relation to national, regional and labour traditions." Thorpe argues

[8]Rosemary Feurer, "The Nutpickers Union, 1933-34: Crossing the Boundaries of Community and Workplace," in Staughton Lynd, ed., '*We Are All Leaders*': *The Alternative Unionism of the 1930s* (Urbana and Chicago 1996), 27-50; Robert W. Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front: The Communist Party in California, 1931-1935," *American Communist History*, 1 (2002), 5-42 (quotation on p. 9); Randi Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation': Revolutionary Discipline and Everyday Political Life in Chicago's Communist Party, 1928-1935," *Labor: Studies in the Working-Class History of the Americas*, 1 (Fall 2004), 19-44 (quotations 45, 25, 44); James R. Barrett, "The History of American Communism and Our Understanding of Stalinism," *American Communist History*, 2 (December 2003), 175-82. Barrett's piece is one of several rejoinders to Bryan D. Palmer, "Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism," *American Communist History*, 2 (December 2003), 139-73. I have offered a mildly revisionist analysis of the Third Period in Canada in "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period': The Workers' Unity League, 1929-1935," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 5 (1994), 167-94, and "Red or Yellow? Canadian Communism and the 'Long' Third Period, 1927-1936," in Matthew Worley, ed., *In Search of Revolution: International Communist Parties in the Third Period* (London 2004), 220-46.

[9]Kevin Morgan, who produced the first important revisionist study, *Against Fascism and War* (Manchester 1989), is a crucial figure in CPGB historiography.

that the CPGB may well have turned to the new line "regardless of 'orders from Moscow'." Following Nina Fishman, both credit leading British party members — notably general secretary Harry Pollitt — with actively resisting Moscow's attempt to impose an ultra-left reading of Class Against Class on Britain, especially where trade unionism was concerned.[10] Such views have not gone uncontested (to put it mildly). In a battery of empirical and historiographical interventions, historians Alan Campbell and John McIlroy have insisted that the new line *was* made in Moscow, to serve Stalinist needs, that it *did* have disastrous consequences for the CPGB, and that Harry Pollitt's resistance is a fiction.[11] Their critique has provoked a fierce, ongoing, and at times unpleasant debate.[12]

My aim here is to test these competing claims by looking comparatively at the industrial work of the British, American, and Canadian parties, and in particular how they strived for "independent leadership" of the class in the workplace and dealt with the issue of "red" unionism, which, as American historian James Barrett notes, was "a critical ideological test of one's 'Stalinism'."[13] The three operated in distinctive political-cultural formations that necessarily impinged on their work in peculiar ways. The CPGB was embedded in a labour movement with significant strengths, its historic defeat in the 1926 General Strike notwithstanding: the General Strike was straddled by the first and second Labour minority governments. Despite the long depression in Labour's coal, steel and engineering heartlands in Northern England, Scotland, and Wales, between 1927 and 1934 trade union membership never dropped below 4.4 million or trade union density below 20 per cent of

[10]Worley, *Class Against Class*, 69; Thorpe, *The British Communist Party and Moscow*, 16.

[11]Alan Campbell and John McIlroy, "Reflections on the Communist Party's Third Period in Scotland: The Case of Willie Allan," *Scottish Labour History*, 35 (2000), 33-54; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "'Nina Ponomareva's Hats': The New Revisionism, the Communist International, and the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1930," *Labour/Le Travail*, 49 (Spring 2002), 147-87; McIlroy and Campbell, "The Heresy of Arthur Horner," *Llafur*, 8 (2001), 105-18; McIlroy and Campbell, "'For a Revolutionary Workers' Government': Moscow, British Communism and Revisionist Interpretations of the Third Period, 1927-1934," *European History Quarterly*, 32 (2002), 535-69; McIlroy, "Miner Heroes: Three Communist Trade Union Leaders," in John McIlroy, Kevin Morgan, and Alan Campbell, *Party People, Communist Lives: Explorations in Biography* (London 2001), 143-68; McIlroy and Campbell, "Histories of the British Communist Party: A User's Guide," *Labour History Review*, 68 (April 2003), 31-59.

[12]See responses by Fishman, Thorpe, and Worley (and Campbell and McIlroy's rejoinder) in *Labour History Review*, 69 (December 2004) and the exchange in *Twentieth Century British History*, 15 (2004), 51-107, between Campbell, McIlroy, John Halstead, and Barry McLoughlin, in one corner, and Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, in the other, over the latter's article "Stalin's Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School, 1926-1937," *Twentieth Century British History*, 13 (2002), 327-55.

[13]James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana and Chicago 1999), 158.

the workforce, in part because there was a place for semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the "general" unions and even in some major craft unions like the Engineers. Through the 1920s and early 1930s trade union density in North America never rose above 10 per cent. The American Federation of Labor [AFL] and its Canadian satellite, the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada [TLCC], remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the craftsman and were politically peripheral (the Socialist Party of America collapsed in the 1920s, and Canada lacked an authentic national labour party until the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF] in 1932). At the onset of the Great Depression, AFL membership was barely three million (with almost as many workers enrolled in company unions or "employee representation" plans). A similar situation prevailed in Canada. There, moreover, the unions were split into three rival labour "centres," the TLCC (which had roughly 70 per cent of Canada's 322,449 trade unionists), the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (which, as its name suggests, had its *raison d'être* in anti-Americanism), and the Quebec-based and church-run Federation of Catholic Workers of Canada [FCWC], while the federal government's late 1920s open-door immigration policy intensified ethnic divisions within the working class.[14]

Our three parties shared membership of the ECCI Anglo-American Secretariat, which characterized them as "Anglo-Saxon," a description that bore no resemblance to the ethnic composition of the CPC and CPUSA (though British immigrants did play important industrial roles in both). Both the CPC and CPUSA were overwhelmingly parties of the foreign-born and the sons and daughters of the foreign-born; roughly 90 per cent fell into one of these categories (and mainly the first). Both were hit hard by "bolshevization," which in their case primarily meant an attack on ethnic "federalism." According to Harvey Klehr, half the American party membership disappeared virtually overnight in the autumn of 1925, falling from 14,037 to 7,215 when the call went out to move smartly to multi-national street and factory "nuclei," before recovering to between 8,000 and 9,000 in the late 1920s. The fall in Canadian membership was less calamitous, thanks to general secretary Jack MacDonald's attempt to implement bolshevization with more care and understanding of the Finnish and Ukrainian viewpoint than Moscow approved. CPC membership fell from a high of 4,808 in 1923 to around 3,000 in 1927. Between the end of the General Strike and the eve of the new line in early 1928, CPGB membership fell from 8,000 members to 5,000 members.[15]

[14]David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays in the Twentieth Century Struggle* (Oxford 1993), 82; Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Longman Handbook of Modern British History 1714-1980* (London 1983), 154-55; Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Canada Year Book 1936* (Ottawa 1936), 101, 754-55.

[15]Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, CA 1978), 22. See Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 91; Mike Squires, "CPGB Membership During the 'Class Against Class Years'," *Socialist History*, 3 (Winter 1993), 4-13; Andrew Thorpe, "The Membership of the Communist Party of

Moscow constantly compared the three "Anglo-Saxon" parties and encouraged their mutual assistance and "socialist competition."[16] Between two of them and the third there was one significant difference. As Stalin observed in 1929, the CPUSA and CPGB were "among those very few Communist parties of the world that are entrusted by history with tasks of decisive importance from the point of view of the revolutionary movement."[17] By contrast, the CPC (though in relative terms the largest of the three) had little geo-political importance, and was often reminded of that fact.[18] A comparative approach may aid understanding of the degree to which these different parties exercised "autonomy" in "bending" (or "blending") the international line to their purposes; the political significance of their "resistance" to Moscow; and the overall quality of their work.

Adopting the New Line: Coercion and Consent

The disappointing results of the "united front" tactic may well have prepared certain elements within all three parties for *a* new line that would lift them *out* of sectarian isolation.[19] In Britain, as Thorpe and Worley emphasize, Communists did not need the Comintern executive [ECCI] to stir their loathing of officialdom: always disposed to view those who chose Labour Party reformism as careerists and labour traitors, they cited the Trades Union Congress's [TUC] betrayal of the General Strike, its subsequent search for a junior partnership with capital and the state, and its efforts, in concert with the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party [LP], to eliminate communist influence from constituency parties and Trades Councils as justification for the New Line. Nevertheless, the British Communist who produced the fullest statement of this scenario, Political Bureau [PB] member J.R. Campbell, did so *after* he exposed himself to Moscow as a skeptic about the relevance or realism of the new line for British conditions; his continued skepticism contributed to his removal from the PB in December 1929.[20] Neither of the two

---

Great Britain, 1920-1945," *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), 777-800; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 314-15; Manley, "Red or Yellow?," 220-22.

[16]See, for example, "Between Us and U.S.," *Worker* (London, National Minority Movement), 11 April 1930; "USA Mobilizing Support," *Worker*, 25 April 1930.

[17]Stalin, 1929, quoted in Starobin, *American Communism in Crisis*, 44.

[18]In 1953, the Canadian embassy in Moscow was pleased to report that the CPC's insignificance had just been confirmed by *Pravda*'s non-publication of its letter of condolence to the Russian people at the death of Stalin. National Archives of Canada [NAC], Canadian Security Intelligence Service [CSIS] Files, File 92-A-00012, Part 7, Canadian Charge d'Affaires, Moscow, to Secretary of State for External Affairs, 14 March 1953.

[19]American historian Bert Cochran describes the 1920s as a "decade of failure" for the CPUSA; the same could be said of the CPC and CPGB, both of which were in decline by the mid-1920s. Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, ch. 2.

[20]National Museum of Labour History (Manchester) [NMLH], CPGB Archives [CPGBA], Reel 32A, J.R. Campbell, speech to AAS English Commission, 15 February 1928; J.R.

North American parties was very effective at "boring from within" the craft unions of the American Federation of Labor [AFL] through American Communist William Z. Foster's Trade Union Educational League [TUEL]. By 1923, however, the CPC was detaching itself from the TUEL, which that year was proscribed by the AFL, and after 1924 it was increasingly amenable to pressure from A.S. Lozovsky and the Red International of Labour Unions [RILU] to initiate the organization of the unorganized, if necessary outside the AFL. It chose to do so, however, in alliance with Canada's national unions, which united in the ACCL in 1927.[21] In the United States, many American unions expelled TUEL supporters, and the "civil war" in the garment unions and the United Mine Workers of America [UMWA] generated a degree of rank-and-file support for "dual" unions before the New Line was adumbrated. According to Earl Browder, he and TUEL cadre Jack Johnstone (a Scot who had been active in the Canadian labour movement) pressed Lozovsky for a "completely new start."[22]

Nevertheless, if the Americans, British, and Canadians supported *a* new line, *the* new line was a Russian confection. Only Russians could claim credit for the pernicious theory of "Social Fascism," for example. Conceived by Gregory Zinoviev in 1924 but from 1929 appropriated by Joseph Stalin and his followers, this theory stated that the "objective" role of social democracy in the fast approaching political crisis would be to sustain reformist illusions in the neutrality of the state, mask the rapid mutation of capitalism into Fascism, delay the movement of the proletariat towards revolutionary consciousness, and thus undermine the revolutionary struggle of Class Against Class. Loose talk of the "theoretical unity" of Fascism and Social Democracy translated easily into a practical equation: social democrats were "social fascists" — the "main threat" to socialist revolution.[23] Nor did the drift to the left in trade union and industrial tactics happen independently or primarily in response to indigenous factors. From 1924-25 onwards, all three parties were in continuous consultation and negotiation with Lozovsky, the Stalinist secretary of the RILU. Always a leftist, always disdainful of the AFL, he increased pressure on the North American parties to take a more assertive trade union line af-

Campbell, *Red Politics in the Trade Unions: Who Are the Disrupters?* (London 1928), and *Communism and Industrial Peace* (London 1928).

[21]John Manley, "Does the International Labour Movement Need Salvaging? Communism, Labourism, and the Canadian Trade Unions, 1921-1928," *Labour/Le Travail*, 41 (Spring 1998), 147-80; Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 111-18.

[22]Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 160; New York University [NYU], Tamiment Library [TL], Daniel Bell [DB] Papers, Box 1, CPUSA, Political Committee [Polcom] Minutes, J. Angelo to Dear Comrade, undated; Steve Rompa to Jay Lovestone, 16 February 1928; Pat Devine, "Report on Southern Illinois Sub-District," January-February 1928; William Weinstone, "Report on the Mining Situation," 7 March 1928; Box 47, Bill Goldsmith, interview with Earl Browder, 1955. See also NYU, TL, TAM\062, Alexander Bittelman, unpublished autobiography, 481.

[23]Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, 157-59.

ter the Fifth Comintern Congress (1924) as a key part of its drive for international bolshevization, instructed member parties to root themselves in the workplace and organize the unorganized, even if it meant operating outside or against the mainstream unions. During 1926-27, Lozovsky had a serious falling-out with Foster, who remained dogmatically opposed to forming unions outside the AFL, while becoming a confidante of CPC industrial secretary Tim Buck, whose nationalist re-orientation he supported over Foster's objections. Buck and Lozovsky saw the new ACCL as a promising mechanism for organizing the semi-skilled and unskilled mass production workers the AFL had hitherto ignored.[24] By early 1928, what had been relatively gentle pressure became more insistent. Inviting parties to the Fourth RILU Congress, Lozovsky proclaimed that reformism had "proved itself once and for all to be the instrument of the bourgeois state" and that all parties should accommodate the demands of the masses for new, uncorrupted, red unions.[25]

The early opposition of most of the British party leadership to the New Line was widely known in the labour movement. Given a sneak preview of the original, relatively mild Bukharinist version, which anticipated an indeterminate period of capitalist growth and saw continued political value in united front tactics, at the Anglo-American Secretariat in late 1927, William Gallacher cast his mind back to the Second Comintern Congress in 1920 when Lenin had presented *'Left Wing' Communism — An Infantile Disorder* to warn delegates (and Gallacher personally) *against* the very practices the ECCI was now advocating; he could hardly believe it. When the CPGB formally accepted the already more Stalinist version — *imminent* crisis, *abrupt* break with reformism — at the Ninth ECCI Plenum in February 1928, political rivals gleefully reported its humiliating "somersault."[26] Nevertheless, *resistance* to the trade union dimension of the new line remained pronounced in the British leadership. At the Fourth RILU Congress, South Wales miners' leader Arthur Horner bravely fought Lozovsky's pressure to adopt a new union perspective, and the Congress settled for charging the National Minority Movement with a more

[24]NAC, Comintern Fonds [CF], Reel 1, File 21, National Secretariat for America and Canada, Minutes, 12 January 1927.

[25]"For the Fourth Congress of the Red International of Labor Unions," *International Press Correspondence* [*IPC*], 12 January 1928; "The Fourth Congress of the RILU," *IPC*, 21 March 1928; "Comrade Lozovsky's Reply to Discussion," *IPC*, 5 April 1928.

[26] NMLH, CPGBA, Comintern Files, Reel 32, "Discussion on the British Question at Meeting of Anglo-American Secretariat," 19 November 1927; J.R. Campbell, Report to the English Commission, ECCI, 15 February 1928; "The Praesidium Turns Somersault: The CPGB's Yes-No Policy," Glasgow *Forward*, 3 March 1928. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford 1980), 291-92, 315, 329-31; Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR, Second Period: 1923-1930* (New York 1978), 404-8. Use of the term "Stalinist" is still stirring a mighty wind on the H-NET American Communism site. Some contributors argue that "Stalinist" and "Stalinism" have no analytical value and are purely pejorative epithets whose use signifies users as propagandists rather than as serious scholars. I disagree.

vigorous boring-from-within policy, using the "utmost tact ... [and] patient comradely explanation" to wean union members away from "reformist methods."[27] Lozovsky responded by cultivating leftist support within the CPGB Central Committee [CC] and among local militants, but as late as the Tenth CPGB Congress in January 1929 the CPGB adopted a trade union resolution that rejected new unions — which would "only lead to the isolation of the revolutionary workers from the great mass of the organised workers and play into the hands of the bureaucracy" — in favour of continuing the struggle for independent leadership within the existing unions.[28] For the CPGB, "the enemy" was not the Trades Union Congress (after all, less than three years earlier it had called for "all power" to the TUC General Council), but the Labour Party.

Pace Earl Browder's recollections, the American Party's two main factional rivals, Foster and general secretary Jay Lovestone, were united in refusing to see much domestic evidence of "mass radicalization." If the process was under way, it was "still too local and limited [for an all-out attack on the AFL] ... we must always avoid confusing what should be done with what can be done by the Party with its present limited forces."[29] Foster's resistance, however, eroded in the face of accusations from within his increasingly pro-new line faction that he had gone over to Lovestone's position of "American exceptionalism" and a personal request from Lozovsky that the Americans stop "dancing a quadrille" around the AFL (an effeminate image perhaps designed to provoke Foster into reasserting his masculinity). The Fourth RILU Congress backed this up by directing the CPUSA to form new unions. Between September 1928 and January 1929 the CPUSA created the National Miners Union [NMU], National Textile Workers Union [NTWU], and the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union [NTWIU]. Foster's last resistance ended early in 1929 after eleven members of his faction criticized him in the *Daily Worker* for his

[27]Worley, *Class Against Class*, 104; "The Red International Program," *Labor Unity*, August 1928; Ralph Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy* (Liverpool 1998), 188-89.
[28]Ian McDougall, ed., *Voices from the Hunger Marches: Personal Recollections by Scottish Hunger Marchers of the 1920s and 1930s*, Vols. I & II (Edinburgh 1990, 1991), especially James Allison, 125-26; Hugh Sloan, 273; Gary Bolton, 335-36; Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1927-1941* (London 1985), 38-48; Campbell and McIlroy, "Reflections on the Communist Party's Third Period in Scotland," 42-4; *The New Line* (1929), quoted in Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 41.
[29]NYU, TL, DB, Box 1, CPUSA, Polcom Minutes, 2 January, 20-22 February 1928; J Box 40, Trade Union Educational League, National Executive Committee Minutes, 18 February 1928. They knew, for example, that rank-and-file support for new coal and garment unions was far from unanimous. "The Results of the IV Congress of the RILU," *IPC*, 12 April 1928; NYU, TL, DB, Box 1, CPUSA, Polcom Minutes, 28 March 1928; RILU, *Report of the Fourth Congress of the RILU* (London 1928), 130-38; NMLH, CPGBA, James Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/01, CPGB, Central Committee Minutes, 28-30 April 1928; NAC, CF, Reel 45, File 334, CPC, Trade Union Department Minutes, 17 June 1928.

dilatoriness on the red union issue. He duly agreed to transform the TUEL into a new red union "centre" — the Trade Union Unity League [TUUL].[30]

The CPC made the easiest transition to the new line, which it saw as little more than a continuation of the old one of working through the ACCL. It controlled one ACCL affiliate, the Lumber Workers Industrial Union [LWIU], held a strong influence in one or two others, notably the Mine Workers Union of Canada, and was preparing joint initiatives in woodworking, textiles, garments, and automobiles.[31] Delegates reported back from the Fourth RILU Congress that the Russian comrades viewed the CPC as an exemplary exponent of the new line.[32] A major strike at General Motors' main Canadian plant seemed to confirm the Third Period thesis that capitalism was standing on the brink of a rising wave of class battles, and the CPC duly formed the Auto Workers Industrial Union [AWIU] — the first new red union in North America — a few months later in July 1928. During August, it formed the second, the Industrial Union of Needle Trades Workers [IUNTW].[33]

This happy situation changed, however, following the Sixth Comintern Congress. The ECCI, CPC general secretary Jack MacDonald reported to the central committee, had again sanctioned the party's orientation on the ACCL but wanted it to adopt a more adversarial "united front from below" approach towards ACCL leaders. MacDonald was prepared to do that, but he was not prepared to launch red unions willy-nilly. Claiming Moscow's approval, he stated that union drives "could

[30]Edward Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton 1994), 238-45; James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism* (New York 1973), 198-99; NYU, TL, TAM\062, Alexander Bittelman, unpublished autobiography, 431-32, 481 (Bittelman wondered whether Lovestoneite ideas had managed to "penetrate even our own group"); Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 24; Provincial Archives of Ontario [AO], Communist Party of Canada [CPC] Papers, 1A 0177, Philip Aronberg to Tim Buck, 29 March 1929; "Workers Prepare for TUEL Convention," *Labor Unity*, 4 May 1929. A fourth red union, the Detroit-based Auto Workers Union, had serendipitously fallen into CPUSA hands in 1927. See Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*, 51-9.

[31]NAC, CF, Reel 7, File 152, Minutes of Enlarged Central Executive Committee Meeting, 17-18 December 1927; John Manley, "Communists and Autoworkers: The Struggle for Industrial Unionism in Canada, 1925-1936," *Labour/Le Travail*, 17 (Spring 1986), 112-20; Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners," *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Fall 1992), 95-7.

[32]RILU, *Report of the Fourth Congress of the RILU* (London 1928), 130-38; NAC, CF, CPC, CEC, Trade Union Department, Minutes, 17 June 1928.

[33]Editorials, "The Rank and File Move Leftward," Toronto *Worker*, 16 June 1928; "The 'Unrest' of the Canadian Workers," 23 June 1928. NYU, TL, DB, Box 1, CPUSA, Central Executive Committee, "Resolution on Trade Union Work," 30 May 1928; NAC, CF, CPC Political Committee, Minutes, 3 August 1928, citing a telegram from Ben Gitlow. The Canadians irritated their American garment trades' comrades by pinching leading left-wing garment organizer J.B. Salsberg and appointing him IUNTW secretary.

not be drawn from the air, they must have their roots in objective conditions, and be real." This position did not go far enough for up-and-coming leftists from the Young Communist League [YCL], who accused MacDonald of underplaying the militancy of the international line and demanded *more* red unions. One of MacDonald's party allies, Montreal garment organizer Michael Buhay, inadvertently undermined him by stating that the flagging IUNTW should never have been formed. MacDonald, the YCL claimed, was Canada's representative of the full-blown "right danger" supposedly represented by Bukharin.[34]

During 1929, the Comintern intervened heavy-handedly in the affairs of all three parties, forcing them to create new leaderships that were demonstrably free of the "right danger." The purge affected the three in different ways. The CPUSA experienced it first and most brutally. Though Jay Lovestone had accepted the new line, added his voice to the denunciation of Bukharin, and seemed the most secure of party leaders, at the Sixth Convention in April 1929 Comintern plenipotentiaries Philip Dengel and Harry Pollitt peremptorily ordered him to cede the general secretaryship to Foster. His protracted resistance exposed him to the full impact of Stalinist organizational measures. Stalin personally intervened in the American Commission convened to hear Lovestone's appeal, warning him that if he refused an ECCI order to remain in Moscow and returned to New York, he and his supporters would find that they were "the majority" only by the Comintern's grace and favour. Returning to New York regardless, Lovestone discovered that his supporters had abandoned him or were being hounded out of the movement. The Foster faction (though Foster himself was in torment) quickly consolidated their grip on the rank-and-file by forming a rash of red unions and in September affiliated them to the new "revolutionary" TUUL.[35]

If the CPUSA's endemic factionalism facilitated this process, in Canada the ECCI had to create factionalism to provoke a political crisis in which, to general surprise, the party's affable industrial director *cum* organizational secretary Tim Buck became the champion of the YCL-dominated left, a manoeuvre facilitated by his connections with Lozovsky and the decision of Maurice Spector, recently elevated to the ECCI and hitherto seen by many of the younger, more radical element as MacDonald's likeliest challenger, to become the co-founder (with James P. Cannon) of North American Trotskyism. Sponsored by Lozovsky — from whom he sought and

[34]AO, CPC Papers, 8C 0132 ff., CPC, Enlarged Central Executive Committee Minutes, 20-22 October 1928; 8C 0156, "Resolutions on the Trade Union Policy of the CPC," undated; Jack MacDonald, "Sixth Congress of the CI," and Tim Buck, "Challenge of the Working Class," *Canadian Labour Monthly*, November 1928.

[35]NYU, TL, DB, Box 47, Earl Browder, memo re "Relations Between the CP of America and the Communist International," undated, 17-19; Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago 1978), 288-307; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 377-429; Pedersen, *The Communist Party in Maryland*, 41-5.

received financial support to prosecute the red union line — and by Canada's International Lenin School [ILS] students, Buck forced the pace of the new line programme in the needle trades and in the Windsor, Ontario, auto plants, but succeeded only in causing turmoil in the party's Jewish and Ukrainian sections. By early 1929 he had trained his guns on MacDonald. The latter, however, even undermined by a raft of "open" and "closed" ECCI letters (and Lovestone's eviction), survived the CPC Sixth Convention in June, only for Buck to take over as general secretary in the chaotic situation that followed, when the Finnish and Ukrainian sections effectively went on strike against the new line.[36] One of the first decisions he and his second-in-command, ILS graduate Stewart Smith, took was to form a red union centre. However, it was only after Moscow's intervention that, on Christmas Day 1929, the Workers Unity League [WUL] was finally created — and even then, the WUL's existence was not made public until March 1930.[37]

By North American standards, the re-making of the CPGB was as polite and amicable as the Party itself. At the Tenth ECCI Plenum in July 1929, Manuilsky witheringly described the CPGB as a "society of great friends," temperamentally incapable of chopping off heads and thereby condemned to be permanently plagued by deviations.[38] Would such a party ever have independently generated a tactical line as bruising and divisive as Class Against Class? Yet Moscow seemed hesitant about provoking the same sort of factional battle in the CPGB as it had done in the North American parties. Constrained by British circumstances (small party, no red union tradition, huge and hegemonic TUC), Lozovsky was not only unable to foist red unions on it, at the Tenth ECCI Plenum he also had to state with particular reference to Britain (and through gritted teeth, one suspects) that red unions should only be formed at the "high tide of strikes," when the political struggle was "very acute" and when "considerable sections of the proletariat [had] already grasped the social fascist character of the reformist trade union bureaucracy."[39] At the same time, since it was beyond question that the character of the reformist trade union bureaucracy *was* social fascist and it would only be a matter of time before these ideal conditions became present, the CPGB had to be seen to be making appropriate preparations. Two red unions were duly formed in Britain in 1929: the United Mineworkers of Scotland [UMS], which grew out of an authentic rank-and-file uprising against bureaucratic manoeuvrings by reformist officials in the Scottish Executive of the Miners Federation of Great Britain — but which the CPGB only

[36]NAC, CF, Reel 1, File 34, ECCI, Anglo-American Secretariat, Draft Letter to Communist Party of Canada, 4 November 1928; NAC, CF, Reel 45, File 335, Tim Buck to A. Lozovsky, 23 February 1929; Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 225-55.
[37]AO, CPC Papers, 10C 1813-14, CPC, National Trade Union Department, Minutes, 25 December 1929.
[38]Quoted in Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, 45-46.
[39]Lozovsky, Tenth ECCI Plenum speech, in Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents*, Vol. III (London 1965), 52-64.

launched after Moscow applied heavy pressure — and the rather flimsier United Clothing Workers Union [UCWU], formed during a strike in North London.[40]

Moscow's exasperation with the CPGB was growing, however. Harry Pollitt, appointed general secretary of the party after the Tenth Plenum and entrusted with forcing through the new line, failed to inject the ideological rigour and dynamism Moscow expected. Especially after Wall Street's collapse and the simultaneous triumph of Socialist Construction incontrovertibly proved the genius of Soviet Marxism, British inertia became "impermissible" (a favourite word of the time). The ECCI ordered the CPGB to call a *second* congress in 1929. The "emergency" Eleventh Congress, held in Leeds in December, gave Moscow the leadership it wanted and changed the temper and ambience of CPGB life. Under the gaze of ECCI representative Walter Ulbricht, the CPGB retained Pollitt as general secretary (though the tenuousness of his position was reflected in the "stony silence" with which militants and moderates alike listened to his keynote report, each group apparently doubtful of the degree to which he believed what he was reading) but, using an official slate for the first time, dumped 19 other CC members and elected 25 newcomers, mainly younger militants, increasing the size of the CC from 30 to 36; leftists also dominated the new 10-man Political Bureau. Having "cleansed" itself, the Congress proclaimed the existence of "mass radicalization" and re-launched the National Minority Movement (a formally independent body which since 1924 had loosely coordinated the work of party sympathizers and other trade union militants in a number of industries) as an openly communist centre through which militants would fight "inside and outside the trade unions." Discordantly, several delegates — all underlining their long industrial experience — insisted on recording that they had failed to witness the upsurge of the masses that supposedly justified these changes. The most prominent disbeliever — and a victim of the CC purge — was South Wales miners' leader Arthur Horner, whose distaste for breaking away from the South Wales Miners Federation, a policy beloved of many youthful local militants, led to his summoning to Moscow for a brief period of political re-education,

[40]"Miners and Communists," *Forward*, 6 October 1928; NMLH, CPGBA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/05/01, J.R. Campbell, "The Mining Situation in Great Britain," Report to Political Secretariat, October 1928; Alan Campbell, "The Communist Party in the Scots Coalfields in the Inter-war Period," in Geoff Andrews, Nina Fishman, and Kevin Morgan, eds., *Opening the Books: Essays on the Social and Cultural History of the British Communist Party* (London 1995), 44-63; Alan Campbell, *The Scottish Miners. 1874-1939, Volume Two: Trade Unions and Politics* (Aldershot 2000), 284-96, 307-44; Martin, *Communism and the British Trade Unions*, 127-29; "The Recollections of John McArthur," in Ian McDougall, ed., *Militant Miners* (Edinburgh 1981), 118-51; Sam Elsberg and Dave Cohen, *The Rego Revolt: How the United Clothing Workers Trade Union Was Formed* (London undated [1929]); Anne J. Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors: Trade Unionism Amongst the Tailors of London and Leeds, 1870-1939* (Ilford 1995), 173-78; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 124-25.

then to Berlin to complete his penance working for the RILU Miners International Propaganda Committee.[41]

Keeping Left, 1929-32

Third Period sectarianism peaked in the latter part of 1929 and early 1930. Apparently "dizzy with success," Lozovsky forgot the careful formula he had proposed at the Tenth Plenum and called for rapid formation of red unions and prosecution of the line of independent leadership. An RILU correspondence course for new cadres run during the winter of 1929-30 pointed out that the RILU had never "made a fetish" of trade union unity and called for no sentimentality about breaking with mainstream unions that were blocking the workers' path to revolutionary consciousness.[42] Only a few months later, however, the ECCI took stock, recognized that excessive sectarianism was having negative results virtually everywhere, and reined Lozovsky in, specifically criticizing his role in prematurely pressing for the formation of a red United Mineworkers of Great Britain [UMGB].[43] The ECCI (possibly because Stalin's rout of Bukharin was now complete) now made a series of modest retreats from extremism, culminating at the Fifth RILU Congress in August, when the perils of the "left danger" were elevated almost to the same level as those of the "right danger."

In this phase of Class Against Class, all three parties were more closely attuned to Moscow's signals than to what ordinary workers were saying. As many Communists knew, mass radicalization was a mirage. Amidst soaring unemployment, getting and keeping jobs were far higher priorities than fighting to maintain or improve job conditions. Employed and unemployed alike had no truck with the fantasy that they were living through a near-revolutionary situation and refused to fill the roles Comintern theoreticians had awarded them. Thus, instead of increasing in intensity and precipitating new political crises, strike activity sank to record lows (by every index) in 1930, and rose only slightly in the next two years.[44] Never-

[41]"The CP Congress and the MM," *The Worker*, 6 December 1929; NMLH, CPGBA, Idrix Cox, unpublished memoirs, 37-8; Branson, *History*, 48-51, 339-40; Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: A History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (London 1980), 149-54; Nina Fishman, "Horner and Hornerism," in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell, *Party People*, 130-35; Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions*, 33-40; John Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Study in British Stalinism* (London 1993), 131-32; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 140-43; McIlroy and Campbell, "The Heresy of Arthur Horner."

[42]AO, CPC Papers, 10C 1964, RILU Correspondence Course brochure, February 1930.

[43]NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 32, J.R. Campbell, Speech to Anglo-American Secretariat, 30 July 1930. Campbell remarked that Lozovsky had "nobly assisted" Pollitt.

[44]Stuart Marshall Jamieson, *Times of Trouble: Labour Unrest and Industrial Conflict in Canada, 1900-66* (Ottawa 1976), 214-15; Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker 1920-1933* (Baltimore 1966), 341-42; NYU, TL, TAM\002, "Strikes 1931, Compared in Duration with Strikes, 1930."

theless, with Moscow insisting that conditions were "objectively favourable" and constantly reminding parties of their duty to stop imperialism from hurling "its bleeding masses in a rain of steel ... [against] the first Socialist republic," party leaders had to push red unions into action whenever possible, maintain an aggressive stance towards reformist union leaders (the "fascist shock-troops of the capitalist class"), and find indigenous "subjective" explanations of their failure to achieve a revolutionary breakthrough: residues of factionalism (USA) and social democracy (Britain, USA), the opportunistic tendencies of North American "language" sections (USA, Canada), and the passivity of "old" leaderships (all three), as well as personal failures of will (invariably caused by the "right danger") and tactical misunderstanding (usually the product of the "left danger").[45] Replacing serious tactical analysis with mantras — capitalism was beyond redemption; the unemployed would not scab; the profundity of white working-class racism had been much exaggerated — they exhorted cadres to "have faith in the masses."[46]

An opportunity existed for North American Communists to stand by Lozovsky's restrictive Tenth ECCI plenum formulation of the appropriate conditions for the formation of red unions, but they generally succumbed whenever the RILU pushed them to ignore all preconditions.[47] Their early industrial tactics were highly sectarian. The two red garment unions, swinging "to the left through fear of

[45]*New Masses*, 1931, quoted in Leslie A. Fiedler, "Hiss, Chambers and the Age of Innocence" (1951), in Patrick A. Swan, ed., *Alger Hiss, Whittaker Chambers, and the Schism in the American Soul* (Wilmington 2003), 16; "TUUL Conference Score [*sic*] A.F. of L. Fakers," *Liberator*, 15 January 1930; AO, CPC Papers, 10C 1754, *WUL Bulletin # 1*, 2 February 1931. Roger Keeran's chapter on the 1930-33 period (in *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*) neatly captures the reality: "Work or Wages: Organizing the Unemployed."

[46]NYU, TL, Earl Browder Papers (microfilm), Reel 3, Series 2-51, "Draft Resolution on Keeping New Members," undated [1930]; Browder Papers, Reel 5, Series 2-125, "Report on the Preparations for the Building up of the Campaign to Elect Delegates to the Vth World Congress of the RILU," 15 July 1930; Browder Papers, Reel 36, Series 6-15, "Resolution on Keeping New Members," undated; "Struggles Ahead! Thesis on the Economic and Political Situation and the Tasks of the Communist Party," Adopted by the Seventh National Convention, 20-25 June 1930, 17-25; Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 41; AO, CPC Papers, 1A 0439-40, Tom Ewan to Jim Barker, 24 December 1930; NYU, TL, Vertical File — TUUL, "Tasks of the Trade Union Unity League of the USA (Resolution adopted by the Sixth Session of the RILU Central Council)," undated; Len Jeffries, "Faith in the Working Class," *Communist Review*, October 1932.

[47]As late as December 1931, despite clear signs that Moscow was re-balancing revolutionary and reformist union work, Andrew Overgaard and other American delegates leaped to Lozovsky's defence at a meeting of the RILU central council, where Pollitt accused him of failing to support the CPGB's work in the mainstream unions. Reports of speeches and discussions by Comrades Overgaard, Jackson, Pollitt, and Lozovsky in *RILU Monthly*, 1, 15 February 1932. There were Canadian delegates present, but their views — if they had any — were not recorded.

the Lovestoneite treacherous policies" (as the NTWIU put it), underlined their break with reformism by reorganizing on the basis of "100% industrial unionism" (replacing old-style occupational locals of cutters, pressers, operators, etc. with "revolutionary" shop committees), called numerous poorly prepared and invariably defeated strikes, and purged themselves of many experienced Trotskyist and Lovestoneite cadres (thereby inadvertently reinvigorating the reformist unions).[48] In the WUL's first ever campaign, it attempted to use the RILU's "strike and split" line to form a single red Mine Workers Industrial Union [MWIU] that was to sweep away the "social fascist" United Mine Workers of America [AFL] in Nova Scotia and the Mine Workers Union of Canada [ACCL] in Alberta. The policy rocked the two districts to their foundations. Many rank-and-file Party members — never mind rank-and-file miners — considered it foolhardy and unnecessary. Such was the opposition in Alberta that the policy was eventually abandoned, though not before several of the most influential comrades had been expelled for right deviationism and the party had split into sometimes physically warring factions. In Nova Scotia, "strike and split" was pushed through over the increasingly open opposition of leading local Communist James B. McLachlan and with even more disastrous results: the red union collapsed in a matter of weeks and the district Party went into a slump from which it never recovered. Toronto's response to a request for emergency funds from Nova Scotia's beleaguered DO exposed the adventurism of the campaign. Pleading poverty, the PB recommended that he seek aid from the red mining unions in the United States and Scotland, neither of which was in much better shape than the MWIU.[49]

Some American revisionists have attempted to mitigate the sectarianism of communist strike tactics by suggesting (correctly as it happens) that, instead of launching poorly prepared and palpably un-winnable strikes, for the TUUL it was more often a case of inheriting the leadership of spontaneous strikes over which it had little real control, with predictably barren results. Even when TUUL unions learned from their mistakes and prepared strikes well, Fraser Ottanelli notes (and it

[48] *The Militant*, 1 February 1929 (for the first Trotskyist expulsions); NYU, TL, DB, Box 10, Report and Program of the General Executive Board to the Second National Convention, NTWIU, 6-8 June 1930; General Executive Board, NTWIU, *Report to the Third National Convention*, October 1932, 17; Report on the Struggles and Activities of the New York Organization of the NTWIU to the District Convention, from July 1931 to September 1932, 13-14; Mercedes Steedman, "The Promise: Communist Organizing in the Needle Trades, The Dressmakers' Campaign, 1928-1937," *Labour/Le Travail*, 34 (Fall 1994), 49-52.

[49] Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 97-101. On the state of the UMS and NMU, see Campbell and McIlroy, "Miner Heroes," 137; Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 40-1; Nelson, Barrett, and Ruck, *Steve Nelson*, 88-90. ("The NMU was born weak," Nelson remembered, "and it grew continually weaker under the attacks from the employers, the UMWA, and the police.")

is important to underline that in 1931-32 strike practice at the local level did become more considered), the outcome was the same "because employers refused to negotiate."[50] Ottanelli might have asked: why did the employers refuse to negotiate? It was not primarily because they were dealing with Communists (Harlan County was "Bloody" long before the first Communist arrived), but because the contemporary balance of forces — which included on their side the full coercive power of the state — virtually guaranteed their victory regardless of whom they were facing.[51]

Red unions were not models of workers' democracy. Party cadres often refused to fight around demands that actually came out of the rank-and-file, such as work sharing (the "stagger system") and seniority, which they deemed insufficiently revolutionary. Instead, in organizing campaigns and strike struggles they tried to impose their own political agenda, often involving the imminence of imperialist war and the need to defend the Soviet Union, and they produced "shop papers" that proclaimed the unions' party affinities (some, indeed, contained party application blanks).[52] WUL membership cards came embossed with the hammer and sickle and stated that membership was open only to "those subscribing to the class struggle."[53] Nothing more clearly stamped the TUUL's break with "pure and simple unionism" than its uniquely advanced stand on the race question: at a time when most white workers, some black workers, and most on the non-party left expressed skepticism about the practicality of combining effective, economistic trade unionism with progressive racial politics, the TUUL, as instructed by the RILU, proclaimed "relentless war" against lynching, segregation, and white, working-class chauvinism ("an insidious boss-inspired tendency against class solidarity ... widespread among the workers and even to some extent in the left wing").[54] All red un-

[50]Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, 22-6.

[51]Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 45; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 59-60 (on the United Textile Workers in South Carolina).

[52]Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front," 24; AO, CPC, 3A 1892, Tom Ewan to Ben Winter, 8 June 1931; Letter to G.G. Coote, MP, quoted in Canada, House of Commons, *Debates*, I (21 April 1931), 769-70; Harvey Murphy, "The Stagger System — A Quack Remedy for Unemployment," Toronto *Worker*, 7 November 1931; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 86-7; AO, CPC, 1A 0244-45, 0282-90, correspondence between Tom Ewan and Joe Gershman, November-December 1930.

[53]AO, CPC Papers, 2A 0922-26, Fred Rose, "Report of the Cowansville Strike [2-10 March 1931]."

[54]A.J. Muste, "Who Shall Organise — And How?," *Labor Age*, September 1930; Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (1931; New York 1974), 419-23; W.E.B. Du Bois, "Communists and the Color Line," *Crisis*, September 1931; NYU, TL, Vertical File — TUUL, "Tasks of the Trade Union Unity League of the USA (Resolution adopted by the Sixth Session of the RILU Central Council)," no date [1930]. The Moscow viewpoint was reinforced by a phalanx of Moscow-trained African American cadres, often with personal ties to Lozovsky; this group

ions were instructed to (and most did) recruit black workers as a matter of priority, encourage their participation and leadership, develop appropriately specific "Negro demands," and fight for black workers' full social, racial and political equality.[55] Depending on one's perspective, the TUUL's stand was uncompromising and inspirational or dogmatic, provocative, and impractical.[56]

Though less wildly sectarian than its North American counterparts, the CPGB also had its moments of "crazy maximalism."[57] The high point came early: the Bradford woollen weavers strike in the spring of 1930. In its defence, the Party did not rush into the strike willy-nilly; it had been preparing for action through the winter. When the strike began in April, most of the national leadership (and a "shock brigade" of seven recent ILS graduates sent by the ECCI, which had been misled by some hugely optimistic reports from the Party about the strike's prospects) flocked into West Yorkshire and quickly took over the strike leadership, sidelining even the Textile Minority Movement. Yorkshire District Organizer E.H. Brown managed to get himself elected chair of the Central Strike Committee, while his wife Isabel chaired the strike committee in nearby Shipley. Neither paid much attention to rank-and-file views, changing the strikers' original, defensive demand of no wage cuts to a demand for wage increases and calling for the formation in every mill of Mill Committees that would unite "all workers irrespective of craft or section, age or sex, union membership or non-membership [in] mass activity." Strike leaflets, apparently prepared by the ILS comrades, even used the slogan "The Struggle for Power." The strike petered out in May.[58]

---

included James T. Ford, Maude White, Harry Haywood, George Padmore, and Otto Huiswood. See Edward T. Wilson, *Russia and Black Africa before World War II* (New York and London 1974), 175-86; Immanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement* (London 1974), 332-35; Haywood, *Black Bolshevik*, 293-95; Harry Haywood, "Lynching — The Red Unions Must Fight It," *Labour Unity*, January 1932; Otto Huiswood, "The Revolutionary Trade Union Movement Among Negro Workers," *RILU Magazine*, 15 February 1932; Maude White, "Special Negro Demands," *Labor Unity*, May 1932. The importance of "Negro Demands" was tied in with the Comintern's contemporaneous promulgation of the "self-determination of the Black-Belt thesis," which in a recent issue of this journal Bryan Palmer put to the sword as a particularly ridiculous expression of Stalinist intrusion. See Bryan D. Palmer, "Race and Revolution," *Labour/Le Travail*, 54 (Fall 2004), 193-222.

[55]Trade Union Unity League, *The Trade Union Unity League: Its Program, Structure, Methods and History* (New York [1930]) 40-2; NYU, TL, Vertical File — TUUL, TUUL membership application, Detroit (no date).

[56]On Gastonia, North Carolina (1929), and Harlan, Kentucky (1932), respectively, see Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 29; Cochran, *Labor and Communism*, 55. To balance these, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 78-9.

[57]Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 74.

[58]William Gallacher accepted responsibility for raising the "Struggle for Power" slogan, but not for the promiscuous way it was subsequently used. Heatedly and not altogether convincingly, he explained to the Anglo-American Secretariat that he had raised this impeccably Le-

Helped by positive signals from Moscow, the party leadership quickly backed away from its worst sectarian excesses, though that was not always true at the grassroots. UMS leaders in Lanarkshire, for example, had a tendency to inflate their successes and became notorious for recklessly placing "far too much emphasis ... on getting a pit idle ... [using] any kind of issue, real or imaginary ... to get the men to walk home, so that they could report that a strike had taken place." During one strike in late 1930, they invited strikers to "demand the death penalty for the 'Industrial Party plotters' then on trial in the Soviet Union."[59] Nevertheless, the exceptional character of the Bradford woollen weavers' strike is underlined by its instantly becoming an object lesson in the pitfalls of adventurism and the amount of time the party spent debating its lessons. In discussing it, CC member J.T. Murphy — hitherto identified with the Left — referred to the good sense of Lozovsky's Tenth ECCI Plenum speech in pointing out that when a new union had been formed there could be "no going back without paying a very heavy price indeed." The obvious inference was that there always *would* be a going back.[60]

The Heresy of Harry Pollitt?

One of the most controversial areas of debate among British historians of the Party is Harry Pollitt's role in shaping Class Against Class in the trade union movement. According to Nina Fishman (whose interpretation reappears in Worley's *Class Against Class* and in other authors' works), Pollitt was a trade union "loyalist" who believed that the party had to become "embedded in the bowels of the proletariat, specifically in the trade union movement," and who thus systematically worked "to deflect the party from independent unionism whenever it was possible to do so."[61] Certainly, Fishman's picture is overdrawn. Pollitt was as ultra-left as anyone on the issue of relations with the Labour Party. He was also a supple player of the Comin-

---

ninist concept at an educational session, to encourage the Party and the strikers to consider the logic of their action in forming parallel structures — permanent Mill Committees — to the unions. NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 32, W. Gallacher, Remarks at English Commission, Anglo-American Secretariat, 11 August 1930. On the strike itself, see Pearce, "Some Past Rank and File Movements," 123-24; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 170-72. E.H. Brown, "The Way to Win," *Worker*, 18 April 1930; Brown, "Our Party and the Woollen Strike," *Communist Review*, July 1930.

[59]"The Recollections of John McArthur," 133; Campbell and McIlroy, "Reflections," 46; Campbell, *The Scottish Miners*, 324, 360, n. 72.

[60]J.T. Murphy, "New Unions and Their Place in the Revolutionary Struggle: A Reply to F. Jackson and Others," *Communist Review*, August 1930; Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy*, 194-99; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 173.

[61]Nina Fishman, "Essentialists and realists: reflections on the historiography of the CPGB," *Communist History Network Newsletter*, 11 (Autumn 2001), electronic version, 1. See also Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 66-9; Keith Laybourn and Dylan Murphy, *Under the Red Flag: A History of Communism in Britain* (Stroud 1999), 62.

tern survival game, as he showed in his enthusiastic serving of Moscow's writ on Jay Lovestone in the spring of 1929 and in his reply to CC members who, after the ECCI British Commission in July-August 1930, asked him to clarify whether the "right" or "left danger" was more important: "The Right danger," he replied, "remains the biggest fight in the Party, but Left sectarianism is most [*sic*] dangerous." Alan Campbell and John McIlroy nail Pollitt for his dastardly role in throwing Arthur Horner to the wolves (in a speech E.H. Carr described as "dispiriting") in 1931.[62] But what was his stand on red unions?

Here, Campbell and McIlroy overstate their case in characterizing Pollitt as a staunch supporter of the red union strategy. In his *The Scottish Miners*, Campbell quotes Pollitt in December 1928 stating to the ECCI Political Secretariat that "the most serious danger ... that we are facing in the party is an attempt to interpret the resolution of the Ninth Plenum as meaning that we are, whenever possible and on every occasion that presents itself, to establish new trade unions." This "new union danger" would lead to isolation and sectarianism. He went on to say that to fix a date for the formation of (what would become) the UMS would be "suicidal, ridiculous and premature."[63] For Pollitt, Lozovsky's Tenth ECCI plenum criteria, which virtually defined a revolutionary situation as the only appropriate moment for forming red unions, became a default position. In his report to the Central Committee following the Tenth Plenum, he hinted at his personal antipathy to red unions in an off-the-cuff comment that ECCI official Osip Piatnitsky had opined that "Red Unions which had not got the masses in them ... should be liquidated." He forgot to add — so J.R. Campbell reminded him — that Piatnitsky "did not carry his point."[64] His comment about liquidating illegitimate red unions may have been aimed at the UCWU. He stated that he would have blocked its formation if he had been around to do so, and he may still have proceeded to subvert it. The message Pollitt brought back from the Fifth RILU Congress was unequivocal: "What we have to do is make a sharp turn in another direction, that is, our trade union work.... We have to take a decisive turn to bring our comrades back into the trade unions."[65]

[62]NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 1, CC Minutes, 13 September 1930; NYU, TL, TAM\062, Alexander Bittelman, unpublished autobiography, 525; E.H. Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern, 1930-1935* (Basingstoke and London 1982), 211. McIlroy and Campbell, "The Heresy of Arthur Horner"; McIlroy and Campbell, "Histories of the British Communist Party," 44-45.

[63]Campbell, *The Scottish Miners*, 290-91.

[64]NMLH, CPGBA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/01, CPGB, Central Committee Minutes, 7-11 August 1929. Piatnitsky remained a useful ally against red unionism, though in other respects he was a leftist. See Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, 221, 150, 154.

[65]Late in 1929, the CPGB Political Bureau [PB] ordered the secretary of the UCWU, Party member Sam Elsbury, to hand over his post to another comrade and go to build the union in Leeds. Elsbury refused to do so and quit the Party, claiming that it had failed totally to support the new union (which limped along until it was dissolved in 1934). NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 1, CPGB, Central Committee Minutes, 11-12 January 1930; Martin, *Communism and*

The two red unions formed in 1929 were the *only* ones formed in Britain. Moreover, the CC defied a Sixth Congress directive to create another out of the Seamen's Minority Movement [SMM]. Once again, the argument of Pollitt and his cohorts was that there was no legitimacy for such a move. With the support of permanent ECCI representative Max Petrovsky (A.J. Bennett), in 1929 the PB proposed what they called "the perspective" of a new union, which accepted that a red union would be formed, but only after very careful preparation including the establishing on a wide scale of functioning "Ships Committees." While upholding the principle of red unionism, Pollitt was clearly delaying it in practice. By July 1930 the CPGB had made so little preparation that a representative of the RILU's Transport Workers IPC accused it of "a measure of manoeuvre that amounts to sabotaging" the international line. MM secretary George Allison denied the accusation but insisted that the immediate formation of a red union would be "mechanical," a position endorsed by the Fifth RILU Congress a few weeks later. Allison reported back to the CC that "we must make continued preparation along a pre-arranged plan of work so that we launch the union after a series of district conferences then a national conference."[66] Yet despite the RILU's heavy emphasis on organizing seamen and dockers in a crucial "war" industry and the support of SMM leaders George Hardy and Fred Thompson for the red union line, no red seafarers' union ever slid down the slipway.[67]

Campbell and McIlroy also interpret Pollitt's leading role in the CC's adoption in 1930 of "the perspective" of "one miners' union" — the United Mineworkers of Great Britain [UMGB] — as an example of his ultra-leftism. The context, however, in which he made this proposal was the South Wales Miners Federation's decision to expel the militant Mardy lodge and an ensuing rise in local left-wing support for

---

the British Trade Unions, 136-44; Kershen, *Uniting the Tailors*, 173-78; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 167-69; Darlington, *The Political Trajectory of J.T. Murphy*, 195-7.

[66]NMLH, CPGBA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/01, "The Proposed New Union for British Seamen," 25 October 1928; Fred Thompson to Alex Robson, 14 December 1929; Pat Murphy, "Memoirs of the Seamen's Struggles," 19 April 1971, 4-6; CPGBA, Reel 32, Comrade Smith, English Commission, Anglo-American Secretariat, 31 July 1930; George Allison, Report on the Minority Movement, English Commission, 10 August 1930; Reel 1, George Allison, Report on RILU Congress, in CPGB, CC Minutes, 14 September 1930; RILU, *Resolutions of the Fifth Congress of the RILU, Held in Moscow, August 1930* (London 1931), 107-14; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 123, 129.

[67]On the RILU's stress on the importance of organizing seamen and dockers, see AO, CPC Papers, 4A 2747-48, Tom Ewan to George Hardy, 17 November 1930; 4A 2836, Fred Thompson to Ewan, 6 December 1930; 4A 2422, Ewan to George Mink, 19 February 1931; Vernon L. Pedersen, "George Mink, the Marine Workers' Industrial Union, and the Comintern in America," *Labor History*, 41 (2000), 307-20; Jan Valtin, *Out of the Night* (1941; London 1988), chs. 21-23, appendix (the latter includes a sharply critical portrait of Hardy and Thompson — indeed, the CPGB as a whole — in 1932).

the immediate formation of a breakaway from the "Fed."[68] Discussions in the CC exposed sharp divisions, and Pollitt (possibly motivated by fear of suffering the same fate as Arthur Horner) produced a political compromise around which he thought the CC could unite — which it did, unanimously.[69] As Campbell and McIlroy note, on this occasion Pollitt "misjudged the shifting currents of Comintern policy," but it is possible to read his (and Willie Gallacher's) English Commission exchanges with ECCI bigwigs like William Weinstone as a protest against Moscow's expectations that they — party leaders and experienced trade unionists — would drop an agreed position (even one originally suggested by the RILU) at the drop of a hat. Standing by the UMGB perspective, Pollitt pointed out that "no member of the CPGB leadership had been 'a more consistent opponent at [*sic*] the epidemic of new unionism' than himself."[70] While these fragments of evidence — which are not offered here in support of a view of the CPGB as a relatively autonomous, near-equal agent in its dealings with the Comintern — are inconclusive, and some will find them unconvincing, they suggest that while Stalinism was monolithic, Stalinists were not. Pollitt's leadership mattered. Had he been less steadfast, Lozovsky might have succeeded in pressing a more North American-style line on Britain *via* the group Fishman calls "Young Turks," who were often contemptuous of Pollitt's trimming and who from 1930 to 1932 literally did not stop complaining that the centre was displaying "scepticism with regard to the unorganised workers" and sabotaging the "line of independent leadership."[71]

Conformists and Initiators

At the Fifth RILU Congress both Lozovsky and Otto Kuusinen spoke out against the "left danger" of becoming isolated from the masses, the Finn declaring himself bemused that some comrades had somehow taken up the daft idea that red unions "can and must be created everywhere in whatever circumstances." In nudging the RILU to the right, however, they did not alter its fundamental direction. When WUL secretary Tom Ewan foolishly whinged about the CPC's "lack of forces," Kuusinen told him in no uncertain terms that "IN EVERY INSTANCE, THE WORKERS WILL SUPPLY

[68]This minor victory for the left failed to correct Horner's supposed rightism. Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 149-54; Nina Fishman, "Horner and Hornerism," in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell, *Party People*, 130-35.

[69]NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 1, CPGB, CC Minutes, 5 April, 19-20 July 1930.

[70]Pollitt, quoted in Campbell, *The Scottish Miners*, 337; William Gallacher, Speech to English Commission, Anglo-American Secretariat, 11 August 1930. Interestingly, Gallacher and four other CC members voted to retain the original resolution. Unlike some others, Gallacher noted, a simple order from the ECCI was not enough to change *his* vote.

[71]Jack Mahon, "What's Wrong with the Minority Movement," *Worker*, 11 April 1930; L. Zooback, "What's Wrong with the Minority Movement?," *Worker*, 2 May 1930; F. Jackson, "Some Reflections on the CC Resolution," *Communist Review*, July 1930.

THE FORCES."[72] All three parties went on to suffer political defeats — the arrest of the CPC's seven-man Political Bureau [PB] in August 1931 (in November all were convicted and the CPC was outlawed), the election of the National Government in Britain in October 1931, the derisory showing of the Foster-Ford partnership in the 1932 presidential election — that objectively shattered the theoretical case for Class Against Class. Nevertheless, Moscow only "fumbled and wavered" towards a saner line.[73] Even after the National Socialists took power in Germany — indeed, after almost a year of Nazi rule — the ECCI Thirteenth Plenum reasserted all the main Third Period perspectives, described social democracy ("social fascism" was used more sparingly) as the "main prop of the bourgeoisie," and insisted that "it would be a right opportunist error to fail to see now the objective tendencies of the accelerated maturing of a revolutionary crisis in the capitalist world."[74]

Why did so many Communists suspend their critical judgement about the new line? Did "Moscow Gold," which arrived in quite large amounts in London and New York and quite small ones in Toronto, as Klehr and Haynes speculate, make it "easier for dedicated Communists to remain committed to the movement"?[75] And if it did so for leading cadres, how far did it trickle down to the middle and lower ranks? The California party, District Organizer Sam Darcy quipped, was rich "only in irony." Rather more bitterly, WUL national secretary Tom Ewan remarked: "The Moscow-Gold myth was always a good propaganda-point with the powers-that-be, but I would sure enjoy seeing them have to live on it." Out in the field, Canadian or-

[72]AO, CPC Papers, 3A 1710, Tom Ewan to Ben Winter, 30 January 1931; "The National Minority Movement of Great Britain: Positions and Tasks," in RILU, *Resolutions of the Fifth Congress of the RILU*, 107-14; AO, CPC Papers, "The Resolution of the Anglo-American Section of the Profintern on the Situation and Tasks of the Workers' Unity League of Canada," 28 November 1930; "The Economic Struggle and Tasks of the RILU Affiliated Sections in Face of the Ever-Deepening World Crisis" (Speech of Comrade Lozovsky at the Eleventh ECCI Plenum, 2 April 1931), in *Communist Review* (CPGB), September 1931.

[73]In 1932 the RILU at least acknowledged that there were such things as "objective difficulties," but still insisted that these were "not the decisive factor in the development of economic struggles." NYU, TL, Vertical File — Strikes 1932, *RILU Social and Economic Review*, August 1932; Carr, *The Twilight of Comintern*, 61. In August 1932, the RILU bluntly told the WUL's First National Congress that there was no possibility of "winning over the reactionary trade union apparatus" and that it should continue to support "all mass movements for splitting away from the AFL." For good measure, the ECCI announced that Canada's newly formed and first truly national social democratic party, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF], was "social fascist" and had to be treated accordingly. "RILU Greets 1st National Congress of the WUL," *Workers' Unity*, August-September 1932; NAC, CF, Reel 15, File 132, "The Concrete Tasks of the CPC," 16 September 1932.

[74]NYU, TL, Browder Papers, Reel 36, Series 6-15, *Theses and Decisions: Thirteenth Plenum of the ECCI, December 1933* (New York 1934).

[75]Hervey Klehr, John Earl Haynes, and Kyrill Anderson, eds., *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven 1998), 162-3, quoted in Campbell and McIlroy, "Nina Ponomareva's Hats," 173.

ganizers literally had to live off the land.[76] Subsidies probably helped party members make a slightly better fist of implementing policy that they would have tried to implement come what may, precisely because they trusted implicitly in orders that ultimately came from the leaders of the world revolution.[77]

At the leadership level, intellectual independence had already been surgically excised. Since 1928, when the Sixth Comintern Congress reserved for the ECCI the right to send not just delegates but "instructors" to national parties, the ECCI had accelerated the drive for intellectual "monolithicity ... the process of selection within the active nucleus of each national Communist party in favour of those elements that were readiest to submit to the will of the centre in Moscow."[78] Personal ambition encouraged leading cadres to discipline themselves. In his fascinating portrait of Moscow's mediation of the "slugfest" between Earl Browder and William Weinstone in 1930-32, James G. Ryan shows that there was not an inch of ideological daylight between the two and that the real winner was the referee.[79] Since those who kicked too hard against the line, like Arthur Horner, invariably suffered, many comrades clung to it for safety (Horner himself, during his stint at the International Miners' Propaganda Committee (IMPC), was prepared to press its red union line on the Canadian party, though he remained hostile to it where South Wales was concerned).[80]

As comrades learned to watch their step and not over-commit to a particular position, they became both more prolix and more conformist. Such were the requirements of "self-criticism," part of the accelerating Stalinization of the International. The ECCI's Russians vigorously promoted the cleansing properties of self-criticism, a disciplinary ritual that usually began with *someone else's* criticism of this or that industrial failure, and for the self-critic meant acknowledging the point at which she or he had veered too far to left or right and promising appropriate

[76]NYU, TL, Sam Darcy Papers, unpublished autobiography, chs. 13 and 18; Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto 1974), 155.

[77]By the mid-1920s, North American communists were prepared to "defend the Soviet Union" by breaking up meetings of other workers' organizations where criticism of the Soviet Union was anticipated. Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York 1940), 216-23; Toronto *Worker*, 14, 21 March 1925.

[78]Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, 114. It was perhaps no coincidence that this announcement coincided with the graduation of the first cohort from the Lenin School's full three-year programme.

[79]Ryan, *Earl Browder*, 45-56.

[80]Arthur Horner to Tim Buck, undated [c. May 1930], in Province of Ontario, Office of the Attorney General, *Agents of Revolution: A History of the Workers' Unity League, Setting Forth Its Origins and Aims* (1934); Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period'," 175.

[81]For some Canadian examples of the impact of "self criticism" on party discourse, see the exhanges between YCL member Oscar Ryan and Florence Custance, NAC, CF, Reel 7, File 57, Synopsis of Minutes of the Political Committee, 15 June 1928; Minutes of Special Politi-

corrective action.[81] Some party officials endorsed the practice. Chicago district secretary Bill Gebert "proudly" told a district committee plenum in April 1930 that self-criticism was an established "instrument for cleansing the party."[82] Several months later, on the other hand, Willie Gallacher complained to the Anglo-American Secretariat of its baleful effects. "Wherever you go," he observed, comrades were "searching and searching for deviations." Few could discuss a specific issue without repeating "every slogan that has come from the Comintern ... everything must be in" for fear of making an error of omission that might later be held against them.[83]

Given that Lenin School graduates — the "praetorian guard" of the line — often helped the disoriented find their bearings, it was ironic that the CPC's Lenin School *wunderkind* Stewart Smith should so spectacularly lose his.[84] Browder, it seems, in order to make the point that the CPC needed to correct the excessively leftist industrial line he had just witnessed as an ECCI delegate at an enlarged CC plenum in Toronto, arranged for Smith to be ambushed at a special Canadian Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat in the spring of 1931. Smith began the session with a declaration of war on the AFL. After his fellow Canadians fell on him like hounds, spurred by approving nods from the Russian comrades, he ended it by denouncing himself. With "perspiring earnestness," he thanked every participant for "showing him the speciousness of his own arguments [and] pledged his wholehearted support to the policy [of working responsibly in the reformist unions] their superior wisdom had recognized as the only way." The scene, a witness remarked, "would have been funny had it been less an affront to human dignity."[85]

ECCI and RILU directives seemed designed to keep parties constantly on the hop. Described by a British émigré whose job was to draft them as "mainly exercises in self-insurance and platitudinous abstraction," they perpetually balanced "right" and "left dangers," reminding parties of the need to work inside *and* outside the reformist unions, to use the "most elastic forms" of the united front from below but *without* "opportunism," and to couple the maximum amount of "mass work"

---

cal Committee Meeting, 17 July 1928; and between B. Buhay and R. Shoesmith, Toronto *Worker*, 30 March, 13 April 1929.

[82]Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation'," 26.

[83]NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 32, William Rust, Report to Anglo-American Secretariat, 30 July 1930; William Gallacher Speech to English Commission, AAS, 11 August 1930.

[84]Pollitt complained to the Thirteenth ECCI Plenum that young cadres who "in England could talk simply and clearly to the workers" returned from the Lenin School "speaking a foreign language." McDermott and Agnew, *The Comintern*, 106.

[85]John Hladun, "They Taught Me Treason," *Maclean's* (15 October 1947), 78. Hladun was a member of the ILS class of 1930. A few months later, Browder arranged a similar experience for Foster, having him hauled over the coals for his ineffective leadership of the recent tri-state bituminous mining strike. See Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 173-75; Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 260. Smith perhaps had vengeance in mind in 1932, when he backed Weinstone (the loser, of course) against Browder. See Ryan, *Earl Browder*, 51-2.

with enough secrecy to protect cadres, and sometimes reversed specific tactics without explanation.[86] By discouraging unmediated contact between parties and denying them "official information about the situation in other countries," they left the Comintern free to make self-serving (and frankly dubious) comparative evaluations of their successes and failures.[87]

Paradoxically, however, the "line" offered stability against the very political chaos it had created. Party members *believed* that "life itself" was on the side of Soviet Marxism. Belief — unlike faith — was scientific: Socialist Construction and capitalist crisis were observable *facts*; the bosses *were* carrying out massive programs of rationalization, of "stretch out," "speed-up," and "more looms"; wages *were* being slashed; workers *were* being sacked. It took no great stretch of the imagination to conclude that capitalism *was* finished.[88] If the revolution was failing in the west, it was not the Russians' fault. Indeed, identification with the Soviet Union — a "land where socialism lives and breathes" — offered psychological consola-

[86]Freda Utley, cited in Barry McLoughlin, "Visitors and Victims: British Communists in Russia Between the Wars," in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell, *Party People*, 219. One directive in late 1930 told communist cadres on the shop floor to be prepared to "come out openly before the workers in the name of the party, without regard to the risk, to the possibility of arrest or dismissal." Exactly a year later, another insisted that they "observe elementary conspirative rules ... the factory cell must not expose itself openly." Compare "Extracts from a circular letter on Factory Cells of the Organization Department of the ECCI," December 1930, in Degras, ed., *Documents*, 14-47, and "The Work of the Factory Cells," *Communist Review*, November-December 1931; "Work in the Factories: How To Do It (Summary of Directives of 8th RILU Council)," *Labor Unity*, May 1932.

[87]Harry Wicks, *Keeping My Head: The Memoirs of a British Bolshevik* (London 1992), 139; McLoughlin, "Visitors and Victims," 216 (on Margaret McCarthy). At the Anglo-American Secretariat in July 1930 a Russian official unfavourably compared the CPGB and MM with the CPUSA and TUUL. The Americans, he claimed, had overcome their trade union "crisis" while the British "on the contrary [displayed] a liquidatory tendency." A few months later, however, Stewart Smith described the CPUSA's industrial work as a "sycophantic recitation of formulas" and warned the CPC against using it as a yardstick. See NMLH, CPGBA, Comintern Files, Reel 32, Romanenko, comments in discussion on W. Rust's Report to Anglo-American Secretariat, 30 July 1930; NAC, CPC Papers, Box 8, file 7, Stewart Smith to Tim Buck, 4 December 1930, 11 January 1931; "The Position of the RILU Sections and Their Role in the Leadership of Economic Struggles and Unemployed Movement (report by Comrade Lozovsky)," *RILU Magazine*, 1 February 1932.

[88]AO, CPC Papers, 10C 1964 ff., *RILU Correspondence Course*, February 1930; *Communist International*, 1, 15 March 1930; Leslie Morris, "The Unemployment Crisis and Our Party," Toronto *Worker*, 19 April 1930; Freda Utley, "Economism Today," *Communist Review*, May 1930. Utley complained that the CPGB's "economism" betrayed a misunderstanding of the international line. Instead of urging workers to fight for their "elementary demands," it should be telling them that strike action was incapable of extracting concessions from dying capitalism.

tion against material hardships and political and personal isolation.[89] If few were prepared to physically defend the Soviet Union like the 5,000 or so North American Finns who left for Soviet Karelia in the early 1930s, most felt duty bound to offer it at least their intellectual defence (and sometimes, too, their fists, feet, and foreheads).[90]

According to some revisionists, where national leaders tended to privilege international obligations over local realities, the opposite was the case among middle- and lower-level cadres. Look at their worlds, revisionists argue, and at their mediation of the party-class relationship and a very different, more nuanced, generally more edifying picture appears. Here is where we see not "puppets" or "automatons," but Communists showing initiative, independence, creativity, and realism — even disobedience.[91] For London seamen's organizer Pat Murphy, the kind of "person who has studied political theory and has practical experience" would not hesitate to adapt directives that "were not always compatible to a particular situation we were confronting."[92] Murphy's base of operations was in the East End docks, only a bus ride away from CPGB headquarters. Distance from the centre probably made it easier to adapt the line to local realities. Continuous contact between the party centres in New York and Toronto and districts several hundreds or even thousands of miles away was possible only by letter and telegram, which inevitably carried less weight than direct personal contact. The CPC, in particular, was so short-handed that provincial officials and local cadres who were prepared to dig in their heels had a fair chance of prevailing over the centre.[93] It was no coincidence that the California and British Columbia districts became bywords for waywardness. At a time when the CPUSA was exhorting each member to turn his or her "Face to the Shops," new California secretary Sam Darcy reported to New York, the comrades in Los Angeles and Sacramento still equated revolutionary practice with

[89]J.B. McLachlan, "When the Red Army Sings," *Nova Scotia Miner*, 23 January 1932; Peter Hunter, *Which Side Are You On, Boys? Canadian Life on the Left* (Toronto 1988), 86.

[90]W. Saarinen, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: A Historical Geography of the Finns in the Sudbury Area* (Waterloo, ON 1999), 144-47; Reino Karo, "The Canadian Finns in Soviet Karelia in the 1930s," (1979), <http://www.genealogia.fi/emi/art/article228e.htm> (13 November 2004); Klehr and Haynes, *In Denial*, 115-18; Ed Laughlin, Blantyre miner, quoted in Campbell and McIlroy, "Reflections on the Communist Party's Third Period in Scotland," 44.

[91]Storch, "'The Realities of the Situation'," 21-3; Storch, "The Rise and Fall of Chicago's Revolutionary Unions: From the TUUL to the AFL," North American Labor History Conference, Wayne State University, Detroit, 15 October 1998.

[92]NMLH, CPGA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/01, Murphy, "Memoirs of the Seamen's Struggles," 9-10.

[93]See Tom Ewan's unsuccessful attempts to persuade Winnipeg WUL organizer Ben Winter to pull a strike at Swift Canadian meatpackers. AO, CPC Papers, 3A 1847-8, Tom Ewan to Ben Winter, 7 May 1931; 3A 1853-56, Winter to Ewan, 14 May 1931; 3A 1863, Ewan to Winter, 26 May 1931.

"socking the cops."[94] Ironically, Darcy proceeded to go native himself, becoming embroiled in a prolonged battle against what he saw as Earl Browder's visceral sectarianism.[95]

Down the chain of command, party rank-and-filers sometimes stood to the left and sometimes to the right of national and district leaderships. Some of the strongest critics of the harum-scarum leaders of the Lanarkshire UMS were their more sober-sided comrades in Fife, while the Ontario section of the Lumber Workers Industrial Union accused the more dynamic British Columbia section of having a "strike for strike's sake mentality."[96] One may infer, however, from the number of complaints about "hiding the face of the party" that the "turn to mass work" — in large part, a turn to the unemployed (supplemented in the United States by local racial struggles in which there were few lines of demarcation between red unions, unemployed councils, and branches of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights) — taught them how to organize and how to relate to actually existing class-consciousness.[97] Only too aware of the mismatch between their forces and those of the corporations, they learned how to listen to the class and used the ambiguities of ECCI directives to emphasize the need for cautious struggle for the masses' everyday needs. By 1931 most local party sections had adopted a "grievance approach to organising" in which abstract propagandizing played a diminishing role, but which allowed organizers to display flair and resourcefulness. Some,

[94]NYU, TL, Darcy Papers, Box 1, Sam Darcy to CPUSA CC Secretariat, 24 February 1931; Darcy to CC, 13 May 1931.

[95]NYU, TL, Darcy Papers, Box 3, unpublished autobiography; Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front," 19-26.

[96]Alan Campbell notes that there was an ethnic dimension to this characterization of the Lanarkshire men, which contained "unfortunate echoes of the of the popular Scottish stereotype of the 'feckless Glasgow Irish'." Campbell, "The Communist Party in the Scots Coalfields," 59. For confirmation of this bigotry, see Rab Smith, oral interview in MacDougall, ed., *Voices from the Hunger Marches*, Vol. I, 83-4. Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff," 103-5; "Resolution on the Situation and Tasks of the LWIU of Canada," *Lumber Worker*, September 1932.

[97]A. Markoff, "Building the Party in the [Pennsylvania] Mine Strike Area," *Party Organizer* (CPC), September-October 1931; Jack Johnstone, "Hiding Face of Party Greatest Error," *Party Organizer*, November 1933; AO, CPC Papers, 2A 0922-26, Fred Rose, "Report of the Cowansville Strike [2-10 March 1931]"; "The Turn to Mass Work," Resolution of the Central Committee (January 1931), *Communist Review*, April 1931; Amter, "Don't Abuse the Worker Who Doesn't Agree With You." For grassroots experience, see [Canada] "Textile Worker" to *Young Worker*, 2 January 1931; Paul Phillips, "Experiences in the Textile Field," *Young Worker*, 19 May 1931; M.S., "Some Lessons in Shop Work," *Young Worker*, 5 January 1932; [United States] John Schmies, "Organizing in Ford's," *Labor Unity*, July 1932; "Shop Paper Editor" section of *Party Organizer*, August, September-October 1932; G.P. "Shop Nucleus at Sparrows Point," *Party Organizer*, March 1934.

like the Americans Herb March and William Sentner or the Canadian Harvey Murphy, became genuine mass leaders.[98]

But how politically significant were indigenous tactical initiatives? Here, Theodore Draper makes an important point about the distinction between the conception and implementation of policy. Draper allows that local cadres often adapted and modified the line, but still did "no more than might be expected of human beings trying to put into practice a general line according to their best understanding and in more or less favourable circumstances."[99] The party program — the international line — remained invulnerable. Some cadres worked out that they could exploit the inbuilt ambiguities of the line provided they were careful to keep within its parameters: if they achieved a victory, however it was achieved, Moscow (or Toronto, or New York) would always find a way to claim it as a victory for the line.[100] The boldest could put up a cogent defence against accusations that they had committed deviations, but they could not actually commit any and hope to remain active leading Communists. The street-smart Sam Darcy carefully emphasized the *tactical* character of his disagreements with New York, and when New York refused to listen, he usually bowed to party discipline.[101] Randi Storch establishes that her Chicago Control Commission members were often decent human beings, but in the absence of any examination of the countervailing top-down influences, her case for an "elastic" party culture seems too good to be true.[102]

[98]Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: The Life and Times of a Black Radical* (New York 1994), 189-90; Al Richmond, *A Long View From the Left: Memoirs of an American Revolutionary* (New York 1972), 101-7; Steve Nelson, quoted in Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-54* (Urbana and Chicago 1997), 103, 168-69; Saul Wellman, in Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, eds., *Talking Union* (Urbana and Chicago 1996), 159; Feurer, "The Nutpickers Union," 40, 44. For March and Sentner, see Halpern and Feurer. Harvey Murphy, reviled for his disruptive role in Alberta in 1930, became a hugely popular leader in that province over the next three years before going on to become a leading figure in the Mine Mill and Smelter Workers Union in British Columbia. See Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party, and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1936* (Toronto 1973).

[99]Draper, *A Present of Things Past*, 133.

[100]The Toronto *Worker*'s account of a successful foundry workers' strike in Winnipeg focused almost exclusively on the role of unemployed solidarity, which "proved" that the unemployed would not scab. To do this, the article had to overlook strike organizer Michael Biniowsky's many deviations from the line. Toronto *Worker*, 26 September 1931.

[101]Darcy, quoted in Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front," 22, n. 36; 26, n. 44. In their introduction to Steve Nelson's important oral autobiography, his revisionist co-writers mention some of its problematic silences. The greatest, which they barely discuss, is the virtual disappearance of the party line except in very general terms usually relating to international developments.

[102]I might add that her account of the Chicago party's "fight" against Trotskyism depicts a remarkably polite — bloodless — affair. See "'The Realities of the Situation'," 33-36.

Towards Unity

The turn away from Class Against Class and towards the united front is normally dated as beginning some time between the immediate aftermath of the German catastrophe in the spring of 1933 and the Seventh CI Congress in the summer of 1935. Where the CPGB was concerned, however, the trade union turn was all but completed by late 1932.[103] When Pollitt clashed with Lozovsky at the RILU central council in late 1931, he knew that he had ECCI backing for a sharper turn back towards the mainstream unions. He reported this to the PB and CC, which duly issued a series of resolutions in December 1931 and January 1932, decisively reorienting the CPGB on "SYSTEMATIC REVOLUTIONARY MASS WORK IN THE REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS." Though expressed in militant language, the CC resolutions ignored the issue of red unions, barely mentioned the UMS, now a growing embarrassment, stressed that the complete absence of work in the reformist unions had been the party's "greatest defect" in recent years, and demanded "steady and persistent work in every trade union branch," which was as important as "work in the factories [and] the building of independent leadership of strikes."[104]

Gallacher put his weight behind Pollitt, and the two showcased the new orientation in the Lancashire cotton weavers' strike that ebbed and flowed through most of 1932.[105] By its standards, the CPGB put a huge effort into supporting the strike, but from the outset its aim was to challenge the misapprehension that it was anti-union. Thus, to the dismay of its own left wing, it put most of its efforts into building the independent Cotton Workers Solidarity Movement, though it also boasted that its pressure had helped stop union officials from making the strike a "stay at home" affair. In the process, of course, the party also helped those officials demonstrate that they *would* fight: the Amalgamated Weavers Association paid out the colossal sum of £355,853 in strike benefits. The settlement, though a clear defeat (and even then, as time would show, not worth the paper it was written on), demonstrated that the officials' authority was undiminished.[106]

[103]Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions*, 32-59.

[104]CPGB, *Central Committee Resolutions*, "Coming Strike Struggles," December 1931; "Immediate Tasks Before the Party and the Working Class," January 1932, original emphasis; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 77; McIlroy and Campbell, "Histories of the British Communist Party," 45.

[105]*Labour Research*, February to October 1932, esp. Cotton Industry Supplement, October; Edwin Hopwood, *A History of the Lancashire Cotton Industry and the Amalgamated Weavers' Association* (Manchester 1969), 95-8, 108-13; Alan Fowler, "Lancashire Cotton Trade Unionism in the Inter-war Years," in J.A. Jowitt and A.J. McIvor, eds., *Employers and Labour in the English Textile Industries* (London and New York 1988), 114-18; Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (London 1971), 107-14.

[106]Harry Pollitt, "The Cotton Fight Today," *Communist Review*, June 1932; CPGB, *The Way Out for the Cotton Workers* (Rawtenstall 1932); NMLH, CPGBA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/07, Report of Manchester District, 7 March 1932; Draft Resolution on the Cotton Strike, 3 October 1932.

The publication of Lozovsky's version of his "right up-and-downer" with Pollitt in the February 1932 *RILU Magazine* suggested that the RILU chief felt that Pollitt had gone beyond what had been decided in Moscow.[107] There were still significant elements within the CPGB leadership who thought the same. Reasserting the Class Against Class line that the reformist unions were homogeneously "fused with the capitalist state," Party theoretician Rajani Palme Dutt and *Daily Worker* editor William Rust launched a counterattack against the one-sidedness of the CC resolutions in an attempt to rally the left for a challenge at the Twelfth Party Congress in November. Though Dutt's position was undermined by the revelation that among the younger, more militant workers he was cultivating were the founders of British Trotskyism — the "Balham Group" — he and Rust still commanded considerable support.[108] New MM secretary Willie Allan was no ultra-leftist, but he was alarmed by Pollitt's sidelining of the organization in the massive Lancashire cotton strike and his tendency to see the Party's future in non-party rank-and-file movements that were springing up in several industries. He later joined Birmingham district organizer Maurice Ferguson in asking for a plain statement that the MM had been "liquidated."[109] Pre-Congress discussion materials, based on September's Twelfth ECCI Plenum, called for vigilance against "those opportunist elements who still in practice oppose the existence of Red Trade Unions and the RTUO."[110] Shortly before the Congress, however, the influential Scottish district, citing recent developments in the AEU, explicitly rejected the Dutt/Rust line and endorsed systematic work in the union branches.[111] With several other issues crying out for a show of Party unity, right and left stitched together a militant-sounding compromise committing the communists to building a new and improved MM — the Trade Union Militant League — and a Red Trade Union Opposition.[112]

[107]The "right up-and-downer" expression quickly entered party folklore, as recently recalled by veteran member Bill Moore, "I Was Around at the Time," *Socialist History Society Newsletter*, January 2005.

[108]Worley, *Class Against Class*, 292; Branson, *History*, 242. The irony here was that Trotsky's position on the trade unions was the Pollitt/Gallacher position.

[109]William Allan, "The Present Struggles and the Building of the Revolutionary Union Opposition," *Communist Review*, June 1932; W. Allan, "The Party and the Minority Movement," *Communist Review*, October 1932; Maurice Ferguson, "Have We Liquidated the Minority Movement?," *Communist Review*, October 1932; Campbell and McIlroy, "Reflections on the Communist Party's Third Period in Scotland," 48.

[110]CPGB, *The 12th Plenum of the ECCI: Material for Twelfth Congress CPGB*, 7.

[111]NMLH, CPGBA, Klugmann Papers, CP/IND/KLUG/05/07, Resolution of the Scottish District Party Committee on the Trade Union Question, 6 October 1932; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 78-82. On the AEU, see Frow and Frow, *Engineering Struggles*, 92-4; and on rank-and-file movements more generally, see Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions*.

[112]Harry Pollitt, *The Road to Victory*: Opening and Closing Speeches at the Twelfth Congress of the CPGB, Battersea, November 1932, 41-8; Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, 79-80; Martin,

Once the Congress had been safely negotiated, Pollitt not only forgot all about the Trade Union Militant League, he also interred the Minority Movement and declared that permanent factory committees of union and non-union workers were "unthinkable." Adopting the slogan of "100 per cent trade unionism," the PB instructed cadres to mitigate the "harshness" of their propaganda, permeate the non-party rank-and-file movements, win the trust of the rank-and-file through union branch work, and seriously contest branch elections. Do all this, and they would remove any credence from the "charge ... so often made against our Movement; that of union smashing."[113] Horner's victory in 1933 in the election of a miners' agent for the SWMF's Welsh-speaking anthracite region — no mean feat, given that he was still officially expelled from the union and "was well known for his ignorance of the Welsh language" — showed what was possible.[114] As for the UMS, the erstwhile red union flagship was now an embarrassment. Members were instructed to "make clear the reformist responsibility" for its creation.[115]

Support for a more flexible industrial line grew within the North American parties throughout 1932, and some of it undoubtedly came from indigenous sources. For the CPC, one such source was the shock of illegality. Forced underground, it had no option but to "hide" its face. In 1931, it had enthusiastically taken up the more flexible united front from below tactics sanctioned by the ECCI in unemployed and labour defence work. Impressed by the results — and perhaps responding to British developments — it asked for permission to extend this licence to industrial work.[116] Moscow, however, though beginning to sanction united fronts from above in other areas (its cession of leadership of the international strug-

---

Communism and the British Trade Unions, 172-74; Branson, *History*, 90-2; Worley, *Class Against Class*, 293-95; Andrew Flinn, "William Rust: The Comintern's Blue-Eyed Boy?," in McIlroy, Morgan, and Campbell, *Party People*, 89-90.

[113]Working Class Movement Library, Salford, Pit and Factory Papers Collection, *Salford Docker* file, Fred Thompson to E. Frow, 4 November 1932; CPGB, Materials for Twelfth Party Congress, Draft Resolution of the Political Bureau on the Independent Leadership in Economic Struggles (November 1932), 4; Harry Pollitt, "The Party Congress and the Railwaymen's Fight," *Communist Review*, January 1933; Idris Cox, *How To Work in the Factories and Streets* (London 1933), 20; D.W., "Enthusism and Efficiency: The Way to the Trade Unionists," *Communist Review*, October 1933; R.W. Robson, *How the Communist Party Works* (London undated), 15-17.

[114]NMLH, CPGBA, Idris Cox memoirs, 45.

[115]"Some Proposals for Developing Work in the Trade Unions," *Communist Review*, September 1933. Ironically, when the UMS dissolved in 1936 its leaders felt "we were actually organizationally and financially better [off] than we had been for a long period." "The Recollections of John McArthur," 136.

[116]NAC, CF, Reel 1, File 176, Report by "Morgan" [Norman Freed] to the ECCI Anglo-American Secretariat, 2 July 1932; John Manley, "'Fight, Don't Starve!': Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929-1939," *Canadian Historical Review*, 79 (September 1998), 466-91; Manley, "Red or Yellow?," 228-36.

gle around peace and anti-fascism to Henri Barbusse and Romain Rolland was quickly reflected in September 1932 in the formation of the League of Professional Groups for Foster and Ford, a "model for the white collar Popular Front"), insisted that the CPC and CPUSA continue to pursue independent leadership in industry, where their priorities remained the same: build red unions in the "war" industries and smash the AFL. Late in 1932, however, the RILU also sanctioned a serious push back into the reformist unions, only to renew its red union aspirations when North America was swept by a labour insurgency in the spring of 1933.[117]

Though Communists could scarcely believe it, the main source of this surge, which lasted through the explosive summer of 1934, was capitalist recovery, coupled in the United States with the optimism engendered by the labour provisions of Roosevelt's 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act [NIRA].[118] The insurgency propelled the TUUL and WUL in very different directions. American workers who sought to unionize turned first to the AFL, secondly to independent unions, and only *in extremis* to the TUUL.[119] For every worker who joined the red auto and steel unions, scores joined independent unions, AFL federal locals, and the Amalgamated Association of Iron Steel and Tin Workers Rank and File Movement. At its peak in

[117]Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 180; Daniel Aron, *Writers on the Left* (New York 1969), 213-15; "Culture and the Crisis" (1932), in Albert Fried, *Communism in America: A History in Documents* (New York 1997), 168-72; Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 118-20; *Workers' Unity*, August-September 1932; NAC, CF, Reel 18, File 153, WUL, National Executive Board, Resolution on the Reformist Unions and Tasks of the Workers Unity League, 2 January 1933.

[118]"Strike Wave in Canada," *October Youth*, November-December 1933; Jack Johnstone, "Hiding the Face of the Party Greatest Error," *Party Organizer*, November 1933; Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 123-24. The economic upturn, the CPC argued, was a myth concocted by the state. Strike militancy — a vindication of Class Against Class — had happened when the WUL had brought its technique and energy into line with latent working-class consciousness. See "Towards a Thoroughgoing Clarification of the Situation and Our Tasks," *Communist Review* (Toronto), March 1934.

[119]Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, 50-54; Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 123-25; Harvey Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism, and the CIO* (Westport, CT 1981), 24. Filipino, Japanese, and Mexican agricultural labourers flocked into the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union in California and the South West because there was no alternative. In 1933 CAWIU led almost two-thirds (22 of 35) of the agricultural strikes and over 80 per cent of the strikers (41,650 out of 50,601) in California. NYU, TL, Darcy Papers, Box 2, "California Strikes 1932 & 1933," undated, "Chronological Summary of Cotton Pickers Strike, San Joaquin Valley, Calif., 1-30 October 1933"; NYU, TL, Darcy Papers, Box 3, Sam Darcy, unpublished autobiography, 329-49; Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the American Communist Party* (Oxford 1990), 42-54; Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870-1941* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London 1981), ch. 5.

mid-1933, the TUUL claimed (a possibly inflated) 125,000 members.[120] In Canada, on the other hand, the WUL became a genuine force. Even with no NIRA to give the reformist unions confidence, Canadian workers generated the highest levels of industrial militancy seen in the Dominion since the post-war labour revolt. The relative unresponsiveness of Canada's reformist unions (except in the needle trades) to the stirrings of the unorganized gave the WUL a clear run. It led seven of 1933's ten biggest strikes and in 1934 led over two-thirds of *all* strikes, winning improved wages and/or conditions in most. At its peak that summer the WUL possessed substantial unions in coal mining, logging and lumber, garments, and furniture, the only union bases in several industries, including metal mining, textiles, auto, shoe and leather, meatpacking, and maritime, and a total membership of between 30,000 to 40,000. Though only about a quarter the size of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada [TLCC], it was probably as big as the ACCL and more dynamic than either. So dangerous had the WUL "monster" become that, in the spring of 1934, the federal and Ontario provincial governments conspired in an unsuccessful attempt to discredit it; their reluctance to try simply to lock up its leaders was a measure of how far the public mood had changed since 1931.[121]

By late 1933, when Browder reported to the RILU that the party needed to make a "thorough re-examination" of its labour policy, many workers were quitting the TUUL unions for their mainstream counterparts.[122] The CPUSA was evidently prepared for a change of direction, but at its Eighth Convention in April 1934, while calling for "maximum attention" to work in the AFL, it denied that any kind of retreat from Class Against Class was under way and demanded "a sharp struggle against any liquidatory tendencies."[123] On the West Coast, Sam Darcy was forcing it to move more rapidly towards the international unions than it cared to go. For over a year, he and his "Albion Hall" group of San Francisco longshoremen had

[120]NYU, TL, Browder Papers, Reel 36, Series 6-15, Earl Browder, *Report of the Central Committee to the 8th Convention of the Communist Party of the USA, Held in Cleveland, Ohio, 2-8 April 1934* (New York 1934), 34-8; Nathaniel Honig, *The Trade Unions Since the NRA* (New York 1934); Honig, *The Trade Union Unity League Today* (NewYork 1934); Jack Stachel, "The Independent Unions and Fight for Unity in the Trade Unions," *Labor Unity*, June 1934; Stachel, "Some Problems in Our Trade Union Work," *Communist*, June 1934.

[121]House of Commons, *Debates*, 14 February 1934, 577-78; 23 February 1934, 872; *Agents of Revolution*; Toronto *Globe*, 17, 19 February 1934; "Communism in Canada," *Labor Leader*, 22 June 1934.

[122]Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*, 115-17, 128; Browder, quoted in Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States*, 52; Wayne State University [WSU], Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs [ALHUA], Harvey O'Connor Papers, Boxes 22, 23 and 25, various materials on the SMWIU and the AA Rank and File Movement.

[123]NYU, TL, Browder Papers, Reel 36, Series 6-15, *The Way Out: A Program for American Labor*, Manifesto and Principal Resolutions adopted by the Eighth Convention of the CPUSA, Cleveland, Ohio, 2-8 April 1934, 60-84.

been struggling for a comprehensive orientation on the AFL's Internal Longshoremen's Association [ILA] against the party-backed Marine Workers Industrial Union [MWIU], which had a small shipboard presence but virtually no base at all on the docks. The conflict, sociologist Howard Kimmeldorf observes, reduced the party's "strategic 'line' ... [to] little more than a blur."[124] Darcy's ebullience and obstinacy helped ensure that the Party was at the centre of events when the San Francisco longshoremen launched their memorable 1934 strike, which — with the ensuing general strike — offered conclusive evidence that the way forward for the party lay in building progressive coalitions inside the AFL. But not until Moscow gave the nod did New York agree to liquidate the MWIU.[125]

That Browder could then liquidate the TUUL unions so speedily speaks both to his subservience and their objectively poor state: the MWIU, SMWIU, NTWU, and Packinghouse Workers Industrial Union all went between September and December 1934; and the CAWIU, NTWIU, and National Lumber Workers Union followed in the next two months.[126] In March, the Party formally dissolved the TUUL at a brief convention in New York City. Before disappearing, the TUUL passed on to its cadres very similar instructions to those the CPGB had issued two years earlier: there was still a need for strong union fractions but there should be no attempt to set up a permanent "Minority Movement"; whenever possible, cadres should seek to present themselves as "real" candidates for union office, and the "tone used in the press with regard to the AFL must be changed, criticizing and exposing the reactionary leaders of the AFL in a manner convincing for the rank and file, but treating the AFL locals and unions as mass workers' organizations."[127]

[124] Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford 1992), 82-6; Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front," 14-19.

[125] Cherny, "Prelude to the Popular Front," 27-9.

[126] Jack Stachel, "Our Trade Union Policy," *Communist*, November 1934; Ben Gold, "Dressmakers Fight for Unity," *Labor Unity*, December 1934; various materials in WSU, ALHUA, O'Connor Papers, Boxes 22, 23, and 25; Staughton Lynd, "The Possibility of Radicalism in the Early 1930s," *Radical America*, 6 (November-December 1972), 37-64; Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*, 128; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 101-2; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 119-24; Jerry Lembcke and William Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madeira Park, BC, and New York 1984), 37. At the death of the SMWIU, the Party decided to keep the Metal Workers Industrial Union going until it subsequently became part of the United Electrical Workers.

[127] "Communists and the Trade Unions," *Labor Unity*, January 1935. For examples of the desired style, see WSU, ALHUA, O'Connor Papers, Box 22, Moissaye J. Olgin, "Mike Tighe Is Preparing His Own Defeat," *Daily Worker*, undated clipping [January 1935]; John Steuben, "Rank and File Movement in Steel Industry Is Broadest in Country," *Daily Worker*, April 1935, clipping; *Daily Worker*, 16, 17 March 1935.

The CPC was well aware of these developments. In May 1934, the Anglo-American Secretariat sent it the first of several draft trade union resolutions for its next convention. Raising forcefully the question of labour unity, it inverted (without explanation) the key premise of the red union line, arguing that the rapid rise of fascism in Canada made "a turn towards work in the REFORMIST TRADE UNIONS ... *decisive* for the growth of the revolutionary union movement as a whole and for widening the mass influence of the Party." In making this assertion, the ECCI extrapolated freely from *American* conditions: as ever, the ECCI had an inadequate grasp of Canadian conditions, but it also wilfully under-emphasized the WUL's relative success. The draft resolution suggested that the WUL consider dropping its name, send its smaller red unions into one or other of the reformist unions, and seek unity with the independent unions — though this last proposal was swiftly dropped after the TUUL had failed to interest American independents in a similar pact. Later drafts added little, and the final draft concluded with a rather tame suggestion that the CPC consider "how the problem of trade union unity could best be raised in Canada."[128]

Not all of the pressure for trade union unity came from Moscow. From inside and outside the red unions, Trotskyists and Lovestoneites had been raising questions about the practical need and theoretical justification for separate revolutionary unions and a revolutionary centre since 1932.[129] Party spokespersons inadvertently conceded ground to them by ceasing to refer to the WUL unions as "revolutionary" and claiming that what made them distinctive was simply that they were led by men and women who were determined "to honestly defend the interests of their class."[130] Partly as a result of its success in opposition work, by the autumn of 1934 the WUL had dropped its aspiration to hegemony and was calling for a united front struggle by "all labour unions" for the right to exist and of all workers "to organize into the unions of their own choice."[131] By December, it had conceded that it lacked the capacity on its own to build viable unions in industries like auto and steel, and the restored PB (general secretary Tim Buck, the last of the members jailed in 1932, had just been released) seemed to signal that it was ready to dissolve the WUL.[132]

[128]See Drafts in NAC, CF, Reel 18, File 155.

[129]William Matheson, "Revolutionary Strategy in the Trade Unions," *Vanguard*, November-December 1932; "Strike at Hallman and Sable," *October Youth*, August-September 1933.

[130]Annie Buller, "Workers Leading Fight Against Bosses' Offensive," Toronto *Worker*, 16 December 1933.

[131]T.C. Sims, *Strike Strategy and Tactics*, Report to the National Executive Board, WUL, 4-5 September 1934.

[132]See speeches and reports to the Central Committee, December 1934, in *The Communists Fight for Working Class Unity* (Montreal 1935).

At this point, however, the CPC surprised Moscow by deciding that it did not want to liquidate the WUL. Having reviewed the American and Canadian union situations, it declared that they were "in no way to be compared." Crucially, there had been no rank-and-file influx into the AFL unions *in Canada*. Hence the red unions remained the "main avenues for the organization of the masses ... in the basic industries and ... the main channel of the strike movement."[133] When Moscow urged reconsideration and accused the CPC of dragging its feet and failing to understand the need for unity, the CPC *unilaterally* announced that it would seek unity by *amalgamation* of the WUL, TLC, and ACCL in an "All-inclusive Federation of Canadian Labour," with all three having discrete but unspecified roles.[134] Somewhat reluctantly, the ECCI sanctioned the strategy, which remained in force — surviving the Seventh Comintern Congress in July-August — until November, when, literally without a word of warning, the Ninth Enlarged CC Plenum ruled that the WUL should "merge with" (in reality, dissolve into) the AFL-TLC unions.[135]

Why did the liquidation of Canadian red unionism happen a full year later than in the United States?[136] One partial answer, which illustrates both the possibilities of and constraints on national autonomy, is that the ECCI gave the Canadians a reasonable period in which to implement its nationalist program and called a halt when it was clear that the program was not working: the reformist centres would not talk to each other, never mind the WUL. Another possibility is that the Canadians had the backing of Lozovsky, long a protagonist of Canadian trade union autonomy and who was clearly aware that the liquidationist logic of trade union unity threatened the RILU itself.[137] As to timing, the creation in October 1935 of the Committee for Industrial Organization [CIO] *inside* the AFL opened up the very real prospect of a dynamic drive to organize the very *war* industries the WUL had admitted it was unable to penetrate. There was, in short, a convincing *objective* case for returning to the AFL.

Conclusions

Broadly speaking, Class Against Class did not thrust the CPC, CPGB, and CPUSA into a German-style catastrophe, though in the case of the British and Canadian parties it

[133]NAC, CF, Reel 22, File 179, unsigned letter to "Dear Friends," 8 March 1935.
[134]Toronto *Worker*, 26 March 1935.
[135]NAC, CF, Reel 22, File 181, AAS, Draft Letter to CPC on Trade Union Work, 31 March 1935; RILU American Fraction, Letter to CPC on Trade Union Work, 28 April 1935; CPC, *Canada and the VIIth World Congress of the Communist International* (Toronto [1936?]), 17-18; CPC, *Towards a Canadian People's Front*, Proceedings of the Ninth Plenum of the Central Committee, CPC, Toronto, November 1935.
[136]It was a more complicated process than suggested by Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour*.
[137]Reiner Tosstorff, "Moscow Versus Amsterdam: Reflections on the History of the Profintern," *Labour History Review*, 68 (April 2003), 92.

undoubtedly did serious harm. By 1930 CPGB membership had plummeted to 2,500, while a plenum of the CPC Central Committee (which substituted for the regular two-yearly party convention — cancelled because the party was broke and bleeding) announced a combined party-YCL membership of just over 2,000. Both parties then recovered somewhat, but not until they emerged out of the Third Period in 1933-34 did membership return to and surpass the peak levels of the 1920s. In all three countries, Class Against Class tactics deeply divided the left. As late as February 1934, months after it had formed the League Against War and Fascism, the CPUSA was still prepared to break up the Socialists' Madison Square Garden protest against Austrian Fascism, an action that had the Socialist *New Leader* labelling the disrupters as "moral lepers."[138] Part of the political legacy of Class Against Class was the absence of a solid proletarian core from the ensuing Popular Front. If rank-and-file Labour Party members in Britain and CCF members in Canada often took Communist appeals for unity at face value, their leaders ensured that there would be no (or minimal) formal cooperation at the top.[139]

Nevertheless, where the two North American parties were concerned, far from becoming *more* isolated from the class than in the 1920s, through their unconstrained immersion in the struggle to organize the unorganized they came into contact with and to some extent mobilized the widest range of class forces since 1919-20. The same sectarian sense of mission that drove them to disgraceful attacks on fellow socialists also drove them to work for objectives that went against the national grain. They consciously set out to organize groups whom the craft unions had often ignored or patronized — women, immigrants from Asia and south, east, and central Europe, and (in the United States) African Americans — and in the process burrowed into open-shop plants and established some of the salients from which the CIO would move forward a few years later.[140] One of the ironies of the Third Period is that the CPGB, perhaps the least sectarian of our three subjects, achieved least on the industrial front. For all that it offered no real challenge to the established jurisdictions or organizing methods of the most powerful craft and gen-

[138]Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 115.

[139]See, for example, NAC, Percy Bengough Papers, Vol. 3, Vancouver and District Trades and Labour Council, *Important Information for Trades Unionists* (1936). This document, issued by the president and secretary of the Vancouver TLC, warned rank-and-file unionists not to be fooled by the advocates of the "united front." Much of the document was drawn from British Labour Party sources.

[140]For the WUL's efforts around race and ethnicity, see Manley, "Canadian Communists, Revolutionary Unionism, and the 'Third Period'," 176; Ian McMillan, "Strikes, Bogeys, Spares, and Misses: Pin-Boy and Caddy Strikes in the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 158-59. The CPUSA's commitment flowed directly from Stalin, his views on the emancipatory power of revolutionary nationalism, and the theory of "self-determination for the black belt," which "infused the communist commitment to racial equality with an unusual intensity." Gary Gerstle, "Working-Class Racism: Broaden the Focus," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 44 (Fall 1993), 34.

eral unions, it could hardly have looked more like a rival to the TUC had it given the Young Turks their head to pursue red unionism. Does the absence of the same commitment to industrial unionism and organizing the unorganized that the North American comrades possessed help explain why Britain failed to experience a militant upsurge among semi-skilled and unskilled factory proletarians comparable to that which swept North America in 1936-37?[141]

One does not have to look too hard at Communist parties in the Third Period to see individual ingenuity, courage, dedication, and heroism. The TUUL's attempts to fuse racial and class struggle deserve recognition. While the red unions were too weak to make a significant difference in the lives of many black workers, they did more than any contemporary rival to break down African American distrust of unions and force white workers to contemplate the not so hidden injuries of race and racism. Over time, TUUL organizers overcame some of their earlier immaturity and dogmatism by learning from the workers they were organizing how to manoeuvre more sensitively around racial realities.[142] To the extent that the CIO was racially egalitarian, some of the credit should surely go to the TUUL.[143] To turn round Harvey Klehr's critical comments on the NTWU's insistence on playing the race card even when black workers were absent, when they were present, red unions en-

[141]Minority Movement leader George Allison bemoaned that many semi-skilled metal workers were unorganized and held "in subjection" to the Amalgamated Engineering Union. NMLH, CPGBA, Reel 32, George Allison, Report on Minority Movement, English Commission, AAS, 10 August 1930. On this point, see Branson and Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties*, 126-29. For the Party's late 1930s ultra-loyalism, see *Trade Unionism and Communism: An Open Letter by John Mahon* (London [1935/36?]). Mahon had been one of the leading Young Turks.

[142]For example, that white racism was not going be overcome in an instant and that many black workers actually preferred separate locals. See "Fighting White Chauvinism," *Party Organizer*, May 1931 (on the NTWU in Greensboro, SC); M.E., "Concentration Brings Results," *Party Organizer*, November-December 1932; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 28. Positive accounts of the party's racial record in a variety of industrial settings include Linda Nyden, "Black Miners in Western Pennsylvania, 1925-1931: The NMU and the UMWA," *Science and Society*, 61 (Spring 1977), 69-101; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (Oxford 1979), 30; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 84-6; Rosemary Feurer, "The Nutpickers Union, 1933-34"; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 108-12; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 60-63.

[143]Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO: The Possibility of Racial Egalitarianism During the 1930s and 1940s," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 44 (Fall 1993), 1-32, and responses. Goldfield and his interlocutors barely mention the TUUL. Judith Stein argues against inflating the Communist impact. Daniel Nelson, in the process of moving from *Workers on the Waterfront* to *Divided We Stand*, effectively erases the TUUL. Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin's *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (Cambridge 2003), 247-48, on the other hand, makes a strong pro-Communist case.

sured that they were not invisible.[144] The abundance of these positive qualities, however, only suggests what might have been had they been harnessed to realistic political projects and not to tactics and slogans that widened divisions in the labour movement and saddled Communists with lasting reputations among many trade unionists as "splitters" — a heavy burden in a movement instinctively drawn to unity.[145] The British experience up to 1933 and the Canadian in 1935 (compared with which the manoeuvrings of Sam Darcy and the humane flexibility of the Chicago Control Commission are politically insignificant) show the limits of the ECCI's accommodation of national peculiarities. Set against Moscow's record of uprooting apparently entrenched national leaders, summoning others for political re-education, using Lenin School graduates as a mobile political commissariat, and installing compliant leaderships prepared to accept every twist and turn of the line as the last word in Marxist theory, these three national experiences reveal no significant degree of autonomy or initiative from below. The very disposability of the red union line showed that what really mattered was the power to make and break policy in the interests of Socialism in One Country. And as clear-eyed Communists had recognized since 1929, the leaders of that country held all meaningful power.[146]

I would like to thank the editor of Labour/Le Travail *and the journal's anonymous reviewers for many helpful comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank Jim Phillips for his hospitality and comradeship at a crucial stage in the gestation of this paper*.

[144]"Launching the National Miners' Union," *Labor Unity*, October 1928 (includes a photograph of black NMU vice-president William Boyce); John Hunter, "Detailed Steps in Organising Department and Shop Committees," *Steel and Metal Worker*, February 1934.

[145]When the seven-member CPC Political Bureau was jailed for sedition and theParty outlawed in 1931, the Dominion's small Trotskyist cohort showed exemplary solidarity for its beleaguered former comrades. A larger portion of the Canadian labour movement thought (rather like the members of the CPUSA when Trotkyists were prosecuted under the Smith Act during World War II) that they had it coming. Compare Maurice Spector, "Anti-Communist Arrests in Canada," *The Militant*, 29 August 1931; "Those Strongly Vocal Persons," editorial, Vancouver *Labor Statesman*, 11 September 1931.

[146]Nowhere was this more clearly reflected than in the fatalism that led important revolutionaries to submit to Moscow rather than be replaced by "some kid from the Lenin School." Comment attributed to Palmiro Togliatti, quoted in Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*, 50.