

*The Trade Union Unity League: American Communists and the Transition to Industrial Unionism: 1928–1934**

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The organization known as the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) came into formal existence at an August 1929 conference of Communists and radical unionists in Cleveland. The TUUL's purpose was to create and nourish openly Communist-led unions that were to be independent of the American Federation of Labor in industries such as mining, textile, steel and auto. When the TUUL was created, a number of the Communist Party's most experienced activists were suspicious of the sectarian logic inherent in the TUUL's program. In Moscow, where the creation of new unions had been debated by the Communists the previous year, some Americans—working within their established AFL unions—had argued furiously against its creation, loudly accusing its promoters of needless schism. The controversy even emerged openly for a time in the Communist press in the United States. In 1934, after five years of aggressive but mostly unproductive organizing, the TUUL was formally dissolved. After the Comintern's formal inauguration of the Popular Front in 1935 many of the same organizers who had worked in the obscure and ephemeral TUUL unions aided in the organization of the enduring industrial unions of the CIO.¹

Historians of American labor and radicalism have had difficulty detecting any legitimate rationale for the founding of the TUUL. Its five years of existence during the first years of the Depression have often been dismissed as an interlude of hopeless sectarianism, inspired more by directives from Moscow than by the needs of American

*Thanks to Eric Schneider, Janet Golden, Randall Miller, and Bruce Nelson for their comments on earlier drafts.

¹Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 38–48, 118–134; Theodore Draper, "The Communists and the Miners," *Dissent* (1972), 373; *Communist*, April 1928, 197–198; *ibid.*, July 1928, 404–405; Fraser Ottanelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), 17–48; James Matles and James Higgins, *Them and Us: Struggles of a Rank and File Union* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974), 29–36. The CP-led unions that were already in existence before the TUUL conference were: the National Miners Union, the National Textile Workers Industrial Union, the Needle Trades Workers Industrial Union, and the Auto Workers Union. The unions that were formed under TUUL auspices after the conference were the Marine Workers Industrial Union, the Agricultural Workers Industrial League (later the Cannery and Agricultural Workers Industrial Union), the Packinghouse Workers Industrial Union (in some areas called the Food and Packinghouse Workers Industrial Union), the Tobacco Workers Industrial Union, the Shoe and Leather Workers Industrial Union, the Laundry Workers Industrial Union, the Metal Workers Industrial League, the Tobacco Workers Industrial Union, and the Sharecroppers Union. Total membership levels claimed by the Communists for the TUUL vary from 57,000 (claimed at founding, 1929) and 40,000 (William Foster estimate, 1932); (see Ottanelli, 27, Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 357–358).

workers and unionists. After all, the TUUL was founded only one month after the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in Moscow, where the leader of the Red International of Labor Unions, Aleksandr Lozovsky, proclaimed that existing trade unions in the United States were mere “schools of capitalism” that could never achieve a revolutionary purpose. The period 1928–1934 was one of relentless leftward pressure in the Comintern and its affiliated bodies, as Josef Stalin consolidated his power in the Soviet apparatus and ruthlessly purged the “right” opposition to his domestic policies. The Comintern’s policies during this so-called “Third Period” created difficulties for Communist union activities not only in the United States, but also in Great Britain, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Germany.²

Occasionally, it has been possible to glimpse evidence for a different interpretation of the importance of the TUUL and the new “red” unions that were formed during the Third Period in the United States. Few could credibly deny that many key unions in the AFL during the late 1920s were moribund or ineffective, unable to contest the terms of employment for industrial workers in any significant way. The Communists and the TUUL, in their brave manifestoes, promised to take up the task of “organizing the unorganized” in basic industries, an undertaking at which the AFL had failed miserably. Working outside of the AFL, Communists were able to achieve leadership of large strikes in the textile industry at Passaic, Gastonia, and New Bedford, and in the clothing industry in New York City. The resulting angry confrontations, like those that had been led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the pre-war period, dramatically called into question the AFL’s craft-based structure. Moreover, during this period significant sentiment had developed among workers in the bituminous coal fields of western Pennsylvania for a new union to replace the once-powerful UMW. The Communists responded by creating the dual National Miners’ Union in 1928, months before the founding of the TUUL. The Communist-led strikes of the 1920s were brutally if somewhat inefficiently repressed. However, in a number of different contexts, the organizers of the TUUL were able to demonstrate that despite the cautious conservatism of Samuel Gompers and many socialist unionists, the vitally important ideal of industrial unionism retained a powerful appeal to workers in some industries in the late 1920s. The TUUL tested the limits of radical industrial unionism in a number of American communities on the eve of the Great Depression.³

²For interpretations emphasizing the futility of the TUUL unions, see Klehr, Draper, above, also Cochran, 43–81; Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960), 12, 20–28, 39, 140–141, 343, 379–381, 386–389. Kevin McDermott and Jeremy Agnew, *The Comintern: A History of International Communism* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1977), 103–110.

³The best overview of the TUUL is in Ottanelli, 17–48. On the activities of TUUL unions in particular industries, see Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 51, 53, 86; Michael K. Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 52–58; George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 235–238; Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers: A Life in the American Communist Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 42–58; Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women/Cannery Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 41–57; Howard Kimmeldorf, *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 81–88; Cletus Daniel, *Bitter Harvest* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 105–166; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988), 28–29, 86–102, 269–279; Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 161–162; Elizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 296–97; Albert Fried, *Communism in America: A History in Documents* (New York: Columbia

The new TUUL unions and the strikes they led attracted a great deal of attention among American writers and intellectuals. It was during the period of aggressive organizing by the TUUL that such prominent cultural figures as Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, Richard Wright, Waldo Frank, Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson, and Lewis Mumford first became involved in the margins of the Communist movement. Because of its outlaw status, revolutionary rhetoric, and confrontational tactics, the Communist party of the Third Period held an attraction for many class-conscious intellectuals.⁴ The Gastonia strike alone inspired six novels. A close reading of the proletarian novels of the period has led one recent critic to conclude that “there is little basis to the common charge that the Third Period Marxist critics imposed a narrow, sectarian, or ultraleft definition of proletarian literature upon writers in the orbit of the left.”⁵

The recent opening of the Profintern, CPUSA, and Comintern archives makes it possible to explore in more detail the origins and fate of the TUUL, with its logic of Communist-led industrial unionism. Evidence from these archives suggests two conclusions. First, although the sudden shift in “line” which resulted in the creation of the TUUL in 1929 was formally promulgated by the Comintern, significant support already existed within the CPUSA for this change. This support derived from a number of Communist organizers who themselves often came out of an indigenous tradition of radical industrial unionism and who could argue persuasively for their perspective as a result of the manifest failures of Communist trade union policy during the 1920s. Second, the TUUL unions represented a significant advance over the previous Communist policy of “boring from within” existing AFL trade unions. Although meager in membership and results, the TUUL helped to establish a new type and style of Communist unionism, more suited to the organization of African-Americans, women, and mass-production workers. This change in emphasis was consistent with later achievements of Communist organizers operating within the CIO.⁶

University Press, 1997), 93–226; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904–1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997), 112–125; Carl Meyerhuber, *Less than Forever* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1987), 109–136; Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Peggy Dennis, *The Autobiography of an American Communist* (Berkeley: Creative Arts, 1977), 35, 48, 51, 68, 131; James Barrett and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1981), 33, 70, 58; Steve Rosswurm, ed., *The CIO's Left-Led Unions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 10–13; Rosemary Feuer, “William Sentner, the UE, and Civic Unionism in St. Louis,” *ibid.*, 96–100; James Prickett, “New Perspectives on American Communism and the Labor Movement,” *ibid.*, 5–8. Perspectives of Communist historians are in William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (New York: International, 1932); Philip S. Foner, *The TUEL: 1925–1929* (New York: International, 1994), 246–292. On the American “ideal” of industrial unionism on the eve of the Depression, and its redefinition in the 1930s, see Robert Zieger, *The CIO* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 14–15, 83–89.

⁴Paula Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire: Women in Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 29–30. For the view that the party's appeal to intellectuals during the Third Period was largely sectarian and ephemeral, see Klehr, 69–84; Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961), 269–279; for other perspectives see Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in US Proletarian Fiction from 1929–1941* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Alan Wald, *Writing from the Left* (New York: Verso, 1994), 67–84, 100–113; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

⁵The six novels were: Mary Heaton Vorse, *Strike!*; Sherwood Anderson, *Beyond Desire*; Fielding Burke, *Call Home the Heart*; Grace Lumpkin, *To Make My Bread*; Myra Page, *Gathering Storm*; William Rollins, *The Shadow Before*. Barbara Foley, 128.

⁶James Green, *The World of the Worker* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 131–132. On IWW organizing efforts among African-Americans, see: Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 328–336; Howard Kimmeldorf and Robert Penney, “‘Excluded’ By Choice: Dynamics

In order to fully understand the shift in Communist trade union policy, which resulted in the creation of the TUUL, it is important to recognize that since the founding of the CPUSA in 1919 it had been a forum for serious ongoing debate over the aims and culture of radical unionism in the United States. Beginning in 1921, the official “line” of the Comintern and Profintern was that American labor radicals should focus their efforts on establishing influence within the AFL. This had initially caused consternation and dismay among American advocates of industrial unionism, many of whom were former or present members of the IWW who detested the AFL as a hopelessly reactionary organization. Yet, the Communists, dutifully echoing Lenin’s perspective on unions in *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), officially renounced the separatist assumptions of the IWW, which was traditionally opposed to the AFL and its emphasis on organizing the skilled, relative secure workers in the crafts. Industrial unionism in America, according to any Wobbly, would come about through militant organizing efforts among the unskilled in basic industries, and could never develop through “boring from within” the AFL. This idea was not forgotten by Communist organizers in America in the 1920s.⁷

Nonetheless, in 1921, the Communists, working through William Z. Foster and his Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), initiated a campaign to develop momentum for industrial unionism within the AFL. Foster was convinced that industrial unionism had to develop among the minority of direct-action militants in already-established unions; his paradigm was still the pre-war “federation” movement on the railroads and the Great Steel Strike, which he had helped organize in 1919. Foster joined the Communist Party in 1921, shortly after participating in the first congress of the Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern) in Moscow, which increased financial support for his TUEL. Among some radicals in the United States, Foster was referred to as “E.Z.” Foster for his idea that workers could be moved to action merely by a few Communists attaining influential positions in the otherwise timorous AFL bureaucracy.⁸

of Interracial Unionism on the Philadelphia Waterfront, 1910–1930,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 51 (Spring 1997). On CP unionism and African-American workers in the 1920s, see: Philip S. Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker* (New York: International, 1974, 1981), 193–196; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement of the US*, Vol. 10 (New York: International, 1994), 191–192; Philip Foner and James Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans: A Documentary History, 1919–1929* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), x–xvi. For diverse views of the achievements of the Communist and left-led unions of the CIO era, see: Herbert Hill, “The Problem of Race in American Labor History,” *Reviews in American History*, 24 (1996), 202; Michael Goldfield, “Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Equalitarianism During the 1930s and 1940s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 44 (Fall 1993); Gary Gerstle, “Working-Class Racism: Broaden the Focus,” *ibid.*; Goldfield, “Race and the CIO: Reply to Critics,” *ILWCH*, 46 (Fall 1994); Bruce Nelson, “Class, Race and Democracy in the CIO: The ‘New’ Labor History Meets the ‘Wages of Whiteness,’” *International Review of Social History*, 41 (1996), 353–355, 357–360, 362–365; Eric Arnesen, “Up From Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race and the State of Labor History,” *Reviews in American History*, 26 (1998), 153–155; Alex Lichtenstein, “‘Scientific Unionism’ and the ‘Negro Question’: Communists in the Transport Workers Union in Miami, 1944–1949,” in Robert Zieger, ed., *Southern Labor in Transition: 1940–1995* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

⁷Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking, 1957), 11–28, 311–315; Edward Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 150–174.

⁸Draper, *American Communism*, 311–326; Johanningsmeier, 158. See also, Harvey Klehr, John Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 127–129, 131.



William D. Haywood

Earl Browder, Foster's assistant during his first years as a Communist, helped Foster promote his "boring from within" rationale in Communist Party circles in Moscow. Responding to an inquiry from Leon Trotsky in 1921 about whether there had ever been a "revolutionary situation" in the United States, Browder cited the Steel Strike of 1919, which Foster had led and allowed that "the events of 1919 provided the American workers with more fundamental education by one hundred times than was accomplished by the Communist Parties." More importantly, Browder thought that revolutionary change in the United States would come about as a kind of coup d'état led by radical labor "executives" working within the AFL: "it is within the realm of possibility, in the immediate future ..." As for the TUEL, Browder believed that "a compact, well-educated Communist minority in the great mass organizations, united upon a clear program of practical action, can obtain the strategic positions of power in organized labor."⁹ It was a curiously "managerial" proposition, couched

⁹References to materials held in the former Central Archives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, now called the Center for Research and Preservation of Documents on Modern and Contemporary History (RTsKhIDNI), are organized as follows:

in the phraseology of non-ideological manipulation, control, and administration of workers.

In some quarters, both in Moscow and in the United States, Foster's ideas were met with skepticism, even derision. In Moscow in 1921, at the first Profintern Congress, William D. Haywood, the fugitive former Wobbly leader, challenged the new line, stating that "There are some fellows around here who say that there are 159,000 good reds in the AFL. Anybody who says that is a damned fool."¹⁰ Haywood, living in Moscow after fleeing from the American justice system, found it necessary to defend the IWW from criticism, circulating at the highest levels of the Communist International, that the IWW had been so effectively persecuted that it was now essentially an underground organization. Writing to Lenin in August, he attempted to assert the continued relevance of the IWW:

I gleaned from the last time I saw you, that you imagined the Industrial Workers of the World was an illegal organization, or at least compelled to do much of its work underground ... I now desire to explain, that notwithstanding the bitter persecution and prosecution that the membership of the IWW has been compelled to undergo, it has never been driven undercover.

However, as evidence, Haywood could only cite the number of IWW newspapers then publishing in a variety of languages.¹¹ Prevented from openly challenging the leadership of Foster and the "boring from within" orientation of the TUEL after 1921, Haywood nonetheless soon made it clear that he was not going to sit quietly in Moscow and accept "Fosterism."¹²

In the meantime, Lozovsky made clear to Foster that despite the general policy of the Communist International after 1921, he expected a concerted effort to reach out to IWW militants in the United States. Lozovsky, a veteran unionist and Bolshevik who had been active in the labor movement in Paris while in exile before World War I, and Secretary of the All-Russian Union of Railway Workers soon after the October Revolution, became Secretary-General of the Profintern in 1921, a post he would hold until the organization's dissolution in 1937.¹³ He was generally among Foster's defenders in fractional disputes in both the Russian and American parties in the 1920s, but it is now

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- Communist International Archive: Fund 495.
 - Communist Party of the U.S. Archive: Fund 515, Opis (Catalogs) 1 and 2.
 - Red International of Labor Unions, Profintern Archive, American Section: Fund 534, Opis 7.

Citations are listed as: fund (f); followed by delo or file number (d); and listok or page number (1). For some documents the listok number was not recorded.

Earl Browder to Leon Trotsky, Moscow, May 19, 1921, f. 515 (Papers of the CPUSA), d. 39. Browder's letter was in answer to Trotsky's question about "whether there has ever been a revolutionary movement in the U.S."

¹⁰Haywood, quoted in *Truth* (Duluth), Sept. 16, 1921, 2.

¹¹Haywood to Lenin, Aug. 12, 1921, f. 5 (Lenin Secretariat), d. 275.

¹²However, in Moscow, Haywood signed a document which stated: "In case of disagreement between the American Bureau of the RILU and the Communist Party of America, the Party decision prevails until final decision from Moscow." Signed document, dated Moscow, July 18, 1921, f. 515, d. 39.

¹³On Lozovsky, see Branko Lazitch and Milorad Drachovitch, *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern* (Stanford: Hoover Institution, 1986); Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*, 319–320; Issac Deutscher, *Soviet Trade Unions: Their Place in Soviet Labor Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 18–22; Albert Resis, "The Profintern: Origins to 1923" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1964), 10; McDermott and Agnew, 34–35, 50, 85, 93, 103, 105; Reiner Tosstorff, "The Red International of Labour Unions," paper in author's possession.

clear that from the beginning of their relationship he was critical of Foster's somewhat narrow approach.

At the second Congress of the Profintern, held in November and December 1922, the TUEL was roundly criticized for ignoring the majority of unorganized workers, and specifically required that the TUEL form a kind of united front "Council of Action" with IWW representatives and other "independent" unions. A later resolution even proposed that the IWW "should be represented in [the] Executive Bureau of the [TUEL]."¹⁴

Lozovsky himself issued direct appeals to the IWW rank-and-file to join the Profintern. Haywood's name was noticeably absent from these appeals, and Lozovsky's entreaties had little effect. Only in 1923 did the TUEL become the Profintern's official section in the United States.¹⁵ In the meantime, Foster wrote a pamphlet *Bankruptcy of the American Labor Movement*, which derided the pre-war IWW and blamed the Wobblies for the destruction of the once-powerful Western Federation of Miners.¹⁶

In Moscow, Haywood was enraged by this attack on the IWW. In a blistering critique of Foster's whole rationale, circulated at the highest levels of the Comintern, Haywood offered a refutation of Foster's tract, as well as his own interpretation of the tasks facing labor militants in the 1920s. Quite perceptively, Haywood latched onto a certain intellectual simplicity and complacency inherent in the "boring from within" rationale. Foster's pamphlet was thin in concept, according to Haywood, the title being "much too pretentious ... for the depth and weight of the document itself." Moreover, "the pamphlet is wrong in concept, historically erroneous and offers no plausible remedy for the conditions which he meagerly describes." Haywood, somewhat surprisingly, set out a strong defense of the culture and even the politics of "regular" AFL unionism:

The Trade Union movement is energetically active, in every town and city, business agents are running about in automobiles from place to place attending to the interests of their trade. Meetings are held daily where conditions of each job are reported. Job stewards are alert to the interests of their craft. Every considerable place has its central body. Delegates attend regular weekly meetings. Thousands of union headquarters are hives of energy. Hundreds of weekly and monthly journals are published and distributed. Sick and death benefits are paid.

Therefore, asked Haywood, "why not recognize the fact, and acknowledge the life, energy and activity of the American Labor Movement?"

Haywood posited a distinction between the labor "movement" and the AFL apparatus, which in his eyes was exclusive, arrogant, racist, undemocratic, and utterly resistant to change. The old Wobbly resurfaced in Haywood's critique: signing contracts "are the death warrant of labor, and should *never* be entered into with the Capitalist Class under any circumstances or conditions." According to Haywood, Communist policy was fatally flawed because its approach tended to mirror that of the trade union bureaucracy:

¹⁴*Resolutions and Decisions of the First International Congress of Revolutionary Trade and Industrial Unions* (Chicago: American Labor Union Educational Society, 1921), 62; Albert Resis, "The Profintern: Origins to 1923," 316; Typescript, "Fifth Session of RILU Executive Committee, Resolutions [1923]," f. 534, op. 7 (Papers of the Profintern, American Section), d. 461, 1. 7.

¹⁵[Lozovsky], "An Appeal to the Rank and File of the IWW," Aug. 30, 1922, IWW Collection, Reuther Library, Box 25, folder 25; Typescript, to "Executive Committee, R.I.L.U.," signed E.W. Lachem, 1922, IWW Collection, Box 25, folder 28, p. 7.

¹⁶William Z. Foster, *The Bankruptcy of the American Labor Movement* (Chicago: Trade Union Educational League, 1922), 35–36.



William Z. Foster

The remedy for Bankruptcy is not the TUEL confining itself to the AFL or part of the Working Class. If so, what becomes of the revolutionary slogan "To the Masses! To the Masses!" Where are the unorganized? What about the colored race ... In the national trades what has become of the great basic industries, agriculture and oil? Agriculture is primal [sic]. Are they to be lumped in the miscellaneous trades, with the unions of feather strippers and coconut crackers?¹⁷

Haywood's critique was given the imprimatur of official sanction when a high-level Polish Communist echoed some of his ideas in an article in the Comintern's official organ, *International Press Correspondence*. Foster bitterly protested publication of the piece to Lozovsky. Even so, Foster's fractional opponents in the CPUSA would continue to criticize the TUEL approach throughout the 1920s.¹⁸

Perhaps the most pointed, and acute, critique of Party labor policy in Comintern circles was contributed by Foster's son-in-law, Joseph Manley, no neophyte either in Communist politics or labor organizing. He had worked closely with Foster during the 1919 Steel Strike, was involved in the Farmer-Labor party movement of 1923, and was Eastern District head of the TUEL in the early 1920s. He was trusted enough to be used as a courier for Soviet funds transferred to the TUEL in the early 1920s.¹⁹

However, in 1924 Manley broke quite openly with the Communists. He wrote to Lozovsky that he had concluded that Communist strategy "is unrealistic and not fitted to the actual economic and political conditions now existing in this country."

He was convinced that the AFL was simply not a force in basic industries, except the coal and building industries. Citing the fact that unionism was almost completely

¹⁷William D. Haywood, "Bankruptcy is not the Term," [1923], CPUSA, f. 515, d. 251. Haywood's typescript is marked "Radek" and "Trotsky."

¹⁸Z. Leder, "Wm. Z. Foster, *The Bankruptcy of the American Labor Movement*," *International Press Correspondence*, Mar. 1, 1923; Foster to Lozovsky, July 27, 1923, f. 534, d. 459, 1. 96; Max Bedacht, "The Present Trend in the Labor Movement," *Communism*, 6 (June 1927), 212; Benjamin Gitlow, "The Crusade of the AFL Against the Reds," *ibid.*, 215; Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 217.

¹⁹On Manley, see Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism*, 133–134, 160, 186; Manley's work as a courier is referred to in Julius Hammer to Isidore Spilberg [1924], f. 534, d. 481.

absent or ineffectual in large-scale industries, he observed that destruction of unions because of “mechanical development” was an issue that was “scarcely mentioned” in TUEL propaganda. In order to facilitate the development of organizing in basic industries, Manley suggested that the CP begin to work with the IWW. He noted that the IWW seemed to be making some gains in the Northwest, where, not coincidentally, Farmer-Labor politics was “recently most active.” Manley’s letter must have been a bombshell, coming as it did from one of Foster’s most trusted associates. Soon thereafter, Manley left the Party, and returned to his trade as structural iron worker. He fell to his death while working in New York City on the Chrysler Building in 1925.²⁰

The largest category of Party workers in the union movement was concentrated in the building trades. Manley referred to agreements carried out between employers and unions in the building industry as a scandal—“but even in this industry the tendency is towards centralization and elimination of unions for skilled workers.” Manley’s critique, however, didn’t specify how the Communists were to lead organizing campaigns in basic or mass production industry. And, the IWW seemed increasingly marginal. A letter from an old associate of Haywood’s was saved in Profintern files: “I will tell you this that the Wobbly movement, Bill, is now on the rocks for fair. All the old timers have long ceased to pay dues ...”²¹

William Foster was conscious of the need to establish Communist nuclei in mass-production industry. The party had established a small presence in the independent Auto Workers Union by 1924, and in 1926 Foster could write to Lozovsky that the Communists in the auto industry had formulated a program of work, established a headquarters, and elected a subcommittee of organizers. That year, the Communist presence forced the AFL to begin a half-hearted and dismally unsuccessful organizing campaign. According to Foster in August 1926, organizing in the auto industry was difficult because of “comparatively” steady employment and high wages. Foster also reported to Moscow that the Communists had established a headquarters in Pittsburgh to begin organizing work in the electrical appliance industry, including the Westinghouse, Western Electric and General Electric plants. In 1928, in response to internal criticism of the party’s weaknesses in industrial unionism, Foster was citing increased Communist efforts in the rubber and steel industries, in addition to auto.²²

Despite these efforts, the Party seemed unprepared, both philosophically and organizationally, for the large and militant strike of textile workers that erupted in Passaic in 1926. The striking textile operatives were precisely the kind of workers who had been most susceptible to IWW-style appeals in the past. In Moscow, Lozovsky excoriated Foster for “sacrificing” the leader of the strike, Albert Weisbord, and the Communist-dominated strike committee, by turning over the striking workers to the AFL union, which subsequently expelled the Communists and “negotiated” a token settlement with the employers. Foster replied that “I understand that you have some doubts about the wisdom of the course pursued.” He stated defiantly that the settlement was the “only practical way,” given the massive repression faced by the strikers.²³

²⁰Joseph Manley to Lozovsky [1924], f. 515, d. 406, 1. 35.

²¹Typescript, “Industrial Registration,” [1924], f. 515, d. 358, 1. 32; Manley to Lozovsky, d. 406, 1. 35; Ted Fraser to W.D. Haywood, Oct. 28, 1925, f. 534, d. 469.

²²Foster to Lozovsky, Aug. 6, 1926, f. 534, d. 473, 1. 1; Foster to Lozovsky, Mar. 7, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 45; Roger R. Keeran, “Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry, 1920–1933: Paving the Way for an Industrial Union,” *Labor History* (Spring 1985); Keeran, 48–51; Steve Nelson, James Barrett, Rob Ruck, 21–25.

²³Lozovsky to Foster, Feb. 2, 1927, Box 4, Bertram Wolfe papers, New York Public Library; Foster to Lozovsky, Nov. 27, 1926, f. 534, d. 473, 1. 105.

The Passaic strike was an important turning point in Communist trade union strategy. It encouraged Foster's critics within the Party to further amplify their concerns about "organizing the unorganized," and foreshadowed a period of transition in focus, style, and constituency for Communist trade unionists. Henceforth, a complicated mixture of inputs and criticisms, both foreign and domestic in origin, resulted in the creation of the TUUL in 1929 with a radically different perspective from that of the TUEL.

The TUUL should be understood not simply as a "paper" organization, the sum of various party resolutions and Comintern orders. Rather, it should be regarded as an experiment in radical trade unionism that had a firm grounding in organizers' experience and in union history. At the level of implementation, the formation of the TUUL helped create a certain kind of oppositional culture in CP labor organizing that addressed not only the concerns of the CP's Moscow patrons, but also related persistent questions about the potential of the trade union movement in the U.S. and the meaning of the IWW, about workers' control and technology on the shop floor, and about the places of women and African-Americans in any new type of union organization.

The disastrous aftermath of the Passaic strike ultimately affected the policy of the Party in the mine fields of Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio. There, the Party, under the guise of a "Save the Union" [UMW] movement, prepared for the strike that developed as a result of John L. Lewis's failure to gain a renegotiation of the "Jacksonville" wage agreement. Foster saw this as an opportunity to gain enough prestige for a coalition of progressives to perhaps overthrow the Lewis bureaucracy. In February, 1927, however, long before the official Comintern shift favoring the creation of entirely new unions in various industries, Lozovsky emerged as a vehement critic of the "Save the Union" rationale. Writing to Foster from Moscow soon after Lewis managed to outvote John Brophy and the "Save the Union" slate in the 1926 elections for union president, Lozovsky demanded that

THE QUESTION OF SETTING UP AN INDEPENDENT UNION MUST BE RAISED, otherwise you will never escape from this vicious circle. You may have 99 percent of the votes but if the secretaries under Lewis [tear] up your ballot-slips, make fictitious ones, bring hirelings to the Congress, you will have to remain in the power of Lewis to the end of time.

It is significant that Lozovsky's letter was dated nearly a year before the Comintern's formal "change in line" in 1927. Foster angrily sought to defend the Progressive movement he had helped build. "About all I hear is that our slogan 'save the union' is not good, in spite of the fact that it has been the slogan around which we have built the biggest left-wing mass movement in the history of the party."²⁴

Meanwhile, in 1927 Foster once again had to confront the question of working with the IWW—this time when a strike broke out among Colorado miners. The IWW retained a particularly strong reputation in this area—Foster wrote to Lozovsky that "We cooperated with the IWW in preparing the strike and in organizing it generally. They accepted our cooperation very gingerly, refusing to allow us to circulate our literature or otherwise to play a prominent part in the movement." According to Foster, one result of the strike was "a much closer relationship between us and the IWW," and an organizer wrote to him of the "warm feeling" existing between the IWW and the CP

²⁴Lozovsky to Foster, Feb. 3, 1927, copy in Bertram Wolfe papers, Box 4; Foster to Lozovsky, April 14, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 128; Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 278–290.

in Colorado. Earl Browder made a tour of the strike district in October and reported that although Communists were active in the strike, leadership was still in the hands of the Wobblies. A number of UMW locals were swept into the strike as well. It was an unashamedly “dualist” movement, organized by the IWW to appeal to miners long since ignored by the United Mine Workers. Foster himself was reluctant to endorse the IWW strike until the organization “liquidated” their “wrong ideas” about dual unionism and “the general question of Soviet Russia,” but, typical of his ambivalence during this vital period, he recognized that “in spite of these differences in policy we should try to work with them so far as we can.”²⁵ Still, James Cannon, a former Wobbly who would soon help found the American Trotskyist movement, expressed his exasperation in one CP plenum about the party’s disconnection with American syndicalists. Ever since the founding of the CP, Cannon stated, he had felt that “it was a weakness in the tactics of the Party that it had not learned to combine the ideological fight against syndicalism with the task of fighting side by side with the syndicalist workers and winning them to the Party.” The Party, he thought, was “learning” how to do this in the Colorado strike.²⁶

The Colorado strike seemed particularly to impress Lozovsky, who wanted to know why the IWW was more compelling to the Colorado miners than the Communists. Foster, referring to the thinly spread Communist forces in mining, replied that “We have perhaps not over 20 English-speaking comrades in the entire industry capable of exercising any appreciable degree of leadership.” It was “worse than ridiculous” to expect the TUEL to cover every unorganized territory. Foster’s frustration in explaining his policies to Moscow is easily discerned here; Lozovsky was knowledgeable about unionism and labor issues in general, but occasionally quite naive about American conditions. Foster tried to give Lozovsky a history and geography lesson: “Colorado is 2100 miles from New York. It is a district in which our party has never functioned, whereas the IWW has been established there more or less ever since its inception 23 years ago.”²⁷

When the Colorado strike was finally called off in March 1928, the miners emerged with a small wage rise, but little else. The Communists, however, now bitterly attacked the IWW management of the strike. Perhaps most significantly, the strike had raised the question of how Communists should confront the problem of technological change in the workplace. In the mining industry, the unemployment created by the introduction of loading and digging machines in the late 1920s was widespread. In other industries as well, as Joseph Manley had earlier indicated, the problem of workers’ control and how to assert it had to be readdressed if American radicals were going to formulate a meaningful approach to unionizing mass-production industry.

According to a Communist party post-mortem of the strike, the Wobblies in Colorado, in encouraging the idea that workers could return to work and continue the strike “on the job,” had spread “pernicious illusions” among the miners. “The impossibility of slowing down on the job effectively for any length of time in highly organized machine industry, or even in coal mining” was obvious to most workers, the party concluded. The IWW “must be considered an organization whose activities, especially in this period of great concentration of capital, huge combinations of capitalists and centralization of government power ... creates confusion and division in the working class.”²⁸

²⁵Foster to Lozovsky, Nov. 7, 1927, f. 534, d. 476, 1. 138; Foster to Lozovsky, Dec. 28, 1927, f. 534, d. 476, 1. 185; Earl Browder to Foster and Lovestone, Oct. 26, 1927, f. 515, d. 1199, 1. 25; Foster to Hugo Oehler, Dec. 14, 1927, f. 515, d. 1103, 1. 110.

²⁶“Cannon-Discussion at Plenum, Feb. 5, 1928,” f. 515, d. 1256, 1. 83, p. 4.

²⁷Foster to Lozovsky, Mar. 7, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 45.

²⁸*Daily Worker*, Mar. 10, 1928, 8.

Foster himself tried to come to grips with the problem of “efficiency” in a series of articles in the Party’s theoretical organ, *The Communist*, in 1928.²⁹ He proposed nothing new in the way of organizational strategy and disregarded the problem of unemployment, but he did raise the question of how radicals were to confront the rule of the stopwatch-wielding “experts” on the shop floor. Foster proposed that capitalist efficiency experts had captured the imaginations of many workers with their promises of a “managed” capitalism and unending prosperity, what he awkwardly called “Capitalist Efficiency Socialism.” Foster, however, was quickly repudiated in the Party press. John Pepper, a powerful ally of the Lovestone faction in the party and an acute observer of ideological trends in Moscow, blustered that “control of production by the workers under capitalistic conditions is nonsensical and opportunistic ... The workers cannot control capitalistic industry ... workers’ control can be established only after the expropriation of the industries and after rationalization of production.” In one American forum, Foster’s ideas about the “illusions” of efficiency were ridiculed: “Certainly it would be difficult to find workers who are under the illusion that the speed-up system will lead to the abolition ... of capitalism,” according to one speaker.³⁰ Foster immediately backed off. The task of thoroughly analyzing the phenomenon of “capitalist engineering ‘socialism’” was “a task for the Communist International,” he weakly concluded in one essay.³¹

Even so, the experiences of American Communists during this period with mass-production industry and technological change raised the question of workers’ “inside” control in a particularly acute and urgent way, and pointed to the necessity of organizing among the unemployed. Foster himself acknowledged that efficiency “illusions” among workers were resisted far more among those in the great unorganized industries than among the AFL unions and leadership.³² One central argument for the formation of the new National Miners Union by the Communists in 1928 would be that the UMW had “failed entirely to do anything whatever to protect the interests of the men as the loading machine and other mechanical devices advanced ...” The idea that workers’ control could lead to organization, rather than vice versa, would be common among Communist unionists in the 1930s.³³

To be sure, the “Third Period” change in perspective that resulted in the TUUL formally originated in Moscow, but a significant number of American organizers found the new outlook congenial. Joseph Zack and Earl Browder were among those prominent “trade unionist” members of Foster’s faction who wrote open, and penetrating, criticisms of the Party’s policies in the American and international press during this period, re-asserting the idea that the Party must pay far more attention to organizing on its own in basic industries. Zack pointedly referred to the “boring-from-within” strategy

²⁹Foster, “Capitalist Efficiency ‘Socialism,’” *Communist* (Feb. 1928); “Capitalist Efficiency ‘Socialism,’” *ibid.* (March 1928), 169–174.

³⁰John Pepper, “A Program of Action for America,” *ibid.*, 7 (June 1928), 335; “Wicks’ Speech at Plenum,” f. 515, d. 1256, 1. 108.

³¹Foster, “Capitalist Efficiency ‘Socialism,’” *Communist*, 7 (Feb. 1928), 104.

³²Foster draft, “Capitalist Efficiency Socialism,” presented to PolCom, 1/18/28, f. 515, d. 1259, 1.1, 11.

³³*Daily Worker*, Aug. 31, 1929, 6; Arne Swabeck, “The National Miners’ Union: A New Conception of Unionism,” *Communist*, Oct. 1928, 623; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 67, 107–113; Robert Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986), 51–52; Zieger, *The CIO*, 32, 46–54, 118–119; Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor*, 130–155; Henry Kraus, *The Many and the Few* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1947, 1985), 43–56; James Green, *The World of the Worker*, 131–132, 155, 157, 159–160.

as a typical American “get rich quick” scheme whereby the workers would somehow be handed over to the Communists as a result of bureaucratic maneuvering.³⁴ As well, the IWW seemed to be a factor in Foster’s thinking in 1928. The Wobblies were making inroads among bituminous coal miners in the Pennsylvania–Ohio district that the Party had helped organize.³⁵ Shortly after Lozovsky issued his public call for new unions, Foster wrote to Lozovsky demanding that the Profintern make a formal statement clarifying its stand and “combatting assertions of the IWW and others that our policy has been wrong all these years.”³⁶

Whatever the influence of the IWW as a result of the new line which emerged in Moscow in 1928, new unions were soon established by the Communists in a variety of industries that had long been ignored by the AFL. New unions had already been set up in the coal, textile, needle, auto and food industries; after 1929 TUUL unions were established in marine and steel as well. During this period, Foster forthrightly implored his patrons in Moscow to send money, if they really wanted to see the Americans set up an effective federation of new unions. In order to conduct the first convention of the new Trade Union Unity League in Cleveland in 1929, Foster wrote that “the very minimum necessary from you is 10,000\$.” The exact amount that was finally forwarded by Moscow is unclear.³⁷

During the period following the creation of the TUUL, Foster immersed himself in organizing for the new National Miners’ Union in Pennsylvania and Kentucky. Ever the realist, Foster fought to maintain a basis for working with the AFL progressives, even after he finally realized that the official CP “boring from within” policy was doomed.

It was after the inauguration of the “Third Period” perspective in Moscow, with its call for “Negro Self-Determination in the Black Belt” that the Communist Party began making significant efforts to organize African-Americans.³⁸ Almost from the beginning of its existence, the TUUL under Foster had neglected work in this area. From 1922 in Foster’s bailiwick, Chicago, a large number of blacks had drifted away from the Party because of the “patronizing attitude of whites,” according to one cadre. In Pittsburgh in 1924, the attempts of one African-American to join the local Party split the entire

³⁴On Zack’s critique, see Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 293, 499. Despite Foster’s protest to Lozovsky that a Zack article in the Comintern press of January 1928 “presents much information, [and] tends to create very wrong impressions regarding TUUL policy towards the formation of new unions,” more of Zack’s ideas appeared in the *Daily Worker*, May 14 and June 10, 1927. See Foster to Lozovsky, May 9, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 45; Foster to Lozovsky, May 9, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 197. See also, Draft, Joseph Zack, “The Question of New Unions in the USA: A Criticism of Our Trade Union Policy in America.” Annotation: “written in December [1927] appeared in Feb. issue of Profintern magazine—in German, Russian and French—not in English as there is no such edition.” f. 515, d. 1223, 1. 43, Browder article in *Die Gewerkschafts International* (Feb. 1928), referred to in Foster to Lozovsky, May 3, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 165.

³⁵Wagenknecht to Lovestone, Jan. 9, 1928, f. 515, d. 1342.

³⁶Foster to Lozovsky, May 3, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, 1. 165.

³⁷Foster to Lozovsky, Feb. 16, 1929, f. 534, d. 485, 1. 33.

³⁸Nell Irvin Painter, *Narrative of Hosea Hudson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 13–19; Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 16–23; Fraser Ottanelli, 36–37; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1990, 13–14; Foner and Allen, *American Communism and Black Americans*, xiv–xvi; Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker*, 193–197, 202–203; Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* (Chicago: Liberator, 1978), 317, 319, 349; Robin D.G. Kelley, “Afric’s Sons with Banner Red: African American Communists and the Politics of Culture, 1919–1934,” in Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994, 1996); George M. Frederickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford, 1995), 199–202.

membership, with many refusing to attend meetings in his presence. Finally he gave up trying to join the Party in Pittsburgh and went elsewhere. Most AFL unions practiced some form of exclusion or segregation. For a variety of reasons, therefore, the number of blacks in the Party before 1928 was minuscule. The deep South was largely out-of-bounds for Communist organizers in the 1920s, and it was an unwritten policy that the party opposed African-American migration to the North because it would undermine the position of unionized white workers and exacerbate racial antagonism.³⁹ As late as 1927, in the heyday of the "Save the Union" movement in the minefields of western Pennsylvania, the *Daily Worker* warned strikebreaking black miners somewhat ominously that their "excuse" for "scabbing," that the UMW discriminated against blacks, was erroneous and that the UMW did not exclude blacks from membership.⁴⁰

At the Sixth Comintern Congress the idea of a black nation in the rural American South sounded surrealistic and sectarian to most black Communists. In 1930, a top Soviet official, Dmitri Manuilsky, quizzed some African-American Communists in a Moscow forum about the self-determination slogan, saying "I have been told that the Negro workers in America don't want an independent republic in the South, they want to carry on the struggle with white workers." One African-American Communist told Manuilsky that the slogan would alienate white workers, and he pointed to the example of Haiti, "where they have a state but it doesn't mean anything." When it seemed evident that the discussion was not going his way, Manuilsky ended the interview by flatly proclaiming that "this slogan has been verified by the experiences of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union is a country with more than 110 nationalities inhabiting the country and we have found in our work that this slogan is the correct slogan in such a country."⁴¹

Despite this seeming ukase, the exact meaning of the "negro nation in the black belt" remained open to interpretation, debate, and adjustment as the slogan was implemented at various levels by organizers in the United States. The most careful recent student of the Comintern's shift in line has concluded that "the power of self-determination lay not in its theoretical validity, but in its pragmatic implications.... The vision of black national oppression ... galvanized the Party into unprecedented activities for Negro rights in the 1930s."⁴²

Aside from controversies arising over the "negro nation in the black belt," at the Sixth Congress the American party's general lack of progress in recruiting blacks was the subject of "much discussion," and a critique emerged in Comintern circles after

³⁹"Interview of Manuilsky with American Comrades," Sept. 1, 1930, f. 495, op. 37 (Comintern papers, Anglo-American Secretariat), d. 73, 1. 115; Otto Huiswood, "The Negro and the Trade Unions," *Communist*, Dec. 1928, 775; Cyril Briggs, "Our Negro Work," *ibid.*, Sept. 1929, 496; William Foster, "Party Trade Union Work During Ten Years," *ibid.*, Sept. 1929, 612; Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, 334.

⁴⁰*Daily Worker*, Nov. 30, 1927, 4.

⁴¹"Interview of Manuilsky with American Comrades," Sept. 1, 1930, f. 495, op. 37, d. 73, 1. 117-120.

⁴²Mark Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998), 68-91; see also Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe* (1990), 13-33; 92-116; Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson* (1979), 14-18. See also the assessment of a South African historian: Keith P. Griffler, *What Price Alliance? Black Radicals Confront White Labor, 1918-1938* (New York: Garland, 1995), 65: "The original Comintern directive containing the so-called 'Black Belt Thesis' was a hopelessly confused and contradictory document." However, it should also be borne in mind that the Third Period's "fusion of Marxism and anti-imperialist nationalism would become the twentieth century's most successful strategy of revolution. In America, it infused the communist commitment to racial equality with an unusual intensity long after the Comintern line had changed ..." See Gerstle, "Working Class Racism: Broaden the Focus," 34.

1928 of CPUSA policy towards blacks which focused not as much on “self determination” as on the problem of industrial unionism: “The party has not yet obtained access to the real American proletariat and is scarcely linked up at all with the most oppressed sections of the workers of America—the Negroes,” read one internal Comintern assessment. In a searing speech at the Sixth Congress, James Ford declared that although the “Negro Industrial Proletariat” had increased by millions during World War I, there were only 50 blacks in the CPUSA. And “Negro comrades have been driven out of the trade union movement, without the Party raising a hand or doing anything to counteract this situation.” And he stated “Negro comrades who are continually bringing this question before the Party are persecuted and driven out of the Party and into the IWW and other organizations.”⁴³

At the inaugural convention of the TUUL in Cleveland in 1929 a new “Negro Department” was established. A large number of African-American delegates were in attendance and there was a discussion of “tasks,” but for the time being there were no tangible organizational gains. J.W. Johnstone, a high-ranking white organizer who had experience organizing black packinghouse workers in Chicago during the war years, admitted confidentially that the “Negro Department” was merely a “paper organization.” Another prominent organizer complained of continued resistance to the new strategy, noting that there had been no real systematic recruiting efforts among blacks in the pre-convention period. Lozovsky sharply criticized the TUUL for offering little but vague general “demands” to African-American workers. Yet, one organizer reported an incident that would not have occurred at previous conventions: “At one of the hotels where a large body of our delegates stayed, the management refused to permit Negro delegates to stay there; whereupon the other delegates immediately went on strike against this hotel.” As a result, “most of them had to walk the streets all night without a place to stay.”⁴⁴

Communists began to shift their attention to the South after 1928, and by 1930 Foster had revealed to Lozovsky his discovery that industrial workers were more militant in the South than in the North. Citing the large numbers of blacks and whites attending meetings conducted by James Ford in a recent Southern tour, Foster wrote to Lozovsky that “the center [of] gravity of our work will be shifted more into the heavy industries of Alabama, Kentucky, West Virginia, etc.” One internal TUUL report stated that “the negroes are better fighters than white workers in the steel mills.” Ford himself asserted in one report that the early years of the Depression had shown that “the old theory that the Negro of the South in particular was a ‘reserve of capitalist reaction’ has been smashed.” He was now convinced that the Profintern line on self-determination for blacks, combined with “joint struggle of white and negro workers” would be increasingly successful in the South, especially in the Birmingham area.⁴⁵

African-Americans were somewhat responsive to the new line on unions in the mining industry, but a significant level of racial antagonism existed from the beginning

⁴³Dear [?], July 15, 1928, f. 515, d. 1248, l. 18, p. 1; “Supplement to the Draft of the Resolution” [Executive Committee of the Communist International], 1/27/28, f. 515, d. 1226, p. 5; “Resolution on Work Among Negro Masses of the USA” [1928, VI Congress], f. 515, d. 1226. Ford’s speech is in *International Press Correspondence*, 25 July 1928, 708; see also, *ibid.*, 3 Aug., 1928, 722.

⁴⁴Lozovsky to National Committee, TUUL, 12/30/28, f. 515, d. 1498, l. 8; Jack Johnstone to Lozovsky, Nov. 15, 1929, f. 534, d. 485, l. 195; [?] to Lozovsky, Sept. 6, 1929, f. 534, d. 486, l. 45.

⁴⁵“Third Session of the National Executive Board [1930],” Report of Overgaard on Steel and Metal, f. 534, d. 494, l. 1; *Ibid.*, “Report of Ford on Negro Work,” Johnstone to Lozovsky, Nov. 15, 1929, f. 534, d. 485, l. 198; [?] to Lozovsky, Sept. 6, 1929, f. 534, d. 486, l. 45.

in the Communist-led National Miners Union, founded in Pittsburgh in 1928.⁴⁶ A large number of blacks participated in an NMU-sponsored strike in western Pennsylvania in 1931. Earl Browder bragged to the Comintern that “the situation among the negroes in the strike is a great advance over everything that has ever been in this district before.... The negroes are on the strike committees, and then in most cases there is not the slightest division between the whites and the negroes.”⁴⁷ Browder was exaggerating about the level of solidarity that existed, but Communist efforts to organize African-Americans and unemployed workers in the bituminous fields near Pittsburgh contributed to the largest strike in the history of radical unionism in America in 1931, involving some 40,000 miners.⁴⁸

In the aftermath of the strike, however, attempts to recruit blacks into the NMU suffered. The union chose to forego holding interracial social events (e.g. dances) in the Pittsburgh area because of the conflicts created. When a black union member had his house burned by the KKK, the union refused to take a stand in his support.⁴⁹ Reports of rampant “white chauvinism” in the union surfaced, and one report concluded that “considering the number of Negro workers in the mining industry, the percentage of those in our union is very small.” By 1932, in the new TUUL unions, according to one frank assessment, “everywhere the weakest spot is the Negro membership.” Clearly, racism continued to plague Communist efforts to organize African-Americans. The success of the new emphasis on organizing African-Americans depended mostly on the efforts of a few dedicated Communist cadres to implement their vision of radical industrial unionism, and on African-American organizers themselves who had been energized by the ramifications of the “Black Belt thesis.”⁵⁰

Beginning in the late 1920s, the American CP made a far more concerted effort to begin organizing among women. The origins of this change in emphasis remain obscure, but in late 1926, a Comintern’s “Women’s Department” sent a letter to the American Party demanding a program of immediate demands for work among women, the organization of a Women’s Department in the Party, and re-direction of Party work towards industrial women workers rather than housewives. The Party was specifically asked to demand admittance of women into the unions.⁵¹ Perhaps the Profintern had taken note of the important role of women in the Passaic strike. Kate Gitlow, Secretary of an organization called the “United Council of Working-Class Housewives,” asserted in one report that 50% of the Passaic strikers were women and most were married with

⁴⁶Meeting of TUUL National Buro-Minutes, Stachel Report on Convention of National Miners’ Union, Mar. 28, 1928, f. 515, d. 2979, l. 55.

⁴⁷“Report of Comrade Browder on the Miners’ Strike,” June 16, 1931, f. 534, d. 498, l. 137.

⁴⁸For three different views of this strike, see Linda Nyden, “Black Miners in Western Pennsylvania, 1925–1931,” *Science and Society*, 41 (1977), 94; Draper, “The Communists and the Miners,” *Dissent*, Spring 1972, 377–379; Carl Meyerhuber, *Less Than Forever*, 109–136; Minutes of Anglo-American Secretariat, June 26, 1932, f. 495, op. 72, d. 150, l. 35.

⁴⁹“Report of Comrade Borich, National Committee of NMU,” Sept. 10, 11, 1932, f. 515, d. 2989, l. 78, p. 14.

⁵⁰“Dear Alexander,” February 29, 1932 [Report to Anglo-American Secretariat from Comintern Representative in U.S.], f. 515, d. 2616, l. 1, p. 25; “The Present Situation in the Mining Industry of the U.S. and the Tasks of the NMU” [1931], f. 515, d. 2558, l. 93; “Report of Randolph to Anglo-American Secretariat,” June 26, 1932, f. 495, op. 72, d. 15, l. 36.

⁵¹“Directives from the E.C.C.I. [Executive Committee of the Communist International] to the American CP from the 6th ECCL Plenum to Date,” 11/25/27, f. 515, d. 934, l. 198. On the Communist party’s Third Period organizing among women, the most penetrating critical accounts are in Alice Kessler-Harris and Paul Lauter, “Introduction,” to Fielding Burke, *Call Home the Heart* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist); Rabinowitz, *Labor and Desire*; Barbara Foley, *Radical Representations*.

children. "The strikers speak several languages, but they understand each other well," she wrote in evaluation.⁵²

During this period, one writer in the Party's organizing bulletin explicitly connected the idea of industrial unionism with the increasing importance of women in mass-production. Two of the greatest weaknesses of the Party, this writer concluded, were that the Communists seemed to ignore organizing "in the basic industries where the masses of workers are to be found," and that in shop nuclei "there are scarcely any women members." Other women organizers cited widespread rationalization, large-scale introduction of machinery, and relentless wage reductions among men in basic industries as forcing ever-increasing numbers of women into industry to supplement family income. One organizer, Gertrude Welsh, noted that this provided a perfect opening for the Communists. The leaders of the old craft unions had been "deaf, dumb and blind to the situation, being opposed to the organization of women *first* because they are women, *second* because they are unskilled; and *third* because the American labor bureaucracy has altogether ceased to function as an organization apparatus toward any group of workers." One effect of the development of new TUUL unions in the textile industry was the development of programs appealing specifically to women workers, calling, for instance, for a minimum wage for women, vacation with pay for two months before and two months after childbirth, permission for mothers to leave their work every three hours to nurse their children, and free day-care.⁵³ In the United States, 72 women were represented at the Cleveland TUUL conference, most from outside the needle trades.⁵⁴

Vera Buch, a prominent TUUL organizer, called attention to the importance of women for the Party's organizing work in Michigan. She noted in a 1928 Profintern report that there were now 57,000 women industrial workers in the state, including many auto workers. During this period, the party established women's columns in various shop papers, including the *Auto Workers News*, the *Ford Worker*, the *Hudson Worker*, and the *Fisher Body Worker*, and a regular "Working Woman" column in the *Daily Worker*. Profintern files after 1928 contain a number of reports from women cadres, outlining conditions in industry and lobbying for increased funding for women's organizing, something almost completely lacking in the earlier period. The number of women in the party doubled between 1931 and 1933.⁵⁵ Despite such emphasis, women did not get all that much support. One organizer complained that at a recent Party conference of 127 steel and auto workers, only two were women: "This is a very outstanding weakness in our general work." In 1930 a woman organizer complained about the lack of women in shop nuclei and the continued lack of women's departments in the various industrial districts.⁵⁶ During the 1931 miners' strike, rank-and-file strike committees, usually but not always led by Communists, split in response to a

⁵²Kate Gitlow, "What the Workingclass Women have Done to Help Win the Passaic Strike," f. 515, d. 1223, l. 58.

⁵³*Daily Worker*, Mar. 3, 1928, 7, 8; *ibid.*, Mar. 5, 1928, 6; Gertrude Welsh, "Report on RILU Commission on Work among Women [nd]," f. 534, d. 482, l. 328; "Resolutions Passed at National Convention held in New York City," Sept. 22-23 [NTWU], f. 534, d. 482, l. 32, 5; Rebecca Grecht in *Party Organizer*, 3 (Feb. 1930), 12-14.

⁵⁴[?] to Lozovsky, Sept. 6, 1929, f. 534, d. 486, l. 45.

⁵⁵See, for instance, Rebecca [Grecht] to CEC, Apr. 2, 1928, f. 515, d. 1520, l. 21; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 163-164.

⁵⁶Vera Buch, "Report on Women's Work," District 7, Mar. 5, 1928, f. 534, d. 481, l. 189; Schmies to Lozovsky, June 19, 1930, f. 534, d. 491, l. 146; *Party Organizer*, 3 (Feb. 1930), 12-14; *Daily Worker*, Sept. 16, 1929, 2.

sheriff's edict prohibiting women from picketing. Union members resisted attempts by women to report on their activities during meetings, and after the strike the women's departments in the Pittsburgh area seemed to have lost support from party headquarters and dissolved.⁵⁷

However reluctant to embrace the change in Party line beginning in 1928, William Foster finally became an articulate defender of the idea of new unions in Comintern circles. Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly a desire to outmaneuver his political opponent in the party, Jay Lovestone, who hewed to the boring-from-within line long after it was considered a "right deviation" in Moscow. Yet, in 1928 Foster acknowledged that the ever-escalating rationalization of the workplace was a primary cause of discontent among workers in mass-production industry. In one forum he finally conceded that the old craft unions were simply incapable of organizing mass-production industry. Foster predicted quite accurately that "to establish this task will require a systematic campaign of establishing new unions."⁵⁸ In a speech given at the special "American Commission" session in Moscow, which resulted in Lovestone's expulsion in 1929, Foster acknowledged that his initial resistance to the new unions had been mistaken. On a personal level, he revealed his essentially radical temperament, a temperament which had alienated him from the AFL hierarchy during the great steel strike of 1919 and still prevented him from working effectively within the AFL "establishment." He declared that despite the fact that he had been "offered good jobs" in the AFL, "I came to the [Comintern] and I stayed with the [Comintern] and I shall be with the [Comintern] when many of those comrades who have the guts to stand up and criticize me will be on the other side of the barricades."⁵⁹

Although Foster's hesitancy was undoubtedly a factor in slowing the effects of the change in Party line in 1928, both his loyalty to the Comintern and his knowledge of American industry and the labor movement ensured that he would grudgingly accept the relevance of his critics' arguments—arguments he had resisted throughout his career.

The new unions that were formed as a result of the change in Moscow's line met with few tangible organizational or strike successes. However, by 1934, a "militant minority" of Communist organizers had "colonized" a number of strategic auto, rubber, meat-packing, and steel plants, and had made important progress in shifting the Party's attention to African-Americans and women. Dual unionism and the Third Period helped measure the limits of Communist unionism in America, and represented an opportunity to begin learning how to organize the kind of workers that the AFL (and American Communists) had largely ignored in the 1920s. As one recent study of the influence of Communists in the CIO concluded, in regard to re-defining the meaning of industrial unionism in terms of race and gender, "the Communist-influenced CIO affiliates stood in the vanguard."⁶⁰ Evidence in Comintern files confirms that in 1936 John L. Lewis quickly turned to the Communists to aid in the development of the CIO "from the bottom up."⁶¹

⁵⁷Hathaway Speech, Anglo-American Secretariat, Jan. 7, 1932, f. 495, op. 72, d. 168, l. 108–110.

⁵⁸Foster Speech, 7/17/28, Anglo-American Secretariat, f. 495, op. 72, d. 36, l. 178.

⁵⁹Foster Speech, May 6, 1929, "American Commission," f. 495, op. 72, d. 66, l. 96–97.

⁶⁰Zieger, *The CIO*, 257; on the nature of CP achievements in the field of race, see sources under n. 6.

⁶¹In a meeting of the Anglo-American Secretariat in Moscow in September of 1936 William Weinstone reported on meetings he had had with John L. Lewis, in which Lewis promised to help re-instate expelled Communist unionists, place them as paid staff on the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, and allow Communists to be elected to offices in the UMW. According to Weinstone's summary of his meetings

While the extent of his activities and interest in American policy are yet to be revealed, it is reasonably certain that William D. Haywood was lobbying behind the scenes in Moscow in favor of the change in perspective. There is no reason to doubt accounts that Haywood's apartment was a convivial gathering place for American Communists in Moscow, and that Haywood was not reticent about the failures of the Party's labor organizing in the 1920s. However, in March of 1928, just as he was preparing to attend the Fourth Congress of the RILU, where Lozovsky would begin to demand that the Americans change their approach to the unions, Haywood suffered a stroke. Although Haywood "received many of the RILU congress delegates who were still in the city, and discussed the problems of the congress" with them, he died in a Kremlin hospital in May. A typical CP assessment of his career concluded that he was "an agitator of the masses" but "not deeply-based in Communist theory."⁶² Despite Haywood's supposed theoretical weaknesses, it cannot be denied that in the late 1920s the Communist Party began for the first time to seriously answer his question: "Whatever became of the slogan 'to the masses?'"

Although the evidence to be gleaned from the Moscow archives is still incomplete, the willingness of Haywood and others to offer pointed challenges to the Communists' labor policy in the 1920s suggests more of a link between the tradition and outlook of the pre-war IWW and Communist activism in the industrial unionism movement of the 1930s than has previously been acknowledged. Although the TUUL never achieved significant organizational momentum, its activities nonetheless represented an important transitional phase in the CPUSA's reorientation towards a more inclusive, mass-based unionism during the Great Depression.

with Lewis, "during this period and in these elections [in the UMW], Communists have been elected into the leadership, and this in no sense without his knowledge." Because of Lewis's need for Communist organizers "from the bottom" in the crucial steel campaign of 1936 and CP support for Roosevelt, "the Communists are winning a place for themselves that they have not occupied at any time in the history of the Party," Weinstone concluded. See Weinstone Report, "Meeting of Secretariat of Comrade Marty, Sept. 15, 1936," f. 495, op. 14, d. 16, l. 1-16.

⁶²*Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International, 1929), 364-365; Louis Engdahl, "William D. Haywood," *Communist*, July 1928; Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik* (Chicago: Liberator, 1978), 170-172. See also, Foster, *History of the Communist Party of the United States* (New York: International, 1952), 124. Foster may have never fully reconciled himself to TUUL, despite his endorsement of some of its perspectives. See Maurice Isserman, *Dorothy Healey Remembers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 159; Earl Browder interview, Theodore Draper papers, Woodruff Library Special Collections, Emory University, B1, f. 3, pp. 1, 2.