

SUMMARY 1922-1928I. InternationalA. The International Situation

The Sixth Comintern Congress of 1928 characterized the decade following the First World War as consisting of three "phases" or "periods." The first, it said, "reached its highest point in 1921, culminating on the one hand in the victory of the USSR over the forces of intervention and internal counter-revolution, and in the consolidation of the proletarian dictatorship and the establishment of the Communist International; and on the other, in a series of severe defeats for the Western European proletariat and the beginning of the general capitalist offensive. This period ended with the defeat of the German proletariat in 1923." The German defeat was especially significant because the Communist movement considered Germany the key to revolution in Europe, and the uprising itself had been planned by the Comintern. The year 1923 also saw the establishment of a military dictatorship by coup d'etat in Bulgaria, and the subsequent crushing of both a rising against the dictatorship and the Communist Party which led the rising.

The second period began with the German defeat of 1923. It was described as "a period of gradual and partial stabilization of the capitalist system, of the 'restoration' of capitalist economy, of the development and expansion of the capitalist offensive, and of the continuation of the defensive battles fought by the proletarian army weakened by severe defeats. On the other hand, this period was a period of rapid restoration in the Soviet Union, of important successes in the work of building socialism, and also of the growth of the political influence of the communist parties over the broad masses of the proletariat." This second period was considered over by the end of 1927. The year 1927 also saw China's comprador bourgeoisie crush the Chinese Communist Party and the labor and peasant organizations which it led, gaining hegemony over the national bourgeoisie at the same time.

Of the third period, the Sixth Congress said it was "the period in which the capitalist economy and the economy of the USSR began almost simultaneously to exceed their pre-war levels... For the capitalist world, this was a period of rapid technical development, and of the accelerated growth of cartels and trusts, one in which a trend towards State capitalism can be observed. ...This third period, in which the contradiction between the growth of the productive forces and the contraction of markets becomes particularly accentuated, will inevitably give rise to a fresh era of imperialist wars among the imperialist States themselves; wars of the imperialist States against the USSR; wars of national liberation against imperialism; wars of imperialist intervention and gigantic class battles. ...this period will, through the further development of the contradictions of capitalist stabilization, increasingly shake that stability and lead inevitably to the most severe intensification of the general capitalist crisis..."

This Comintern characterization of the "three periods" seems to accurately describe the main political and economic features of the 1922-1928 period.

B. The International Communist Movement

In the 1922 - 1928 period, the parties of the Comintern were given two major tasks: the first was to win over the masses. Due to several circumstances, the transformation of the parties into mass parties became the method by which the parties were to accomplish that task. (Among those circumstances were: the Bolshevik Party's being a mass party, the inclusion or affiliation of several mass parties in and with the Comintern at its inception, and the failure to successfully develop other methods of "transition or approach" to winning over the masses to the proletarian revolution as called for by Lenin in "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder.)

The second major task of the parties was "Bolshevization," that is the transformation of the parties into truly Bolshevik-type parties able to apply the experience of the Russian Communist Party and the best Comintern parties to concrete situations. In the main, by the end of the 1922-1928 period, most of the parties had achieved many of the organizational standards of Bolshevization (with one very important exception: the failure, in the main, to truly establish factory nuclei).

It seems to us, that in a non-socialist country, there is a basic contradiction between the concept of the mass party and that of the Bolshevik-type party -- the end result of Bolshevization. That contradiction showed itself in the parties in the 1922-1928 period -- and beyond.

The party described by Lenin in What is to be Done was to consist of revolutionaries having a relatively high ideological level. It was to be based on democratic centralism. That is, the program, the aims and tasks of the revolutionary proletarian movement during a certain period, based on the application of Marxist theory to the study of the particular features of a country's economics, politics, national composition, etc., was to be developed by the Party leadership, which was the leadership because the Party rank-and-file had confidence that it was the best in regard to loyalty to class and Party, ability and experience. The membership, to the greatest extent possible, was to participate in the creation of Party policies deriving from the program, and in the approving or disapproving of proposed policies. Once a majority view was arrived at, it was to be carried out by all in a disciplined, tightly organized fashion, such as an army led by a general staff would carry out a military operation. True democratic centralism requires a relatively high theoretical level among the membership which, in our view, can not be attained by most of those in a mass party because of the nature of that party. Also, the mass party is vulnerable to rapid destruction by the state.

The Comintern and its parties, in the attempt to achieve mass parties, neglected the development of membership. The theoretical level of the membership was generally low, and the priority given to attaining the large membership figures necessary for a mass party led to an enormous turnover in membership that precluded developing the experienced and steeled membership necessary for the Bolshevik-type party.

C. The USSR

The one significant victory in the 1922-1928 period was the final defeat of the attempts to destroy the USSR and the maintenance of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the foundations of socialism. The maintenance of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the foundations of socialism was only made possible through the defeat of significant bourgeois and petty bourgeois political tendencies, those led by Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin.

Trotsky was a Social-Democrat who had been in constant opposition to Lenin before 1917 over such issues as organizational principles (Trotsky upheld the traditional social-democratic mass party, Lenin the party of democratic centralism) and the proletarian-peasant alliance's being essential for carrying out the revolution in Russia (Trotsky thought such an alliance preposterous). Trotsky and a small following joined the Bolsheviks shortly before the October Revolution, in July 1917. Trotsky continued to oppose Leninist policy within the Bolshevik Party, although he was in its leadership. (Examples: Trotsky opposed and seriously obstructed the signing of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany; he upheld factionalism as essential to a Communist Party; he called for the transformation of the trade unions into organs of the Soviet state, with the unions ultimately administering the economy. Lenin held that the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty was essential to the continued existence of the Soviet state; Lenin considered factionalism as antithetical to democratic centralism; and Lenin saw the transformation of the trade unions into organs of the Soviet state as syndicalist, and antithetical to the dictatorship of the proletariat.)

In the year 1923, there were severe economic problems in the USSR based essentially on the inability of a slowly recovering industry in a war-ravaged country to supply those goods to the countryside that would induce peasants to sell food. There was extreme poverty, unemployment, and strikes. There was dissension within the Bolshevik Party, dissension which Trotsky abetted. It was at this time that Trotsky attacked the Party leadership and apparatus as undemocratic and unresponsive to the needs of the masses. (This immediately after he, as a member of the Party's Central Committee, had voted to approve policies it had adopted to correct those faults, which had indeed existed.) Trotsky's attack on the Bolshevik leadership and its policies precipitated a debate throughout the entire Party, a debate which Trotsky and his followers (many of whom were Moscow students) lost.

In the autumn of 1924, Trotsky wrote "Lessons of October," a long preface to an edition of his works. In it he attacked the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, accusing it of being responsible for the failure of the 1923 German Revolution and, in general, of not being Leninist. He pointed out Zinoviev's and Kamenev's opposition to the initiation of the October Revolution. This "preface" initiated an extensive debate and struggle throughout the Soviet Party which brought to light Trotsky's opposition to Lenin on such questions as the Brest-Litovsk Treaty and the proletarian-peasant alliance. It was a struggle which Trotsky and his followers again lost.

Also in 1924, Trotsky began his opposition to the continuation of the

New Economic Policy (NEP), the partial restoration of the capitalist economy initiated by Lenin in 1921. Stalin, and the majority of the Party, held that the time was not ripe for the immediate full-scale industrialization and collectivization which Trotsky demanded.

Zinoviev and Kamenev, who had no confidence in Russia's being converted into an industrialized and socialist country (as they had no confidence in the possibility of the proletarian revolution in October 1917) joined forces with Trotsky in 1926 against the line of the Bolshevik Party led by Stalin which held, essentially, that within Russia, a socialist economy could and would be developed, but that such development would have to correspond to the political and economic realities of that nation. The Trotsky-Zinoviev-Kamenev coalition was defeated politically. In 1928, Bukharin, who had adopted a political line which represented the interests of the Kulaks (rich peasants), tried to form an alliance with Kamenev and Trotsky. This new attempt at an anti-Bolshevik alliance failed, as did Bukharin's political line.

II. The Economic and Social Situation in the United States

A. Introduction

In the United States, the decade of the 1920s was called the "Roaring 20s" and the "Golden Era," and was, on the surface, carefree and hedonistic, noted for private greed and public indifference. It was the era of the flapper, prohibition, Al Capone and Charles Lindbergh. The flamboyancy and the appearance of the "good life" masked the severe living and working conditions of farmers and the working class, and the even worse state of Black people.

By 1920, the nation had made the transition from a primarily rural to a primarily urban country. (In the 1920 census, 51.2% of the people lived in urban areas -- i.e., incorporated areas of 2,500 or more inhabitants.) The Scopes Trial symbolized the clash of older established rural values and newer urban scientific ideas. The radio made its debut in the 1920s, contributing a very important method of mass communication. Advertising and consumerism grew from little seeds at the beginning of the decade to blooming manias by the end. Immigration was severely restricted and, with the crash in 1929, potential immigrants saw that the streets were not paved with gold after all. The great migration to the United States was ended forever.

It was also a period in which the seeds of the Great Depression were sown. Productivity and products soared, stock market speculation grew even wilder, while 71% of the people earned less than \$2,500 a year (in a time when a minimum budget was \$2,000).

B. Economic Developments

Economic developments were characterized by increasing concentration of industry, increased productivity, skyrocketing profits, severe maldistribution of income and a farm depression. Throughout the 20s, small firms were swallowed up by large ones, and by 1930, 200 corporations controlled one-half of all the corporate wealth of the country. And these 200 were

controlled by Morgan, Rockefeller or Mellon interests.

Technological improvements and speed-up increased productivity per worker hour by 32% in manufacturing and resulted in a 30% gain in output. This was the backbone of the increase in national income. Manufacturing profit increased by 38% (therefore profit per unit grew). Profits as a whole increased 62% in the decade (150% in financial institutions). Wages however only went up 8%. Prices also did not go down, the cost of living being fractionally higher at the end of the decade.

Income was severely maldistributed. 71% of the families received less than \$2,500 a year, 59.6% less than \$2,000 and 42% less than \$1,500. One tenth of one percent of the families at the top received as much as 42% of those at the bottom. A farm depression existed throughout the period.

Installment buying became very popular in the 20s and by the end of the decade six billion dollars were outstanding. Stock market speculation began in 1927 and culminated in the crash of October 24, 1929.

Productivity, output, and profits grew tremendously. Wages did not go up proportionately and prices did not go down. At the end of the decade, corporations had more money than they needed for current production and future investment. The problem was an insufficient market. The masses of people were too impoverished to buy the goods they were making.

C. Ruling Class Initiatives and Reaction

The first half of the 1920s saw a vicious and successful campaign of capital, completely supported and reinforced by government, to break the organization of the working class. Using the anti-alien patriotic verbiage of the immediate post-war period, it presented itself as the "American plan." Its aim was to destroy unions by the open shop and yellow dog contract. These methods were shored up by the injunction, labor spies, professional strike breakers, and private police systems. The government complied by upholding these methods in the courts and by forming the anti-trust laws into a powerful weapon against labor. The frontal attack gave way to the more subtle form of Welfare Capitalism in the second half of the 20s. While union busting was its aim, the idea of the mutuality of interests of labor and capital was put forward as the purpose of forming employee organizations ("kiss me clubs"), company unions, employee stock ownership plans, and the like. Like its more brutal form, Welfare Capitalism was able to succeed only for a short time.

The Ku Klux Klan was revived in this period in the soil of rural America which was depressed economically, looked down upon culturally and threatened in its fundamentalist views in the face of increasing urbanization and technological progress. While its main support was found in the rural areas, it also was a strong force in some cities since most city dwellers were not so far removed from the land. It reached its peak in 1924 with 4.5 million members. For a time it held political influence in Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Indiana, Oregon and California. It terrorized whole communities with its atrocities. Its appeal was to old stock Protestant Americans who, though they were in the majority, were portrayed as under attack and threatened in the preservation of both their stock and

values.

Sacco and Vanzetti, both Italian immigrant working men, were executed on August 23, 1927, the victims of the anti-alien, anti-red hysteria that was excited after the war. Even after evidence that showed their innocence was presented, and an international movement demanded their release, the state would not be moved.

D. The State of the Working Class

The decade of the 20s was a very harsh one for the US working class. During a time when a minimum "health and decency" budget required \$2,000 a year income, the average earnings of workers never rose above \$1,500 at any point in the decade. The average work week was 50 hours, with steelworkers working an 84-hour, 7-day work week, and women and children in southern textile mills working between 54 and 70 hours a week. During the 20s, an average of 25,000 workers were killed annually on their jobs -- 100,000 permanently disabled -- and more than 2.5 million injured.

The attempts of the working class to organize itself and to fight were severely weakened from both within and without. The masterfully planned, elaborately financed, and governmentally aided attack called the American Plan severely weakened the unions. Membership fell by almost a half between 1920 and 1930. Many unions either disintegrated completely or were very severely curtailed. The AFL was not able to respond with strength or a fighting spirit. Led by men who accepted capitalism and who saw their purpose as that of maximizing the price of labor, the AFL continued its craft union focus in an era of burgeoning mass industries. It also continued to refuse membership, in the main, to Blacks and women in both skilled and unskilled jobs. When capital changed its tactics to Welfare Capitalism, the AFL greeted with relief this "higher strategy for labor" and "new wage plan." This blatantly class-collaborationist trend further weakened the labor movement.

The number of workers who struck declined by 62% between 1923 and 1929. Nevertheless, the period did see several bitter, hard-fought strikes-- some successful, some not. The Railway Shopmen's Strike (1922) was crushed by the betrayal of other union leaderships, an unprecedented injunction, National Guard and strikebreakers. The United Mine Workers were backstabbed by Lewis, after a strike in which the miners took up arms against scabs, and were greatly weakened by the end of the 20s. A Communist-led strike in the Furriers union won the first 40-hour week in US history. Textile workers in the South struck in 1929 and were crushed. To this day the area is unorganized.

E. The State of Black People

The 1920s mark a very important period in the development of Black people as a people. There was a tremendous migration North, stimulated by the need for labor during and after the war, and a secondary migration to southern cities. It was expected that life in the northern cities would provide a better life -- more personal freedom, better schools, and good paying jobs. The reality was crowded ghetto living, very poor health conditions, and widespread job and union discrimination.

Although the Great Migration characterizes the period, at its end, Black people were still overwhelmingly southern (79.1%) and rural (56%). Of the 11.8 million Blacks, 9.4 million still lived in the South, and 6.4 million in the rural South.

Life in the urban ghettos was very harsh. But the migration brought about a dramatic step forward in the development of a Black proletariat and in a new consciousness as a people. Garvey built on this new proud sense of peoplehood and touched the frustration of the newly urbanized Black. At first this progressive side dominated, and militant demands were made, expressing readiness to struggle in the U.S. Later, the Garvey Movement's reactionary side emerged as dominant, as the focus became a peaceful return to Africa. Garvey began to publicly state his agreement with the KKK that the U.S. was a white man's country and that white southerners should be thanked for having "lynched race pride into the Negro."

The Harlem Renaissance began in the 20s. It was a cultural flowering arising from the strength and pride of Black people that developed from these conditions.

By 1930, 1.3 million Blacks were working in transportation, mining, and manufacturing. This was a proportional decline from 1920 (because of economic crisis). In 1920, 66.2% of employed Blacks worked in agriculture or personal or domestic service. In 1930, the figure was 74.7%. Discrimination by employers and unions caused most of those employed in industry to work in the hardest, dirtiest, least skilled or semi-skilled jobs.

About 4.3% of Black workers were unionized, compared to 20.8% of all U.S. wage earners. This was due to exclusionary union policies and employer discrimination which kept Blacks in unskilled, unorganized jobs. The AFL had long abandoned its initial commitment to unite and organize working people "irrespective of creed, color, sex, nationality or politics." While its official policy of nondiscrimination did not change, in practice it claimed no power over the discriminatory practices of most of its unions.

Many unions did not accept Black people at all. So the AFL chartered separate "federal locals" or "directly affiliated locals" for Blacks. These sham "unions" collected dues but, having no power to negotiate or enforce contracts, left Black workers powerless. In addition, some white workers cooperated with racist employers and refused to work with Blacks. At times, they even struck over this issue.

The role of the AFL in this period was a reactionary one. Not only did it refuse to combat white chauvinism in the working class, but it actually added fuel to the fire by its white supremacist policies. It bears the primary responsibility for the development of anti-union sentiments among Black people.

The role of the unions set the stage for Black strikebreaking. In addition, there are two other prominent factors in this period. The first is that when Blacks were first recruited out of the South by industry, they had a rural outlook. They did not have any experience with factories nor, therefore, with a union or strike. (Spero and Harris state: "most of the colored labor used to break strikes came straight from the farms without

any previous industrial contact.") The second is that some Black leaders (i.e., ministers, professors and organizations such as the Urban League) saw the interests of Black people allied with "enlightened" capital and blamed the economic plight of "their" people on racist white workers. They, therefore, were active in leading Black people in strike breaking. Given the reactionary role of the AFL, it was natural that Black workers could see strike breaking as being in their interest.

Blacks, however, were seldom the only or even the most important element in strike breaking. Few strikes were broken by Black labor when compared to those broken by white labor. In strike after strike, Blacks fought on both sides. But, as Spero and Harris note, "the bitterness of American race prejudice has always made his (the Black's) presence an especially sore point and not infrequently a signal for exceptional disorder."

Lynchings and terror were widespread in the South at this time. There was active resistance, both spontaneous and organized, North and South.

F. Women's Movement

The lives of women in the 20s were improved because of the overall development of society. Home work was lightened considerably by such labor-saving devices as running water, coal (as opposed to wood) stoves, vacuum cleaners, washing machines and refrigerators. The rise in canned and bakery goods, as well as the more ready-made clothes, lightened their load. Two million more women joined the work force. Ninety-five percent of working women had to work to support their families. Their second job at home allowed them no rest and often their health and that of their children suffered or failed from this burden. They were poorly paid, few were allowed to join unions, and during the same decade, they made increasingly less than men for the same work.

The women's movement drew women mainly from the middle and upper classes. It had been organized around getting the right to vote and had put all its eggs in one basket. Viewing women as fundamentally different from men -- "pure in spirit, selfless in motivation, and dedicated to the preservation of human life" -- it believed that women would remake society with their vote. The 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, and succeeding years proved these ideas wrong. Illusions shattered, without a central issue to unite around, and with the conservative and repressive atmosphere of the 20s weighing on it, the women's movement collapsed and was unable to wage successful campaigns for other progressive issues as it had traditionally done.

The Women's Trade Union League was the only organization which attracted working class women. Throughout its history it was always composed of a mixture of upper class and middle class social reformers and working class women. It supported women on strike and in their struggle for jobs in male-dominated work areas. It was always more progressive in its stands than the AFL, which gave lip service to its desire to help them, but never actually did in practice.

G. Conditions for Revolution

The 1920s was not a period favorable for revolution, either objectively or subjectively. The ruling class was riding high in this era of rapid technological progress, increasing productivity, concentration of industry, and skyrocketing profits. Big business and government were blissfully wed and were active partners in the attack against the working class.

The consciousness of the masses was low. The image of endless prosperity in the forefront of public consciousness, the betrayal of the AFL, and the immaturity and primitive level of the Communist Party all contributed to the low level of subjective conditions.

III. Communist Party U.S.A.

A. Structure

In the decade 1919-1929, the development of the Party in the U.S. Communist movement was a sluggish struggle to move away from its Socialist Party roots towards a Bolshevik-type party. The Socialist Party's legacy of factionalism and non-industrial orientation in both politics and organizational structure proved to be an extremely formidable obstacle in the U.S. Communist movement's effort to Bolshevize and build a Marxist-Leninist party.

The external role of Comintern leadership was critical as the ever-present force whose criticisms and directives molded the U.S. Party structure, in spite of itself, into its Bolshevized form in 1925. The U.S. Party's inertia and resistance to Comintern policies and directives was notorious.

Although the first parties (1919) were largely modeled after the Socialist Party's structure, influence from the Russian Party was evident, with "shop branches" and "districts" and a central executive committee, all based along industrial lines. Further Bolshevik and Comintern influence was reflected in the subsequent inclusion of the Executive Committee, Political Committee (Polcom), Organization Committee (Orgcom), Industrial Committee and Secretariat in the underground Communist Party (1921) and the Workers Party (1921).

In 1925, the Workers Party arrived at its Bolshevized structural form, though not substance, mainly through pressure from the Comintern's Orgburo. The Comintern sent an explicit letter of instruction detailing what changes were necessary and how to make them. This letter was converted to a resolution and adopted unanimously by the Fourth Convention of the Workers Party. Its intent was to establish for U.S. Communists, not just a modification, but a complete reorganization of the Party -- to proletarianize its orientation. Piatnitsky, the Comintern Organization Secretary, demanded more factory nuclei, more fractions, and the abolition of the foreign-language federations.

The Comintern's Fourth World Congress' Resolution on Bolshevization compelled the Workers Party to change its organizational structure by

transforming the Party's language federations into shop and street branches. Although the aim of this change was to dissolve the federations, in reality they survived in a camouflaged form (fractions). Foster, in the History of the Communist Party of the United States, characterized the Party at the end of the decade as "still too largely agitational in character and it retained many sectarian weaknesses." This seems to have been the case.

The pre-Bolshevization Workers Party had a much greater power of attracting members than of holding them. The post-Bolshevization Party attracted fewer members but retained a larger percentage. This fact seems to correlate with the Party's efforts to raise the criteria for membership.

Much of the loss in membership was the result of the liquidation of the foreign-language federations. However, foreign-language federation members were, for the most part, the Party's presence in basic industries, and constituted the major portion of the seventy five percent of the membership who were working class. It is not clear if the Party could have, under the existing atmosphere of factionalism, handled the liquidation process any better. Although the breaking up of the language federations was in the interest of consolidating Party democratic-centralism, some of the positive aspects of the language federations were overlooked. The prominence of foreign-language federation members in the basic, unorganized industries provided a base for the big labor organizing campaigns of the 1930s. Nevertheless, as stated above, the Party was not thorough in liquidating the federations, and most of them survived in other forms, such as Party fractions.

Could the Party have done more to attract English-speaking membership? Was that as important a task as Piatnitsky made it appear?

There is no question that, in the long run, the Party had to have a predominantly English-speaking membership. But in the 1920s there was no great opportunity to recruit such a white English-speaking membership. (The failure to recruit Black membership is discussed elsewhere.)

The foreign-language speakers were among the most exploited of the white working class, which did much to produce a good class outlook. Also, it seems to us that the reason that factory nuclei were not formed -- in the predominantly foreign-language speaking Party -- was not so much a question of language difficulty, but of breaking the foreign-language speakers of the habit of operating politically in the context of the community cultural groups. Those in factories could and should have been in factory nuclei.

It is our opinion that the push to proletarianize and Bolshevize the Workers Party was a correct and necessary policy. However, the necessary centralism between the Comintern and its member parties, which was of course reflected within the U.S. Party's internal structure, did inhibit the proper ideological development of this policy amongst the rank-and-file. Instead, it was imposed from above by directive, which was superficially effective, but failed to thoroughly root out the Workers Party's resistance. Party factionalism was, no doubt, a detrimental factor here, too.

B. Factionalism

The Party factions: what positions did they purport to represent? Who were the leaders? And what was the Comintern's estimate of both the factionalism and factions within the U.S. Party?

The first issue that gave rise to factionalism in the 1922-1928 period was that of whether or not the Communist Party should remain an underground party or become an open "legal" one.

Charles E. Ruthenberg, Secretary of the Workers Party in 1922, had left the Socialist Party to help form the Communist Party (of which he became Executive Secretary) in 1919, left the Communist Party (because of its sectarianism) in 1920 for the Communist Labor Party, which later merged with the original Communist Party to become the Communist Party of America in 1921. In late 1921, the Communist Party, which was an underground organization, created a "legal" party, the Workers Party; the Communist Party continued to exist as an underground party. (All Communist organizations had gone underground after the Palmer raids of January 1920.)

Ruthenberg, who had become secretary of the Workers Party in 1922, led those in the Party who saw no further reason for the existence of the underground party. In the struggle for the "legal" party, Ruthenberg's main opposition was in the persons of Lovestone, Amter, Gitlow, and Minor.

Pepper (Pogany), who had come to the U.S. Party from the Comintern and was elected to its Central Committee in 1922, supported the Party's becoming "legal." In fact, that was the position of the Comintern.

By 1923, the struggle for the "legal" party had been won; the Workers Party represented the Communist movement in the United States.

The question of which course the Party should take after its failures in the 1923-1924 Farmer-Labor campaigns gave rise to another factional struggle. One faction, led by Ruthenberg, Lovestone, and Pepper, held that the farmer-labor movement was only temporarily dormant and was still the best means of the Party's developing into a mass Communist Party. Another, led by Foster and Bittelman, held that the necessary mass trade union base for a farmer-labor movement did not exist, and therefore, the Communists should concentrate on building their own organization.

Foster had joined the Party in the summer of 1921, after having attended the founding congress of the Red International of Labor Unions in the Soviet Union as an observer. He had been active in the Socialist Party, left it for the I.W.W. in 1910, founded the Syndicalist League of North America in 1912 because he had come to disagree with the I.W.W.'s doctrine of (revolutionary) dual unionism, led a (successful) nation-wide packing house strike in 1917 and an (unsuccessful) nation-wide steel strike in 1919. He formed the Trade Union Educational League in 1920.

Some of the leaders in the Ruthenberg faction were Lovestone (who took it over when Ruthenberg died), Gitlow, Stachel, Minor, and Bedacht. Most of them were the sons of Eastern European immigrants. (Minor was an exception.) Some of the leaders in Foster's faction were Johnstone, Browder,

Bittelman and Cannon. This leadership had more trade union background and fewer Eastern European antecedents than that of the Ruthenberg faction, (Bittelman, who came from the Russian-Jewish revolutionary movement, was a significant exception.)

The attitude of these factions toward each other was hostile in the extreme. They were prepared to eliminate all those in the opposing faction from any position of influence in the Party, and often were stopped from doing so only by Comintern intervention. One faction (Lovestone's in 1929) was even prepared to sell Party buildings and other property rather than see it fall into the hands of the "opposition." Lovestone himself, while Party Secretary, took a "right" position, upholding Bukharin's theses, including that of "American exceptionalism."

Stalin, representing the American Commission of the Comintern (and leader of the world Communist movement), in May 1929, made the following estimates of the factions in the U.S. Party, after having heard the leaders of both sides state their positions.

In the first of two speeches, Stalin said that the leaders of both factions "were guilty of the fundamental error of exaggerating the specific features of American capitalism," and that, consequently, each faction had made "right" errors, each, at different times, failing to "realize the full extent of reformism in America" and underestimating "the leftward swing of the working class."

What are the main defects in the practice of the leaders of the majority and the minority?

Firstly, that in their day-to-day work they, and particularly the leaders of the majority, are guided by motives of unprincipled factionalism and place the interests of their faction higher than the interests of the Party.

Secondly, that both groups, and particularly the majority, are so infected with the disease of factionalism that they base their relations with the Comintern, not on the principle of confidence, but on a policy of rotten diplomacy, a policy of rotten intrigue.

He then cited examples of the Foster and Lovestone groups' vying with each other to curry favor with the Comintern: Foster's group ("the minority") calling itself "Stalinist"; Lovestone's ("the majority") expelling Pepper after the Comintern had expressed its displeasure at its supporting him; each group claiming to have the confidence of Stalin.

Stalin went on to support an Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) resolution which, addressed to the membership of the U.S. Party, called for: dissolution of all factions in the Party, on pain of expulsion; removal of Lovestone and Bittelman from work in the U.S. Party; rejection of the minority's call for a special convention; and reorganization of the Party's leadership.

In his second speech, Stalin attacked Lovestone's and Gitlow's defiance of the Comintern decision regarding the U.S. Party as a violation of

democratic centralism.

The importance of the decision adopted by the Presidium consists in the very fact that it will make it easier for the American Communist Party to put an end to unprincipled factionalism, create unity in the Party and finally enter on the broad path of mass political work. No, Comrades, the American Communist Party will not perish... Only one small factional group will perish if it continues to be stubborn, if it does not submit to the will of the Comintern, if it continues to adhere to its errors... Because one small factional group is liable to perish politically, it does not follow, that the American Communist Party must perish.

C. Women

From most accounts, the woman question was not significantly developed on the level of internal party struggle. There is no mention of any analysis or Party campaigns to rectify male-female contradictions in Party work in the ranks.

The U.S. Party formed a Women's Department in 1922, a counterpart to the Comintern's, to "work amongst women in the U.S.A." But it is unclear what it actually did or accomplished. It set up a number of front organizations such as the United Council of Working Class Women in New York City, the Mothers League of Boston, and the Detroit Proletarian Women, all of which never attracted many members and ceased to exist beyond the twenties.

The Party's role around women in this period was generally to build support for mass struggles where women's issues were incidental or peripheral. The political role of women Party members, particularly housewives (15% of Party membership), appear to have been subordinated to male supremacist attitudes. It is estimated that at least four thousand members were part of a "dual stamp system," which was abolished in 1925, wherein husbands and wives were permitted to share a single dues stamp. Consequently the Party rolls contained many housewives who were members in name only. Apart from rare exceptions where there were some prominent women leaders who were usually free from family responsibilities, the Party leadership was overwhelmingly white and male.

It is apparent that the Party was chronically backward regarding its women cadres. It also seems that political consciousness on the women question was uneven, undeveloped, and just nominal in Party practice. Had the Party been theoretically stronger on this question, women's political work in the Party might have been on a higher level, with more of a central role. More active women's leadership would have magnified the Party's influence, certainly in raising the political consciousness of women workers and housewives. It goes without saying that the working class movement would have been stronger for it.

D. Mass Work: The Farmer-Labor Movement

In discussing the Party's strategy toward mass work in the farmer-labor movement, the following questions must be answered:

Was it correct to become involved in a movement that was initiated and dominated by labor bureaucrats and the petty bourgeoisie (farmers and small businessmen)? Was it principled to operate in such a movement "from above," that is, through dealing with the leadership? Was the goal of a labor party or a farmer-labor party, one that was initiated by Lenin and the Comintern, itself correct? Should a Communist Party get involved in a farmer-labor movement before it itself is strong, ideologically and organizationally? Or does the Party become strong in the course of doing work in such a movement? Why was it that the Workers (Communist) Party could not establish a successful relationship with the farmer-labor movement? And how does a small and relatively weak section establish principled and effective relations with a farmer-labor party or other mass organizations?

In our opinion, in principle, there is nothing wrong with the Party having the farmer-labor party as a goal -- if it was to be used to get Communist ideas and leadership to the masses, if it were led by workers and working farmers rather than union bureaucrats and big farmers, and, most importantly, if the Party was strong enough, ideologically and organizationally, to be able to resist the inevitable push towards reformism that would come from working in such a movement.

The farmer-labor movement with which the Communists became involved in the early 20s was led by the petty bourgeoisie and the union bureaucrats. This, in itself, did not make the Communist involvement unprincipled. Part of what was wrong with the Party's involvement was the fact that it came from a "united front from above," that is, alliance with the head of the Chicago Labor Federation. When that head, Fitzpatrick, came under pressure from the anti-Communist AFL national leadership, he withdrew from the alliance, taking with him much of the labor composition of the "mass movement." After the Communists tried to maintain the farmer-labor movement as an organization consisting mostly of themselves, La Follette, as presidential candidate, took over what was left of the movement and destroyed it. Finally, a Comintern admonition against cooperation with La Follette caused the Party to withdraw from the farmer-labor movement in 1924. Foster, in his history of the Party (1952) says that withdrawal was a mistake; the Communists should have become the "critical left-wing" of the La Follette movement. Given the situation of the Party, that would have been more unprincipled than the alliance with Fitzpatrick which was based, to some degree, on rank-and-file support for the Communists.

It seems to us that for a Communist Party to be both principled and effective it must know when and how to withdraw from an alliance or association. Once Fitzpatrick withdrew his forces from the farmer-labor movement, the Party, because of its own lack of political development, and because objective conditions would probably not have allowed it to influence the masses through that movement, should have immediately got out of it.

It seems to us that an ideologically and organizationally strong Communist Party was a prerequisite for any extensive work in a farmer-labor

movement. This the Workers Party was not. The Party -- and its members -- had not become Bolshevized. That is, they had not achieved the prerequisite Leninist ideological and organizational standards. Worse, the Party did not establish the necessary program to give its membership the basic theoretical knowledge which would allow it to struggle for correct line and policy and be effective as Communists.

E. Mass Work: The Trade Union Movement

Three periods of U.S. Communist trade union policy can be distinguished prior to Bolshevization:

The 1919-1921 period was based on revolutionary dual unionism and aimed at destroying the AFL.

The 1921-1923 period was based on a "united front" with the progressive group within the AFL. The Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) was the Party's chosen instrument in the trade union field, ending with the Fitzpatrick split. Considerable headway was made among garment, railway, mine, and metal workers.

The 1923-1925 period saw the split with the progressives, the expulsion of TUEL members from the AFL and the decline of the TUEL.

The Party, through its Trade Union Educational League, in the years 1922-1924, substantially influenced the trade union movements in the U.S. and Canada. It did this through forming a "left-progressive" coalition which took on and threatened the reactionary leadership of many unions. The TUEL's Program was: industrial unionism, the formation of a labor party, and the recognition of the Soviet Union. That program was widely accepted by the rank-and-file of the trade unions. The beginning of the end of the TUEL's mass influence was the 1923 AFL Convention where the TUEL supporters confronted the AFL leadership -- and were defeated on every issue. That defeat marked the beginning of a mostly successful campaign by the AFL leadership to rid the AFL of TUEL influence. The reasons Foster gives for the success of the anti-TUEL campaign seem to be correct. They are: the amelioration of the economic situation and the slowing down of the capitalist union-crushing campaign; the AFL leadership's program for "Union-Management cooperation"; the "looseness" of the TUEL which made it unable "to back up their wide agitational support by vigorous organized action"; and the loss of support of Fitzpatrick and his Chicago Federation of Labor and other organizations which it influenced. The loss of support of the Fitzpatrick-influenced organizations had happened July 1923 over the issue of the immediate organization of a farmer-labor party -- which would have been strongly influenced by the Party.

After 1924, the Party's attempts to gain control in certain (mostly New York based) unions and to organize the unorganized were led by the Ruthenberg-dominated Political Committee, which bypassed the (by then underground) TUEL and Party Trade Union Department, both led by Foster. This was part of the factional struggle within the Party. (The Comintern's American Commission soon reversed the bypassing of both the TUEL and the Trade Union Department.)

The Party led the Passaic, New Jersey, textile strike, which lasted for about a year. On the basis that the Communist-led United Front Committee that was in charge of the strike was a form of dual unionism and that, if it continued to lead the strike, the strike would fail, the strike leadership was handed over to the AFL's United Textile Workers.

The Party had some successes in the New York area, particularly in the fur and needle trade industries (based, it is safe to speculate, on the foreign-language speaking Party members and sympathizers in those industries).

The Comintern's Ninth Plenum, February 1928, in a statement which, ostensibly, continued to uphold the policy of working in the established trade unions, called for organizing the unorganized into independent unions. Lozofsky, head of the Red International of Trade Unions (Profintern), used that Plenum statement to criticize the U.S. Party for not having organized the unorganized and for relying on alliances with so-called progressives within the moribund AFL.

Lozofsky's criticism, which only Foster fought for any length of time (and which he ultimately gave in to), led to the Party's withdrawing from the anti-John L. Lewis "Save the Union Movement" (SUM), which the TUEL had formed in 1925 within the United Mine Workers, to form an independent union. This action destroyed the coalition it had had with the progressives in the UMW and an April 1928 strike which the SUM was to lead. The limited trade union forces of the Communists were then directed to organizing new independent unions, in line with the Comintern's new "left" line emanating from the Sixth World Comintern Congress. The experience gained in strike strategy and auxiliary organization was a prelude to the mass CIO organization of the thirties.

Was the Party correct in withdrawing from the "Save the Union Movement"? While the policy of organizing the unorganized was correct, particularly when the AFL unions were unwilling to organize, it was probably wrong in principle and certainly wrong tactically to break off an alliance with a non-antagonistic ally, leaving both it and the masses of workers in the lurch. There is no contradiction between a Communist Party organizing the unorganized and doing principled work within the established trade unions.

F. The Black Struggle: Political Line and Structure

In 1920, Lenin and the Second Comintern Congress suggested that the Black struggle in the United States was a national struggle and, subsequently, prodded the U.S. Party immediately to implement organizational work amongst Black people. When the Workers Party was formed in 1921, it characterized the Black struggle as a class struggle, without acknowledging the particular demands of an oppressed nationality. This was a holdover from the traditional Socialist Party line.

The Negro Commission of the Fourth Comintern Congress was the first Comintern effort to treat the struggle of U.S. Blacks as a colonial question, but only in that role as a vanguard for a "world Negro movement," i.e.,

African liberation. However, the Workers Party's Third Convention in 1923 went against the Comintern's current by restricting Black struggle to a U.S. context, and emphatically disclaiming any kind of pan-Africanism, specifically the Garvey movement.

The core of the Party's first Black cadres came from the African Blood Brotherhood (ABB), whose program called for economic, social, political equality, race pride, self-defense against the KKK, industrial development, solidarity between Black and white workers, and the defeat of capitalism. In 1921, the Party made its first contact with the ABB; and eventually won over Cyril Briggs (its founder) and other top leaders, while Otto Huiswood and a few other Black Party members became ABB members. Lovett Fort-Whiteman, Otto Hall, and Harry Haywood were also later recruits into the Party from the Brotherhood. Also, a few of the first Black Communists came from the "Messenger" group from about 1920-1922.

With the organizational Bolshevization of the Workers Party in 1925, the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) was created, on instruction from the Comintern, to replace the African Blood Brotherhood which had made no headway in penetrating Garvey's mass base. This was the first full-fledged front organization for the Party's Negro work. The Congress succeeded in representing only "a very few thousand of organized Negro Workers," a few trade unions and no farmers. Thus, the ANLC never did significantly reach the Black masses, not even after the collapse of the Garvey movement.

White chauvinism played a major part in the Party's inability to win over the masses of Black people. The general condition of Blacks was worse than the other sectors of society, with extreme oppression and lynchings in the South. The Party itself did not deal with white supremacy within its organizational practice and political line. Claude McKay, Harry Haywood, and other Black delegates to the Comintern, reported on several occasions race discrimination within the Workers Party, and that that was responsible for the shortage of Black members in the Party.

The legacy of the Socialist Party line that Black oppression was just another form of class struggle between workers and capitalists put blinders on the Workers Party, rendering it unable to recognize the nationalist aspirations behind Garvey's mass following and, consequently, unable to win over his base.

Although the Comintern provided the impetus for the Workers Party to improve its Negro work, and although its line was the most advanced for the period, the fact remains that its focus was diffused around Africa, and that it did not address the Black national question as a national question, which allowed the Party to avoid facing the reality of the Black nationalism that was the key to uniting the Black struggle with the working class movement.
