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## Preface

This dissertation examines the activities of Communist and anti-Communist workers in the organization of certain industries and the internal political life of particular industrial unions. Although a number of important issues are raised by this study, one question links these somewhat disparate chapters: what was the effect of the controversy over Communism which culminated in the expulsion from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) of those unions charged with Communist domination. It will be shown that the effects of those expulsions were harmful to the labor movement and the working class. Communists, despite certain weaknesses and errors, played a constructive role in the American labor movement. The decision to expel them from the CIO hurt the trade union movement by bringing political debate inside the CIO to a standstill and limiting the rights of all CIO members to dissent. More important, perhaps, it resulted in significantly poorer contracts, lower wages, and more oppressive working conditions for major sections of the American working class. These conclusions run counter to most of the work in this field, but they are well documented and incontestable.

A brief review of the chapters will illustrate the way each fits into the argument. Chapter one surveys the literature on Communism and the labor movement, and demonstrates that anti-Communist assumptions, rather than hard evidence, has provided the basis for most of the scholarship in the field. Chapter two examines the internecine warfare in the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union

(ILGWU). In that union, Socialist officers attempted to eliminate a Communist-led opposition through mass expulsions, an alliance with the underworld, and other undemocratic tactics. These maneuvers led to the loss of two-thirds of the union's membership and the obliteration of union standards in the shops. The struggle in the ILGWU in the 1920s offers a fascinating preview of the anti-Communist purges in the 1940s as well as an instructive contrast with the tactics used by Communist leadership to defeat their opponents.

Chapter three traces the efforts of Communist workers and organizers in the campaign to unionize the automobile industry from the middle 1920s to the 1939 convention of the United Automobile Workers (UAW). This chapter, the longest in the dissertation, enables us to test two common, anti-Communist theories. The first is that Communists, through superior organizational abilities and deceptive, manipulative skills, obtain influence out of proportion to their numbers. The second is that Communists were uninterested in winning higher wages and better working conditions, and were solely concerned with winning control of the union machinery for outside political objectives. As we shall see, neither theory is sustained by the evidence. Chapter four continues the examination of automobile unionism from the 1939 convention to the triumph of Walter Reuther in 1947. These two chapters reveal the way a number of divergent approaches and contradictory Communist Party lines were applied in a single industry over several decades.

Chapter five demonstrates the deterioration of union democracy in the National Maritime Union after NMU president Joseph Curran

broke with and defeated the Communist faction. Chapter six analyzes the response of the leadership of the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) to an aggressive, anti-Communist opposition. Unlike the anti-Communist ILGWU leaders, or the Curran administration after he broke with the Communists, the UE leadership, a coalition which included Communists, never resorted to mass expulsions or violence against its opponents. One would not have to find UE a paragon of democratic virtue to note that its record in this area is far superior to that of anti-Communists in the ILGWU, the UAW, and the NMU. Moreover, UE leaders faced a more complicated situation, since UE dissidents were not only working against the administration but were also conspiring with other unions to take their locals out of UE. Despite this greater provocation, UE remained democratic. Chapter seven examines the controversy which led to the expulsion of the left-wing unions, and points out the harmful effects of that expulsion on the labor movement and the working class. Chapter eight states the conclusions of the inquiry.

In this dissertation, a Communist is defined as a member of the Communist Party. Some may think that definition is too restrictive, but any broader definition is misleading. A pro-Communist is defined as someone who is willing to work with Communists and who believes that the Communist Party is an important and worthwhile organization. For example, in 1948 a large number of liberals and radicals were willing to work with the party in organizing the Independent Progressive Party, but only a pro-Communist few believed that the CP was a progressive political entity. Those

independent liberals and radicals opposed to curtailing the rights of Communists and willing to work with them in building an organization or fighting for a cause are termed left-wingers. The CIO left-wing is that grouping which includes and is influenced by Communists. This grouping is usually called Communist-dominated, but Communist-influenced is a more accurate term.

Anti-Communists are defined as those who believe that Communists should be denied political rights that non-Communists enjoy. Anti-Communists supported measures denying Communists the right to hold union office and, in some cases, the right to belong to the union. According to this definition, opponents of the Communist Party opposed to repressive measures against Communists would not be considered anti-Communists.<sup>1</sup> Different types of anti-Communists are indicated by adding a term to anti-Communist such as anti-Communist liberal, anti-Communist radical, or anti-Communist socialist. The anti-Communist groupings are referred to as the right-wing of the labor movement. This characterization will engender some controversy, particularly from those who view themselves as anti-Communist radicals. Two anti-Communist socialists, for example, have written that if the terms left-wing and right-wing "meant anything at

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<sup>1</sup>This position was held by a remarkably small group of people. Even within the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), it was a minority position. The ACLU's strong anti-Communism, Mary McAuliffe has pointed out, severely "limited the extent to which the ACLU defended the rights of American Communists." Mary S. McAuliffe, "The Politics of Civil Liberties: The American Civil Liberties Union During the McCarthy Years," Robert Griffith and Athan Theoharis, eds., The Spectre: Original Essays on the Cold War and the Origins of McCarthyism (New York: Franklin Watts, 1974), 170.

all, it was within the Reuther group that there was a genuine left: trade unionists, who while opposed to Russian totalitarianism, are militant and inclined to radical politics."<sup>1</sup>

While it is true that there was a left-wing in most of the anti-Communist coalitions, there are two compelling reasons for using the term right-wing to describe anti-Communist caucuses. First, this is the term which they (including the Socialist members) applied to themselves. "Now as between the right and the left wing" in the ILGWU," Norman Thomas stated privately, "I am decidedly a right."<sup>2</sup> Nathan Fine and Benjamin Stolberg, both friendly to the Socialist Party, described the Socialist leadership as right-wing and the Communist opposition as left-wing.<sup>3</sup> In the 1940s, the same terms were used. Brendan Sexton, a Socialist, arranged for an anti-Communist ally to address the "right-wing caucus of Ford local 200."<sup>4</sup> Harry Block, another Socialist,<sup>5</sup> described his anti-Communist caucus in UE as a "so-called right-wing group, if you want to use that word (even though

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<sup>1</sup>Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, The UAW and Walter Reuther (New York: Random House, 1949), 170.

<sup>2</sup>Norman Thomas to Morris Hillquit, June 14, 1927, Morris Hillquit Papers (microform edition), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1969.

<sup>3</sup>Nathan Fine, "Left and Right in the Needle Trades Unions," The Nation, CXVIII (June 4, 1924), 639-40; Benjamin Stolberg, "The Collapse of the Needle Trades," ibid., CXXIV (May 4, 1927), 498.

<sup>4</sup>Jack Taylor to Paul Webber, December 14, 1946, Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, Detroit chapter, Papers, Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

<sup>5</sup>Monsignor Charles Owen Rice, Oral History Interview, Pennsylvania State University, October 18, 1967, April 5, 1968, pp. 14-15.

it isn't a good word to use, today)."<sup>1</sup> Second, the term is accurate. In spite of enormous political differences within the two caucuses, on the major difference between them (the rights of Communists), the anti-Communists were clearly in the right-wing. The coalition of conservative Catholics and militant Socialists<sup>2</sup> in the UAW, for example, united solely around the limitation of Communist influence in the union. Despite the presence of some radicals, the impact of a caucus organized around that issue was conservative. One can protest that these individuals were Socialists, Trotskyists, dissident Marxists and radicals of various hues. No matter. Their willingness to support repressive measures against Communists (which often were used against them later) and to ally with distinctly conservative forces to defeat Communists meant that they place a right-wing role in the labor movement.

One term will be absent unless, of course, it appears in a quotation: Stalinist. This term fails the two tests which right-wing passed. It was not used by Communists or left-wingers to refer to themselves, and it is not accurate. The term was invented by enemies of the Communist Party, and it sought to convey several questionable

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Block, Oral History Interview, Pennsylvania State University, September 25, 1967, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Supporters of the Communists might argue that these socialists were pseudo-militant on the grounds that no one who lined up with the employers on a crucial issue like the rights of Communists could be a genuine militant. Yet some of the anti-Communist locals, like local 212 in the UAW, were extremely militant. Many anti-Communists were sincere, genuinely radical workers who nevertheless played a conservative role. This suggests that anti-Communism has a reactionary dynamic, quite apart from the perceived politics of its adherents.

ideas. First, it suggested that Communists were loyal not to a set of principles or even a particular organization, but to a "Russian dictator." Second, it implied that there were a number of Communist movements, more or less equally significant, each led by a single individual. One does not separate Communists from non-Communists, but Stalinists from Trotskyists, Lovestoneites, Weisbordites, Shactmanites, etc. Then one examines the different political lines or determines which individual leader is more attractive. In fact, there was one international Communist movement, led by Joseph Stalin, and involving millions of men and women. These other movements, whatever else one may say about them, stood apart from the genuine Communist movement and were, for the most part, opposed to it. Finally, the term indicated that the Communist movement had somehow disappeared, and was replaced by the Stalinist movement, which was somehow very different. Those who agree with these implications of the term Stalinist, and are prepared to rigorously defend them, can continue to use the term. The rest of us should reject this highly loaded term.