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# The Communist International and the CPUSA: Channels of Influence, Political Consequences, Historiographical Discussion

The past twenty years have seen an upsurge of writing about the Communist Party, United States of America (CPUSA) which has led to a broad and somewhat sympathetic reevaluation of this organization. Though the study of what was the major political force of the United States left since World War I has become part of the normal academic discussion among historians - described even as a minor cottage industry - it has also led to fiery and passionate exchanges in the pages of one of the country's most prestigious organs of intellectual debate.[1] A more or less complete bibliography of all books, articles and dissertations on the subject, published in 1987, listed no less than 2,086 items.[2] Moreover several recent reference works on the history of the US working class movement have given ample space to the CPUSA.[3]

Despite the mass of material which by now exists on this party the study of its relationship to the Communist International has progressed very little beyond works which were at least indirectly connected to the spirit of the Cold War. It is in fact quite striking, although as will be seen not by chance, that the works of the last two decades have devoted little space to this question. Given that the standard and most important accounts of the Comintern generally pay little attention to the United States section it is clear that at least in this area there is much work still to be done.[4] It may be useful, before examining the various stages in the historiographical debate on the party, to summarize briefly the CPUSA's history underlining how it has interrelated to the Comintern.

## *1. A brief outline of the party's history*

The CPUSA can best be understood as a political organism operating both in a national society in which it was or sought to be rooted as well as in an international organization (even after the formal dissolution of the

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[1] The 1984-85 debate in the *New York Review of Books* will be discussed further on. That the Summer 1989 issue of the main periodical of the history of the working class movement (*Labor History*, Summer 1989) was almost entirely dedicated to articles on the CPUSA is a clear indication of continuing interest among specialists. One should also note the existence since 1982 of a specific group of those interested in the history of the CPUSA - Historians of American Communism - which publishes a Newsletter with detailed bibliographic information including work in progress.

[2] The extremely valuable work by John Earl Haynes, *Communism and Anti-Communism in the United States. An Annotated Guide to Historical Writings* (New York, 1987), is divided topically. See the previous bibliographies which are also annotated: Fund for the Republic, *Bibliography on the Communist Problem in the United States* (New York, 1955); Joel Seidman, *Communism in the United States. A Bibliography* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969).

[3] Bernard D. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr, *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (Westport, Conn., 1986); Mari Jo Buhle *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York, 1990), more sympathetic to the CPUSA and thus more representative of recent studies contains, in addition to biographies, entries on concepts and events; Gary Fink, *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor Leaders* (Westport, Conn., 1974) has information on eleven CP or CP-oriented leaders.

[4] See for example the works of Branko Lazitch and Milorad M. Drachkowitch, James W. Hulse, Kermit McKenzie, Milos Hajek, V. M. Lejbzon and K. K. Srinja as well as the anthologies of Jane Degras and Aldo Agosti. Although the last work of E. H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern, 1930-1935* (New York, 1982) has practically nothing on the CPUSA, *Socialism in One Country*, vol. 3 (London, 1964), pp. 244-255 and *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 3, part 2 (New York, 1976), pp. 594-614 has interesting comments on relations between the Comintern and the Workers Party while the Third Period resolutions on the "Negro Question" are dealt with in *Foundations of a Planned Economy*, vol. 3, part 3 (New York, 1978), pp. 991-1016.

TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

Comintern).[5] Each of the three points of this triangle - the party, the society, the International - influenced the other two, although at different moments in varying measure. In this the CPUSA was after all no different than the other sections of the Comintern while its history divides itself naturally into stages which resemble those of sister parties. But just as this does not mean an absence of strong national particularities so a division into stages does not mean agreement with one of the tenets of anticommunist historiography: that their beginning and end points were abrupt and determined entirely in Moscow. As can be documented - also with regard to the United States - the passage from one to another of these periods was often gradual or occurred in a zig-zag fashion and in any case was not without roots in the specific conditions of each country.

The communist movement in the United States was as in Europe born within a socialist party; onto a radicalization provoked by World War I was grafted the powerful reality of the Russian Revolution. The two communist parties formed in 1919 (Communist Party, Communist Labor Party), similar to most of their European counterparts, were sectarian in spirit. In addition to the general roots of this attitude two specific factors in the USA accentuated it. First, among the extreme left forces in the Socialist Party were various foreign language groups of East European origin who were not only connected to the revolutionary movements in their home countries but continued to live mentally in Europe often acting politically as if they were still there. In addition part of the genuinely indigenous revolutionary forces - John Reed may well be taken as an example - were spiritually not alien to that United States protestant tradition which prefers bearing moral witness, that is enunciating the "correct" position, to working towards an actual political transformation. The practical effect of this attitude was a refusal to participate in electoral activity and the American Federation of Labor (the main reformist trade union grouping) as well as the choice of clandestinity as the situation most befitting a revolutionary movement.

Comintern influence in the 1920s operated in two separate and contradictory directions: on the one hand sectarianism was gradually reduced as the two parties were unified and "bolshevization" was interpreted as integration at the work place of communist workers of different nationalities. On the other hand extremely bitter factionalism, connected to Comintern politics and unconnected to the US society, greatly reduced the party's effectiveness. Nonetheless, despite never having more than 10,000 militants, the movement in its first decade (called the Workers Party till 1929) managed to be present through the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), which operated within existing trade unions, in various working class struggles and through the International Labor Defense (ILD) in the agitation for Sacco and Vanzetti and for numerous black victims of racial injustice. At the end of the decade, once again linked to general questions of the Comintern, came the major expulsions in the history of US communism: in 1928 the followers of Trotsky were expelled as was a year later the group around Jay Lovestone connected to Bucharin.

The positions of the Comintern left wing shift of 1928-29 were of course to be directly applied by the CPUSA. The theory of "social fascism", whatever its correspondence to the reality of social democracy's defense of capitalism, was in the United States abstract, confusing and counterproductive given the extreme weakness

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[5] The present writer's views on the development of the CPUSA and its relations to Comintern can be seen in the following: *Sinistra politica e movimento operaio negli Stati Uniti. Dal primo dopoguerra alla repressione liberal-maccartista* (Naples, 1984); "*Party Organizer* and American Communist Mentality in the 1930s", *Storia Nordamericana*, vol. 2, n. 2 (1985), pp. 11-38; "Comunisti statunitensi e coscienza nazionale negli anni '30", in Tiziano Bonazzi and Maurizio Vaudagna (eds), *Ripensare Roosevelt* (Milan, 1986), pp. 241-275; "The 1944-45 Upheaval in American Communism: Earl Browder and William Z. Foster on the Post-War Perspectives for the United States", *Internationale Tagung der Historiker der Arbeiterbewegung. 21. Linzer Konferenz 1985* (Wien, 1986), pp. 256-279; "Pogàny/Pepper: un représentant du Komintern auprès du parti communiste des Etats-Unis", *Cahiers d'histoire de l'institut de recherches marxistes*, n. 28 (1987), pp. 119-131; "Les communistes américains pendant la période du Front populaire: la transformation des structures d'organisation et de la formation des militants", *Cahiers d'histoire de l'institut de recherches marxistes*, n. 36 (1989), pp. 41-64; "Roosevelt, i sindacati e il Partito comunista: un Fronte popolare americano?", in Aldo Agosti (ed.), *La stagione dei fronti popolari* (Bologna, 1989), pp. 402-421; "American Communists in the Popular Front Period: Reorganization or Disorganization?", *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 23, n. 3 (1989), pp. 375-393; *Politica e ideologia nel comunismo statunitense* (Rome, 1989); entries "Earl Browder" and "Popular Front", *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, pp. 111-113, 591-595; specifically on Browder's ideas see "Left-Wing New Dealers, Moderate Communists, and Enlightened Bourgeois: Progressive Capitalism as a Program for the Postwar U.S.A.", in C.-L. Holtfrerich (ed.), *Economic and Strategic Issues in U.S. Foreign Policy* (Berlin, 1989), pp. 225-254.



TÜRKİYE TOPLUMSAL TARİH VAKFI

of the socialist movement. Other positions, linked to the depression which broke out at the beginning of the Third Period, did offer possibilities and encouragement for the communists to be present in key sectors of the society. Frontal opposition to reformist trade unions in the form of dual unionism - the TUEL became a separate trade union central, the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), directly in competition with the AFL - led to attempts at organizing all those, including the unemployed, willing to struggle. In addition, Comintern resolutions of 1928 and 1930 had identified in the black population a central force in the coming US revolution; specifically those in the rural deep South who constituted a majority were considered to have the right to self-determination. Though this too was abstract in that it had not previously emerged as a demand of the black people themselves, it did give the communists the force to contrast the black nationalists as well as the courage to be present in situations in the South of almost complete illegality. And yet, despite the dedication with which they operated and the misery of the first years of the depression, the communists only managed to double their strength by 1933, reaching 18,000, an extremely reduced number in a population of 140 million. One could sustain that the CP in this period did form a sufficient number of cadre which would allow it to play a dynamic role once Roosevelt was elected in 1932.

The first measures of the new administration which greatly reformed, strengthened and rationalized the capitalist state were judged by the CP as moving in the direction of fascism and in this sense were considered a form of "social fascism", a view it should be noted shared by several non-communist intellectuals. The same measures however, extending and even encouraging social conflict, gave the party room for maneouvre. Under Earl Browder, general secretary since the beginning of the decade, it participated in the great strike wave of 1934 careful not to cut itself off from the many workers among whom the president remained popular.

The gradual formation of what can be called the United States version of the Popular Front took place slowly in the period 1934-35. It was in fact the product of a parallel evolution of Roosevelt (blocked in his relations with the capitalists), of the Comintern (increasingly preoccupied by fascism) and, separate but connected with the latter, of the CPUSA (searching a means of entering into the political mainstream). If each of these factors was not without influence on the other two, the most important for the situation in the United States was the transformation, through the impulse of the president, of the New Deal into a broad unofficial left-liberal coalition into which the communists were indirectly but clearly invited.

The hallmark of this coalition was antifascism at home and abroad together with social welfare measures and the extension
of democratic rights for the masses, including the black population. If the CP often criticized the hesitancy and swerving character of the president whose Democratic Party contained many anti-New Deal elements, it steadfastly refused to break with this coalition given the ever greater threat of fascism in Europe and Asia. Foreign policy and the defense of the Soviet Union came to be ever more central as the president moved slowly - indeed, very slowly - in the direction of international antifascism.

In this more favorable climate the CP grew in membership (reaching during the war, together with its youth group, its maximum of perhaps 100,000) and in acceptability while the Socialist Party, largely through its opposition to the New Deal, became insignificant. The communist experience was however contradictory. Accepting that a mass-based third party could not be formed the CP came to be gradually integrated in a subaltern fashion into the two-party political system. At the same time it was also progressively transformed and weakened as it lost its defining ideological and organizational characteristics, something which would become apparent during the Cold War.

As the decade came to a close, the New Deal reform impulse had ground to a halt. Thus after the 1939 pact between Germany and the Soviet Union was concluded it was not difficult for the CP leadership to shift its main attack to the Roosevelt administration. While various intellectuals refused to accept the change in party line and while a whole series of alliances with liberals was badly shaken the mass of the membership held firm. The CP was less isolated than one might think in that it could link up with the always present isolationist tendencies; moreover rearmament had reduced unemployment and the working class was ready to strike - also under the leadership of CP members - even in defense industries. The government did not hesitate to come down hard on the party and Browder himself was, for a period, imprisoned. The party naturally made another brusk shift with the Nazi aggression against the Soviet Union but the attack on Pearl Harbor six months later allowed the CP to integrate itself fully into the national war effort.

Pushing the party's alignment with the president to its furthest limit Browder interpreted the Teheran Big Three agreement at the end of 1943 to mean that class conflict within the United States as well as world conflict between capitalism and socialism had come to an end; moreover a progressive capitalism had in some way eliminated imperialism. Given this the communist secretary - with the support of almost the entire leadership and the mass of militants - transformed the party in 1944 into a political association which would operate



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARŞİVİ VAKFI

primarily as a stimulus to the Democratic Party.

The frailty of the communist position resided in its dependence on the CP's unofficial alliance with Roosevelt and the country's formal alliance with the Soviet Union. The death of the president in the spring of 1945 and the ensuing Cold War - factors not entirely separable - made this abundantly clear. In any case, even before the Cold War began, the leading forces in the international communist movement decided that Browder had gone too far in his revision of Marx and Lenin and his interpretation of Stalin: the CP was reconstituted in 1945 with William Z. Foster - a long time antagonist of Browder's more extreme positions during the thirties - as its head.

Under Foster the party did not revert to a new edition of the Third Period but attempted to maintain a system of Popular Front alliances; Foster's desire, however, for a stronger and more defined communist presence carried with it a definite sectarian push. The Cold War repression had been initiated by Truman and the majority of the liberal forces even before the Smith Act indictments of 1948; at the same time more right-wing elements - McCarthy and his followers - continually and successfully applied pressure to the liberals moving them further along that path. The CPUSA was by now considered to be simply the spokesman within the United States of the country's main enemy. Under ever greater repression and in many ways weakened by its transformation during the Popular Front period and with ever fewer militants, the party, expelled from the mainstream of both the trade union movement and the cultural world, turned upon itself in a search for spies (who certainly existed) and ideological deviations (like "white chauvinism"). In large part it had already disintegrated by the time the dramatic events of 1956 hit. The last communist was released from prison in 1963, perhaps because there was no longer a need for the US government to keep him in. To a CPUSA already living on the margin of politics the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia eliminated most of what had been left while the addition of some new members like Angela Davis did little to change this. It is in fact extraordinarily indicative that the upheaval in United States society in the late 1960s and 1970s in no way brought about a revival in the fortunes of the party; and undoubtedly indicative of the country's mentality, neither did the protagonists of that period find it necessary to refer to the deeds of the communists in preceding decades. If the party continued through the eighties to maintain a formal existence it is quite possible that the new Soviet cost accountancy approach to the utilization of resources will put an end to even that.

Rather schematically the history of the CP appears to have been a voyage from relative isolation in the society (until the mid-thirties agitation for the revolution among specifically disadvantaged groups) to an excessive integration in a vast reform movment (from 1935-45 as part of the New Deal coalition) followed by a return to an even stronger isolation (from the Cold War on) which was nothing less than political irrelevancy. Seen in this perspective what "sense" or "meaning" can one assign to such a historical experience? On a purely subjective level the movement had a strong existential value for its members. To many this political activity gave a sense of dignity, of participating in and making history. Not a few came to conclude that this period of their lives - when they struggled to better themselves together with their fellow men and women - was the richest and most meaningful.

On the broader level the balance does not seem so positive. Clearly in terms of its final goals it not only was a failure - in this not really very different than other communist movements - but left few visible traces. And yet it did contribute to the defeat of international fascism even if fascism was, much less than the communists thought, a threat to the United States itself. More importantly it did count in terms of the evolution of the country in which it operated. Articulating for a part of its history the conscious desire of the masses for a better and more secure life the CP did help force the bourgeoisie to fit this into its synthesis; it did in short push the country towards reform which of course meant greater stability. Once however this was accomplished history seems to have had no more need for it. This might be chalked this up as one more historical irony: the communist movement operated as a useful stimulus on the bourgeoisie, helping it indirectly to strengthen its control over US society.

*2. The debate among historians*

This relatively small movement has always attracted interest and the renewal in the historiography on the CPUSA can only be appreciated in reference to how one wrote about the organization before the 1970s. Given that historical judgements have almost always been mixed with methodological choices and political evaluations views on the CP are something of an indication of the general intellectual climate of the country.

For the first three decades of the party's history studies about it were quite heterogeneous. The main lines of the anticommunist critique - subservience to the "Russian dictatorship" which finances the CP, dishonesty



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

in its use of funds, misrepresentation of political opponents and "infiltration" of other organizations - were laid down as early as 1927.[6] There were however less ideological and more concrete studies of the presence of the Workers Party in the trade unions, of the psychological aspects of communist propaganda during the depression and of the presence of the CP and the role of religion in the Gastonia, N.C. textile strike of 1929.[7]

The writings by communists on their own party displayed rather early characteristics which would prove to be more or less permanent and which have plagued until recently vastly more important communist organizations. The distortions they introduced derived much more from questions of emphasis and omissions than from deliberate falsifications. Those expelled were invariably not mentioned and the Comintern was kept far in the background; moreover, through the Third Period communist strength was exaggerated while from the Popular Front on often an excessively low profile dominated.[8]

Central for the development of the historiography on the CPUSA are the eleven volumes in the series "Communism in American Life" which appeared between 1957 and 1966: in fact opposition to its general outlook will be the starting point for much of the inspiration of the new studies. Sponsored by the liberal-oriented anticommunist fondation The Fund for the Republic, the series considered communism - both domestic and foreign - "a grave problem for the United States"; the heart of the domestic threat was "a small but highly disciplined body of zealots [...] whose loyalty runs to a powerful world movement controlled by Soviet Russia".[9] Alongside this traditional anticommunism there was however a desire to supercede Cold War hysteria: the subject was to be treated in an "objective" fashion through the utilization of traditional research methods.

The several studies dealt with the political history of the party, the social, psychological and philosophical bases of communism in the United States and the CP's presence in various sectors of life. The conclusions of those on communist activity in the schools, the churches and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the major black organization for civil rights, clearly responded to the Fund's desire to exonerate such institutions from the accusation by the extreme right that they had fallen under CP influence.

All of these monographic studies, despite their limits, are filled with important information. Among the most well known is that of Daniel Aaron which examined communist influence among writers showing how the CP managed to catalyze and give direction to the literary rebellion during the depression.[10] Nathan Glazer on the other hand investigated the social composition - occupational status and ethnic group - of the members concluding that while during the thirties the party had acquired a base in the middle class and was present among

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[6] James Oneal, *American Communism: A Critical Analysis of Its Origins, Development and Programs* (New York, 1927). For similar studies written during the New Deal see Benjamin Stolberg, *The Story of the C.I.O.* (New York, 1938) and Eugene Lyons, *The Red Decade. The Stalinist Penetration of America* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1941).

[7] David M. Schneider, *The Workers' (Communist) Party and American Trade Unions* (Baltimore, 1928); Harold Lasswell and Dorothy Blumenstock, *World Revolutionary Propaganda. A Chicago Study* (New York, 1939); Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers. A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, 1942).

[8] For the first communist work which deals at length with the CPUSA see Anthony Bimba, *The History of the American Working Class* (New York, 1927). William Z. Foster himself can be considered the main historian of the CPUSA from within: his historical works (*History of the Communist Party of the United States*, New York, 1952 among many others) possess the characteristics of autobiography while his autobiographical ones (*From Bryan to Stalin*, New York, 1937; *Pages from a Worker's Life*, New York, 1939) are in large part histories of the party. The Popular Front approach can be best seen in Richard O. Boyer and Herbert M. Morais, *Labor's Untold Story* (New York, 1955) and Philip Foner, *The Fur and Leather Workers Union. A Story of Dramatic Struggles and Achievements* (Newark, N.J., 1959). If both downplay the CP presence in the name of trade union "unity" the latter is quite extraordinary in mentioning the party perhaps five times in a work of 700 pages which deals with a trade union openly led by communists from its inception.

[9] Introduction to the *Bibliography on the Communist Problem in the United States*, p. ix, which preceded the series.

[10] Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York, 1961).



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARŞİVİ VAKFI

clothing workers, dockworkers and merchant sailors, it never was strongly rooted in the English speaking industrial working class; moreover among this latter group and the blacks rapid turnover remained constant.[11]

The volumes dedicated to the political history of the party ideally should have been the base of the entire project but the centrally important period of the depression was not covered.[12] The two works however by Theodore Draper - on the foundation of the CP and its history during the nineteen twenties - were historiographically the most important. Philologically serious in the use of archival material and printed sources, the basic limit of his work was in its almost exclusive concentration of the inner struggles of the party leadership and its contacts with the Soviet Union. If his volumes contain much useful biographical information the concentration of the national leadership eliminated any inquiry as to who the actual militants and middle level cadre were and what they did in the situations in which they operated. Certainly the CP in the twenties was greatly absorbed in inner-party conflict. And yet only through understanding the relationship between the party and United States society could Draper have verified his double hypothesis: that the linkage to the Comintern was always the determining factor in the development of the CP line and that such a linkage was negative for the party in that it served always and only the interests of the Soviet Union.[13] Except for Aaron the communist movement is for the authors of "Communism in American Life" essentially extraneous to society, something abnormal which was imposed on it, and consequently illegitimate. In this sense the series remained firmly rooted in the Cold War atmosphere that it tried in part to transcend.

Almost all the new studies on the history of the CPUSA, from the late 1960s on, can be clearly distinguished from the preceding historiography in their basic starting point and/or conclusions: that despite the influence of the Comintern and the Soviet Union communism in the United States had national roots and at least in certain periods was very much linked to the society in a way that cannot be described as "infiltration". It is difficult to imagine that such studies could have matured except in the new political and intellectual climate which developed in this period. The predatory and unconstitutional nature of the war against the Vietnamese people helped delegitimize anticommunism. Moreover although the revisionist school of diplomatic history founded by William A. Williams paid little attention to the working class movement its approach brought a more balanced view of the Soviet Union and a more critical one of the ruling class in the United States. Equally important was the new wave of social and urban history with its emphasis on how the masses actually lived and thought. With regard to the history of the CP this directed interest towards the presence of the party at base of the society and away from the national leadership in New York and its links to the Soviet Union.

The new studies have touched all possible areas of the relationship of the Communist Party to United States society. As can be seen from the Haynes bibliography cited at the beginning of this essay the amount of material is quite considerable; here an attempt will be made only to indicate the most significant studies in terms of their contents, the conclusions reached and the influence they have exerted.[14]

Given the weight of the communists in the trade union movement it is not surprising that this area has

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[11] Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York, 1961).

[12] Also missing in the series was the crucial area of CP influence in the trade unions. Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York, 1949), Max M. Kampelman, *The Communist Party vs. the C.I.O. A Study in Power Politics* (New York, 1957) and David J. Saposs, *Communism in American Unions* (New York, 1959) partially filled this gap; all aggressively anticommunist they take as their starting point the necessary expulsion from the CIO in 1949 of the CP-oriented trade unions.

[13] Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, 1957) and *American Communism and Soviet Russia. The Formative Period* (New York, 1960). The Trotskyist leader James Cannon's correspondence with Draper and comments on these books (in *The First Ten Years of American Communism*, New York, 1962) are extremely interesting. Draper's works are far superior to the invective and bitterness which pervade Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party. A Critical History* (New York, 1957). The other political history in the Series was David A. Shannon, *The Decline of American Communism. A History of the Communist Party of the United States since 1945* (New York, 1959), a straight forward narrative where the CP appears primarily as a victim.

[14] For a detailed discussion of most of the new writing including areas not touched in this present essay (sports and popular music among others) as well as the previous stages in this historiographical debate see Sylvers, *Politica e ideologia nel comunismo statunitense*, "Il dibattito storiografico", pp. 31-127.



TÜRKİYE İŞÇİ TARİHİ VAKFI

attracted most attention. Roger Keeran demonstrated that the CP presence in the automobile industry was legitimate, constructive and central, that its ends were not in contrast with the interests of the workers and that, given the limits of the latter's ideological formation - the Ku Klux Klan and the Catholic Church were both strong - the party did what was possible to form a socialist consciousness; Ronald Schatz that in the electrical industry the CP position which supported piece rate was not in contrast to the desires of the workers, that radicalism was often stronger among the skilled and better paid, that at least some conservative workers continued to support a left wing trade union and that family values of religious and political tolerance were important in members' support of such a trade union; Bruce Nelson that the communists were creative trade unionists among dockworkers and sailors, that they were capable of showing independence from national party policies and that their success in part derived from an absorption of existing syndacalist ideology. The syntheses on the CP presence in the CIO by Bert Cochran and Harvey Levenstein both deny that there was a plan by the party to enter and control the trade union central and see the communists as merely utilizing the opportunities that developed. If for the authors the communist trade union leaders deluded themselves as to the nature of "Stalinist Russia" and are not convinced that CP led unions were necessarily more democratic they do see these leaders as individuals with a social vision defeated by the general Cold War climate which made it impossibile for them to function in the interests of the workers. All of these scholars see the rise of anticommunism and the expulsion of the CP from the union movement as an integral part of the decline of trade union democracy.[15]

The rural areas of the United States have also received attention from the new studies. The activities of the Communist Party have been analyzed in the Mid West among independent farmers increasingly impoverished during the agrarian crisis of the 1920s and the subsequent general depression; in California among the multi-ethnic agricultural laborers where the party during the Third Period was especially present and increasingly non-sectarian; and in the South, particularly among the black sharecroppers. The partial ability of the party to move in different cultural contexts comes out clearly as does the sharply reduced involvement of the CP with the sharecroppers and farm workers as it became more and more integrated into the New Deal coalition which included the oppressors of these groups.[16]

There is yet no detailed treatment of the Communist Party and the women although an article by Robert Shaffer has discussed how the party accepted the concept of the special oppression of women, especially in the

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[15] Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* (Bloomington, Ind., 1980); Ronald Schatz, *The Electrical Workers. A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse 1923-60* (Urbana, Ill., 1983); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, Ill., 1988); Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism. The Conflict That Shaped American Unions* (Princeton, N.J., 1977); Harvey Levenstein, *Communism, Anticommunism and the CIO* (Westport, Conn., 1981). See also Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home. The CIO in World War II* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982) on the party's changing working class base (from skilled to unskilled workers) which paralleled changes in the working class itself and the process of burocratization. Very important was the pathbreaking article by James R. Prickett ("Anti-Communism and Labor History", *Industrial Relations*, vol. 13, n. 3 (October 1974), pp. 219-243) which frontally assaulted the then still dominant anticommunist labor history; this and subsequent issues contained in fact sharp exchanges between Prickett and those under attack. Agitation and organization among the unemployed was especially strong during the early years of the depression. See Daniel J. Leab, "'United We Eat': The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930", *Labor History*, vol. 8, n. 3 (Fall 1967), pp. 300-315; Alex Baskin, "The Ford Hunger March - 1932", *Labor History*, vol. 13, n. 2 (Summer 1972), pp. 331-360; Roy Rosenzweig, "Organizing the Unemployed: The Early Years of the Great Depression, 1929-1933", *Radical America*, vol. 10, n. 4 (July-August 1976), pp. 36-60.

[16] Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest. The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln, Neb., 1982); John L. Shover, *Cornbelt Rebellion. The Farmers' Holiday Association* (Urbana, Ill., 1965); Donald H. Grubbs, *Cry From the Cotton. The Southern Tenant Farmers' Union and the New Deal* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1971); Mark D. Naison, "Black Agrarian Radicalism in the Great Depression: The Threads of a Lost Tradition", *Journal of Ethnic History*, vol. 1, n. 3 (Fall 1973); Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest. A History of California Farmworkers 1870-1941* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981); Walter J. Stein, *California and the Dust Bowl Migration* (Westport, Conn., 1973). Extremely useful is Lowel K. Dyson, "Radical Farm Organizations and Periodicals in America, 1920-1960", *Agricultural History*, vol. 45, n. 1 (January 1971), pp. 111-120.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARŞİVİ VAKFI

form of the female worker who was also a wife and a mother, and in this context has noted the contributions by the intellectuals Grace Hutchins and Mary Inman. Both the party's fight at various levels for equality as well as how it tried to develop special structures to deal with the question are also touched upon. The author acutely notes how during the Third Period the CP developed new analyses with regard to women but was separated from them as a category while during the Popular Front its presence grew among the women but the party became absorbed in sexist cultural traditions.[17] With regard to the ethnic immigrant groups which were most important to the CP - the working class and farmer Finns in the Mid West and the working and middle class Jews in the urban centers - there are several studies which have underlined the varying sociological contexts in which the party operated.[18]

Black Americans however were theoretically more central to the communist vision of political struggle and historians have analyzed from various perspectives the CP attempt to build in that community a lasting base. Dan Carter and Charles Martin have written respectively on the legal defense organized by the CP of the Scottsboro Boys and of the communist organizer Angelo Herndon; from their studies one can see that the ILD in its constant polemic with the NAACP had successes as well as limits, that the ILD operating in the field in the Third Period was far less sectarian than the national office, that the CP worked seriously for the liberation of the accused and did not "exploit" the cases as traditional anticommunism has asserted, and that the black community had no hesitation in collaborating with the communists when it appeared to be in their interests.[19]

Other studies on the link between the blacks and the CP have pointed out that the left trade unions most serious in their antiracist campaign were those with numerous black members while the racism of white members often was a limiting factor on CP-oriented leaderships. Analyses of the National Negro Congress of the 1930s (and to a certain extent of the Civil Rights Congress of the 1940s) show them to have been alliances which reached far beyond the CP. A monograph by Mark Naison on the CP in Harlem has demonstrated how extensively the CP was rooted in that community during the depression. Its interracial base, in itself positive, did however leave little space for the black community to express its autonomy. Despite this Naison rejects the idea that the party exploited Harlem and wonders instead if the blacks did not manage to use the party for their own needs. Rather important for the general discussion of the party's history, the author dates the decline of the CP to the late thirties - that is before the war - when it had already begun to shift its emphasis from a policy of mass protest to one of alliances at the top with liberal forces. Naison, moreover, considers the influence of the Comintern to have been useful in that it encouraged the party to concentrate on the black population while

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[17] Robert Shaffer, "Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1920-1940", *Socialist Review*, vol. 9, n. 3 (n. 45) (May-June 1979), pp. 73-118. According to the author, an increasingly conservative approach towards sexuality and the family was linked to the Soviet model of the late thirties. See also Sharon Hartman Strom, "Challenging 'Woman's Place': Feminism, the Left, and Industrial Unionism in the 1930s", *Feminist Studies*, vol. 9, n. 2 (Summer 1983), pp. 359-386 which finds that the traditional communist lack of interest in white collar workers sharply reduced attention to women given their presence in such jobs.

[18] Auvo Kostianinen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism, 1917-1924. A Study in Ethnic Radicalism* (Turku, Finland, 1978); Kostianinen, "Santeri Nuorteva and the Origins of Soviet-American Relations", *American Studies in Scandanavia*, vol. 15, n. 1 (1983), pp. 1-13; Michael Karni, "Struggle on the Cooperative Front: The Separation of Central Cooperative Wholesale from Communism, 1929-30", in Michael G. Karni *et al.* (eds), *The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region: New Perspectives* (Vammala, Finland, 1975), pp. 186-201; Arthur Liebman, Jews and the Left (New York, 1979); Paul Buhle, "Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question", *Radical History Review*, n. 23 (Spring 1980), pp. 8-33. See also Joshua Freeman, "Catholics, Communists, and Republicans: Irish Workers and the Organizations of the Transport Workers Union", in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (eds), *Working-Class America. Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society* (Urbana, Ill., 1983), pp. 256-283; and on the firm CP ally Vito Marcantonio: Peter Jackson, "Vito Marcantonio and Ethnic Politics in New York", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 6, n. 1 (January 1983), pp. 50-71.

[19] Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro. A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, La., 1969); Charles H. Martin, *The Angelo Herndon Case and Southern Justice* (Baton Rouge, La., 1976).



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

it did not prevent communists from acting locally with dynamism and flexibility.[20]

Together with the trade unions the CP, from the depression up to the Cold War, was especially strong among the literary intellectuals. Richard Pells has examined the latter's search, especially at the beginning of the thirties, for community and a non-bourgeois morality concluding that the attraction of the CP, which saw the intellectuals as promulgators of a program for the transformation of society, was more psychological than political. Others have analyzed the *New Masses* and the John Reed Clubs finding their relations with the CP in the 1920s not always linear while their success is located in the emergence of a native proletarian literature in the United States, linked however with the debate in the Soviet Union.[21]

There have also been several recent attempts to synthesize periods of the party's history either on a national or local level. Particularly studied have been those moments and situations when the party, operating within a broader coalition, had more of a chance to make its weight felt. The special situation in Minnesota, where the state's main political force was a Farmer-Labor Party (FLP) within which the CP always tried to be present, has been studied by Millard Gieske and John Haynes. The former considers the communists to have been a negative influence not only because anticommunism could be used against this party but also in that the CP forced what for the author was a local movement based on economic protest to become enbroiled in foreign policy questions. Haynes, instead, has underlined the instability of the alliance between the communists and the liberals in the FLP; while he judges the communists to have had "totalitarian objectives" they were guilty of neither "subversion" nor "infiltration" since they had no secret agenda nor did they deliberately conceal their identity.[22]

Kenneth Waltzer has found in the CP presence in the New York American Labor Party an essential contradiction between the party's socialist objectives and its electoral coalition politics. The CP entry into the Popular Front was in fact accompanied by no new analysis of either political institutions or of how the new alliances could be linked to a socialist strategy. The study of Henry Wallace by Norman Markowitz is extremely

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[20] Donald T. Critchlow, "Communist Unions and Racism," *Labor History*, vol. 17, n. 2 (Spring 1976), pp. 230-244; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York, 1979); Meier and Rudwick, "Communist Unions and the Black Community: the Case of the Transport Workers Union, 1934-1944", *Labor History*, vol. 23, n. 2 (Spring 1982), pp. 165-197; Lawrence S. Wittner, "The National Negro Congress: A Reassessment", *American Quarterly*, vol. 22, n. 4 (Winter 1970), pp. 883-901; Gerald Horne, *Communist Front? The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Rutherford, N.J., 1988); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana, Ill., 1983). For the integration of CP activity into a black religious context see Robin D. G. Kelley "'Comrades, Praise Gawd for Lenin and Them!': Ideology and Culture among Black Communists in Alabama, 1930-1935", *Science and Society*, vol. 52, n. 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 59-82.

[21] Richard Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams. Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (New York, 1973); Gabriella Ferruggia, "Radical Intellectuals and the Workers (Communist) Party in the United States: *New Masses* and *The Daily Worker*, 1926-28", *Storia Nordamericana*, vol. 2, n. 1 (1985), pp. 5-34; David Peck, "The Tradition of American Revolutionary Literature: the Monthly *New Masses*, 1926-1933", *Science and Society*, vol. 42, n. 4 (Winter 1978-79), pp. 385-409; Eric Homberger, "Proletarian Literature and the John Reed Clubs 1919-1935", *Journal of American Studies*, vol. 13, n. 2 (August 1979), pp. 221-244. See also on the *Partisan Review*, initially CP-oriented, James Burkhart Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans. A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York, 1968); and, on the CP in Hollywood from the thirties through the post-war depression, Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood. Politics in the Film Community 1930-1960* (New York, 1980). Scant attention has been paid to the non-literary intellectuals. On the growth of a left wing orientation among the social workers, distressed at simply alleviating the disintegration produced by the capitalist depression, see John Haynes, "The 'Rank and File Movement' in Private Social Work," *Labor History*, vol. 16, n. 1 (Winter 1975), pp. 78-98; and in general, Lorenz J. Finison, "Radical Professionals in the Great Depression. A Historical Note: The Interprofessional Association", *Radical History Review*, vol. 4, n. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1977), pp. 133-137.

[22] Millard G. Gieske, *Minnesota Farmer-Laborism. The Third-Party Alternative* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1979); John Earl Haynes, *Dubious Alliance. The Making of Minnesota's DFL Party* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1984).



TÜRKİYE BİLİMLER AKADEMİSİ TARİH ARŞİVİ TBAKFI

important towards an understanding of how the CP related to what was their main remaining link in the liberal camp after the repression began. With regard to the 1948 election the author denies that it was the Cominform which pushed the CP to support Wallace; moreover the party - especially Foster - continued in its ideological criticism of Wallace's "keynesiansim" and vision of a "progressive capitalism" while the structure of the newly formed Progressive Party was always more New Dealish than leninist.[23] Recent years have also seen important syntheses on the CP as a whole during its most influential period: Maurice Isserman has studied the party during the war while Harvey Klehr that of the period of the depression.[24] Isserman's study pays much attention to society in the United States: the changes in the party which Browder embraced as well as guided are judged positively in that they came to grips with US reality developing a "national communism" in which the Bolshevik tradition came to be mixed with "American democracy". Despite a comment about Browder's "illusions" with regard to capitalism the transformation of the party in 1944 is seen as the last and best oportunity to have created a mass based socialist movement; thus the Moscow directed turn-about of the following year is considered to have aborted an essential and natural process. The author evidently does not feel that these illusions, certainly at the heart of Browder's political positions, were sufficient to have blocked any real development of a socialist movement nor does he see as negative the gradual but far reaching changes in the party from the mid-thirties on.[25]

Dramatically different in outlook and conclusions is Harvey Klehr's study of the CP in the thirties. Author, among others, of a socio-biographical study of the composition of the changing membership of the party's Central Committee and an article, based on FBI dossiers, on the party's 1922 underground congress, Klehr's outlook is at odds with most recent studies which have seen the CPUSA in relationship to United States society and have concluded that indeed it did there have roots. The author instead follows very closely the perspective of Theodore Draper in insisting that the meaning of the CP experience can only be understood in relationship to the Comintern and the Soviet Union and in them alone can be found the source for whatever changes took place in the communist positions.[26]

Klehr's study is without a doubt a useful contribution: having clearly delineated for the crucial decade of the thirties the political choices of the national leadership of the CPUSA, showing the stages through which they developed, all future studies will be in some way indebted to him. The problem with this work is not simply the author's total lack of sympathy for the CP seen as a mere group of manipulators in turn

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[23] Kenneth Waltzer, "The Party and the Polling Place: American Communism and an American Labor Party in the 1930s", *Radical History Review*, n. 23 (Spring 1980), pp. 104-129; Norman Markowitz, *The Rise and Fall of the People's Century. Henry C. Wallace and American Liberalism, 1941-1948* (New York, 1973). For CP alliances in the south and the struggle to apply the New Deal there see Thomas A. Kreuger, *And Promises to Keep. The Southern Conference for Human Welfare, 1938-1948* (Nashville, Tenn., 1967). See also John Earl Haynes, "The New History of the Communist Party in State Politics: The Implications for Mainstream Political History", *Labor History*, vol. 27, n. 4 (Fall 1986), pp. 549-563. Most works on the anticommunist repression have seen the CP more as a victim than a protagonist. See, for example, Cedric Belfrage, *The American Inquisition 1945-1960* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1973); and David Caute, *The Great Fear. The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York, 1978).

[24] Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, Conn., 1982); Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism. The Depression Decade* (New York, 1984).

[25] Isserman has also put forward the interesting thesis ("The 1956 Generation. An Alternative Approach to the History of American Communism", *Radical America*, vol. 14, n. 2 (March-April 1980), pp. 43-51) that the CPUSA of the forties and fifties was dominated by a generation which emerged out of a Jewish urban immigrant background and which lived the party experience as a form of Americanization, that is as a successful reaching out towards US society (contact with blacks in Harlem and the south, Slavs in the Mid-West, etc.). The author faults this generation, in which Browder had his strongest supporters, with not fighting Foster and coming to Browder's defense in 1945; moreover, in the '56-'57 crisis most of them, deluded with the Soviet Union, simply left the party aiding once again Foster.

[26] Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre. The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, Calif., 1978); "The Bridgeman Delegates", *Survey*, vol. 22, n. 2 (99) (Spring 1976), pp. 87-95.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL BİLİMLER TARİHİ ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

manipulated by the USSR (and thus his unpleasant use of venerable anticommunist terminology like "infiltration"); nor that he has very selectively utilized memoires and even testimony before governmental agencies of repression (accepting all accusations of spying); nor an absence of real interest for the Comintern's motivations and its functioning (something for which the use of sources in German would have been useful). The real problem is that his approach has left out the society and the links of the CP with it; having done that Klehr is able to take away from the CP the right to be considered a legitimate political force.

The relationship between the CPUSA and the Comintern is located in a vacuum and is sharply one-sided in that only the decisions of the international organism are noted: dual unionism is discussed without noting the almost impossibility of work within the AFL; the dissolution of the TUUL without the development of trade unionism in 1934; the theory of the right to self-determination without the nationalist Garvey movement; the development of the Popular Front without that of the Roosevelt administration; the shift in 1939 without the exhaustion of the New Deal. Class relations, the ethnic mix, mass mentality, the thrust of the party under Browder to integrate itself into national politics as well as the actual activity of the CP in the society are all aspects missing from his history. He refuses to see, in short, that the CP was part of a social dynamic and consequently its whole history cannot be comprised in a comparison of the declarations of national communist leaders with those of the Comintern. The Comintern positions are not seen merely as an essential element, which of course they were, but rather as the only determining one. If Draper's work on the twenties - when the CP was much more on the margins of the society - was already insufficient, Klehr's study, partial even as a study of the relations between the CPUSA and the Comintern, is unacceptable as a general history of the party.

Not surprisingly Klehr's monograph, published in 1984, unleashed a rather heated debate which can best be seen in the pages of the *New York Review of Books*. It not only raised fears of a return in studies on the CP to an older anticommunist approach that many felt had been definitvely buried by the new historiography but seemed to represent part of a general right wing assault in some way connected with Reaganite America. Draper himself intervened very determinedly defending Klehr, the only historian who has steadfastly continued his approach: vigorously denying that the CP line was a mixture of local conditions and Comintern directives, he judged it to have been only an attempt to apply the latter to a specific situation. Moreover, he added, emphasis on the Popular Front period was misleading since it was only a mere four years of the entire party history.[27]

Much more important on a methodological level was Draper's criticism that the younger historians had preferred paying attention to the life experiences, including minor details, of locally based militants rather than the broad political decisions of the national leadership. This for Draper meant depoliticizing the history of the CP; the visual angle of social history was by itself insufficient towards an understanding of this organization. It is also clear - although he did not raise the point directly - that emphasizing the context in which the CP operated necessarily led to downplaying the relationship to the Comintern. One could even suggest that the new historians, hesitant to deal with this subject, probably feel that any discussion of it directly leads towards the older outlook which not only denied value to the experiences of the grass roots but refused to consider the CPUSA a legitimate political force. And yet, as Draper has continually asserted, the Comintern and its relation to the CPUSA were by no means minor aspects of the latter's history.

It is possible to indicate many fields in CP history still untouched by the new wave of historiography - biographies of the major party leaders, monographs on organizations like the International Workers Order and the National Negro Congress, syntheses of moments like the Third Period, analyses of the intellectual history of the party - but an essential point for further research is that any study (of individual periods, specific trade unions, geographic areas, etc.) must be linked not only to the nation's political history in general as well as the overall development of the CP but also to that of the Comintern. The CP was a part of United States society and the social history approach can and already has revealed much about it. Moreover it is true that Comintern decisions were often greatly mediated at the local level. On the other hand, whatever its merits or demerits, the

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[27] *New York Review of Books*, May 10, 1984; December 6, 1984; May 9, 1985; May 30, 1985. The agitated tone of this polemic can be seen in Draper's shock - expressed here and in other periodicals - that some of the new historiography of the CP was by tenured professors in major universities and his accusation that they were following a "party line". Draper had in the 1970s written two articles ("Gastonia Revisited", *Social Research*, vol. 37, n. 1 (Spring 1971), pp. 3-29; "Communists and Miners 1928-1933", *Dissent*, vol. 19, n. 2 (Spring 1972), pp. 371-392) affirming that changes in the CP trade union line could only have been connected to Comintern positions.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

CPUSA was hardly a New Left organization.[28]

*3. Sources: oral history, autobiography, archives*

At the various stages in this historiographical debate different types of sources have been utilized. A specific question concerns the use of autobiographies or oral history. Those which were the most hysterically anticommunist - published in the late forties and early fifties - and which insisted the most on accusations of spying for the Soviet Union, the personal cynicism of the leaders and the psychological misadaptation of members were often not surprisingly based on the memoires of ex-communists now greatly deluded. Such sources are of course of limited value and it is quite difficult to evaluate their undoubtedly exaggerated descriptions of the climate in the CP.[29] As to the memoires of those who were still party members when they wrote in the thirties, forties and fifties, often excellent in recreating the political climate of human experience they rarely discuss, critically or otherwise, the political line of the party.[30]

A similar criticism can however be made of the memoires of the seventies and eighties which have been amply utilized by the new wave of studies of the last twenty years. Mostly written by those who, although they had left the party, nonetheless evaluated positively the period spent in the CPUSA, they too perhaps more often reflect the period in which they were written as opposed to that about which they wrote. On the other hand, analogous to memoires of whatever period they often contain much information on people, events and documents which can be followed up.[31]

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[28] Party history from within was somewhat influenced for the better by innovations in the general historiography on the subject: Simon W. Gerson wrote a biography (*Pete. The Story of Peter V. Cacchione New York's First Communist Councilman*, New York, 1976) emphasizing the CP's policy of alliances during the Popular Front; two general works of Philip S. Foner (*Organized Labor and the Black Worker 1619-1973*, New York, 1974; *Women and the American Labor Movement From World War I to the Present*, New York, 1980), different from his previously mentioned history of the fur workers, gave a balanced view of the CP presence in two sectors; and Gerald Horne's excellent academic study on the Civil Rights Congress has already been mentioned in note 20 above. For his part Klehr has continued to put forth the Comintern as the only interpretative key of CP activity: "Self-Determination in the Black Belt: Origins of a Communist Policy", *Labor History*, vol. 30, n. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 354-366.

[29] The most famous of this genuine literary genre were: Louis F. Budenz, *This is My Story* (New York, 1947); Bella V. Dodd, *School of Darkness* (New York, 1954); Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York, 1952); Elizabeth Bentley, *Out of Bondage: The Story of Elizabeth Bentley* (New York, 1951); and of course Herbert A. Philbrick, *I Led Three Lives: Citizen, Communist, Counterspy* (New York, 1952) which became the subject of a popular TV series. More balanced are autobiographies of two who left the CP in the '56-'57 crisis but maintained a faith in some kind of socialism and progress: Howard Fast, *The Naked God: The Writer and the Communist Party* (New York, 1957); John Gates, *The Story of an American Communist* (New York, 1958).

[30] Mike Gold, *Jews Without Money* (New York, 1930); Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York, 1936); Angelo Herndon, *Let Me Live* (New York, 1937); Ella Reeve Bloor, *We Are Many: An Autobiography* (New York, 1940); Joseph North, *No Men Are Strangers* (New York, 1958); Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand* (New York, 1958).

[31] Notable among these many autobiographies are those of the female militants Peggy Dennis and Jessica Mitford (P. D., *The Autobiography of an American Communist. A Personal View of a Political Life 1925-1975*, Berkeley, Calif., 1977; J. M., *A Fine Old Conflict*, New York, 1977); the blacks Harry Haywood and Hosea Hudson (Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevick. Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist*, Chicago, 1975; Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson. His Life as a Negro Communist in the South*, Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and the national leaders Al Richmond and Steve Nelson (A. R., *A Long View from the Left. Memoirs of an American Revolutionary*, Boston, 1972; S. N., James R. Barrett and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson. American Radical*, Pittsburgh, Penn., 1981). Especially Richmond's has acute reflections



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

While most of the "Communism in American Life" series was based primarily on printed sources Draper can be said to be the first historian who utilized, together with these - in his case, with reference to the Comintern, also in German -, archival sources. This material, including minutes of the Central Executive Committee and the Political Bureau and correspondence between leaders, was given to him by various former protagonists of the CPUSA (Harry M. Wicks, Jay Lovestone, Charles S. Zimmerman as well as Earl Browder) whom he interviewed. Previously in his private possession all the papers gathered during the preparation of the two books, together with his own correspondence and interviews with CP leaders and militants, almost 1,000 pamphlets, various communist reviews as well as newspaper clippings and relevant doctoral dissertations are now deposited as the Draper Research Files at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, a choice evidently connected to the presence there of Harvey Klehr. Equally important is the massive Earl Browder Archive (correspondence, subject files, manuscripts, photographs and legal files) at Syracuse University which embraces a period even broader than his direction of the party from 1930 to 1945.

Much new archival material has become available as increasingly, from the 1960s on, individual CP militants and leaders - including those who remained in the party - as well as pro-communist personalities have deposited their papers in university or public libraries. Such collections, together with the records of various organizations, have been at the base of the most recent stage in CP historiography and an appendix lists the most important of them.

It would appear that the CPUSA does not itself have an archive or at least whatever it posseses is not normally consultable.[32] What might be contained in such an archive is clear when one observes that missing from the long list of CP militants and leaders whose papers are available is no less than William Z. Foster, the main party leader along with Earl Browder, active in the CP from the early 1920s until his death in 1961. As to government archives the restrictive interpretation of the Freedom of Information Act given by the administrations of Reagan and Bush has reduced the importance of what may be obtained from the Department of Justice (and thus the Federal Bureau of Investigation).[33] While FBI material might contain important papers from the CP itself, seized during the Cold War repression, this particular source is rather overrated in that it mostly contains often unreliable reports from informers and spies. On the other hand, available independently of the FOIA, is the vast material in the Roosevelt archive in Hyde Park, probably still underutilized with regard to the CPUSA in its period of major expansion.

It should also be noted that in the late 1960s and 1970s printed sources became more available: Feltrinelli reprinted Third International congress proceedings, *Inprekorr* and *Rundschau*, essential for studying the US movement; almost 20 of the over 100 periodicals in "The American Radical Press 1880-1960" series of Greenwood Press reprints are from the United States communist movement; a microfilm edition, prepared by the Microfilming Corporation of America, of the extremely important Browder archive appeared to which was added printed material (410 pamphlets, the periodicals *Labor Herald*, *The Workers Monthly*, *The Communist* and *Political Affairs*, together with the proceedings of most party conventions).[34]

Precisely with regard to relations with the Comintern, the possibility of consulting the latter's archive would change the situation considerably. The recent release by the Soviet Union of documents relating to the United States anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman - although not it seems from Comintern

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on how the CP related to other political forces during the Popular Front. The autobiography of Nate Shaw (Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers. The Life of Nate Shaw*, New York, 1974) contains rare information on CP activity among black sharecroppers in Alabama.

[32] Letter from Mary Licht of the History Commission, CPUSA, to the author, August 20, 1990.

[33] Harvey Klehr has obtained through the FOIA an FBI file labelled "Comintern Apparatus in the United States". Deposited in the Emory University library it contains "thousands of pages" most of which, however "is blacked out". (Letter of Klehr to the author, June 14, 1990.) One can in fact only request the photo-copying of entire files (paid for by the reserarcher) as opposed to researching in them; moreover they are released with deletions as decided by the government agencies.

[34] Microfilm editions of the papers of CP-oriented trade unions as well as of the Cold War government agency, the Subversive Activities Control Board, have also appeared. The microfilm edition of the Browder archive contains in addition a very useful printed guide. Information on communist periodicals can be gather-ed from Walter Goldwater, *Radical Periodicals in America 1890-1950*, New Haven, Conn., 1966.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARŞİVİ TSTA VKFİ

archives - indicates this as a possibility of the not too distant future.[35]

What could one expect to find and in what way could our understanding be enriched? Important documents might include material of the various Comintern commissions which dealt with "American questions", reports from CPUSA emissaries in Moscow and messages and telegrams from the party to the international organism. Information on relations to the Comintern might touch cadre decisions, the entity of monetary transfers and how they were effected, possible differences between certain CPUSA leaders and those of the Comintern, how society and politics in the United States were appraised by the organization's leaders, the ways in which US communists remained in contact with the USSR and the Comintern as well as the modalities of the international organization's interventions which were particularly discrete during the Popular Front period. Moreover if the US party actually did send a copy of the minutes of all meetings of its leading organisms (the Central Executive Committee and the Political Bureau) the find would be extraordinarily rich. In addition, considering that Foster died in Moscow, it is possible that at least some of his papers are still there, deposted in the Comintern archive.

*4. Political history and the search for a new synthesis*

Although Draper and Klehr have clarified various threads which connected the CP and the Comintern, a political history of this relationship which would integrate social and intellectual elements, is yet to be written. If it is clear that ignoring the existence of the international organization paints an unreal portrait the need to go beyond the "domination/obedience syndrome" is apparent since that was only one aspect, however determining, of the history of the Comintern and its national sections.

Questions that deserve a fuller treatment include what the Comintern and the CPUSA expected from one another, what they knew of each other and how they formed their opinions, and through what channels - official and unofficial - the relationship operated. Only after answering such questions can one arrive at a more balanced evaluation of the political meaning and utility of the connection.

The intentions and expectations of the International towards its United States section are not at all clear. If US communists certainly expected material help as well as general and perhaps specific inspiration the Comintern seems to have actually given little importance to the CPUSA. It is difficult to believe that the Comintern ever thought the party capable of activating and guiding a revolutionary process. It may well be that the Third Intenational expected merely that the United States communists would operate as a pressure group on their government pushing it towards a friendlier relationship with the Soviet Union. The Afro-American population, on the other hand, identified as a colonized people and considered essential to a future revolution in the United States, did receive more attention. It is possible to read in the Comintern resolutions a view that some in that organization thought that the political vanguard of this minority might be useful as an instrument of revolutionary propaganda abroad.

The general lack of interest shown for the CPUSA was matched by that given to the USA itself. Certainly an international revolutionary anticapitalist movement should have dedicated more attention to that country which was well on its way by the end of World War I to becoming the leading world power. The United States could and did become an ally against international fascism but underestimating the importance of its particularly dynamic capitalism would prove indeed costly given that the non fascist solution to the depression crisis would be the winning card against communism.

It is notable that the interest demonstrated during the Sixth Congress and by Bucharin himself in the United States and its increasingly central role in the capitalist world was not matched in the succeeding period. Dimitrov's report to the Seventh Congress did generously remark that "As we know, the United States is not Hungary, or Finland, or Bulgaria, or Latvia. The victory of fascism in the United States would vitally change

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[35] The material comes "from both the Central Party Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in the Central Communist Party Committee and from the Central States Archives of the October Revolution" and was released to "the Emma Goldman Papers, a project sponsored by the National Archives' National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the University of California at Berkeley, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and others". The documents, which include a record of the meeting between Lenin and Goldman in March 1920, will be published in a forthcoming edition of the Emma Goldman Papers by the University of California. See *OAH Newsletter* [Organization of American Historians], August 1990, p. 12.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

the whole internaitonal situation" but it cannot be said that this intuition was systematically developed. The ideology of political isolationship seems to have misled even the extremely sharp Togliatti who in his report on the war danger to the same congress saw the USA playing only a secondary role in the Far East.[36] Aside from its ties to, and competition with, European capitalism the country not only possessed a vast informal empire in Latin America, having there completely replaced Great Britain, but in addition maintained a direct control over the strategically placed islands of the Philippines and Hawaii. All this during the 1930s only dimly interested the Comintern.

How can one account for this underestimation? It is often said that the Comintern was inveterately "Eurocentrist" but what exactly did this mean? One should know more about how the Comintern received information on the States and how it went about forming opinions. Were its only sources CP militants studying in Moscow or working for the International? What role was played by information received from Soviet journalists and intellectuals who had been in the States and from diplomats once the country was recognized in 1933?[37]

Who specifically were those who formed the opinion of the Comintern on the United States and its Communist Party? Were decisions reached in an ad hoc and almost extemporaneous fashion or did the various commissions and secretariats really work? How did they gather information and draw up reports and who were their official and unofficial members? Who decided the important interventions of the Comintern in the affairs of the CPUSA and how were they decided? Why was the intervention in 1929 carried out by Stalin himself and why was it so directly forceful? Was it a mere example of a personalistic and chaotic style or was the US party really considered so important? How should the Duclos intervention in 1945 be evaluated? Was it directed only against the Browder leadership of the CPUSA? How was it decided on and what role did the Italian communists Giuseppe Berti and Ambrogio Donini actually play in relaying it?[38] Were in fact United States communists of different ethnic origins useful to the Comintern on other occasions in making contacts and transmitting information?

There are moreover certain general questions about the Comintern which have received insufficient attention and which might clarify aspects of its relationship with the various sections including that of the United States. What might be called the culture of the Comintern deserves investigation. Far too much emphasis has been laid by anticommunist historiography on examples of cynicism and opportunism in the International. In reality it can be argued that the International irradiated a system of positive values which impregnated in a deep way many leaders and perhaps most militants of its sections. Certainly this can be doucmented with regard to the communists of the United States. It might be useful to carry through a linguistic analysis of certain "key words" which continually reappear in Comintern and CPUSA documents, memoires and oral histories. More important here than expressions like "ruling class" and "revolution" could be those like "discipline", "solidarity", "self-criticism", "betrayal" which, among others, reveal thought patterns and a way of life.

"Internationalism" also was not just a slogan but a "value" which in the CPUSA - as among others presumably - had a direct application with regard to relations between blacks and whites and between the various national groups. The Soviet woman was naturally held up as a model of emancipation but does this represent the entire series of "values" held by the communist movement with regard to male-female relations as well as

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[36] On the Sixth Congress see "Die internationale Lage und die Aufgaben der Kommunistischen Internationale", *Protokoll. Sechster Weltkongreß der Kommunistischen Internationale. Vierter Band* (Hamburg, 1929), pp. 14-18 and the conclusions of Bucharin on the Program Commission debate in *Inprekorr*, 7, n. 91, August 28, 1928, p. 1715. Dimitrov's comment is in *VII Congress of the Communist International. Abridged Stenographic Report of Proceedings* (Moscow, 1939), pp. 151, and Togliatti's in *Opere*, edited by Ernesto Ragionieri, vol. 3: 1929-1935, part 2 (Rome, 1973), pp. 752-753. Togliatti did however note rather early - intervening at the XIII Enlarged Executive of December 1933 and in a note to Manuilskij in December 1934 - the specific character and importance of "Rooseveltism" (*Opere*, vol. 3: 1929-1935, part 1, p. cxcvi; part 2, p. 288).

[37] For the Soviet and Comintern press opinion on the New Deal see the useful study by Lapo Sestan, "Il New Deal nel giudizio della stampa sovietica e della Internazionale comunista (1933-1936)", *Studi di storia sovietica* (Rome, 1978), pp. 275-425.

[38] On the role of Berti and Donini see the strongly pro-Browder study of Joseph Starobin, former editor of the *Daily Worker*, *American Communism in Crisis 1943-1957* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 270.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI

gender differences and equality? In fact, were such values - female emancipation and internationalism - mere exports from the Soviet Union or should one not see them as the product of a common culture to which the sections contributed? Could one indicate something specific that the CPUSA brought to the Comintern because of its existence in the United States, a country which contained an oppressed racial minority and where white women were perhaps more emancipated than elsewhere?

Would it moreover be too bold - given the general political atmosphere of recent years - to try to discuss seriously what exactly "Stalinism" and "Stalinist" meant to the individual militant? What was the actual content of "democratic centralism" and what were its concrete effects? Such an investigation is not easy given the paucity of contemporary direct sources which would indicate what the base of a party was actually thinking. And yet there are indications - organizational bulletins, factory papers, leaflets, course outlines of party schools - that together with absolute obedience to organizational structures and directives from above these words also meant, unconnected to the actual deeds of Stalin, seriousness and a dedication to purposeful work.[39]

An attempt at a global evaluation of the political utility of the relationship between the CPUSA and the Comintern to both protagonists is necessary if extremely difficult. Although the diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union by Roosevelt was not at all the product of pressure from the United States communist movement the latter was certainly a factor from the beginning of the Popular Front period on in pushing Roosevelt towards antifascism and an alliance with the USSR. In this sense the Comintern did receive from the CPUSA significant help for what was one of its main tasks, the protection of the first socialist state.

Much more nuanced is the question of how useful the Comintern was to United States communists. This must be examined under at least two separate aspects: on the one hand, the actual interventions by the Comintern in the development of CPUSA policy and the way they were carried out; on the other, the general image that the Soviet Union projected on the masses and opinion makers in the United States.

The formation of the Communist International and the conditions for adherence to the latter were in themselves the first interventions. The advanced state of confusion in the American Socialist Party with regard to organization and a strategy for reaching socialism together with the presence of bourgeois forces within it can, depending on one's outlook, all be utilized as "justifications" for such interventions. Once a communist force was actually organized the suggestions/orders during the life of Lenin all went in an anti-sectarian direction, pushing the United States communists into a firmer relationship with the reality in which they operated: work in the main trade union organization, the AFL; publication of a newspaper in English; elimination of the underground; support for the formation of a Farmer-Labor Party (mostly through the efforts of the intelligent Comintern representative Josef Pogany/John Pepper). Even the bolschevization with its emphasis on work in the factories and the dissolution of the foreign language federations can be seen as tending towards an integration into mainstream politics. On the other hand the factional struggles from the mid-twenties and the expulsions at the end of the decade were all based directly on divisions in the Bolshevik Party as the Comintern, under whatever control it was at any given moment, sought to uniformize the national sections. Given that the choice of Browder by the Comintern finally ended these factional struggles so deleterious for the development of the CPUSA one is not far from the mark in affirming that the International merely repaired in part the damage it had initiated.

The changes brought about during the Third Period - the theory of the right to black self-determination and dual unionism - orginated in Moscow but as seen, were able to find roots in the specific situation in the United States. The shifts in the CP which occured from 1934 on were rooted in the development of the party's relationship to the society but went as far as they did through the encouragement and insistence of the Comintern as in Dimitrov's direct intervention during the Seventh Congress. Thus for both the positive and negative sides of the changes in the CP during the Popular Front period the International can be held partially responsable. The decisive aspect was however the CPUSA's link in the post-war period with the international communist movement and its allignment with Soviet foreign policy despite non participation in the Cominform. In the late forties and fifties it may have been the only correct position for those fighting for peace and against imperialism but it was central in moving the party towards destruction.

As to Browderism, it is not at all clear that it was an entirely native development. Although later

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[39] See Kelley, "'Comrades, Praise Gawd for Lenin and Them!'", p. 67 where oral testimony of black sharecroppers in Alabama tells of Stalin as a reedition of Lincoln in a future liberating civil war. If recent personal memories of the author can be admitted it could be noted that in the Rome sections of the Partito Comunista Italiano, at least up till the 1970s, a comrade who Sunday morning distributed *l'Unità* door to door, even when it rained, was often admiringly qualified as a "Stalinist".



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARŞİVİ VAKFI

repudiated by the international movement perhaps it was only an extreme development of a more general tendency present in various parties. Certainly when Browder used his influence in Latin American communist parties to push them in that direction he seemed to be giving advice that was not only his own.[40] On the other hand if it is correct that Browderism grossly misunderstood the nature of United States capitalism and imperialism the repudiation which was forced on the country's communists from without was not entirely negative.

There may then have been various small benefits from Comintern interventions which at times helped the party, at least on a short term basis, operate in the society. On a broader level however the Comintern did not give particular guidance to US communists - if this was its job - either explaining to them their society or providing them with instruments to understand it. Was there really a threat from fascism? What was the nature of the linkage between US capitalism, the state and the ruling class and its capacity for absorbing and even utilizing reforms which were originally forced on it? Certainly the CPUSA never understood the deeper functioning of this capitalism; if the Comintern however cannot be said to have hindered this inquiry by US communists neither did it help. If the party during the Popular Front had no theory of transition nor an analysis of imperialism separate from fascism, this simply reflected a general uncertainty of the Comintern. It would have been hardly reasonable that the International carry out such analyses for all countries in which it had sections. Perhaps the fault was that of the local communists themselves who accepted unthinkingly that the Comintern leaders necessarily knew better about everything simply because the latter were mostly members of a party which had made a revolution although in vastly different circumstances.

It was in the final analysis the method of Comintern intervention which was the most damaging aspect of the relationship. The International intervened from above and from far away. This in itself gave the impression that the party's loyalty was not within the country. Moreover it limited the CPUSA's understanding of an essential truth: that it had to rely mainly on its own forces and answer primarily to the United States population or at least those sectors in which it claimed and wished to be rooted.

The image of the Soviet Union also varied from period to period and there can be no doubt that at times it was distinctly positive as during the depression when she was productively utilizing all her resources and then during the war when she bore the major brunt of the battle against nazi-fascism. In such moments the Soviet image can be seen as helping United States communists. The link to this country also gave Browder the opportunity to enter into international politics posing as an unofficial spokesman for Tito and Mao Tse-tung among others. But given the elements of religion, patriotism and anti-collectivist individualism in the United States psyche - perhaps strongest among the masses - together with the continuing relative wealth of the country for much of the period of the existence of the CPUSA, a strong linkage to the international communist movement may have been more a liability since these aspects all seemed in contrast with the essence of Soviet socialism. In any case with Moscow as the national enemy any connection with the Soviet Union during the Cold War was deadly.

How then can one divide responsability for the final insuccess of the CPUSA? Can it be put on the shoulders of the Comintern for having limited the initiative of United States communists? The general outlook during the Popular Front did however give the national parties much leeway in developing their immediate policies and ways of being present in their society. If indeed men and women make history - despite their not determining the conditions in which they operate - it is hard not to think that US communists bear responsability for what happened to their movement and that their essential weaknesses, although masked during moments of expansion, must be searched in their own activity and not shifted to the Comintern.

Each year that passes seems to separate us an additional decade from the history of the Comintern. There are today fewer and fewer national states anywhere or important political movements in the advanced capitalist world which claim their roots in its experience. If indeed distance is what serious historical research calls for it might seem that we have arrived at an ideal situation: the Third International in its leading organisms as well as its member parties can now be studied with an absence of political passion and its documents analyzed as one would ancient coins. And yet it may be that increased distance renders more arduous an understanding of the Comintern's ideals and objectives. Moreover current political biases - no less severe than previous ones -

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[40] For a view of Togliatti's positions in Italy as connected to Browderism, as well as the needs of Soviet foreign policy, see Sergio Bertelli, *Il Gruppo. La formazione del gruppo dirigente del PCI 1936-1948* (Milan, 1980), pp. 195-219. On Browderism in Latin America see Harvey Levenstein, "Leninists Undone by Leninism: Communism and Unionism in the United States and Mexico 1935-1939", *Labor History*, vol. 22, n. 2 (Spring 1981), pp. 237-261.



TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİHÇİLER DERNEĞİ/IKFI

may add to such difficulties. It is well known that for a long period the Communist International was considered by certain researchers, especially from certain countries, to have the attributes of holiness which placed it beyond normal scholarship. Fortunately this institution is no longer a sacred cow for anyone; one should however equally assure that it does not become either a scapegoat or a whipping boy.

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*Appendix: Research material of CPUSA members and CP-oriented personalities and organizations*

*State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison)*: the national leaders Eugene Dennis and Betty Gannett and the Wisconsin activist Fred Blair.

*Emory University*: the Asia specialist Philip Jaffe.

*Howard University*: the singer and actor Paul Robeson, the leader of the Civil Rights Congress William Paterson.

*Tamiment Institute (New York University)*: the national leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the New York city councilman Pete Cacchione, the sometime representative at the Comintern Sam Darcy, the feminist and trade unionist Rose Pastor Stokes, the unpublished autobiographies of the leader of the International Workers Order Max Bedacht, the theoretician Alexander Bittleman and the trade unionist who worked in the Profintern Andrew Overgaard, the CP-oriented Jefferson School of Social Sciences and the Kentucky Miners' Defense Collection.

*Schomburg Library (New York)*: the black Birmingham, Alabama steelworker Hosea Hudson, the National Negro Congress.

*Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota (St. Paul)*: the Finish-American agricultural specialist Henry Puro.

*Michigan State University (East Lansing)*: the auto industry organizer Saul Wellman.

*Wayne State University (Detroit, Mich.)*: the CIO publicist Len De Caux.

*Hoover Institution (Stanford, Calif.)*: the protagonists of the 1929 expulsions who formed the Communist Party (Majority Group) Jay Lovestone, Benjamin Gitlow and Bertram Wolfe, the novelist Joseph Freeman.

*University of Indiana*: the writers Upton Sinclair, Max Eastman and Claude McKay.

*Yale University*: the cultural organizer V. J. Jerome.

*University of Virginia*: the writer John Dos Passos.

*Columbia University*: the national leader Robert Minor.

*Cornell University*: the International Workers Order.

*Smith College*: the most significant (and colorful) female working class organizer Ella Reeve ("Mother") Bloor, the social worker Mary Van Kleeck.

*Rutgers University*: the Popular Front New York electoral coalition, the American Labor Party.

*University of California, Berkeley*: the California activist Oleta O'Connor Yates, the League of American Writers.

*California State University, Long Beach*: the national leader Dorothy Healey.

*Harvard University*: the writer John Reed.

*Boston University*: the writer Joseph North.

*Ohio Historical Society (Columbus)*: the national leader Charles Ruthenberg.

TÜRKİYE SOSYAL TARİH ARAŞTIRMA VAKFI