

University of Nevada, Reno

**From the Ashes of the Old: A Critical Analysis of American Labor, Social
Movements, and Cooptation**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology

by

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Abstract:

This project is an analysis of the ways in which the power structure maintains hegemony and ideological dominance when confronted with challenges. Challenges to the power structure typically emerge in the form of social movements. Using conventional and Marxist theories, the American labor movement as an historical case study, and cross-national comparisons, I establish a perspective of social movements and socioeconomic power dynamics which asserts that cooptation is the primary method used by the ruling class to maintain ideological dominance and hegemony. I argue that the American labor movement at its most radical and militant was an effective force for change against the power structure. At the opposite end, I claim that today's institutionalized movements, from the AFL-CIO to what is called the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, hinder social movement radicalism and effectiveness and aid in the maintenance of the capitalist status quo. In the concluding chapter, I present prospects for the future of militant working class activism and identify essential components for the development of a proletarian movement that is capable of effectively challenging the power structure.

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Chapter One: Introduction

While social movements can be defined as collective challenges to the societal power structure, in actuality movements can be susceptible to cooptation by the very elites and institutions which they seek to confront and/or dismantle. Cooptation is defined here as the processes through which elite institutions within the power structure consume, moderate, or destroy challenges to the status quo. The power structure is understood in this analysis to be the networks of corporate and government institutions which collaboratively operate in the benefit of the elite class to the detriment of the working and under classes.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine how progressive and radical social movements have been coopted—commodified, marketized, and/or professionalized—by elite institutions, with a particular focus on the labor movement in the U.S. (but with the addition of a few cases outside the U.S. for comparison). As such, I utilize a comparative/historical approach in my analysis. I find that the radical/militant tactics utilized in the early U.S. labor movement—which largely disappeared later in the movement due to cooptation—provide the best hope for bringing about real change. I also find that Marxist theory is particularly useful in better understanding these relationships and building a philosophy of praxis that can bridge scholarship and on-the-ground mobilization. The findings of this study should contribute to our understanding of the cooptation of social movements, and may help future movements avoid this pitfall.

While the various social movements and activist organizations considered throughout this piece have experienced their own victories and failures, arguably none

have established themselves as concretely and effectively as challengers to the power system as the labor movement, and arguably none have been defanged and institutionalized to such a degree as the once militant and radical unions and worker organizations discussed here. For this reason, there is much space given to labor history and the current state of unions in the United States, with occasional mentions of unions and movements involving labor elsewhere.

The claim established and supported by this analysis is that the labor movement in the United States lost much of its power and influence when it became a wing of the Democratic Party, specifically after the New Deal, the second Red Scare, and the merging of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. These moments in history, catastrophic to the labor movement in their own respective ways, have much to teach other social movements and activist organizations about the dangers of cooptation, and thus the history of the American labor movement stands as both a warning and a source of inspiration for potential challengers of the hegemonic structure and the power systems which operate within it.

It is no secret that certain power dynamics characterize the social, economic, and political relationships which define human interaction, and that these power dynamics operate according to the interests of one class over another is not much of a secret, either. Where ownership of property (which translates to power) serves as the dominant trait of human relationships, one finds a series of inevitable and irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions. This tense relationship between the warring classes naturally produces challenges to the system, which not only contains but is entirely built by the

irreconcilability of the interests of the class which rules and the interests of that which is ruled.

Here, one must consider, after all these years, that something has not yet taken place which has dislodged the ruling class from their positions of power and influence (that is to say the global ruling elite – there have been revolutions of a nationalist character - ‘in one country’ – in a variety of places, but they have largely failed to challenge capital as an international entity). In the pages that follow, one will find an examination of the conditions which continue to hinder the development of a coherent, forceful challenge to the power structure.

One cannot simply analyze the power structure’s outward modes of operation (the factory, the military, the police, etc.). Though the brutality of these institutions is obvious enough to raise suspicion regarding the structure’s legitimacy in even the naïve observer (this impotent suspicion is of importance), the secret of maintaining dominance hides (with wavering effectiveness from day to day) in the skeletal system, in the fundamental shape of the superstructure upon which all else grows as tissue. The challenges which arise in the forms of social movements and revolutionary organizations must be studied alongside this ‘skeletal system,’ or general framework, as there have indeed been moments when it seemed that some militant, organized embodiment of class consciousness and antagonism could have changed the shape of the structure, but did not.

One needs to understand why these challenges failed in order to build answers to the contradictions of the power structure. Thus, this project involves the following: 1) an

analysis of dominant ideology and hegemony, 2) an examination of both Marxist and non-Marxist theories related to social movements, 3) the use of the American labor movement (1905 – 1955; 1955 – present) as an historical case study, and 4) a look toward the future of social movements and the potential of new class conscious challenges to the power structure.

The second chapter presented here considers conventional theories related to social movements, and in particular theories related to the cooptation of social movements by the very forces which they seek to change or dismantle. Specifically, the four-stage model of social movement cooptation (Coy and Hedeem 2005), resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977), and to a lesser extent McDonaldization (Ritzer 2019 [1993]) provide the non-Marxist insights which aid in the development of a coherent understanding of social movement cooptation and the ways in which the power structure maintains and reproduces itself. The four-stage model allows one to see the process of social movement cooptation in an understandable, numbered sequence, and it adds context to the ‘thought processes’ which lead elite institutions to coopt challenges to their power. Resource Mobilization Theory illuminates the challenges faced by social movements in garnering support, positive media attention, and resources, and it also raises concerns regarding the pitfalls of reliance on outside funding in building a challenge to the power structure. Ritzer’s (2019 [1993]) ‘McDonaldization’ paints the bleak picture of a society obedient to the laws of the market system and its bureaucracy – efficiency, productivity, predictability, and strict control. This obedience is observed routinely in social movements.

The third chapter introduces a Marxist critique of social movements, ideology, and hegemony. In so doing, it reveals the shortcomings of the non-Marxist analyses ('conventional theories') while giving attention to helpful Marxist theories, specifically those not only of Marx but also of Lenin (1902, 1918), Gramsci (1971), and Althusser (1970). Marx delivers our analytical foundation, and without his contributions (ideology, base, superstructure, class consciousness, the materialist dialectic, etc.) the ideas presented here would likely be of less conceptual value. Lenin develops Marx's analyses, and his examinations of the state are of particular importance to this project. According to Lenin, "The state is a product and a manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms" (Lenin 1999 [1917]:1). He asserts that "The state arises where, when and insofar as class antagonism objectively cannot be reconciled. And, conversely, the existence of the state proves that the class antagonisms are irreconcilable" (p. 1). In this arrangement, the state rises as the ally of capital. Lenin's scrutiny of the state and hegemony and the conclusions he posits are strengthened by Gramsci, who stands as perhaps the most influential of the Marxist theorists in the development of this project. The concepts of cultural hegemony, dominant ideology, the war of position, and consent as presented by Gramsci provide a theoretical 'home' for the ideas described here, a roof under which these ideas can make sense. Althusser's contributions of ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) and the reproduction of the conditions of production build upon the works of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci while invigorating the analyses and assertions presented in the following pages.

The fourth chapter of this project introduces the historical case study, the American labor movement, and explores some of the major events in the development of the early American labor movement (1905 – 1955) from the birth of the Industrial Workers of the World to the merging of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Here, I also examine some of the dominant political and philosophical characteristics of the American labor movement, paying close attention to the work of Montgomery (1987) and Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin (2002) among other historians of the labor movement. The claim which is established here is that the militancy, optimism, and revolutionary spirit of the early American labor movement were responsible for the gains which were won by the working class, especially those in industrial rather than craft unions (I provide space in the third chapter for an analysis of this distinction as well). The death knell of the American labor movement, described toward the end of the third chapter, was when the labor movement in the United States became linked to the Democratic Party, a result of the New Deal. The Red Scare, Taft-Hartley Act, and merging of the AFL and CIO destroyed what was left of radical unionism, and the decline in union density, rank-and-file participation, and worker power on the shop floor (or any workplace for that matter) are direct consequences of the deradicalization and institutionalization of the labor movement.

The fifth chapter is an analysis of the state of affairs in the American labor movement following the 1955 merging of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. While there have been modest gains which can be boasted by the AFL-CIO since the 1950s, I claim that nothing compares to the organizing

undertaken during labor's more militant years, especially the massive unionization campaign led by radicals in the CIO in the 1930s. I am sure to provide room for acknowledgement of the victories of American organized labor in its moderated, Democratic Party-dominated form, but of importance here is that the political and philosophical values which once guided workers in the fight for a new world under the red banners of left-wing industrial unions are nowhere to be found. Today, workers struggle for scraps, as the corporate elite and conservative mainstream business unions have found common cause in preventing the militancy and radicalism of the past from emerging again. The American labor movement stands as the case study for this project, as its historical and present conditions show the mechanisms in place which moderate and institutionalize challenges to the power structure.

Chapter six applies the theories discussed in the first and second chapters and the analyses of the third and fourth chapters to both historical and recent circumstances in the sociopolitical world, with particular focus given to political parties, labor movements, and the ways in which such organizations and struggles have impacted the social, political, and economic circumstances of their respective national homes. By comparing and contrasting nations which have influential left-wing and radical political parties (communist parties, etc.) and strong, militant worker organizations (anarcho-syndicalist unions, etc.) with the United States (which has such organizations, but none of any real consequence in regards to the functions of the sociopolitical establishment), I am able to show that, while there is variance in the character of each case, the conditions related to ruling class ideological domination, the processes involved in social movement

cooptation, and the continued struggle for a more democratic, egalitarian world are not unique to any single country. Indeed, with few exceptions, even unions and political parties abroad which espouse revolutionary values find themselves consistently battling cooptation, institutionalization, and moderation. The observable moments of the past which opened up opportunities for seizures of power by working class political parties (allied with militant labor) offer clues as to how the power structure functions when faced with real challenges to its legitimacy and dominance. Such moments are littered throughout the histories of the nations which can be called ‘social democracies,’ or more generally ‘welfare states.’ While arguably offering more humane socioeconomic conditions to working class citizens, such nations still operate according to the principles of capitalist doctrine (Canada, various European nations, etc.), and one sees time and time again moments in which such welfare states introduce austerity measures which benefit capital and hurt the poor and working class. Thus, the reformist “middle ground,” which undeniably exists (particularly in northern Europe), cannot be viewed as an answer to the contradictions of capitalism. In order to truly challenge the power structure, both in the United States and elsewhere (since capital does not and in fact *cannot* sit in one place), there are certain conditions which must coincide in the development of a militant, radical workers’ movement which can effectively dismantle the power structure and, in the words of the old labor tune “Solidarity Forever” to “bring to birth a new world from the ashes of the old” (Chaplin 1915).

Chapter seven details the above mentioned conditions which must be in place for the creation of a working class movement which is capable of avoiding cooptation,

developing counter-hegemonic institutions, and replacing the current power structure with one that is radically democratic and egalitarian, designed to foster human creativity while nurturing the minds and bodies of all. By revisiting the American labor movement, paying close attention to the revolutionary leadership which viewed organized labor as a vehicle for the struggle of the working class against capitalist exploitation, chapter seven considers prospects for the application of a philosophy of praxis, a way in which we might put theory into action in revitalizing the militancy of the American labor movement's past while acknowledging its mistakes and shortcomings. The prospects for the future described here are by no means fully developed, and there is much work to be done in their materialization and defense. However, in consideration of the past and the present, and confronted with the persistence of the capitalist power structure, it is hoped that outlining such prospects will generate courage and optimism.

Chapter Two: Conventional Theories

Summary

In order to bring this analysis to life, context and definitions must be provided. Of concern to this project is, in particular, the ways in which the power structure prevents challenges to its workings from attaining meaningful change. By “power structure” I mean the framework upon which ideological control systems are built and operate as a network. Specifically, one must pay attention to the connections which exist between the ruling class and its institutions and the ways in which they relate to the state apparatus. ‘Cooptation’ refers to tactics used by the ruling class to subdue challenges to the status quo through absorption and institutionalization rather than crush them with violence. First, it is beneficial for one to examine non-Marxist theories related to social movements, and therefore I begin with examinations of the four-stage cooptation model as introduced by Coy and Hedeem (2005), resource mobilization theory, and to a lesser extent the concept of ‘McDonaldization’ (Ritzer 2019 [1993]), political process theory, and psychological factors such as moral licensing. While these theories are valuable and helpful in the development of this analysis of the power structure, I claim that theories from the Marxist tradition are superior, and thus in the sixth chapter I critique these conventional theories from a Marxist perspective.

THE FOUR-STAGE MODEL OF COOPTATION

Because the cooptation of social movements is at the heart of this analysis, it makes sense to begin with an examination of the model of cooptation, containing four

stages, introduced by Coy and Hedeem (2005), who specifically applied the four-stage model of cooptation to the community mediation movement. The community mediation movement emerged as an alternative to the criminal justice system, a pillar of the power structure, and the model of cooptation used by Coy and Hedeem can be easily applied elsewhere (admittedly with varying degrees of effectiveness and concreteness of sequence). Of particular interest in the case of the community mediation movement is the process of professionalization – introducing the standards and logic of the wage system to activist or nonprofit organizations. Professionalization is a method of cooptation, for it incentivizes activists to maintain a sense of moderation and ‘respectability’ (in other words, *harmlessness*) in an organization so as to avoid a loss of income or job security (i.e., to avoid offending the sources of funding).

Community mediation was coopted by elites in order to neutralize what appeared to be a well-organized alternative to a cornerstone of the neoliberal power structure: the criminal justice system. “Over the past quarter century, community mediation has become increasingly institutionalized and has undergone various degrees of co-optation in its evolving relationship with the court system” (Coy and Hedeem 2005:405).

Cooptation “becomes possible when a challenging group or social movement opposes the practices, initiatives, or policies” (p. 406) of elite institutions. As with other coopted movements, the community mediation movement became institutionalized by elite forces through “intervention strategies” that “are based on the value system of the dominant culture, and as such, are designed to protect the interests of the dominant culture” (p. 407). These intervention strategies take on numerous forms, and emerge in a variety of

ways, including “the appropriation and resulting redefinition of movement discourse” and “centrist challengers gaining inclusion at the expense of more radical challengers” (p. 407). Thus, elite institutions appropriate the appearance of the social movement, but none of the philosophical commitments associated with it.

The cooptation of the community mediation movement “occurred along three lines: the regulation of what types of cases can be mediated, the passage of ethics laws governing mediator behavior, and the regulation of who can practice mediation” (p. 407). The coopted mediation movement ultimately reproduced the norms which they sought to challenge and thus reinforced the hegemonic order. Elite cooptation initiatives, which in the case of the community mediation movement included neoliberal “restorative justice initiatives,” oftentimes “function as a means of social control as they colonize informal, traditional, and custom-based forms of justice, thereby also securing the hegemony of formalized systems of justice” (p. 408).

The word ‘colonization’ is particularly apt in such cases as the community mediation movement, as the activists involved in its development sought to seize control “over key areas of their political and economic lives from governmental institutions” (p. 408). Communities operating on an independent, communal, and democratic plane is intolerable to the status quo, and so cooptation by elite forces becomes necessary when such developments become apparent – the community must be colonized. The incessant “rationalization, routinization, centralization, and corporatism in U.S. social and economic life” means that “community-based alternative institutions” (p. 408) must increasingly conform to the elite restrictions to action.

The community mediation movement was not beyond the tentacles of the forces of institutionalization. By the 1990s, as community mediation centers “increasingly cooperated with existing political institutions,” they became “more institutionalized” (p. 408) and also moderated their goals and commitments to community demands to better suit the hierarchical framework of the power structure. In other words, they began the process of adopting the principles and logic of the market system, the spirit of the ruling class’s ideology which permeates, with some inconsistency in obvious presence, the entirety of human life within the power structure.

In Coy and Hedeem’s four-stage model of cooptation, one can see that cooptation depends not so much on episodes as it does on processes and progressions between stages. The moment of progression from stage two to stage three are of particular interest. Stage two, which involves the appropriation of language, techniques, and the inclusion of elite-friendly, moderate actors, facilitates an environment in which Stage three, the assimilation of movement leadership, activist members, and participants, and the “Transformation of program goals” becomes possible (p. 409).

Despite its depth, the four-stage model of social movement cooptation is relatively simple to map: there is the inception of the movement and the beginning of engagement between the movement and elite institutions (stage one); the appropriation of language associated with dissent (stage two); the recruitment of moderate (perhaps ‘celebrity-activist’) leadership to promote goals (stage three); and the continual regulation of the organization by elite forces within the state and the business community. The elite are motivated by “a desire to blunt the challenge” presented by social movements “and

head off more substantive changes” (p. 412). In the case of community mediation, terminology associated with the movement was appropriated (even the word ‘mediation’ was appropriated along with terms such as intake, caucus, co-mediation, and problem solving) by the status quo and introduced to the criminal justice system, although the status quo still “bears little resemblance to community-based mediation practices” (p. 414). These terms, once the status quo successfully coopted the movement, were redefined to suit the needs of the elite, and fundamental concepts to the movement (such as voluntary participation) were heavily manipulated or done away with completely (p. 415). Elements of the status quo criminal justice system were introduced to the community mediation movement, including coerced participation, as the status quo “values cost and time efficiency” (p. 415).

The coopted version of mediation, which became “a compulsory process in the courts or other administrative milieux,” represented “a departure from the goals of empowerment set forth” by the grassroots community mediation movement in its more legitimate, radical, and communitarian stages (p. 415). Cooptation involves at least three “closely interrelated and mutually reinforcing” components: “channeling, inclusion/participation, and salience control” (p. 416). ‘Channeling’ refers to the ways in which elite institutions divert the goals of a social movement and moderate them. The centralization of “discussion and decision-making bodies” allows those sympathetic to the status quo to “concentrate their persuasion efforts to effectively neutralize key aspects” of the social movement challenging the power system. In the case of the community mediation movement, the example of the Ohio state legislature creating the

Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management in 1983 caused the agenda of the grassroots activists to be “drowned in the sea of more powerful centrist interests” (p. 416).

While working within the system through interactions with elites and elite institutions may allow social movements to “modify power relations,” very often these modifications are superficial and wither away in a short time (p. 417). The risk of cooptation and the other costs of engaging with elites on their terms must be seriously considered by social movements and activists, as movements are dependent on autonomy, radicalism, volunteerism, and militancy. When movements and activists agree to the code of conduct prescribed by elites, they risk losing “relative autonomy to create and maintain independent social and political spaces where critiques of status quo norms and policies may be nourished and articulated free from the conceptual constraints and boundaries of established thinking and existing policies” (p. 417). Cooptation also contributes to “movement sellouts” as well as “the diffusing, disarming, and channeling of oppositional forces” (p. 417). When social movements become moderate, tame, and nonconfrontational to the power structure, issues become depoliticized and substantial reforms are often delayed by minor concessions. The minor concessions granted by the elite institutions lead to movements and activists feeling a small sense of victory while the status quo is maintained, and ruling class hegemony and capital accumulation are preserved.

When elite institutions participate in a social movement, the ownership of the movement is shifted from the grassroots to the power structure. The primary

responsibility of elite participants (or owners) is salience control, or “shifting the motivational relevance that various issues or grievances have for movement activists” (p. 418). Elites are able to appease activists by maintaining the appearance that the concerns of the movement are being addressed – this causes a shift in the attention of activists from one issue to another, as it is assumed that the elite owners or professional participants are taking care of what has been brought to their attention (p. 418). The consequence of salience control is a “wane in priority for the challenging group” and “erosion in movement mobilization and support for truly alternative initiatives” (p. 418).

Oftentimes the force that drives social movements into the arms of elite institutions is desperation in regards to funding and resources. Dependence on elite resources, support, and recognition alters “the character of the organizations,” redirects priorities, and deradicalizes the grassroots base (p. 419). Social movements seeking elite recognition and resources become “greatly influenced by their dependence on external funding sources” (p. 419). This dependence balloons into a “need to satisfy multiple masters” as the elites sponsoring the movement may have “diverse interests” (p. 420). The goals of the movement and the activists within it become assimilated to the demands of the status quo, “making it hard for the movement to sustain its efforts” (p. 420). Once the social movement is rendered ineffective, starved, and incoherent, elites develop or sponsor “formal reform programs” that attract “movement leaders to staff” the “new institutional initiatives” (p. 420). This stage in the cooptation model (stage three), more than the other steps, heavily involves professionalization. The social movement is starved, alternative elite-sponsored organizations are developed, and moderated and

professionalized activists are employed by the elites, thus trapping them in the master-slave relationship of employer and employee. The activists become dependent on the elite not just for donations or recognition but for employment and individual sustenance. At this point, the movement is either completely absorbed by elite institutions, dismantled, or rendered ineffective and moderate to the point of harmlessness.

Professionalizing activism and culling influential figures from movements serves the status quo by effectively decapitating social movements – removing “seasoned, committed individuals from leadership roles” disrupts the “institutional capacity and memory” (p. 421) of the movement, rendering it rudderless and vulnerable. The case of the community mediation movement serves as an example of such decapitation and cooptation, as elites infiltrated the movement, appropriated its language and aesthetics, moderated and deradicalized its leadership and base, and transformed its “goals and values” (p. 422). Through routinization and rationalization (components of the professionalization process), elites establish a “shift in program goals” (p. 422). For the community mediation movement, this amounted to “the broader goals of community empowerment, relationship building, and democratization of justice” being “set aside in the name of greater efficiency,” efficiency being a dominant value in the neoliberal power structure, which emphasizes capital accumulation (p. 422). After cooptation by the elite, efficiency became “the established and accepted goal of mediation in many venues” (p. 422). The result of the cooptation by the status quo of the community mediation movement was a centrist, institutionalized mediation system that favored expedited case

turnaround times for the sake of efficiency – to the detriment of the work done by grassroots activists and the values of the community mediation movement.

The cooptation of the community mediation movement, as with the cooptation of social movements in general, was founded upon a ‘carrot-and-stick enticement of funding,’ a relationship between elites and the activists that resulted in a restructuring of the movement to the point that it resembled less of a challenge to the status quo and more of a wing of the elite criminal justice system it sought to replace. The elite recognize the importance of maintaining and nurturing dependence in social movements in order to prevent truly autonomous, radical groups from presenting tangible challenges to the status quo. Social movements are marketized and “professionalized in an effort to create a dependence on experts, and to create the perception among individuals and communities that they are incapable of addressing their own needs” (p. 424). This professionalization leads to a phenomenon sometimes called ‘pulling up the ladder.’ For the community mediation movement, this meant that, after elites had successfully infiltrated and taken control of the movement, “higher educational thresholds and more restrictive mediator certifications” (p. 425) were introduced, thus preventing radicals and grassroots activists, who often lacked such credentials, from ascending to positions of influence.

In short, progressive activist groups, such as the community mediation movement, risk cooptation, moderation, and destruction when they agree to the rules of engagement established by elites. While the need for resources and recognition is real, social movements that forsake their radicalism and autonomy for resources and recognition also

sacrifice their power, and in doing so assist in the maintenance of the dominance of the ruling class. This fact is of key importance in the application of resource mobilization theory to this project.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION THEORY

Though there are undoubtedly limitations in the application of resource mobilization theory to the study of social movements, one would be sorry to overlook it, especially in consideration of the attention it pays to the problem of social movement cooptation. Resource mobilization theory “emphasizes both societal support and constraint of social movement phenomena” (McCarthy and Zald 1977:1213). Thus, resource mobilization theory allows one to examine “the dependence of movements upon external support for success, and the tactics used by authorities to control or incorporate movements” (p. 1213).

Of interest here is the way in which resource mobilization theory deeply considers the roles of external forces on the development and management of social movements. This “emphasis upon the processes by which persons and institutions from outside” (p. 1215) the social movement’s “collectivity” makes resource mobilization theory tremendously valuable for the purposes of analyzing the pitfalls of cooptation, in particular those found in regards to financial stability and prolonged potency. The theory, as presented by McCarthy and Zald, discovers most of its strength when it is capable of making assertions related to the ways in which “grievances and discontent may be defined, created, and manipulated by issue entrepreneurs and organizations” (p. 1215).

The problems associated with “issue entrepreneurs” (and “issue organizations”) are worthy of concern, and their influence is of grave importance to individuals and organizations which seek to challenge the power structure.

The trap of professionalization is also of concern to adherents of resource mobilization theory, and the study of social movements and “collective behavior requires detailed attention to the selection of incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms or structures, and career benefits that lead to collective behavior” (p. 1216). There is, thus, “a sensitivity” in resource mobilization theory “to the importance of costs and rewards in explaining individual and organizational involvement in” a social movement (p. 1216). There is good reason for this sensitivity, for a major feature of social movement development and activity is the influence of “supporters – those who provide money, facilities, and even labor” but “have no commitment to the values that underlie specific movements” (p. 1216).

Therefore, there is a very real danger confronting social movements dependent on resources ‘from the outside’ – the fact that the sources of funding, volunteers, and other forms of support have no ‘skin in the game’ as far as the success or failure of the movements *actual* goals are concerned. What is happening here is the control and regulation of social movements as well as the use of social movements as vehicles for public relations. Social movements might attract the attention of external sources with hidden motives, and even in the case of participants, those doing some of the ‘on the ground’ work that is expected of the movement, one finds that it is not unusual for institutionalized or institutionally-sponsored campaigns to be operated fully by

professional activists, people with no real attachment to the goals of any social movement. Here, I make a distinction between those who ‘participate’ in social movements as conscience adherents or conscience constituents, people who do not directly benefit from the goals of the movement but feel *attached* to the movement, and those professional activists who hop from one campaign to another with little care for the specific goals or whether or not victory is achieved. “*Conscience adherents*,” according to McCarthy and Zald, “are individuals and groups who are part of the appropriate [social movement] but do not stand to benefit directly from [social movement organization] goal accomplishment” (p. 1222). “*Conscience constituents*,” on the other hand, “are direct supporters of a [social movement organization] who do not stand to benefit directly from its success goal accomplishment” (p. 1222).

A professional activist might not feel connection of the sort described above toward a social movement as either adherent or constituent, and there have been arguments made as to whether the distinguishing between the two is of importance, anyway. The professional activist is one who has determined that activism is an industry like any other, arguably closest to the sales and entertainment industries, and just as one might pick peaches in one harvest and strawberries the next, the professional activist might engage in movements associated with reproductive rights one season and the election of a member of city council the next. Resource mobilization theory helps one understand the distinction between the conscience adherents and constituents and the cynical figure of the professional activist. It has much to do with the reward systems associated with social movements and activism and the development of social movement

careers. The rigid, hierarchical, and oftentimes hypocritical character associated with work in professionalized activism, whether in labor unions, charities, or political campaigns, is of great importance to this project, and will be revisited in later pages.

A look at the structure of a hypothetical social movement workforce might clarify any complicated or underdeveloped ideas presented above. Of course, “there is the *cadre*, the individuals who are involved in the decision-making processes of” the social movement organization (p. 1227). The members of the cadre “may devote most of their time to matters of the organization or only part of their time” (p. 1227). Of particular interest for the purposes of this project is the professionalized portion of the social movement workforce, those participants “who receive compensation, however meager, and devote full time to the organization,” as well as “those who devote full time to the organization, but are not involved in central decision making processes” which can be called “professional staff” (p. 1227).

Social movement organizations are “confronted with the diverse problems of organizational maintenance,” and this involves both incentivizing continued participation in a movement and managing the flow of resources (p.1234). As organizations grow, there is an observed need to deal with specialization, which “is especially necessary in modern America, where the legal requirements of functioning necessitate experienced technicians at a number of points,” mostly revolving around “skills in lobbying, accounting, and fund raising,” and this “leads to professionalization” (p. 1234). When a social movement organization is firmly established, meaning it is in some sense recognized as a legal (institutional) entity, there is increased opportunity for the

development of social movement “careers,” and this is “simply because the opportunity for continuous employment is greater, regardless of the success or failure of any specific [social movement organization]” (p. 1235). Thus, the professional social movement sector is a sort of gateway leading directly to the wage and market system, the unavoidable consequence of institutionalization and the professionalization of activism.

Professionalization as a mechanism for the institutionalization of social movements is a primary concern for adherents of resource mobilization theory, as are the funding strategies behind professionalization. These “strategies affect not only careers but also the use of beneficiary constituents as workers” (p. 1235). According to McCarthy and Zald, there is a greater chance “that beneficiary constituents,” those who participate in and stand to benefit from the social movement, will be “recruited for strategic purposes rather than for” organizing in social movements which are predominantly funded by “isolated constituents” and ‘outside’ sources (p. 1235). This is in part due to the lack of financial stability which characterizes social movements which are “dependent upon isolated constituents” (p. 1228). What is meant here by ‘strategic purposes’ as opposed to ‘organizing’ is that there is a tendency in institutionalized social movements (that is to say movements which have been partially or entirely coopted by elite forces) to adhere to the whims of those ‘supporters’ (sources of funding) who have no actual interest in whether a movement succeeds in reaching its goals, but view the movement as a means for social control and/or ‘good PR.’

Thus, the movement surrenders energy which could be used in meaningful organizing, and instead uses it to appease sources of funding in the manufacturing of

‘professional victims’ – people who are the potential beneficiaries of a social movement’s victory (the poor; women; transgender youth; etc.) compensated in some form or other for being the vessels of propaganda. For example, McCarthy and Zald mention the “use of some poor people for strategic purposes by the Hunger Commission, a professional [social movement organization]” (p. 1235).

The resource mobilization model is, again, not without limitations, but is still extremely helpful in the construction of an analysis of social movements and their cooptation and regulation by elite institutions. The resource mobilization theory “emphasizes the interaction between resource availability, the preexisting organization of preference structures, and entrepreneurial attempts to meet preference demand” (p. 1236). One can plainly see from the language used by McCarthy and Zald that their conclusions, despite what radical potential they might have, view the conditions of social movements from at least a sort of market perspective if not a perspective completely engulfed by the principles and logic of the market. Still, “in spite of the limitations” of the resource mobilization theory, it does offer “important new insights into the understanding of social movement phenomena” (p. 1238).

MCDONALDIZATION

Ritzer’s (2019 [1993]) analysis of the ways in which society’s institutions have adopted the model of ‘rationalized’ industry, in particular that of fast food restaurants, provides a foundation for the examinations of the nonprofit industry and institutionalized activism presented in this project. Especially useful in terms of this project is Ritzer’s

investigation of the assembly line, which Ritzer calls “a nonhuman technology that permits maximum control over workers” (p. 54). Just as Gramsci (1971) critiqued Taylorism, the ‘scientific management’ of workers most famously (or infamously) associated with Henry Ford, Ritzer analyses the dehumanizing impact of rationalization and the mechanization of human labor. “Human beings, equipped with a wide array of skills and abilities,” Ritzer says of ‘rationalized’ labor, “are asked to perform a limited number of highly simplified tasks repeatedly. Instead of expressing their human abilities on the job, people are forced to deny their humanity and to work like human robots” (Ritzer 2019:55).

Of importance here is, above all, the emphasis which McDonaldization places on predictability. When applied to the world of activism and social movements, the McDonaldized nonprofits and NGOs are practically engineered from above to produce predictable results, which I claim are by design ineffective in challenging the power structure. Also of interest is the way in which the assembly line and McDonaldization establishes the conditions for the reproduction of production and the expansion of capitalist enterprise. According to Ritzer, “Mass production gave many people ready access to affordable automobiles, which in turn led to the immense expansion of the highway system and of the tourist industry that grew up alongside it” (p. 55). “Restaurants, hotels, campgrounds, gas stations, and the like arose and served as the precursors to many of the franchises that today lie at the heart of the McDonaldized society” (p. 55). While the predictability of McDonaldized institutions helps the bosses “manage both workers and customers and aids in anticipating needs for supplies and

materials, personnel requirements, income, and profits,” it “has a tendency to turn consumption (as well as work and even management) into a mind-numbing routine” (p. 101). Thus, what is produced is not only predictable, but also the way in which it is consumed by society – this rings true for activism as well, as I explore in more depth in chapter six.

Chapter Three: Marxist Theory

Summary

It will be of no surprise, perhaps, that in this analysis of the power structure and the ways in which it maintains its dominance, Marxist theory plays an integral role. The Marxist theories explored in this chapter allow for the establishment of a critique of non-Marxist theories related to social movements, especially those which disregard ideological domination and class struggle. I claim that it is to the detriment of sociological inquiry and the study of power that theorists dismiss Marx, and one should note as well that shaking off the influence of Marx is quite difficult, as the concepts he introduced to the sociological landscape have withstood the harsh scrutiny of time. The theories presented below are of undeniable value to this examination of the power structure and the ways in which it prevents the materialization of real challenges to the domination of the ruling class.

Besides Marx, attention is given in this chapter to Lenin, Gramsci, and Althusser, all of whom developed upon the foundation established by Marx in his analyses of power, the state, and ideology. The following examination of Marxist theory is by no means dogmatic or 'orthodox,' and its application to the overall project presented here is not without gaps. However, one cannot dismiss the contributions offered by the thinkers mentioned above, both in regards to an exploration of the power structure nor political philosophy in general.

Marx provides, with his concepts of base and superstructure, ideology, alienation, and class antagonism, the broad scope of analysis which Lenin used in his extraordinary examinations of the state apparatus and the revolutionary process. Gramsci built upon the works of Marx and Lenin in the construction (or at least in the outlining) of a philosophy of praxis which seeks to both understand as well as undermine the dominant ideology of the ruling class, which is maintained by cultural hegemony, another concept of great importance for this project. One must, if practicing this philosophy of praxis, put theory into action. Expanding upon the ideas of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci, Althusser's concepts of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and the reproduction of the conditions of production, wonderful contributions to the study of ideology, provide a sort of philosophical thread which connects the theories of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci in a coherent way. The analyses and assertions established in this project would likely not be possible, or would be in the very least flimsy and malnourished, without the ideas and essential works contributed by Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, and Althusser.

MARX

One cannot approach the topic of ideological domination without offering the attention that is due to Marx. Indeed, Marx laid the groundwork for the political and philosophical ideas which will be described and examined in detail in the pages to come. Of critical importance to this project are (in no particular order) Marx's descriptions of ideology, alienation (or estrangement), and base and superstructure. In order for one to construct a worthwhile analysis of the current state of the power structure and the methods it uses to maintain its control, one would be wise to consider the still pertinent

ideas delivered to the study of power by Marx. Here, I will draw on a few of Marx's works in order to build a frame within which the ideas described later will be applied as a complete theoretical image.

Ruling Ideas and Ideology

In *The German Ideology*, Marx states that "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production, so that the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are on the whole subject to it" (Marx 1976 [1846]: 67). Thus, the ruling class determines the ideas which "are in every epoch the ruling ideas," as "the class which is the ruling *material* force of society is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (p. 67). The relationship between these ruling ideas and the material forces which dominate society is of interest here, especially in regards to the forces of production and the resulting relations of production which emerge as the material manifestations of the dominant ideology – in this case, the ideology of the ruling class. "The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations," says Marx, "the dominant material relations grasped as ideas; hence of the relations which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance" (p. 67).

I argue that the dominant ideology which permeates society as a control mechanism can be viewed as being comprised of 'assumptions' which constitute a shared 'common sense,' and this has much to do, as Marx argued as well, with the ways in which people engage with their surroundings and each other. The material forces of

production establish an environment which is not unlike captivity, and, somewhat simplistically, one can compare the dominated classes of a given society as being similar to an animal born into captivity, fully unaware of what life is like beyond the confines of the enclosure. In this sense, consciousness of one's position and one's interests is outside of their reach – there seems to be no alternative to the present situation, that of captivity within an ideological enclosure constructed by the forces of production which, as I will examine later through the work of Althusser (1970), must continually reproduce itself.

My comparison of the dominated classes to a captive animal is made in total awareness of Marx's assertion that human beings "can be distinguished from animals by consciousness," and I am by no means making a claim which should be misconstrued to mean that the dominated classes are *unconscious*, or that they are bestial in any way (p. 37). Rather, I claim that the dominant ideology, that of the ruling class, fosters *false consciousness*, and in making this claim I am in agreement with not only Marx, but also Engels who, in an 1893 letter to Franz Mehring, said "Ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, it is true, but with a false consciousness. The real motive forces impelling him remain unknown to him; otherwise it simply would not be an ideological process" (Engels 1893: 1). I will go into more detail regarding the establishment of false consciousness later, in the section devoted to Gramsci.

Material Conditions of Production

When it is said that the way in which human beings "produce their means of subsistence," which "depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they

actually find in existence” and thus must “reproduce,” one should not take this to mean that humans are simply reproducing “physical existence,” but rather should view this production as “a definite form of activity” which amounts to an expression of their lives (Marx 1976 [1846]: 37). “What they are, therefore,” says Marx, “coincides with their production, both in *what* they produce and with *how* they produce” (p. 37). Thus, “what individuals are depends on the material conditions of their production” (p. 37). The enclosure built and maintained by the physical manifestations of ruling class ideology, therefore, is a deciding factor in how the dominated classes produce and what it is that they produce. This is a substantial point that must be made in the examination of the power structure, which cannot maintain itself on coercion or violence alone. The power structure must establish in the subjects of its domination perceptions and assumptions regarding their proper places and functions as a ruled class. In other words, the maintenance of the power structure depends on its workings being perceived as natural, and thus insurmountable. In consideration of activism, social movements, and challenges to the status quo, the power structure may 1) seek to maintain its perceived legitimacy by painting the challenge as illegitimate, or 2) maintain its perceived legitimacy by fostering an appearance of ‘openness’ to the challenge – and here one finds the processes associated with cooptation. Thus, even in terms of challenging the power structure, one is likely to find themselves still within the enclosure established by the forces of production.

“In the social production of their existence,” says Marx in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, people “inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in

the development of their material forces of production” (Marx 1999 [1859]: 4). These relations of production are of the utmost importance to the ruling class, as “The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society,” which acts as a base for the “legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness” (p. 4). Thus, the material conditions which define the means of production modify “the general process of social, political and intellectual life” (p. 4). According to Marx, “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” (p. 4).

Consciousness and the Production of Ideas

Marx points out that “consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production” (p. 4). Workers who socially produce goods do not socially reap the benefits of their labor. Their labor is translated into value for the capitalist, who harvests this value in the form of profits. If the boss paid the workers what they were truly *worth*, profit would not be possible. From this basic description of a primary contradiction of the power structure, one can formulate relatively simple outlines of numerous other contradictions, some of which, such as the proliferation of poverty amidst vast wealth, have been examined by Marx.

The contradictions which can be used to explain the lack of authentic consciousness in the dominated classes are likewise useful tools in the explanation of why challenges to the power structure fail. While the false consciousness which persists

in workers who fail to recognize the significance of their positions within the power structure, as well as the interest they share with the other exploited classes in getting rid of the power structure, might be of use in explaining how the capitalist system maintained itself in the past, one should look deeper into this situation in search of another contradiction. I speak here of the fact that individuals who have attained, at least to some degree, class consciousness or consciousness of their authentic interests still being incapable of or unwilling to effectively challenge the power structure.

The workers who are unaware of the mechanisms of the power structure, those who view the power structure as natural and without rival, are quite different from the activists, labor organizers, and social movement participants who have fully acknowledged the existence of the power structure, of exploitation, and of the ideological dominance of the ruling class. Regardless, neither groups have been capable of bringing the system down, the ‘conscious’ activists remaining nearly as ineffective as any ‘unconscious’ worker. Thus, there is much to consider as to why this is the case. Developing an understanding of this situation is paramount to what I hope to accomplish through this project.

“The production of ideas,” says Marx (*The German Ideology*) “of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse” of human beings (Marx 1976 [1846]: 42). The problem mentioned above, that of ‘conscious’ individuals remaining impotent as far as fundamentally challenging and changing the power structure is concerned, has much to do with “Conceiving, thinking,” and “material intercourse” remaining in appearance to be “the direct efflux of”

people's "material behavior" (p. 42). In other words, it has to do with the material conditions and the ways in which one interacts with them to establish the ways in which one thinks about themselves, other people, and the environment in which they live and produce in relation to the material forces of production. One may perceive the current system as unjust, or in need of adjustment, but the ways in which they think about how this adjustment or correction can take place still exists within the confines of the power structure.

The animal in the zoo enclosure might not like some element within the artificial habitat, but it still cannot imagine an alternative to captivity altogether. It may find that some adjustment is made by the zoo staff, a change in rocks or plants, but the animal remains in captivity. In a similar fashion, a 'conscious' activist might perceive injustice in the system, and might work toward the goal of addressing and solving this injustice. However, the tools they decide to use, the networks and outlets which are available to them for their work, exist within the system, and therefore, while there may be some acknowledgment of the injustice by elite institutions, the system which produced the injustice remains, and the activist remains within it.

Imagining another world, or at least another form of society structured according to values other than those of the market and outside of the umbrella of the dominant ideology, is increasingly difficult as capitalism continues to expand, and continues to infiltrate and dominate all forms of human interaction. After all, "It is not consciousness that determines life," says Marx, "but life that determines consciousness" (p. 42). Thus, so long as the material conditions which define human life are under the control of a

ruling class, one which maintains itself through a power structure, through the establishment of a dominant ideology, the consciousness of the ruled will be infected by the exploiters.

Alienation and the State

Challenging the power structure involves familiarizing oneself with the nature of the state (on this topic more detail will be provided in my examination of Lenin) as well as the ways in which the power structure alienates the ruled, or how it produces conditions which cause people to be enslaved by activity and not the other way around. For Marx, the state is “divorced from the real individual and collective interests” of people “and at the same time” it is “an illusory community,” which is based on “realities,” particularly “on the classes, already implied in the division of labour,” and of these classes one “dominates all the others” (p. 52). Marx describes the state as being an illusory concealment of class struggle, and an instrument of intervention and class domination, with “the general interest” serving as “the illusory form of common interests – in which the real struggles of the different classes are fought out among one another” (p. 52).

The state operates, I claim, in part as an apparatus for the alienation of the ruled classes, for the severance of the ruled from true comprehension of their surroundings. In agreement with Lenin (1999 [1918]), I assert that the state is an instrument of capital’s domination, “the product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms” and an “embodiment of ‘alienation’” (Lenin 1999 [1918]:6). Marx asserts with his theory of

alienation (or estrangement) that the “cleavage” which “exists between the particular and the common interest” (p. 53) causes the common interest, that which is shared between people, to become something ‘outside’ of the individual, and this renders the activities in which one engages involuntary and divided. As long as this ‘cleavage’ exists, says Marx, “man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him” (p. 53). Thus, because workers do not control their labor, it exists as something ‘outside’ of them – their productive energy, used alongside one another, is “an alien force existing outside them, the origin and goal of which they are ignorant” (p. 53).

Abolishing Domination

Controlling one’s labor, and thus controlling one’s productive energy and the material conditions in which one uses their productive energy, is imperative for authentic and liberated human existence. For this to be achieved, the ruled must become the rulers – the dominated class, the proletariat, must become the dominating class. Only in this way can the forces of production take on a different form, and along with these forces, the relations of production as well must adopt a different form. According to Marx, “every class which is aiming at domination” must “conquer political power in order to represent its interest” as “the general interest” – in other words, the proletariat must seize control of the state (p. 52-53). By accomplishing this, the proletariat can abolish “the old form of society in its entirety and domination in general,” and thus create a new, more humane and democratic social structure in place of the old (p. 53). Lenin, building off of Marx, aids in the formulation of both a deeper understanding of the workings of the

power structure as well as in the development of an outline as to what can be done in challenging the domination of the ruling class.

LENIN

A fine place to begin an exploration of Lenin's philosophical contributions to the study of politics and power is his description of capitalist (bourgeois) democracy as "democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich" (Lenin 1999 [1918]: 50-51). Lenin's criticisms of bourgeois democracy, which contain all of the venom characteristic of his work, show simultaneously a commitment to the development of authentic democracy as well as a deep understanding of the ways in which bourgeois democracy maintains an appearance of openness and commitment to the maximization of liberty while establishing barriers which prevent the majority of the public from engaging in any meaningful way with the political system. In particular, Lenin's analyses of the state, bourgeois democracy, and proletarian revolution are useful in the development of the assertions made here.

The State and Revolution

Lenin notes in *The State and Revolution*, in agreement with Marx, that "the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another" (p. 7). He continues, saying that the state "is the creation of 'order,' which legalizes and perpetuates" the oppression of one class by another "by moderating the conflict between classes" (p. 7). Worthy of note here is the notion that the state is to act as a moderating force between the warring classes, a perspective which has supporters on both the center

and right (including the far-right) of the political spectrum. Both the bourgeois centrists and the fascists find that the answer to class antagonism is not the liberation of the oppressed classes but the reconciliation of the classes (an impossibility) for the *good of the nation*, each class serving a function suited for its position on the socioeconomic ladder, positions which must remain unquestioned.

Lenin nicely describes the perspective of the bourgeois political caste (or at least a substantial portion of it) when he says that they believe “order means the reconciliation of classes, and not the oppression of one class by another” – in other words, they simply reject the idea (or pretend to not notice) that there is a ruling class and a class which is ruled and that these classes are engaged in conflict (p. 7). This is quite different from the political perspective which, held by conscious elites and conservatives, acknowledges the class conflict and holds firmly to the oppression of the ruled classes by means of state violence and hegemony. In fact, the political sentiment of the “petty-bourgeois politicians” described by Lenin is akin to that of the center-left political figures occupying positions in the U.S. Congress today who profess progressivism but seek only minor reforms in the power structure and not the complete liberation of the oppressed classes (p. 7). This is, of course, to be expected, as “the liberation of the oppressed class,” according to Lenin, “is impossible not only without a violent revolution, but also without the destruction of the apparatus of state power which was created by the ruling class” (p. 7). Thus, it is highly unlikely that one will hear elected officials in the bourgeois political system calling for the complete liberation of the oppressed.

The illusion of openness which presents bourgeois democracy as representative of ‘the people’ and welcoming of participation from the dominated classes is imperative for the power structure’s maintenance of ideological control. “If we look more closely into the machinery of capitalist democracy,” Lenin says, “we see restriction after restriction upon democracy” (p. 51). These restrictions are designed to “exclude and squeeze out the poor from politics, from active participation in democracy” (p. 51). I claim that the illusion of democracy which characterizes the bourgeois republics of the present is a key component of the power structure’s ability to remain ‘legitimate’ in the eyes of the public, thus allowing the ruling class to retain power. “A democratic republic is the best possible political shell for capitalism,” says Lenin, and “once capitalism has gained possession of this very best shell . . . it establishes its power so securely, so firmly, that no change of persons, institutions or parties in the bourgeois-democratic republic can shake it” (p. 10).

The State – a Lecture

In a lecture delivered in 1919 titled ‘The State,’ Lenin paraphrased Engels’ *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*: “every state in which private ownership of the land and means of production exists, in which capital dominates, however democratic it may be,” he said, “is a capitalist state, a machine used by the capitalist to keep the working class and the poor peasants in subjection” (Lenin 2002 [1919]:1). Lenin was sure to mention that the “forms of domination of the state” vary, as “capital manifests its power in one way where one form exists, and in another way where another form exists” (p. 1). However, “essentially the power is in the hands of capital,

whether there are voting qualifications or some other rights or not, or whether the republic is a democratic one or not” (p. 1). Lenin included in his lecture an important point regarding ‘democratic’ states: “the more democratic it is the cruder and more cynical is the rule of capitalism” (p. 1). As might be expected, the United States stand as the primary example of this crude and cynical rule. As Lenin put it, “nowhere . . . is the power of capital, the power of a handful of multimillionaires,” today billionaires, “over the whole of society, so crude and so openly corrupt as in America” (p. 1).

It is also necessary to acknowledge that it is not only the direct beneficiaries of the bourgeois state who “sincerely adhere to the old prejudices” of the power structure, but also “people who are simply under the sway of” bourgeois interpretations of freedom and democracy (p. 1). Thus, there is an ideological component which plays a substantial part in the rule of the elite, one which keeps even those who do not benefit from the workings of the power structure under its influence. There is a façade of openness and democracy in bourgeois republics behind which one finds the organs of the power structure operating for the preservation of elite rule and the oppression of the working and under classes. Capital “dominates the whole of society, and no democratic republic, no franchise can change its nature” (p. 1). Thus, one cannot change the system from within. ‘Reforms’ can be suggested, even introduced, but the power structure remains, unhindered by changes in the faces of those occupying political offices. “The power of capital is everything,” says Lenin, “while parliament and elections are marionettes, puppets...” (p. 1).

What Is To Be Done?

Given the emphasis on the labor movement present in this project, and especially in consideration of my assertion (which will be described in more detail later) that radical labor unions can be effective vehicles for class struggle and revolution, one might find it odd that I provide such space to Lenin, who critiqued the theory of spontaneity and vehemently rejected the notion that class consciousness can come from ‘within’ the working class. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin lashes out against arguments in opposition to the concept of the ‘conscious element,’ those enlightened revolutionaries who are to bring socialist consciousness to the working class, and decries what he believes to be bourgeois and opportunistic theories of revolution posited by both moderate social democrats as well as people he perceives to be adherents of ‘economism.’ ‘Economism’ can be summed up as a sort of derogatory political accusation made by Marxists against those who they perceive as being neglectful of the role of politics while engrossing themselves in matters related to the economy (wages, unionism, working conditions, etc.).

Of particular interest here is the concept of ‘trade union consciousness.’ According to Lenin, “the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.” (Lenin 1902:17-18). Thus, trade union consciousness does not, in Lenin’s view, transcend the ideological limits of bourgeois consciousness; the workers remain stuck in a position which leaves them unable to move beyond ‘economistic’

problems such as those found in the workplace (low wages, cruel bosses, etc.). Lenin's view is that socialists, intellectuals from 'outside' of the working class, must introduce class consciousness (or, more specifically, socialist consciousness) to the toiling masses.

The poor treatment and exploitation of workers does not deterministically lead to the emergence of socialist consciousness in the working class. Lenin quotes Kautsky: "socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other; each arises under different conditions" (p. 30). In other words, the working class, according to Lenin, is not capable of developing socialist consciousness on its own – this is an opinion which contrasted Lenin from the 'left' communists of his time, who believed in a sort of 'organic enlightenment' which could develop in the working class and lay the ideological foundation for revolution. I will revisit this concept momentarily.

In short, Lenin's primary assertion in *What is to be Done?* is that a vanguard party, a cadre of professional revolutionaries, is necessary for the development of socialist consciousness in the working class, and that this vanguard must come from outside of the working class. "Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers *only from without*," says Lenin, "that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers" (p. 48). I claim that one can disagree with Lenin's assertion that class consciousness must come from 'outside' of the working class while still putting into practice his views pertaining to the 'political education' of the working class.

While Lenin claims that “trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie,” I suggest that this is a claim made directly at what today is called business unionism, the conservative unionism which in the United States is found in the form of the dominant labor federation, the American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) (p. 23). After all, Lenin himself uses the term “bourgeois trade-unionism” – thus, there is the suggestion of another kind of unionism, unionism which is not bourgeois but radical, militant, and class conscious (p. 23). While it is true, perhaps undeniably so, that the political education of the working class is necessary for the rise of the proletariat and the establishment of a workers’ government, I claim that Lenin’s assertion that this education must come from ‘outside’ of the working class underestimates the ability of the working class to develop its own organic intellectualism - consciousness of the necessity of revolution from *within* the proletariat. It is here that I now turn to Gramsci in order to further develop this assertion and others.

GRAMSCI

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Antonio Gramsci (1971 [1929-1935]) both in terms of his influence on this project as well as in regards to his contributions to the fields of political theory and philosophy in general. Specifically, Gramsci’s expansion of Marxist thought is of value here, although his influence can be found beyond the confines of Marxism, and this is a clear indication of the weight of his ideas. One can discover Gramsci’s name even on the lips of reactionaries who, for the most part, wish to further the conspiracy of ‘cultural Marxism’ (a term borrowed from the Nazis’ ‘cultural

Bolshevism’). In short, one cannot seriously approach the study of power, politics, and society without at the very least acknowledging that Gramsci lived, and thus his ideas are granted a substantial place in this analysis.

A Brief Examination of Gramsci’s Ideas

The extensiveness and depth of Gramsci’s examinations makes it quite difficult to summarize his work. This is also due, it must be said, to the fact that much of Gramsci’s thought entered the world in the written form while he was incarcerated by the fascist government of Mussolini. Thus, there are moments when his writing seems incomplete or fragmented. Regardless, his *Prison Notebooks* have remained a dominant force in the arena of political and philosophical discourse, and so one would be sorry to ignore what Gramsci has to say.

Hegemony

It is arguably best to begin with a broad description of what intrigued and vexed Gramsci, which can perhaps be condensed (unjustly, to be sure) to the subject of power – what it is, how it is obtained, and how it is held. Before Gramsci, Marx emphasized the ruling class’s use of coercion and consent in the extraction of profits from workers, and Gramsci built upon the work of Marx in the development of the concept of hegemony. Broadly speaking, hegemony “refers to how ruling classes in a society gain, keep, and manage their power” (Fusaro, Xidias, and Fabry 2017:11). This largely has to do with obtaining the ‘consent’ of the ruled.

Acquiring consent, Gramsci says in agreement with Marx, involves “manipulating people into believing that the existing system is natural and beneficial” (p. 11). The ruling class manufactures a dominant ideology which keeps workers in a position in which they believe the current system is as it should be - in other words, the dominant ideology keeps the dominated classes unaware of, or even avoidant of, alternative social arrangements. What is key here for one to understand is that the goal of the ruling class is to establish a sense of ‘naturalness’ to be attributed to the power structure in the minds of the dominated classes. If one perceives the power structure as ‘natural,’ the idea of removing the structure becomes impossible - to overthrow that which is natural is an insurmountable task.

The Integral State

Another concept introduced by Gramsci is the ‘integral state,’ which is based on the notion that “the ruling classes rely on a combination of social institutions to maintain their power and control” (p. 12). Gramsci suggests that the evolution of the state into a “conception of the world,” that is, into “ways of thinking and acting,” depends on the state being capable of “continuous reorganization and development” (Gramsci 1971:267). The concept of the ‘integral state’ is not to be taken as “a government technically understood,” but as a formation born from the “necessary passage” of the three “indissoluble” elements of “historico-political development” from “one to the other”: “religion (or ‘active’ conception of the world), State, party” (p. 266-67).

Gramsci turns his attention in ‘State and Parties’ (a portion of his *Prison Notebooks*) to the “function of hegemony or political leadership exercised by parties” (p. 267). “If the State represents the coercive and punitive force of juridical regulation of a country,” he says, “the parties – representing the spontaneous adhesion of an elite to such a regulation,” to a “type of collective society to which the entire mass must be educated,” are required to show “that they have assimilated as principles of moral conduct those rules which in the State are legal obligations” (p. 267). Thus, there is an automatic restriction upon parties in their relationships with the state which demands adherence to the ‘rules.’ Even in nations which have political parties espousing revolutionary rhetoric, the ‘radical’ parties adhere to a ‘code of conduct’ expected of them by the power structure – they ‘play by the rules’ of the ruling class. I provide a deeper analysis of this political situation in the sixth chapter.

The state, says Gramsci, “operates according to a plan, urges, incites, solicits, and ‘punishes’” (p. 247). The state is “the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (p. 244). Even in republics, states which are considered ‘democratic,’ the structure offers only the illusion of democracy through mass participation (elections), the ‘separate’ powers within the state acting as “organs of political hegemony” (p. 246).

War of Maneuver, War of Position

Gramsci was concerned not only with how the ruling class acquires and maintains power: he was also interested in the ways in which the dominance of the ruling class can be challenged. With the concepts of the war of maneuver and the war of position, Gramsci outlines a distinction between quick, violent revolutionary action (maneuver) and the continual struggle to fundamentally change society's beliefs and values (position). Gramsci contrasts Russia, where "the State was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous" and "the West," where "there was a proper relation between State and civil society" (Gramsci 1971:238).

Russia, according to Gramsci, was more suitable for the war of maneuver, while the dominance of the capitalist ruling class in the West could best be challenged by a war of position. Gramsci recalls Trotsky's presentation at the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern, "when he made a comparison between the Eastern and Western fronts" (p. 236). The Eastern front fell "at once," but "unprecedented struggles" emerged shortly thereafter (p. 236). The West, on the other hand, would require "the struggles" to "take place 'beforehand'" (p. 236). That is, in the West, the war of position would have to be fought before the war of maneuver. In the West, where "armies [can] rapidly accumulate endless quantities of ammunitions, and where social structures [are] of themselves still capable of becoming heavily-armed fortifications," the war of position is "the only form possible" (p. 237).

Generally speaking, in terms of which approach is the better choice overall, Gramsci argued that, though “a war of maneuver offers the chance to quickly overthrow a government, it would not necessarily change cultural beliefs,” and therefore, because people still “believe that the existing society is the best possible option,” they might view the revolution as illegitimate (Fusaro, Xidias, and Fabry 2017:37). Thus, Gramsci suggested that the war of position is the better of the two ‘wars’ to be waged by revolutionaries, and emphasized that “a successful revolution also involves a cultural revolution: society must adopt new morals and values so that when the existing order is overthrown, it will be prepared to set up a new social order” (p. 37). Only through the war of position will the revolutionary proletariat be truly capable of establishing itself as the new dominant class, as bourgeois hegemony is found at the levels of political society (the realm of legal and political institutions) as well as civil society (the realm of ‘private’ life).

Ideology

Gramsci was deeply concerned with ideology, and he paid close attention to the ways in which both politics and culture influence society. Ideologies, says Gramsci, “[organize]’ human masses, and create the terrain on which [people] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc.” (Gramsci 1971:377). Like Lenin, Gramsci was also keenly aware that economic conditions “do not automatically provoke people to challenge the social order in which they live” (Fusaro, Xidias, and Fabry 2017:27). While economic problems can “lead to the potential for a revolution,” Gramsci suggested that revolutionaries must take up the task of “educating working-class people” while

“encouraging them to actively resist” (p. 27). Gramsci expanded Marxist thought in many important ways, namely in regards to the base and superstructure. Gramsci “broke away from the traditional argument that the base determined the superstructure” by arguing that “a society’s superstructure – its values and beliefs – could influence its base” (p. 31). Thus, Gramsci acknowledged that, while the ‘base,’ containing the economic framework of society upon which the ‘superstructure’ is built, does have an impact on the ways in which people think, behave, and perceive their positions within society, the ideological apparatuses which exist in the superstructure have a considerable impact on thought, behavior, and perception as well, and even impact the function of the base.

Gramsci viewed the struggle against the ruling class’s domination of society as having two fronts: the arena of politics and the arena of civil society. One cannot fall into the trap of ‘economism,’ which was as sharply criticized by Gramsci as it was by Lenin, by considering the arena of ‘the base’ as the only battlefield for the war against ruling class hegemony. Gramsci insists that ‘organic intellectuals’ of the working class have an imperative role to play in “increasing awareness” in “the working class of” the processes by which the ruling class maintains control of society (Berberoglu 2005:58). In doing so, the proletarian organic intellectuals work towards “the development of working-class consciousness,” helping to “expand the emerging class struggle from the economic and social spheres into the sphere of politics and ideology” (p. 58). Thus, workers can counter “the ideological hegemony of the capitalist class through the active participation” in “their own collective organizations, the class-conscious organs of workers’ power,” namely “militant trade unions, workers’ political parties, and so forth” (p. 58).

It is of crucial importance, according to Gramsci, that the working class establish counter-hegemonic institutions, designed to challenge the institutions of the ruling class which dominate society, through engagement in these ‘class-conscious organs of workers’ power.’ Putting theory into action, according to Gramsci, meant the application of what he called a ‘philosophy of praxis.’ According to Gramsci, the philosophy of praxis “is precisely in opposition to Ideology” (Gramsci 1971:376). “‘Ideology’ itself must be [analyzed] historically,” he states, “in the terms of the philosophy of praxis, as a superstructure” (p. 376).

The Philosophy of Praxis and Organic Intellectuals

At the core of Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis is the assertion “of the historicity and transience of ideologies on the grounds that ideologies are expressions of the structure and are modified by modifications of the structure” (p. 442). The philosophy of praxis also has much to do with the acknowledgement of hegemony, as “Hegemony [realized] means the real critique of a philosophy, its real dialectic” (p. 381). The philosophy of praxis is one which requires its practitioners to put thought into action - it is the application of theory (specifically Marxism) to the realm of physical engagement with the power structure. Thus, the philosophy of praxis has “two tasks to perform: to combat modern ideologies in their most refined form, in order to be able to constitute its own group of independent intellectuals,” and “to educate the popular masses” (p. 392).

The development of ‘independent’ or ‘organic’ intellectuals of the working class is imperative for the education of the proletariat and the nurturing of class consciousness

in the toiling masses. One need not be of the bourgeois class to be an ‘intellectual’: “All [people] are intellectuals,” says Gramsci, “but not all [people] have in society the function of intellectuals” (p. 9). Working class organic intellectuals are admittedly not a ‘traditional category’ of intellectual, and Gramsci notes that “the mass of the peasantry, although it performs an essential function in the world of production, does not elaborate its own ‘organic intellectuals,” but “it is from the peasantry that other social groups draw many of their intellectuals and a high proportion of traditional intellectuals are of peasant origin” (p. 6). Thus, it can be asserted that, since intellectuals of worker or peasant origin are capable of transcending their own class in order to become the intellectuals of another class, it is possible for organic intellectuals of the working class to remain *in the working class*, making the ‘outside’ intellectuals, the professional revolutionaries viewed by Lenin as necessary in the education of the proletariat, obsolete. Indeed, Gramsci views “technical education,” that which is “closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level,” and not bourgeois education, as “the basis of the new type of intellectual” (p. 9).

The explorations found in the pages of Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* provide one with incredible insights into sociology, psychology, politics, and philosophy. One seldom stumbles across a thinker with such a remarkable ability to weave an ocean of ideas and concepts into coherent assertions, and it is worth noting that the assertions found in *The Prison Notebooks* have not disappeared, but have in fact grown in pertinence as time has passed. The profound contributions of Gramsci achieved new significance and expansion in the work of Althusser (1970), in particular his analyses of ideological state apparatuses

(ISAs) and the reproduction of the means of production, which I examine in the following section.

ALTHUSSER

Drawing on the works of Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci, Althusser offers a perspective of the power structure which examines not only the social consequences of the institutions involved but also the complex relationships which exist between the coercive repressive apparatus of the state and the ideological state apparatuses (schools, churches, mass media, etc.) which operate in the capitalist superstructure. Althusser also posits that it is necessary for the “social formation” to “reproduce the conditions of production” in order to exist (Althusser 1970:1). According to Althusser, “every social formation must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces,” and specifically, it must reproduce “the productive forces” as well as “the existing relations of production” (p. 1). This has much to do with the reproduction of labor power, which is “achieved more and more outside of production: by the capitalist education system, and by other instances and institutions” (p. 3). Thus, Althusser is deeply concerned with the ways in which ideology plays a role in the preservation of production and the relationships which can be found within production.

Reproduction of the Means of Production

Althusser asserts that “no production is possible which does not allow for the reproduction of the material conditions of production: the reproduction of the means of production” (p. 2). He states that “it is essential to foresee what is needed to replace what

has been used up or worn out in production,” be it “raw material,” “fixed installations,” or “instruments of production” (p. 2). The labor power of the workers must also be reproduced for the continued existence of the capitalist system, as it is that which “distinguishes the productive forces from the means of production” (p. 2). Unlike the reproduction of raw material or machinery, the reproduction of labor power “takes place essentially outside the firm” (p. 2). That is, the reproduction of labor power is achieved not in the base, but in the superstructure.

Althusser states that the reproduction of labor power “is ensured by giving labour power the material means with which to reproduce itself: wages” (p. 3). Wages “represents only that part of the value produced by the expenditure of labour power which is indispensable for its reproduction,” says Althusser, allowing the worker “to pay for housing, food and clothing,” in short, to purchase that which enables “the wage earner to present himself again at the factory gate the next day – and every further day God grants him” (p. 3). However, the wages garnered by the worker are used beyond the mere purchase of goods which allow for continued presence in the factory: they are also used “for raising and educating the children in whom the proletariat reproduces himself” (p. 3). Thus, the worker toils for wages which are used to replenish the worker for further exploitation while also providing the capitalist system with assured labor for future use in the form of the children of the proletariat.

Althusser emphasizes the role of the capitalist education system in the reproduction of the means of production (and the reproduction of the relations therein). According to Althusser, children learn in school “a number of techniques, and a number

of other things as well, including elements . . . of ‘scientific’ or ‘literary culture,’ which are directly useful in the different jobs in production” (p. 3). In other words, says Althusser, “they learn know-how” (p. 3). It is important to note that children in the capitalist education system “also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour,” or “the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job [he or she] is ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience,” which Althusser asserts “actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination” (p. 3-4).

Thus, “the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order,” in other words, “a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression” (p. 4). Just as Marx and Gramsci emphasized that a power structure cannot rely on coercion alone for the maintenance of ruling class domination, the reproduction of the means and relations of production depends on the adherence of the working class to the ideology of the ruling class. To fully understand the processes involved here, one must examine more closely the economic infrastructure (base) and the superstructure established upon it which constitute capitalist society.

Althusser famously used the topographical metaphor of ‘floors’ built upon the infrastructure to illustrate his points regarding “the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reciprocal action of the superstructure and base” (p. 5). According

to Althusser, “the structure of every society” contains “a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two ‘floors’ of the superstructure” (p. 5). Althusser analyzes this superstructure from “the point of view of reproduction,” and asserts that “it is not possible to pose” his “questions (and therefore to answer them) *except from the point of view of reproduction*” (p. 6). Turning his attention to the ‘State Apparatus,’ Althusser expands Marxist analyses of “the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie,” and provides further insights into the workings of “the Repressive State Apparatus” (p. 7). “The whole of political class struggle,” says Althusser, “revolves around the State” (p.7). Thus, it is imperative to “distinguish between State power (conservation of State power or seizure of State power), the objective of the political class struggle on the one hand, and the State Apparatus on the other” (p. 7).

The State and Ideological State Apparatuses

In agreement with Marxist theory, Althusser states that “the state is the repressive state apparatus” and “the proletariat must seize state power in order to destroy the existing bourgeois state apparatus” and “replace it with a quite different, proletarian, state apparatus,” thus setting “in motion a radical process, that of the destruction of the state (the end of state power, the end of every state apparatus)” (p. 8). Althusser sought to “advance the theory of the State,” and did so by considering the distinction “between *state power* and *state apparatus*” as well as that between the repressive state apparatus and what he calls ‘ideological state apparatuses’ (p. 8).

Ideological State Apparatuses “must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus,” Althusser warns, as the Repressive State Apparatus, which “contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc.” (p. 9), is quite different from Ideological State Apparatuses, although it functions in tandem with them. Althusser calls “Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions” (p. 9). Among the ‘certain number of realities,’ says Althusser, are institutions of religion, education, the family, the legal, politics, trade unions, communications (“press, radio and television, etc.”) and culture (“literature, the arts, sports, etc.”) (p. 9). While “it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses,” the unity of which “is not immediately visible” (p. 9). Of importance here is the ways in which the state apparatuses (both the repressive and the ideological) function.

According to Althusser, the primary distinction between the Ideological State Apparatuses and the Repressive State Apparatus is that “the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence,’ whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function ‘by ideology’*” (p. 10). However, Althusser notes that this distinction is in need of clarification, as both the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses function by using both violence and ideology. Thus, the clear distinction is that “the (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly” by violence (repression) and “secondarily by ideology,” while “the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*” and secondarily by

violence (repression) (p. 10). The ruling class has both at its disposal, and uses both to advance and preserve its domination, as “*no class can hold State power over a long period of time without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*” (p. 10). Althusser recalls Lenin’s “anguished concern to revolutionize the educational Ideological State Apparatus (among others)” to introduce the notion that “the Ideological State Apparatuses may be not only the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle,” as “the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there” (p. 11). The ruling class, says Althusser, “cannot lay down the law in the [Ideological State Apparatuses] as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus” (p. 11). Thus, as Gramsci suggested, the ideological battlefields of the class struggle are a priority for the revolutionary proletariat.

The Reproduction of the Relations of Production

Just as the capitalist power structure must continually reproduce the means of production to continue its existence, so too is it necessary for it to reproduce the relations of production – the social conditions which establish the domination of the ruling class on an ideological terrain. This reproduction is, “for the most part,” accomplished “by the exercise of State power in the State Apparatuses, on the one hand the (Repressive) State Apparatus, on the other the Ideological State Apparatuses” (p. 11). According to Althusser, “the State apparatus secures by repression (from the most brutal physical force, via mere administrative commands and interdictions, to open and tacit censorship) the political conditions for the action of the Ideological State Apparatuses” (p. 12). “In fact,” says Althusser, “it is the latter which largely secure the reproduction specifically of

the relations of production, behind a 'shield' provided by the repressive State apparatus" (p. 12). Althusser suggests that the dominant Ideological State Apparatus, that which replaced the Church (the old dominant Ideological Apparatus), "is the educational apparatus" (p. 14).

Althusser, begging "the pardon of those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find in the history and learning they 'teach' against ideology," states that it is largely the Ideological State Apparatus of capitalist education that reproduces the "relations of exploited to exploiters and exploiters to exploited" (p. 15). This has to do with the cultural presentation of the school "as a neutral environment purged of ideology," though it is the site of "the massive inculcation of the ideology of the ruling class," where "children in the capitalist social formation" are for "eight hours a day for five or six days out of seven" indoctrinated and trained for participation in the power structure (p. 15). Thus, the role of the capitalist education system is, in short, to promote the ideology of the ruling class on the exploiters and exploited 'of tomorrow' – the children. This process ensures the reproduction of the relations of production, thereby securing the dominant position held by the ruling class and the subjugation of the working and under classes. In short, "reproduction of the relations of production can therefore only be a class undertaking. It is realized through a class struggle which counterposes the ruling class and the exploited class" (p. 28-29). One must, to better understand these circumstances, turn once again to ideology.

Ideology

Ideology, according to Althusser, can be defined as “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a [person] or social group” (p. 16). The ideology of the ruling class is ‘realized’ in its Ideological State Apparatuses, but ideology itself “comes from elsewhere” (p. 29). Ideology, says Althusser, is without history: “it is endowed with a structure and a functioning such as to make it a non-historical reality” (p. 17). Ideology is ‘eternal,’ meaning “omnipresent in its immutable form throughout history” (p. 18). From the perspective that ideology is synonymous with ‘world outlook,’ one might suggest, as Althusser does, that “Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (p. 18). In other words, ‘world outlooks’ (ideologies) “constitute an illusion” while making “allusion to reality” (p. 18).

It must be made clear that “all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production . . . but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them” (p. 19). Ideology, it must also be said, is not something which is metaphysical, but something which exists in the material, as it “always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices” (p. 20). Here, one finds the true importance of Ideological State Apparatuses in the power structure: “The ideology of the ruling class does not become the ruling ideology by the grace of God, not even by virtue of State power alone. It is by the installation of the [Ideological State Apparatuses] in which this ideology is realized and realizes itself that it becomes the ruling ideology” (p. 29). Thus, ideologies and

Ideological State Apparatuses are necessarily elements of class struggle, as “ideologies are not ‘born’ in the [Ideological State Apparatuses] but from the social classes at grips in the class struggle: from their conditions of existence, their practices, their experience of the struggle, etc.” (p. 30).

Althusser’s work brings new life to Marxist theory, and the ideas presented by Althusser in his examinations of the base and superstructure and ruling class ideological domination have retained relevance and continue to do so today. Like Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci, Althusser provides insights into the workings of the power structure which travel far beyond conventional theories of power and struggle. It is difficult to summarize Althusser’s ideas, just as it is difficult to summarize those of the other thinkers mentioned above. However, simply put, Althusser’s gift to readers of his work is a clearer lens through which to view society and the world.

THE ESSENCE OF MARXIST THEORY

While in no way do I wish to demean or degrade the imperative work which has been produced by non-Marxist theorists, some of which has made an appearance in this project and has aided in the articulation of the ideas presented here, I feel it is necessary to defend the use of Marxist theory in the study of human life and to promote it as the superior philosophical viewpoint in the field of sociology. “Everything that is of real importance in sociology,” says Gramsci, “is nothing other than political science” (Gramsci 1971:243). Marxism allows one to understand the social as the political, and this, arguably, makes it exceptional in the social sciences.

What distinguishes Marxism from other ‘schools of thought’ is that it provides a *perspective* – a standing point from which one is able to not only view the world but understand it, critique it, and, most importantly, to change it. There is, of course, much debate pertaining to the ‘mistakes’ of Marxism, especially in consideration of the experiments of twentieth-century Socialism, and there is no shortage of ‘pop culture intellectuals’ espousing a disdain for Marx and Marxism, those who demand the hasty tossing of both into the ‘dustbin of history’ (here, I purposefully use Trotsky’s words which were hurled at the Mensheviks at the 1917 All-Russian Congress of Soviets). I argue that the value of Marxist theory is beyond doubt, as it is uniquely transcendent of time, applicable all over the world in all situations, and succeeds where other theories fail both in its adaptability and in its comprehensibility. I revisit the comparison between Marxist and non-Marxist theories, especially as they are used in this project, in chapter six. I now move on to the historical case study of this project: the American labor movement.

Chapter Four: The Early American Labor Movement (1905 – 1955)

Summary

The American labor movement, as an historical case study, illustrates effectively the following claims which constitute the negative stance of this project (the positive stance is discussed at length in the seventh chapter): 1) Class struggle is inherent to the power structure; 2) The liberation of the oppressed class(es) depends on effective challenges to the power structure; 3) The power structure has adapted to such challenges by using cooptation/institutionalization of ‘dissent’; 4) A movement cannot effectively challenge the power structure by operating according to the rules established by the power structure.

I begin this analysis of the labor movement in the United States with the year 1905 (although I provide some background from the years before), and the decision to begin with 1905 is quite purposeful: it is the year that the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) was founded. While the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the dominant labor federation in the U.S. since the late nineteenth century, has embraced with few exceptions a conservative, reconciliatory philosophy in its approach to labor activism, the IWW, since its founding in Chicago, has unabashedly declared that “The working class and the employing class have nothing in common,” and “The army of production must be organized, not only for everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown.” The aim of the Wobblies (IWW members), as stated along with the lines above in the preamble to the Industrial Workers of the

World constitution, is the formation of “the structure of a new society within the shell of the old” (Chicago, July 7, 1905). Thus, one can see quite plainly that American labor unions hardly agree on the overall goal of the labor movement – this disagreement has existed for some time, since the earliest days of the movement, as a matter of fact.

I claim that the model of the IWW (and later the militant unions of the CIO), open to all workers regardless of race, gender, religion, nationality, or level of skill in a craft, and shamelessly militant, radical, and anti-capitalist, is the blueprint of an effective labor organization. The model presented by the conservative unions under the AFL umbrella, I argue, are toothless, moderate, and boss-friendly – that is to say completely unconscious of the class struggle (or conscious of the class struggle and still sympathetic to the ruling class, which is even worse). In regards to the focus of this project, the cooptation of challenges to the power structure, I posit that the conservative unionism of the AFL helped the ruling class discredit and crush the radical unionism of the IWW and other class-conscious industrial unions, thus rendering the American labor movement neutered, meek, and hopelessly connected to the neoliberal political establishment.

In this chapter, I examine the labor movement in the United States from the early 1900s to the merging of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1955, an event which I claim was detrimental to the labor movement and the American working class in general. While I am, for the sake of readability and coherence, forced to omit vast segments of American labor history in the following pages, I attempt through this exploration of the labor movement to ‘connect the dots’ – to show a pattern through history which concretely establishes the essential

position of this project: only militant, class-conscious movements, especially in labor, can effectively challenge the power structure, and for this reason, it was necessary for the ruling class, finding common cause with conservative business unions, to coopt the labor movement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Developing a comprehensive timeline of the American labor movement is a task which, because of the staggering number of incidents of historical significance involved, each seeming to happen one after another, is both worthwhile and overwhelming. It is of interest, especially in consideration of the consecutive bursts consequential tenacity on the part of the American working class in the course of its history, that Engels (1979 [1887]) wrote in the preface to the American edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*: “In February 1885, American public opinion was almost unanimous on this one point; that there was no working class, in the European sense of the word, in America” (Engels 1979:283). There is hence a question one must pose concerning not only class consciousness in the usual Marxist sense, but also of *consciousness of the existence of class*. If Engels was not being simplistic or exaggeratory in his preface, the absence of consciousness of the existence of class in the American public is of, I claim, monumental consequence.

“To write about the working class is to discuss disparate individuals,” Montgomery (1995 [1987]) says in the introduction to his seminal work on the American labor movement, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, the entirety of which assisted

profoundly in the construction of this project (Montgomery 1995:1). “Moreover,” he continues, “socially prescribed differences in gender, race, religion, and nationality have influenced various workers’ behavior in powerfully different ways” (p. 1). Thus, in studying the American working class and labor movement, one must “be attuned to many different voices, sometimes in harmony, but often in conflict with one another” (p. 1). This conflict between the different voices of the American working class is best understood, I claim, in the context of the American labor movement’s two dominant factions, which are discussed in more detail below: the craft unionists and the industrial unionists.

What is especially notable about Montgomery’s thorough and fascinating exploration of the American labor movement from 1865 to 1925 is his emphasis on the everyday experiences of working people. “The human relationships structured by commodity production in large collective enterprises devoted to private gain generated bondings and antagonisms that were, in one form or another, the daily experience of everyone involved” (p. 1). These daily experiences provided workers with an education unique to their class, for they “taught many workers that although others might wield social influence as individuals, workers’ only hope of securing what they wanted in life was through concerted action” (p. 2). The individualism and philosophy of self-maximization often attributed to the American populace amounts to a terrible hoax as far as the American working class is concerned. According to Montgomery, “all attachments” of the American working class “were rooted in the shared presumption that individualism was appropriate only for the prosperous and wellborn” (p. 2). Thus, there is

a consciousness of one's position, how one relates to others in the same position, and how one relates to those in different positions, which emerges from daily experience.

“Nevertheless,” says Montgomery, “to organize concerted action and to fashion a sense of social goals shared by all workers required some human agency” (p. 2). “Class consciousness was more than the unmediated product of daily experience,” he continues, “It was also a project” (p. 2). Organizers and activists of the working class had to actively and passionately *build* the workers' movement, and did so by fostering “a sense of unity and purposiveness among their fellow workers” (p. 2). The period analyzed by Montgomery, “between the abolition of chattel slavery and the closing down of mass immigration from Europe and Asia,” a timespan which involved “changing structures of economic and political power” and “the evolution of nineteenth-century competitive capitalism into twentieth-century imperialism,” is of crucial importance in the development of the American labor movement (p. 2).

Also of importance is Montgomery's claim that, in examining “less well-known chapters in American workers' experience, such as the struggles of textile and garment workers before 1900 and of railroad, mining, and electrical workers after that time,” he concludes that anti-capitalist influences in American society did not, as it is often claimed, come from intellectuals, but on the contrary, emerged from the organic experiences of workers who discovered mutualism as a preferable alternative to individualism (p. 3-4). Thus, there was arguably an organic growth of an American working class perspective which was born in working class experience. The mutualism of

the American workers “was the ethical seedbed for both the efforts of some workers to reform capitalism and the proposals of others to overthrow it” (p. 4).

II. BEGINNING

‘There is power in a band of working folk’ – “There is Power in a Union”, Joe Hill

The period following the American Civil War was one of precariousness for the American working class. “In the two decades following the Civil War,” says Montgomery, “trade-union activists endeavored simultaneously to organize members of their own crafts in defense of their wages and work rules and to act as the voice of the working class as a whole” (p. 4). The “deflationary crisis between 1873 and 1897” produced “endemic conflict” between workers and employers “over wages and costs of production” (p. 4). Despite the limited success enjoyed by workers’ efforts to unite in the midst of this conflict, “their workplace, craft, and neighborhood solidarities presented formidable obstacles to business’s goals and prompted industrialists to attempt reforms of both work relations and political life that might strengthen their hand” (p. 4-5).

With the emergence of the twentieth century came the ‘scientific management’ pioneered by Frederick W. Taylor, which quickly “gained widespread popularity among business executives” with its blending of “the ideals of ‘rationalization,’ ‘organization,’ ‘efficiency,’ and ‘science in the service of democracy’” (p. 5). The dawn of the new century also changed “the role of the state,” which in “the earlier age of laissez-faire” served the function of “repressing disorder and guaranteeing owners the use of their property without interference from protesting workers” (p. 5). “In the new age of

rationalized and consolidated enterprise,” the state retained “that repressive task,” but it was “supplemented by the need to devise solutions” (p. 5). This undertaking by the state “politicized industrial conflict in the minds of all participants” (p. 5).

While this was all happening, the American labor movement transformed as well. Union membership in the United States quadrupled between 1897 and 1903, and “the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for the first time secured its place as the ‘House of Labor’” (p. 5). The AFL was not, however, viewed by all working people as the appropriate ‘voice’ for the working class. Other unions “continued to function independent of the AFL after 1900, and the Industrial Workers of the World openly challenged its right to speak for America’s workers” (p. 5-6). Regardless, the size and influence of the AFL led to its being recognized by “most union activists” as “the arbiter of what was or was not ‘bona fide’ trade unionism” (p. 6). The political philosophies of working people in the United States at the time were, however, anything but monotonous. For every disciple of Samuel Gompers’ conservative ‘pure and simple unionism’ one could find a socialist, syndicalist, or anarchist. Although a majority of the officials in the “many mansions” that existed in the “house of labor” prior to the 1920s endorsed Gompers’ business-friendly unionism, the ranks of the labor movement “teemed with socialists, Catholic activists, single taxers, and philosophical anarchists” (p. 6).

Regardless of their political or philosophical differences, workers “agreed that their hopes of reshaping the American republic in accordance with the aspirations of its working class could best be achieved by working within labor’s own, self-legitimizing federation” (p. 6). There was, however, some disagreement about how this might best be

put into practice, as the more class-conscious workers found “the conservative hand of craft-union practice an intolerable impediment to the organizing of mass-production workers” (p. 6).

III. A HOUSE DIVIDED

‘Which side are you on?’ – “Which Side Are You On?”, Florence Reece

The conflict between the more conservative and homogenous craft unions and the militant industrial unions is a centerpiece of the American labor movement’s history. While the AFL’s craft unions largely excluded black workers, women, unskilled laborers, and immigrants from membership, the industrial unions, chief among them the IWW, proudly held a philosophy of inclusion, allowing all workers regardless of race, sex, nationality, religion, or skill level to join. A key point to understand here in terms of this conflict within labor (and in consideration of the topic of cooptation) is that, in choosing between the two species of union, bosses viewed the conservative craft unions as the obvious favorable choice. Though they would have preferred to not have to deal with any union at all, the next best thing to a non-union shop, as far as the bosses were concerned, was a shop unionized by a business-friendly association rather than a radical industrial union.

The conservative craft unions simply sought to protect the interests of a small, skilled portion of the working class. The industrial unions, on the other hand, sought to organize the whole of the working class, and the more radical of the industrial unionists called for the fundamental transformation of the economic and social structure. As

Marxist union organizer and co-founder of the Industrial Workers of the World Daniel De Leon said, summarizing the revolutionary perspective of industrial unionism, “the Industrial Union is at once the battering ram with which to pound down the fortress of Capitalism, and the successor of the capitalist social structure itself” (De Leon 1913:1). Industrial unionism, De Leon said, “is the Socialist Republic in the making; and the goal once reached, the Industrial Union is the Socialist Republic in operation” (p. 1).

The revolutionary philosophies of the more militant industrial unions, of which the IWW is the prime example, “extracted from the solidarities and ethical code of workers’ daily lives a merciless critique of the existing structures of exploitation, power, and authority” (Montgomery 1995:310). This critique “did not spare the institutions that workers had created for themselves, but depicted the trade unions and even the Socialist Party as so deeply embedded in the fabric of capitalist life that they had become obstacles” to the organization of the working class and the revolutionary creation of “a new society” (p. 310-11). At the July 7, 1905 founding convention of the Industrial Workers of the World in Chicago, delegates were summoned by a manifesto which said: “Social relations and groupings only reflect mechanical and industrial conditions,” and “Universal economic evils afflicting the working class can be eradicated only by a universal working class movement.” The manifesto concluded that the “movement to fulfill these conditions must consist of one great industrial union embracing all industries,” a union that is “founded on the class struggle,” and the “general administration” of which “must be conducted in harmony with the recognition of the

irrepressible conflict between the capitalist class and the working class” (IWW, *First Convention*, 1905).

One can see quite clearly in the lines of the manifesto quoted above the philosophical differences which distinguished labor’s militant camp from the conservatism of the dominant federation. The popularity of the ‘gospel of direct action’ preached by the Wobblies deeply concerned not only the business class but also the boss-friendly, Gompers-style union leadership of the AFL. As discussions “about industrial unionism, general strikes, and the true path to socialism resounded through” working class “lodges, bars, and lunchrooms,” the leadership of the AFL began to devise plans for crushing the radical challenge presented by the IWW to the legitimacy of the dominant labor federation (p. 312).

The 1905 strike at the General Electric (GE) plant in Schenectady “revealed the determination of the AFL’s leaders, including members of the Socialist Party, to stamp out the IWW” (p. 314). After management at the plant “fired three draftsmen who were recruiting their workmates into the IWW,” the Wobblies “demanded their reinstatement, rejected management’s offer to transfer the men to another department, and organized a sit-down strike by some twenty-seven hundred of the plant’s fifteen thousand workers” (p. 313-14). The International Association of Machinists (IAM), an AFL affiliate, “vigorously denounced the strike,” and played a major role in its disintegration (p. 314). GE “replaced possibly two hundred militants,” and “Lodge 704,” the members of which “were operatives, largely on hand-screw machines” who had “enrolled en masse in the IWW,” was “reorganized under new leadership by the IAM” (p. 313-14). Thus, even in

the IWW's first year, the forces of capital and business-unionism recognized the threat posed by militant, organized, class-conscious workers and, acting on behalf of the preservation of their shared interests, joined together in the crushing of solidarity-based worker activism.

Despite the efforts of the ruling class and the labor aristocracy of the AFL, both seeking to eradicate the radical working class movement that emerged in the form of the IWW and industrial unionism, the concept of the One Big Union remained popular, and the revolutionary potential of organized labor was being discussed by workers in various industries ranging from "metal, mining, and building trades" to "the garment, textile, maritime, and steel industries" (p. 314-15). Marxists engaged in "vigorous debate over the significance of the strike wave that followed the return to prosperity in 1909," and "began to talk about the revolutionary significance of workplace organization" (p. 314-15).

From the revolutionary perspective, "industrial unions were not simply agencies to provide workers with a more effective defense of their interests than craft unions offered," and "they were more than a vehicle for the dissemination of socialist education on a mass scale" (p. 315). The power of industrial unions, and the source of their appeal to the working class, was that "They mobilized direct attacks on capitalism" (p. 315). The socialists engaged in debates regarding the relevance of the industrial union in the class struggle did not share the view held by "committed anarcho-syndicalists" that "party activity" was "useless" or "detrimental" to the movement (p. 315). Dutch socialist and "favorite contributor to the *New Review*" Anton Pannekoek summed up the sentiment felt

by many radicals in the American labor movement when he said that “the ‘labor union has just as great a revolutionary significance as the political party’” (p. 315). Thus, “If workplace organization could have revolutionary significance, it was obligatory for revolutionaries to devote painstaking attention to how the workplace – the modern workplace – might best be organized for workers’ control” (p. 317).

IV. WORLD WAR & CLASS WAR

‘Hold the fort for we are coming’ – “Hold the Fort”, British Transport Workers Union and Industrial Workers of the World

The labor movement in the United States after 1909 was full of energy and revolutionary potential, and “strikes and union membership grew rapidly both inside and outside the bound of legitimacy defined by the AFL” (Montgomery 1995:6). The outbreak of World War I exacerbated the “tensions within and surrounding the federation,” and the shift towards a war economy “locked the administrative structures of business and government tightly together” (p. 6). Class-conscious activists in the labor movement resisted the war. Eugene V. Debs, socialist, labor leader, and founding member of the IWW, was arrested and charged with sedition after encouraging resistance to the draft in a 1918 speech in Canton, Ohio. Debs is also notable for his numerous presidential campaigns on the Socialist ticket, even running from his prison cell in 1920, an effort which garnered nearly a million votes, making it the most successful presidential campaign by the Socialist Party, which it remains to this day.

Despite the hardships which were magnified by the war, a “new sense of power” was felt by workers “of all types,” as “full employment augmented” their “ability to win strikes and improve their terms of employment” (p. 6). There were “New styles of organization within the workplace, often energized by radicals,” that “challenged the scientifically managed enterprise on its own turf and threatened the ‘bona fide’ practices of craft unions at the same time” (p. 6). Thus, the bosses and the conservative leadership of the AFL once again understood their common interests were under attack, as “levels of strike participation soared” in the years between 1916 and 1922 “far above those of any other period” (p. 6). During this period, “workers’ demands became too heady for the AFL or even the Socialist Party to contain and too menacing for business and the state to tolerate” (p. 6). In 1921, striking mine workers in West Virginia engaged in the largest labor uprising in American history, the Battle of Blair Mountain, during which the miners fought for the right to unionize in violent conflicts not only with police and strikebreakers but also the U.S. Army (in the form of the West Virginia National Guard).

The first ‘Red Scare’ (1917-1920) erupted in response to the series of world revolutions (including the Russian Revolution of 1917) and various strikes (including the massive Seattle General Strike of 1919) which took place during, and in the aftermath of, WWI. During this time, “the decisive weight of Justice Department and Labor Department activity was devoted to the imprisonment or deportation of ‘dangerous radicals’” (p. 394). The ruling class, shaken by what was happening not just in the United States but around the globe, responded with violent crackdowns on ‘Reds,’ people perceived as having left-wing political sympathies, and legislation was introduced which

restricted freedom of expression and specifically targeted leftists (Sedition Act of 1918 – an extension of the Espionage Act of 1917). The Palmer Raids, named after Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, were direct attacks on labor unions and immigrants by the Justice Department which involved the targeting and capturing of individuals suspected to be associated with communism or anarchism. The IWW in particular was targeted during this time by both the state and American citizens swept up in the patriotic hysteria of the World War. Frank Little, a Wobbly organizer, was lynched in Butte, Montana in 1917. In 1918, over one hundred Wobblies were put on trial *en masse*. All were convicted and given extensive sentences of up to twenty years in prison.

The American ruling class “unleashed its fury against the IWW during the war” (p. 393). “From the vigilante deportation of 1,186 striking copper miners from Bisbee, Arizona, in 1917, through the lynching of Frank Little and raids by soldiers and sailors who demolished IWW halls, to the trial and conviction of 116 leaders in Chicago, patriotic mobs and due process of law had collaborated to stamp out Wobbly activity” (p. 393-94). Even after Palmer’s “notorious arrests and deportations of alien radicals in 1919 and 1920, the Immigration Bureau of the Department of Labor settled into routine scrutiny of foreign-born workers in cooperation with local police, employers, and patriotic societies” (p. 394-95). The result of this period of violence and hostility towards leftists, immigrants, and progressive unions was a decline in participation in labor organizations and union activism.

At the close of 1922, there was a tremendous deflation in the militancy of the American working class, as “trade unionism” was “largely excluded from larger

corporate enterprises, and the left wing of the workers' movement" was "isolated from effective mass influence" (p. 6). The AFL experienced a decline in membership between 1920 and 1923, but it "remained considerably larger than it had been before the war" (p. 7). The dominant federation emerged from the wartime period more conservative than it had been previously, as the "demands for nationalization of industries, a six-hour day, government guarantees of union rights, a labor party, and strikes to demand freedom for political prisoners," demands which were "never favored by Gompers," completely "disappeared from the federation's proceedings altogether" (p. 7). Any hopes held by progressives within the AFL were crushed in 1923, "when the AFL devoted its Portland convention to a celebration of American capitalism and a summons to the movement to drive out its radicals" (p. 406). By that time, "union membership in America had fallen 25 percent since its 1920 peak" (p. 406).

The decade following 1923 "was a remarkable hiatus in the evolution of the labor movement," with "strike activity falling to an all-time low" (p. 7). The workers who had been "radicalized by the war years" were "isolated" in the reactionary political landscape of post-WWI America, and they were "able to influence only occasional struggles" as "workers' aspirations" turned "inward upon family and ethnic ties" (p. 7). Thus, "corporate mastery of American life seemed secure" (p. 7). The "AFL officials who had once been vociferous reformers," perhaps unaware of the role that the conservatism of the dominant federation played in the damage inflicted upon the labor movement, believed that the only answer was to wait "until a more favorable political climate would allow

them to lead a union resurgence” (p. 7). As it so happens, “when that time came, the petrified house of labor split in two” (p. 7).

V. ORGANIZING THE UNORGANIZED: THE RISE OF THE CIO

‘In factory and field and mine, we gather in our might’ – “Paint ‘er Red”, Elmer Rumbaugh

“The most famous punch in US history wasn’t thrown by Joe Louis,” writes Mike Davis in the April 2005 issue of *Socialist Review*, “but by John L. Lewis,” the “irascible bushy-eyebrowed president of the United Mine Workers” (Davis 2005:1). The target of the punch delivered by Lewis was United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America president William Hutcheson, who had exchanged harsh words with Lewis at the 1935 AFL convention in Atlantic City. “Bitter personal animosities engendered by the rivalry between industrial and craft unionists broke out on the floor of the American Federation of Labor Convention today,” *The New York Times* reported in October 1935, “resulting in a fist fight between John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America, and William S. Hutcheson, president of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America” (*The New York Times* 1935:22). The ‘left hook’ which came to symbolize the rebellion of the industrial unions against the leadership of the AFL “was Lewis’s way of saying goodbye to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the conservative, often nativist, craft unions that dominated it” (Davis 2005:1).

Prior to the 1935 AFL convention which acted as the stage for the infamous brawl between Lewis and Hutcheson, Lewis had already made a name for himself in the

American labor movement. Lewis had been a mine worker in Iowa and Illinois before he became a full-time organizer for the AFL in 1911. In 1921, he was elected president of the United Mine Workers. That same year, Lewis attempted to unseat Gompers at the AFL convention.

The 1921 AFL convention was unique in that “the progressive bloc” of the AFL “included several of the men with the largest fistfuls of votes to cast” (Montgomery 1995:404). Shared among the union delegates were “predictions of ‘the coal miners, the railroad workers and the metal trades forming a powerful coalition to secure control of the federation’ and to promote ‘a sweeping program’ of ‘government ownership and democratic control’ of American industry” (p. 404). Lewis “solicited the support of these delegates for his candidacy to unseat Gompers,” and declared at the convention “‘I stand for Government ownership of the railroad, nationalization of the mines and other progressive legislation . . . for health insurance, old-age pensions and unemployment insurance, all progressive measures for the working masses.’” (p. 404-5) In response, Gompers and his supporters “flailed Lewis as a pawn of [William Randolph] Hearst, an agent of the IWW and of Judge [Elbert Henry] Gary, and a coward who had cravenly capitulated to federal injunctions in 1919” (p. 405). Despite the incoherence of the attacks hurled at Lewis, Gompers was successful in dividing “the ranks of the railroad and metal trades by astute promises of seats on the Executive Council” (p. 405-6). By holding “solid his support in the building trades (except for the mighty carpenters, who went for Lewis)” and “splitting the huge blocs that had seemed destined to favor Lewis,” Gompers “was reelected by a margin of 25,022 to 12,324” (p. 406).

Just three weeks after Lewis struck Hutcheson at the 1935 AFL convention, another convention took place: that of the Committee for Industrial Organization. Frustrated by the refusal of the AFL's leadership "to charter or seriously support fledgling industrial unions in rubber, auto, steel and electrical manufacture," Lewis summoned the leadership of other industrial unions within the AFL to discuss the formation of a faction within the dominant federation that would focus on 'organizing the unorganized' in the spirit of industrial unionism (Davis 2005:1). "On November 9, 1935, the" Committee for Industrial Organization "established itself formally, and made the fulfillment of" organizing the unorganized "its primary objective" (Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin 2002:2). The conservative leadership of the AFL was hostile to the Committee from the start. Just a year after the founding convention of the Committee for Industrial Organization, the AFL "'suspended' the committee's ten international unions on charges of 'fomenting insurrection' and 'dual unionism'" (p. 2).

Against the expectations of the AFL's leadership, the sanctions imposed upon the Committee's participants encouraged sympathy from other unions, which soon "broke with the AFL to join" Lewis and the other members of the dissident faction (p. 2). Three years later, in November 1938, the Committee for Industrial Organization, "under its new name, Congress of Industrial Organizations," split from the American Federation of Labor, and "officially became an independent labor organization" (p. 2). By that time, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) "already consisted of forty-one affiliated unions and 'CIO organizing committees'" (p. 2). Unlike the AFL, the CIO was open to workers "regardless of race, creed, color, or sex," and was dedicated to providing

marginalized communities and women “full representation in the union movement” (Haskins 1976:76). The CIO’s constitution proudly “declared that it aimed ‘to bring about the effective organization of the working men and women of America regardless of race, creed, color or nationality, and to unite them for common action into labor unions for their mutual aid and protection.’” (Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin 2002:3) It is with this radical spirit of inclusion, militancy, and class consciousness that the CIO was able to lead the largest and “most ‘sustained surge of worker organization in American history.’” (p. 2)

VI. ONE INDUSTRIAL UNION GRAND

*‘There can be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun’ – “Solidarity Forever”,
Ralph Chaplin*

From the moment of its founding, the Congress of Industrial Organizations “sought to nourish ‘a new conception’” of working class identity and responsibility (p. 2). Following in the footsteps (albeit not always openly) of the radical industrial unions which came before it, the “CIO incarnated the spirit of the unparalleled workers’ insurgency of the 1930s against the overlordship of capital” (p. 2). In fact, many of the CIO’s leaders and organizers “were veterans of the years of earlier industrial battles,” and ingrained in the ranks of the CIO were “unionists and radicals of all stripes, anarcho-syndicalists, ‘Wobblies,’ socialists, and Communists,” all of whom “were committed to ‘industrial unionism’ and ‘class solidarity’” (p. 2). Although the founders of “the CIO rarely gave credit to the IWW, the CIO [owed] its existence to the legacy left by the

Wobblies” (Werstein 1969:128). This legacy could be seen explicitly in the CIO’s “direct action tactics,” especially sit-down strikes, which the CIO undoubtedly plucked from “a page from the IWW” (p.128).

It must be emphasized, however, that Lewis, despite some of the progressive rhetoric which occasionally burst forth from his mouth, was not a radical (although when compared to Gompers he certainly looked like one). To some of the more militant and class-conscious union workers, Lewis even seemed reactionary and despotic, and his actions occasionally affirmed their perspective. For example, in 1925, when “only 40 percent of the country’s bituminous coal was mined under union contract,” Lewis, in an attempt to appease the bosses of the still unionized firms, “abruptly jettisoned all talk of nationalization and thirty-hour weeks and drove his more radical rivals out of office – indeed, out of the union” (Montgomery 1995:409).

The story of the CIO, a labor federation often portrayed as infested with ‘Reds,’ is complicated, especially in regards to the politics of the union. While there is no doubt that leftists of various tendencies, most famously communists, found a home in the CIO and used it as a vehicle for class struggle, the revolutionary politics of the rank and file and the CIO organizers was not always shared by union leadership. “No twentieth-century political struggle among organized workers in America was more chronic and divisive and ultimately self-destructive than the one between the ‘right’ and ‘left,’ especially as it unfolded within the CIO” (Stepan-Norris & Zeitlin 2002:4). For this reason, the accusations lobbed at the CIO which characterize it as an organization beholden to the interests of Moscow or Stalinism (some of which originate in the political

left – from C. Wright Mills, for example) are, frankly, ridiculous. There were multiple political factions operating within the CIO, some of which emphatically opposed communism.

It is also worth noting that even those workers and organizers in the CIO who were members of the Communist Party did not necessarily adhere to any dogmatic definition of ‘communism,’ and they certainly did not need their radical politics to be imported from elsewhere. Despite the “craven obedience of the Communist Party’s (CP) officials and functionaries to the Soviet regime through every tortuous twist in its line, Communist unionism during the Congress of Industrial Organizations era was ‘the main expression of native, working class radicalism in the United States.’” (p. 1) Indeed, the class-conscious radical organizers and rank and file members of the CIO, in particular those who called themselves ‘communists,’ “were the leading fighters in exemplary struggles” which “enlarged the freedom and enhanced the human dignity of America’s workers” (p. 23). In the largest union organizing drive in American history, led by the CIO in the 1930s, “the unions created and sustained by Communists and their allies” were “among the most egalitarian, the most honest and well-administered, the most racially progressive, and the most class conscious” (p. 22).

While John L. Lewis had been hostile towards radicals, even to the point of the *United Mine Workers’ Journal* publishing hysterical material such as the September 1922 “Exposé of the Communist Revolutionary Movement in Effort to Seize America,” he had to admit a decade later that the ‘Reds’ knew how to organize. More importantly, the communist organizers were “the only people with the necessary skills who were willing

to take the risks involved for low pay.” (p. 41) What’s more, ““after the debacle of 1933 and 1934, when the American Federation of Labor smashed the spirit of unionism,” it was none other than ““the left-wingers who zealously worked day and night picking up the pieces of that spirit and putting them back together.”” (p. 41) Lewis was, again, not sympathetic to the views of communists or other radicals. In order to prevent any ‘communist takeover’ of the CIO, Lewis and the federation’s other founders “tried both to use Communist organizers to build the new CIO unions and to hobble them so that they could not take power in them” (p. 41). Lewis, when warned about allowing ‘Reds’ into the CIO and hiring communists as organizers, replied by sardonically asking “Who gets the bird, the hunter or the dog?” (p. 41).

Thus, while communists and other radicals were a force to be reckoned with as organizers and activists within the CIO, they were largely prevented from gaining positions of influence in union leadership. Nevertheless, the class conscious militants spearheaded an organizing drive which brought millions of workers into the labor movement, an astonishing accomplishment unseen before or since in the United States. Communists were even more effective in organizing when they were not CIO staff – in other words, when they did not have a “CIO organizing committee standing in their way” (p. 43). While “Communists won the leadership of only 17 percent of the twelve international unions that were organized by a CIO committee,” they garnered “61 percent of the twenty-six that had been independently organized” (p. 43). The anti-Communists, on the other hand, “took power in 42 percent of the internationals organized under the tutelage of a CIO committee, but in only 19 percent of the independently organized

internationals” (p. 43). Communists were able to earn “moral authority among the workers” (p. 43), something that could not be achieved by those who lacked class consciousness or convictions beyond the desire for a better wage. This is of critical importance – it shows that class consciousness and an alternative perspective, one which denounces the brutality of the power structure as a whole and prioritizes unity and solidarity, are key to organizing and mobilizing working people in a meaningful way.

The moral fight for the working class had been taken up by ‘Reds’ long before Lewis recognized the legitimacy and importance of industrial unionism and broke from the AFL with the CIO. After all, “‘Red unionism’ and the cause of ‘industrial unionism’ (organizing workers by industry, across trade or craft lines) had been almost synonymous for many years before the CIO took up the call” (p. 33). The effort to organize the working class into ‘one industrial union grand’ had been a priority for the Wobblies, and later for the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL), which in 1929 became the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL). “After the repression of the ‘Wobblies,’ the Communists ‘took over as the chief radical element operating within the American labor movement’ and were the main carriers of the ideas of militant action and industrial unionism” (p. 33). Like the Wobblies, communists and other ‘Reds’ saw the labor movement beyond the terms established by Gompers and the conservative business-unionists. A union meant more than an extra dollar an hour: it meant a path to liberation, to working class ownership of the means of production. It also meant the unification of the working class through the destruction of barriers of race, sex, religion, and nationality.

The ideas held dear by the Wobblies and later the communists who organized under the CIO were, contrary to the standard ideological perspective pushed by ruling class institutions, popular among workers who could be considered ‘apolitical’ or even ‘conservative.’ The truths espoused by the radicals were undeniable, and they brought tangible benefits to the lives of those who toiled. The leadership of communist-led unions, including the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE) (UE, one should note, was even called “the Red Fortress” due to its association with communists), “had leadership as competent as the most successful unions. . .and their record in securing wages and better working conditions for their members through collective bargaining is at least as favorable as that of any of the outstanding unions” (p. 179). In other words, ‘Reds’ delivered the goods. “Undoubtedly, their achievements in the trade-union field enabled them to hold the loyalty of their members, the great majority of whom were not Communists” (p. 179-80).

One cannot deny the contributions of class-conscious radicals, in particular communists, in the tremendous achievements of the American labor movement. This is especially true of the 1930s, when ‘Reds’ led the largest union organizing drive in American history. Millions of workers were brought into the labor movement not by disciples of Gompers or conservative business-unionists, but by militant revolutionaries who viewed the labor movement as a vehicle of class struggle and a force which could be used for the liberation of the proletariat. “Communists and their radical allies in the CIO won responsibility and trust in America’s industrial unions not by ‘infiltration’ or

‘colonization’ but by an insurgent political strategy: fighting for the cause of industrial unionism and organizing the unorganized,” a project which they prioritized “for years before the CIO’s birth” (p. 266). Unfortunately, the years following the Second World War would destroy much of what had been accomplished by the ‘Reds’ and the militant industrial unions in the American labor movement.

VII. NO MORE REDS IN THE UNION

‘My wages they are up so high, my family’s starving, so am I’ – “No More Reds in the Union”, Utah Phillips

The years of the New Deal (1933-1939) were among the most active and formative for the American labor movement. There were several militant strikes which took place in 1934 alone: the Minneapolis General Strike, the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, and the West Coast Waterfront Strike, all of which, it should be noted, were led by both unions and militant left-wing organizations. The Minneapolis General Strike saw collaboration between the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the Communist League. The Toledo Auto-Lite Strike was a joint effort of a federal labor union (FLU) of the AFL and the American Workers Party. During the West Coast Waterfront Strike, the International Longshoremen’s Association fought alongside members of the Communist Party. In 1936-1937, autoworkers in Flint, Michigan engaged in a sit-down strike at the General Motors plant, and the strike spread to Cleveland, Ohio as the striking workers accelerated their struggle. The successful strike, arguably one of the most important of the twentieth century, established United Auto Workers as a major American labor

organization and won workers pay increases as well as the right to discuss union matters at work. It is also worth noting that many of the organizers of the strike, including Wyndham Mortimer, were members of the Communist Party or leftists of another sort. Thus, even before the CIO split from the AFL, 'Reds' were already an influential force in the labor movement, and they remained influential until the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 and the second Red Scare with which the antiunion legislation coincided. Even before the second Red Scare and Taft-Hartley, however, one could sense the impending abandonment of radical politics in favor of partnership with the Democratic Party – the result of the New Deal's concessions to organized labor and the outbreak of WWII.

The communists and their radical allies organizing in the CIO “were only the most conspicuous targets of ‘the great purge of American working life’ begun under Truman in 1946, completed under Eisenhower, and carried out” in conjunction with “self-cleansings” within the labor movement (p. 279). The purge of ‘Reds’ from labor organizations was, however, largely executed “by agencies of the state (aided and abetted by the omnipresent Cold War liberalism that emerged as the dominant ethos in the press and the world of learning) on several closely connected political fronts” (p. 279). Federal government entities such as the Loyalty Review Board, the Coast Guard, Army, the FBI, the Justice Department, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service were heavily involved in the purge, as was Congress in the form of “the Alien and Sedition Act (1940), Labor-Management Relations Act (1947), the Internal Security Act (1950, which among other things authorized concentration camps for the internment of Communists in the event of a ‘national emergency’), the Port Security Act (1950), the Witness Impunity Act

(1954)” and “the Communist Control Act (1954)” (p. 279). All of this, in addition to the formalized assault on labor which emerged as the Taft-Hartley Act, and “the rampaging ‘investigations’ by HUAC,” amounted to an inquisition of the American labor movement from which it has never recovered (p. 279-80).

Communists in the labor movement, along with their radical allies (or suspected allies) were the most heavily impacted by the Taft-Hartley Act. Taft-Hartley exposed “their unions to NLRB decertification and raiding by rivals if they failed to sign a non-Communist affidavit” (p. 280). A year after Taft-Hartley went into effect, “81,000 union officers, including officials of the eighty-nine AFL affiliates and thirty of the CIO’s, already had sworn and signed an affidavit, and the act’s penetration of union ranks deepened over the next nine years” (p. 280). Even after signing the non-Communist affidavit, “many unionists who were suspected of still being party members or sympathizers were brought to trial by the government on perjury charges, which the Justice Department wielded as instruments to bludgeon and try to smash the ousted unions and frighten or demoralize their members” (p. 281). There were numerous labor leaders and unionists who were “tried, convicted, and sent to prison for perjury for falsely filing an affidavit” (p. 281).

The House Committee on Un-American Activities, or House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), along with the “host of other congressional committees holding hearings on ‘Communist infiltration’ of the unions,” inflamed the “climate of hysteria” during the second Red Scare, even without the Taft-Hartley Act (p. 281). The HUAC “took the lead in harassing unionists and punishing them with ‘contempt’

citations” if they refused to comply with the unconstitutional investigations being conducted by the committee (p. 281-82). The post-WWII years of 1945 and 1946 saw the emergence of another wave of promising strikes in numerous agencies. By 1947, the “full weight of virtually every agency of the federal government” was “pressed relentlessly upon the Communist unionists and their allies, from the top officers of the expelled internationals to their loyal adherents at all levels of district and local union leadership” (p. 283). Thus, it was not just the lunacy of a lone Senator from Wisconsin which trapped the American public in an epoch of paranoia and derangement, although when the second Red Scare is discussed in today’s American pop culture outlets, one gets the impression that it was all McCarthy’s fault. The power structure, including the state and the business elites protected by it, simply would not tolerate an effective challenge to its legitimacy and control, and that is precisely what the ruling class saw in the ‘Red’ labor movement.

By 1954, when the Communist Control Act was passed unanimously by the Senate and “with only two nays by the House,” “all labor unions,” and not just their leaders, were “under the surveillance of the Attorney General and the SACB,” the Subversive Activities Control Board (p. 284). The U.S. government, “besides going after individual union leaders, could target the unions themselves, as organizations, and impose drastic disabilities on any” considered sympathetic to communism (p. 284). Millions of American workers in both the public and private sectors were required to undergo “‘clearance’ by some 200 agency loyalty boards” from “1947 to 1956 alone” (p. 285). Some of the workers in the private sector, a “conservative estimate” of about “1.5 million men and women,” “were subjected to private company security programs and

checks, through special departments or private detective agencies (staffed mainly by ex-FBI agents)” (p. 285). The goal of such private ‘loyalty’ programs, “as the National Industrial Conference Board indiscreetly said in a document sent to employers, was to ‘help rid your plant of agitators who create labor unrest.’” (p. 285) If ever there was a time when the connectedness of the American ruling class and the state apparatus was painfully obvious, it was undoubtedly during the second Red Scare, although the first gives the second a run for its money.

It must be said, however, that “the repression per se, as damaging as it was politically, and as much as it inflicted personal suffering on so many thousands of Communists and their families,” along with many more thousands of other workers who had no relationship to the Communist Party or radical politics, “was not what determined the [Communist] party’s political isolation and reduced it by the late 1950s to a moribund sect” (p. 287). As brutal and authoritarian as it was, the state’s extreme repression of the ‘Red’ labor movement, in conjunction with ‘raiding’ of ‘Red’ unions by business-unionists, cannot be blamed completely for “the disappearance of an independent left presence in American labor” (p. 287). It was partly “the [Communist] party leadership’s assessment of the ‘objective situation’ and their consequent incapacity in the face of it” which determined the collapse of what the ‘Reds’ had built in the American labor movement (p. 287). There is no denying that the political climate of the Cold War was terribly restrictive to the Left, and following the FDR years, “Truman and liberal Democrats in Congress capitulated without a whimper to the Republicans’ frenzied and unyielding assaults on the remnants of the New Deal” (p. 287). However, partially to

blame is the Communist Party's "self-contradictory, incoherent, and ultimately disastrous political 'strategy'" that placed the objectives of 'native, working class radicalism in the United States' out of reach (p. 288). The back-and-forth of CP political strategy rendered the 'Reds,' especially in regards to the labor movement, ineffective (the rigidity of the party's connection to the Soviet line did not help, either).

The Communist Party of the United States had cautiously supported the 'Roosevelt-Wallace coalition' against Truman, but ultimately decided to "go for broke and push a third party ticket which, especially after Wallace's crushing loss, precipitated the shattering of the center-left alliance in the CIO and the ensuing anti-Communist cleansing" (p. 289). The CP had not convinced the CIO to endorse a third party wholeheartedly, as moderate unionists within the federation, including UAW president Walter Reuther and president of the CIO Philip Murray, were enthusiastic about the Democratic Party and loathed Wallace, the Progressive Party, and communism. Although the Communist Party had previously sought to prevent sectarianism within the CIO, "a meeting took place on December 15 [1947] between CP officials and CIO unionists" during which Communist Party representatives "told the unionists that the decision had been made to create a third party" and that they were "to support Wallace's soon-to-be-announced Progressive Party candidacy" while bending "every effort, despite the unfavorable and explosive prospects of doing so, to win the CIO leadership's endorsement" (p. 293). By all accounts, this announcement was met with hostility from the CIO unionists present, who did not care much for directives from the CP's 'central committee.' When warned that the Communist Party's support of the Progressive Party

would ‘split the CIO down the middle,’ New York State CP chairman Robert Thompson responded by saying that the directive must be followed regardless (p. 293). Of interest here is “why the party’s top leadership suddenly reversed their line and plunged forward in mid-December 1947 with a policy that they knew would, if their unionist adherents went along, split the CIO” (p. 293). It was, after all, contradictory to the assertions made by party leaders earlier that any viable third party would need the backing of substantial sections of the labor movement as a precondition for its formation.

The October 1947 issue of *The Daily Worker* is worth consideration. In the issue, an editorial reported the formation of a new Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) “consisting of six eastern European Communist parties plus the parties of France and Italy,” and announced the Cominform’s call for the development of ‘united fronts from below’ in opposition to the Marshall Plan (p. 294). “Crucially,” in regards to the United States, “the editorial said nothing about a third party, but again called urgently” for a coalition based on the Roosevelt-Wallace line (p. 294). Regardless, the leadership of the Communist Party and its figures in the CIO pushed for the Progressive Party and repudiated union members who would not do the same. The “ruinous consequences of” the CP’s “repudiation of ‘many’ if not most of their own unionists” became “apparent within the CIO,” and as “Wallace’s star seemed to be fading as the election approached, they drew the wagons around themselves” (p. 295). The moral authority which the Communist Party had built in the CIO had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the workers, and this, along with political repression and union purges, brought about “the swift elimination of the Communist bastions in the CIO” (p. 296). Thus, “the

most significant achievement of the Communists, the building of a combative, class-conscious industrial union movement, was all but destroyed” (p. 296).

VIII. RED UNIONISM: AN AUTOPSY

*‘They’ll raid your meeting, hit you on the head, call every one of you a goddamn Red’ –
“Talking Union”, Pete Seeger*

In the 1950s, the CIO was badly bruised by purges, government repression, and internal struggles. Progressive affiliates of the CIO, weakened by the Red Scare and the antiunion legislation introduced in the 1940s, were especially fragile. This turmoil from within, exacerbated by political battles in the federation, reduced the effectiveness of the federation’s organizing for which it was renowned in the 1930s. In the 1940s, UE, the ‘Red Fortress,’ was under threat of raiding by the UAW, as well as other moderate or conservative unions, and CIO president Philip Murray did nothing to defend UE or discourage other CIO affiliates from raiding. UE was one of the gutsy CIO unions which refused to sign the anticommunist affidavits, and its leaders were charged with contempt for refusing to cooperate with the HUAC. Eventually, however, UE was forced to reverse its earlier rejection of the Taft-Hartley anticommunist affidavits in order to appear on the National Labor Relations Board ballots for representation rights. Regardless, the CIO leadership still refused to prevent or even discourage raiding of UE locals, and in response, UE boycotted the CIO’s 1949 convention by withholding dues payments to the federation, terminating, in effect, its affiliation with the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

UE is worth mentioning here not only because it is one of the two ‘Red’ unions that resigned or was expelled from the CIO, the other being ILWU, which survived the Red Scare and continues to exist today, but also because it has retained the principles of industrial unionism, principles which stand in stark contrast to the conservative, business-friendly politics of the AFL-CIO. In UE’s pamphlet titled “Member-Run Unionism: The Democratic Alternative that Works,” UE gives credit to the IWW in the introduction. The Wobblies “promoted a democratic unionism that sought to organize women and men of all nationalities, races and political beliefs at a time when the American Federation of Labor (AFL) permitted only highly skilled white males to join its ranks” (UE, p. 1). “Corporate America, its allies in government and even some in labor,” the introduction continues, “worked overtime in the 1940s and 1950s in an effort to wipe out democratic, rank-and-file unionism. They nearly succeeded” (p. 1). The bosses resist unions, the UE pamphlet says, “but if they have to deal with one, they would rather deal with a union that lacks organizational strength. Management prefers to meet with the union ‘boss’ behind the scenes to cut a deal” (p. 2). This “leaves the members out of the process, keeping the discussion far away from the work area, reducing the chance of lost production” (p. 2).

UE’s commitment to ‘democratic unionism,’ which is, essentially, a new name for ‘industrial unionism,’ shows that the lessons of the past have not been completely forgotten. “The AFL-CIO leadership has yet to put the issue of union democracy on the agenda – and a meaningful transformation of the labor movement cannot take place until the current top-down structure is replaced by democratic organizations controlled by the

members” (p. 2). The ‘Red Fortress’ remains a formidable adversary to bosses and business-unionism alike.

Also worthy of one’s attention in the UE pamphlet is the section devoted to ‘Independent Political Action.’ “Support for the Democratic Party is an entrenched tradition for much of the working class,” the UE pamphlet says (and one should take note of the use of the term ‘working class’ – conspicuously absent from much mainstream union literature in the U.S.), “but labor parties and other alternatives played a major role in U.S. labor history” (p. 17). What is of particular interest, in consideration of the focus of this project, is the following line from the pamphlet: “The historic labor link to the Democratic Party derives, in part, from the Democrats’ co-opting of labor parties” (p. 17). The examination goes further: “Most unions cling to the Democratic Party because of progressive legislation enacted during Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal administration in the 1930s. Declining union strength – and growing corporate power – have eroded the Democrats’ commitment to labor issues” (p. 17). Thus, UE articulates a primary assertion of this project: the New Deal administration of FDR, through its “patchwork of band-aid assistance” to the American working class, was able to secure for the Democratic Party the loyalty of the moderate leadership of the American labor movement and a vast number of working class voters (Haskins 1976:79).

When the AFL and the CIO merged in 1955, it was clear that the AFL, which remained less militant and more business-friendly throughout the period of estrangement between the two federations, held the dominant position. The political turmoil within the CIO and the expulsion of its most effective organizers, the communists, had rendered the

once powerful federation insecure and desperate. Various other social and political factors, including the election of Eisenhower and the deaths of AFL president William Green and CIO president Philip Murray “within two weeks” of each other, made the merger all the more appealing to the two labor federations (p. 91). The new leaders of the AFL and CIO, George Meany (AFL) and UAW’s Walter Reuther (CIO), were much more attracted to the idea of a merger than their predecessors. As might be expected, after “George Meany and Walter Reuther joined hands to bring down the gavel on the first meeting of a reunited AFL-CIO in 1955,” Meany “assumed the top position, and Walter Reuther, much to his disappointment, was forced to accept a vice-presidential back seat” (p. 91). The divergence in the labor philosophies of the AFL and CIO was, despite some softening in the period following WWII, as apparent as ever. Meany “declared proudly after his election to the AFL-CIO presidency: ‘It may interest you to know that I am president of this great organization that has such tremendous power, and I never went on strike in my life, never ran a strike, never ordered anyone else to run a strike, and never had anything to do with a picket line’” (p. 92). Reuther “chafed under Meany’s conservative leadership,” and later said of the merger: “We merged but we did not unite” (p. 92).

Thus, the American labor movement, since the end of the Civil War to the merging of the AFL and CIO in 1955, encompassed a wide variety of political philosophies, goals, strategies, and perspectives, the most legitimate of which demanded in some form or another the liberation of the working class from the chains of capital. There were, and still are, undoubtedly, conflicts within the labor movement between

conservatives, moderates, and leftists, between reformists and revolutionaries, between those who hold a view of the union as a ticket to a better standard of living within capitalism and those who see the union as a hammer with which to smash the capitalist system to pieces. Of critical importance here is the fact that, regardless of one's politics or philosophical positions, the power of organized labor, of the unionized, class-conscious working class, is undeniable. I claim that this fact, recognized soberly by the ruling class, is the reason that the state and corporate elites invested so much time, energy, and money in the repression and quashing of 'Reds' and their unions, not only during the first and second 'Red Scares,' but consistently throughout the history of the American labor movement, and have continued to do so into the present. State repression, corporate consolidation of power, business-union opportunism, and the incoherence of the left-wing of labor led to the disintegration of what could have been a revolutionary movement in the United States. The American labor movement (or at least its 'mainstream') has, as a result of the incessant attacks on 'Reds' and progressive unions from the ruling class as well as the business-unionist disciples of Gompers, been unable or unwilling to challenge the capitalist power structure in its entirety, and since the New Deal-era, it has been linked to the Democratic Party in a sadomasochistic relationship which I explore more deeply in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: The American Labor Movement Since 1955

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the merging of the AFL and CIO in 1955, mainstream labor unions have been more than anything political lobbying organizations. C. Wright Mills, who, it should be pointed out, was a Wobbly, writes in his examination of America's labor leaders *The New Men of Power* that the bureaucracies of business and mainstream labor (AFL-CIO) have been amalgamated for the purpose of 'stabilization' (Mills 1948:223). One should understand that, in this context, 'stabilization' means simply 'consolidation of power.' Gone are the days of sit-down strikes, sabotage, solidarity boycotts, of worker sentries watching for scabs outside the factory – in short, the relationship between big business and 'big labor' has been one not of conflict, but overall, one of cooperation. In this arrangement, the "union bureaucracy" (that is, the 'union bosses,' who tend to be moderate or conservative politically) "stands between the company bureaucracy and the rank and file workers, operating as a shock absorber for both" (p. 224).

Inherent in this relationship is the crushing of rank-and-file radicals, "unauthorized leaders" who "call unauthorized strikes" (p. 224). In the past, unions did not have such a relationship with the bosses – the class distinctions and power dynamics were apparent, as was, in the words of the IWW, the 'irrepressible conflict between the capitalist class and the working class.' However, in the era of 'stability,' the conservative AFL-CIO works alongside business and the state, guaranteeing a workforce that will not, and arguably cannot (so long as it adheres to the 'rules') slip back into the militancy and

radicalism which characterized earlier decades in the American labor movement. The AFL-CIO is the weakest link in this system, this arrangement between business, labor, and the state. As Mills warned a little over seventy years ago, “the dialectic of business and labor and government has reached a stage where the state, in the interests of domestic stability and international security, increasingly appropriates the aims of the employer and expropriates or abolishes the functions of the unions” (p. 233). “This is the blind alley into which the liberal is led by the rhetoric of co-operation,” says Mills, “This is the trap set by the sophisticated conservative as he speaks of the virtues of the great co-operation” (p. 233). I argue ‘the great co-optation’ is a better term for the situation.

Today, over sixty years since the merging of the AFL and CIO, unions in the United States are starved, if not of money then at least of power. The function of some of the larger unions within the AFL-CIO, including its three largest affiliates: the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), is predominantly to act as instruments of the Democratic Party. As UE points out in its pamphlet mentioned above, labor became entrenched in the machinery of the Democratic Party during the (FD) Roosevelt administration, and it has remained largely connected to the Democrats (the exceptions being police unions and the building trades, which tend to be conservative and connected to the GOP) ever since. When a political campaign for a Democratic candidate emerges, the AFL-CIO is one of the primary organizations funneling money to the campaign and getting feet in the street. Regardless of how much funding and volunteer work the labor federation provides, however, the Democratic Party

is reluctant, nearly to the same extent as the Republicans, to provide any structural assistance to workers or labor unions. “Within the present party system,” Mills wrote several years before the AFL and CIO merged, “labor organizations and union members do not have the power of decision: they are not even able to confront the live alternatives. Day after day they hear the clamor of the public that something must be done; but they don’t know what to do, and they are afraid” (p. 238). The situation remains much the same today.

II. THE GRAVEYARD OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The Democratic Party is an organization with an observable history of coopting, absorbing, manipulating, and moderating progressive social movements, the labor movement chief among them. The political consequences of this are worth analyzing. The Democratic Party “has often been called ‘the graveyard of social movements,’ and more often than not the social struggles in the United States end their useful lives digging their own graves” under the party’s influence (Eagleburger & Rusk 2017:1). As an elite political institution, the “Democratic Party seems to exert a magnetic attraction on social movements regardless of what Democrats actually do for them in the end” (p. 2). While social movements associated with the Republican Party are able to embrace institutionalization because “for them institutionalization means they get more attention, money, and capacity,” this is only because the Republican-associated movements are able to experience institutionalization “without being forced to moderate or demobilize their base” (p. 2). As the movements associated with the Republican Party are unabashedly conservative, capitalist, and even reactionary, they do not pose a threat to the power

structure, and are therefore given license to be as extreme as they would like. Left-wing movements, on the other hand, “become more restrained, more concerned with keeping their leaders happy, less confrontational, and less powerful” when they associate with the Democratic Party (p. 2). While capitalism is a characteristic of one-party states, “these kinds of regimes tend to make mistakes, lose legitimacy and get overthrown,” and so it is beneficial to the neoliberal status quo to “use different parties to try out different strategies, and then go with the strategy that” works better for the ruling class (p. 2). In this way, while “the two-party system supplies some variation and a little healthy competition of policies,” the two major political parties in the United States effectively function, as Gore Vidal once quipped, as two right wings of the same bird: The Property Party (p. 2).

The Democratic Party makes no secret of its disdain for progressive or left-wing politics, and this makes sense, as “it’s a party made up of capitalists” including “numerous millionaires in Congress” whose priority is to “create good conditions for profitability and financial sector growth” (p. 2). This is what makes the relationship between the Democratic Party and progressive social movements strange: why would a political party with center-right policies “be the place progressive social movements always turn,” especially since “it always turns out badly” (p. 2)? The answer rests dustily in the crypt of American history.

In the past, while both the Republican and Democratic “parties had a ‘progressive’ capitalist wing, there was also an independent Socialist Party to compete with, the Industrial Workers of the World and other militant unions, and huge immigrant-

led radical organizations that eventually helped form the Communist Party” (p. 3). The two major political parties still preserved the status quo, “but they could not convince workers that there was no alternative to working inside a capitalist party” (p. 3). It was the coalition of parties, unions, and groups espousing left-wing and alternative politics that led to Roosevelt’s adoption of the New Deal, which, despite being “designed in a thoroughly racist manner that shut many Black workers out of Social Security and set up housing policies that institutionalized segregation,” did “represent concessions to a rising working class movement” (p. 3). The working class parties, unions, and organizations did not collaborate with the Democratic Party to bring about such concessions - on the contrary, the progress came about as a result of workers “refusing its control” (p. 3). The communists “formed councils of the unemployed that pressed directly for jobs through protests” while other leftist groups “led strikes in three major US cities in a wave of sit-down strikes in auto plants that were met by the national guard” (p. 3). In the Jim Crow South, “communists organized interracial unions” (p. 3) in steel mills and other manufacturing institutions. The working class groups did not negotiate with elite institutions or follow the prescribed methods of the Democratic Party, and this autonomy allowed them to remain radical, militant, and uncompromised.

The successful strikes and the growing support for alternative parties and political organizations “set up the strongest working class institution the US had ever seen, the Congress of Industrial Organizations” (p. 3). The Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) “was built upon strikes, many of them illegal, and all of them disruptive to capitalists” and their political institutions (p. 4). However, when the “strike wave of

1936-37 was exhausted,” the union leaders were faced with a choice: they “could continue mobilizing workers and leading strikes” with all of the risks involved, or “they could take contracts that would not require them to carry out continuous worker mobilization” (p. 4). The CIO chose “the latter,” for “if they hadn’t, some other set of conservative union bureaucrats probably would have” (p. 4). While contracts serve workers in taking at least a degree of power from bosses, they also allow union leaders to “get into a position that is easier for them to sit in comfortably if workers are not mobilized to take more” (p. 4). Thus, “if the union officials are not accountable to union democracy and, optimally, a revolutionary socialist party, it is all too inevitable that their actions will come to reflect their own self-interest, whatever their speeches may profess” (p. 4). The labor movement’s largest militant force was thus moderated and institutionalized, which ultimately led to their becoming affiliated with the conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL) and associated with the Democratic Party. The “link up with the Democratic Party” helped “the union officials divert member militancy into hopeless political pressure campaigns,” which bolstered the Democratic Party and weakened the once autonomous and openly radical American labor movement. After World War II, the “CIO bureaucrats collaborated with the Democrats to purge their unions of Communists, many of them the more active organizers and strikers, and then submitted to the Taft-Hartley Act banning revolutionaries in the unions” (p. 5). This further served to moderate the labor movement by stripping unions of their most effective and militant organizers, and led to union leadership becoming more allegiant to the Democratic Party and the neoliberal status quo.

This moderation and institutionalization of the labor movement aided the power structure in multiple ways, including the mythmaking regarding peaceful protest and nonviolent action. In truth, historical social movement action and protest, which did involve nonviolent demonstrations, also involved participants “taking up arms for protection of rights, while sheriffs and white terrorists were using violence to suppress” the challenges to the system (p. 5). The violent, disruptive, and militant history of labor and other movements is downplayed “because it is inconsistent with the story of nonviolence smoothly transitioning into electoral politics” (p. 6).

The labor movement is hardly the only example of a social movement being absorbed, institutionalized, and defanged by the Democratic Party. The Civil Rights movement stands as a particularly tragic example, as the movement that had sprouted as a call for human decency and solidarity was “ultimately drawn to defending” the Democratic Party’s “reprehensible policies,” including “continuation of the Vietnam War, opposing the antiwar movement, and collaborating with the CIA” (p. 6). Organizations within the Civil Rights movement that remained outside of the control of the Democratic Party, such as the Black Panther Party, were met with “the state’s brutal repression” (p. 6).

Social movements that collaborate with the Democratic Party give elite institutions “legitimacy and divert their members from more radical ends,” which sustains the status quo and bolsters the power structure (p. 7). The void that has been created and maintained as a result of strong left-wing alternatives to the Democratic Party being dismantled has led to social movements substituting Democratic election campaigns for

actual grassroots organizing, which helps the Democratic Party, but hinders challenges to the status quo. The only concessions made by the Democratic Party to social movements are given by the party “to deal with the possibility that an anti-Democratic Party movement” could emerge, since this would force the Democrats “to make much bigger concessions to convince people to come back their way” (p. 7).

III. LABOR AND THE DEMOCRATS: A PARASITIC RELATIONSHIP

An examination of post-New Deal relations between the Democratic Party and the labor movement can aid one in identifying the ways in which cooptation and institutionalization sustain the status quo and cripple social movements. It has been observed that “following the New Deal period, organized labor developed close organizational ties with the Democratic Party,” and by the 1960s, “organized labor had become the Democratic Party’s most important political supporter in national elections” (Francia 2010:293). However, despite the labor movement acting “effectively as a campaign and electoral arm of the Democratic Party,” unions have “received comparatively little in return from elected officials in the Democratic Party” (p. 294). An analysis from the Center for Responsive Politics from 1989 to 2009 “shows that twelve of the top twenty groups” that financially support politicians and political parties “are labor PACs” (p. 294). These labor PACs, “unlike many of the corporate and business groups that spread their donations to candidates of both political parties,” overwhelmingly support the Democratic Party (p. 294). As campaign finance reforms “have allowed unregulated money to funnel into 501(c) and 527 organizations,” alternatives to PACs

“have been quite active in recent elections” (p. 295). Many of these 501(c) and 527 organizations “have ties to organized labor” (p. 295).

According to data “compiled by the Campaign Finance Institute,” the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees’ (AFSCME) “federal 527 organization spent \$30.7 million during the 2008 election and” the 527 of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) “spent \$27.4 million,” the combination of which topped “all other 527 groups” (p. 295). However, when the Center for Responsive Politics (CRP) “uses employer and occupational information to categorize individual donors,” the data show that “business donations dominate the campaign finance system” (p. 296). The “business money” flowing “to Democrats” in the 2008 cycle “was fifteen times greater than from labor, casting at least some doubt on labor’s financial clout in the Democratic Party” (p. 296). It should be noted, though, that political contributions from unions and ideological groups are often classified as business contributions by the CRP (p. 296).

The most valuable resource provided by the labor movement, though, is not financial, but human. The AFL-CIO reported that during the 2008 election process, “its volunteers knocked on 10 million doors, made 70 million phone calls, distributed 27 million worksite fliers, and sent 57 million union mail pieces” (p. 297). The outreach tactics undertaken by the rank and file of the AFL-CIO paid off for the Democratic Party, as exit poll surveys of union members showed that “68 and 69 percent of union members voted for Democrats” in battleground states (p. 298). Although the labor movement has played “a major role as an electoral arm of the Democratic Party,” the relationship

“between the two has been one-sided” (p. 300). While the Democratic Party “has reaped the rewards of labor’s efforts in the electoral arena,” “the party has largely failed in the past forty years to deliver much of significance to labor in the legislative arena” (p. 300). Even when Democrats “have exercised unified control of the White House and both chambers of Congress,” the key legislative goals of the labor movement “have failed to gain passage” (p. 300). There are instances in which Democrats have directly opposed the goals of labor. One such occasion was when Senator Joseph Lieberman (a Democrat until 2006 and then an Independent who caucused with the Democrats) “vowed to join a Republican-led filibuster” if a provision for a public option was included in the hotly debated Affordable Care Act. This effectively killed “one of labor’s top policy priorities” (p. 301). The Democratic Party, even after securing filibuster-proof majorities, is “destined to deny labor any major legislative victories on labor law reform” (p. 301).

Labor’s dependence on the Democratic Party, the history of which is described above, has rendered it “unable to achieve victory on its top legislative priorities” (p. 302). This failure has led some labor scholars and activists to “push for the formation of a viable labor party, although the constraints of the U.S.’s single member-simple plurality system certainly complicate any such strategy” (p. 302). Because the labor movement allowed itself to become moderate, institutionalized, and dependent on an elite political party, it has limited its options. The future of American labor lies “in the mold of an organization that specializes more in protest and agitation” (p. 302). The development of a labor movement more forcefully committed “to social movement unionism, built from

the bottom up in partnership with grassroots community-based organizations, seems long overdue in light of labor's failures to achieve much through electoral politics" (p. 303).

IV. THE POWER OF THE STRIKE

The story of the American labor movement clearly shows the pitfalls social movements face in an environment designed to keep them restricted, incoherent, and feeble. However, the story also shows an alternative path that can be taken, and indeed was taken in labor's most militant periods. American labor at its most ferocious and radical provides a blueprint for social movements that seek to effectively challenge the status quo, even under extremely hostile conditions. Unions are an effective vehicle for social change because they "tap into *preexisting* networks of individuals who share common life experiences and social identities" (Dixon, Roscigno & Hodson 2004:6). While some social movements must establish identities for participants and produce frames in order to sustain those identities, unions (and working-class organizations more generally) are able to organize and mobilize based on foundations that already exist in the participants and in the economic, political, and social environment. As "goal-directed decision making and rational calculations among individuals about whether to participate" in a movement "are filtered through, if not fundamentally weighted by, friendship networks, group affiliations, and prior experiences," unions have the benefit of developing and organizing along these lines (p. 6). Thus, unions are a particularly organic example of social movement organization wherein identities and frames are not created but are rather recognized and articulated by the organization.

Another benefit of unions as a vehicle of social movement is that militant labor action fosters “worker militancy” and increases “widespread strike activity,” making it both a cause and an effect (p. 6). Militant unions and worker organizations, therefore, have a unique ability to produce and sustain worker militancy through militant action. Because of the way in which strikes, walkouts, shutdowns, sabotage, and other forms of militant worker action have a tendency to promote further action, unions and union activity “have a positive and significant influence on worker mobilization” (p. 6). There is also some evidence that suggests that loose, unbureaucratic union organization leads to greater worker mobilization, with “worker solidarity and ultimately mobilization” being “bolstered by indigenous strategies and cultural practices that” denote “common constraints and grievances” (p. 7). In reviewing the history of American labor, this seems to be the case, as the more conservative, bureaucratic craft unions were far less militant and mobilized than the diverse, radical, flexible industrial unions.

There is an observable “mutually reinforcing interplay” between unions and worker solidarity that is unique to the labor movement. Workers are “likely contemplate the extent of union organization behind them and their relative leverage in the employment relationship before engaging in a risky job-related collective action,” and “may pursue strategies that agree with their views of the workplace, each other, and the employment relationship” (p. 8). In this process lies the ingredient that makes unions unique vehicles of social movement: the worker determines how their identity relates to the workplace as a habitat. The worker realizes their relationship to the environment and to their fellow workers (class consciousness) and this compels their decisions to “develop

in accord with a collective identity,” and so unions and worker organizations become the obvious vessels for engaging in “tactics that conform to their members’ experiences” (p. 8).

There is evidence that can be found in scholarship pertaining to American labor history defending the premise that labor activism in the past “yielded greater mobilization potential when their messages resonated with already established cultural practices and solidarities of workers themselves” (p. 8). For example, much has been written on the way in which organizations on “opposite ends of the political spectrum” (such as the conservative AFL and the explicitly leftist IWW) “eventually moved toward similar syndicalist paths of direct, militant action because such action was more consistent with workers’ experiences” (p. 8). Such action was also significantly more successful in obtaining the goals of the workers.

This illustrates the point that the militant, radical, unbureaucratic industrial unions (such as the IWW and later the CIO’s more radical affiliates) were more successful in their selection of tactics, so successful in fact that their conservative and moderate rivals were forced to emulate, at least to some degree, their example. While craft unionism is “associated with exclusive tactics, conservative political ideologies, and relatively small, skilled, and racially homogenous work groups,” industrial unionism “has tended to rely on inclusive organizing and mass mobilization strategies” to advance worker goals (p. 9). As stated above, the more militant, syndicalist-style of action practiced and promoted by industrial unionists was eventually adopted (to some degree) by the more conservative craft unionists, as the tactics of the industrial unionists proved more effective. It is also

worth noting that industrial unions tended to be organized along preexisting networks between workers rather than craftsmanship, as was the case for the craft unions. Because industrial unions were open to all people regardless of race, sex, religion, or nationality, members were able to organize both along the lines of existing networks as well as in a way that transcended their preexisting identities and united them under the banner of their shared working class experiences.

Thus, it makes sense that the industrial unions tended to have a stronger sense of solidarity between members, since scholarship “has begun to suggest that solidarity (or solidarity potential) may be established a priori by activities at the point of production, including activities outside those prescribed by formalized union procedures” (p. 9). The above activities “include cooperative, group-building practices, grievance sharing within work units, as well as contentious encounters with management that may alter employee perceptions of the workplace, fairness, and justice” (p. 9). Part of the shared understanding of justice and fairness that can be witnessed in the industrial union setting takes the form of workers defending “one another in the face of authority or abuse” (p. 9). Workers risking their livelihoods for their fellow workers by confronting management not only presents a “challenge to employer prerogatives” but also strengthens the bond of solidarity between the workers (p. 9). This risk represents a sort of opposite to the safe forms of support inherent to slacktivism, which allows participants to support a cause or movement without any negative consequences. While safe, harmless actions weaken movements, actions taken by participants with economic and physical risks invigorate groups and sustain them.

Despite industrial unionism's philosophical opposition to bureaucracy, "sustained movement activity" is dependent on "a core group of activists who are crucial for invoking others' participation" (p. 9). For example, Industrial Workers of the World does not have presidents nor executive boards, but it does have elected delegates and organizing committees. Therefore, in order for "indigenous resistance practices to take hold and foster mobilization, both mutual defense and internal leadership dimensions of worker solidarity will be important" (p. 9). Group leadership, "which usually emerges in conflict with management, provides a base for more lasting collective action, identity building, and, potentially, strike activity" (p. 14). What is important to note here is that leadership in industrial unions exists within the framework of an organic skeleton upon which the muscle of the movement is built. The leadership within industrial unions is never separate from the body, for they are part of the cells making up the muscle that covers the bones. Their class consciousness entrenches them in the labor movement, the vehicle of the working class for the pursuit of its goals. Thus, I again assert that through leadership of the working class by 'organic intellectuals' *within* the working class, class consciousness can be introduced to and attained by workers and weaponized against the power structure.

Working class participants in the labor movement "may engage in direct action based on available organization, resources, and" union power ("leverage in the employment relationship"), but protest action is also taken because "it resonates with" workers' "shared experiences and in some instances with a legacy of collective action (solidarity-centered action)" (p. 10). If a group of workers toil together in a sector known

for instances of worker protest action, they are more likely to engage in protest action, as are workers who have recognized the experiences they share with their fellow workers. There is an organic support system based on class consciousness and a history of action that paves the way for organized, militant worker activity, with unions providing organizational resources and structure. Thus, “the alignment of both union organization and sufficient worker solidarity will have the most pronounced impact” on potential worker actions (strikes, shutdowns, sabotage, etc.) (p. 10).

Industrial unionism, when compared to craft unionism, “clearly has the strongest positive association with striking” (p. 18) and this, I claim, is largely due to its mutually reinforcing relationship with worker solidarity. Because industrial unions are capable of nurturing preexisting relationships and identities while also building class consciousness and worker solidarity, they effectively promote “the convergence of union organization” and “internal solidarity processes,” which makes industrial unionism more “likely to facilitate collective action” (p. 22). The factors mentioned above are “strongly reinforcing, with union organization providing employees with a certain degree of leverage in the workplace and solidarity providing the foundation for collective response at critical moments” (p. 23). When “industrial unionism aligns with solidarity in the form of worker mutual defense, workers are more than four times as likely to strike” (p. 23).

In short, labor action, the primary example of which is the strike, is of interest because it is produced by worker solidarity and also has the ability to bolster and expand worker solidarity. Participation in a strike or other form of worker activism has a radicalizing effect, one which increases the militancy of the worker and builds class

consciousness. While mainstream labor unions are often nonconfrontational, and the union bosses usually do their best to *prevent* rank and file action, the passion and power which derives from collective action, when embraced by a union, reinforces the legitimacy of the labor organization, builds worker solidarity, and places class consciousness at the forefront of the struggle between the boss and the workers.

V. INSPIRATION FROM THE PAST

The Memphis Sanitation Strike of 1968

Workers faced substantial risk during the Memphis Sanitation Workers strike of 1968, a famous wildcat, notable for its participants being predominantly black as well as the support given the strikers by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. shortly before his assassination. The strike in Memphis began “after two sanitation workers, Echol Cole and Robert Walker, were crushed to death by a malfunctioning truck” (Weber 2018:2). The deaths occurred at a time when workers had been voicing their concerns “about many challenges they faced on the job, including similar safety issues, no overtime pay, working for such low wages that many had to get food stamps, no paid sick leave, and blatant racism by the city and mayor” (p. 3).

Dr. King went to Memphis to support the workers after they called a strike – illegally – and said to the workers “You are reminding not only Memphis, but you are reminding the nation that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages” (p. 3) This statement was made only weeks before Dr. King was assassinated. Henry Loeb III, the mayor of Memphis, “refused to recognize the union or

the strike from the start, saying ‘Public employees cannot strike against your employer’” (p. 3). Photographs of armed soldiers and police confronting the striking workers show the belligerent environment in which the sanitation workers carried out their strike. With the approval of Loeb, “militarized police attacked the crowds,” and sixteen-year-old Larry Payne was killed “after a police officer accused him of looting during the protests” (p. 4). Payne was actually waiting for Dr. King to arrive so that he could hear the Civil Rights leader speak – he had nothing to do with the looting that occurred.

The striking workers remained unshaken even after “Loeb called for 4,000 National Guard troops and declared martial law soon after” (p. 4). The strike continued, the workers becoming both somber and more militant after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Coretta Scott King “returned to the city for a remembrance of her husband” (p. 4) only four days after his assassination in support of AFSCME Local 1733, and the widow of Dr. King marching alongside the striking workers brought their movement strength and kept the participants fiercely committed to their cause. Shortly after Mrs. King joined the striking workers, “the union was recognized and the city promised to raise the wages of black sanitation workers” (p. 4).

DRUM and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers

The year 1968 also saw the rise of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM). Formed by black members of the United Autoworkers “at the Chrysler Corporation Dodge Main Plant in Hamtramck, Michigan near Detroit,” the emergence of DRUM “took place with the backdrop of the previous summer’s unrest in the city, in

which black residents rebelled against poor housing conditions and police brutality” (p. 4). While “more than 60 percent” of the workforce in the plant was composed of black workers, “the leadership of United Auto Workers Local 3, plant management, and lower-level supervision was all white” (p. 5). Though the UAW “had supported the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s, it was not quick to allow African Americans into leadership roles,” which led DRUM to demand concessions not only from “Chrysler management, but also the union itself.” (p. 5) DRUM’s July 1968 wildcat strike erupted as a “direct response to a 40 percent increase in assembly line speed and tensions exacerbated by management and union intransigence” (p. 5). The strike “involved nearly 4,000 members” and “lasted nearly three days, preventing production of about 3,000 cars” (p. 5). The DRUM wildcat strike encouraged workers elsewhere around Detroit to take similar action. There developed “a Ford Revolutionary Union Movement at the massive Ford River Rouge Plant, and a similar movement at the Chrysler Eldon Ridge plant,” the “Eldon Ridge Revolutionary Union Movement, which was partially motivated by a worker being accidentally crushed by a box” (p. 5). Though the revolutionary workers were not able to “achieve many of their initial goals of racial equality right away,” the strikes did create meaningful change, with the respective “nascent movements” coalescing “into the League of Revolutionary Black Workers” in the Detroit-area, which, according to its constitution, was built to fight for change “wherever there are Black Workers,” be it in the United States or “the mines of Bolivia, the rubber plantations of Indonesia, the oil fields of Biafra, or the Chrysler plant in South Africa” (p. 6). Thus, the militant actions of the revolutionary black workers in the Michigan auto

plants swelled into a new radical internationalism, and although “philosophical differences in focus and organizing models led to the League’s eventual dissolution,” the example of DRUM and its fellow militant worker organizations “remains a hallmark for addressing the needs of a critical population of underrepresented workers” (p. 6).

Postal Workers’ Strike of 1970

The Postal Workers’ Strike of 1970 serves as another example of militant worker action worth studying. After Congress “voted to give postal workers a 4 percent wage increase, while it gave itself a 41 percent raise,” infuriated “U.S. postal workers suddenly walked off the job – catching the country, the union, and President Nixon by surprise” (p. 6). The working conditions in American “postal centers were abysmal, with workers prohibited from negotiating pay for raises, unable to work overtime, and often needing to find a second job” (p. 6). Having had their fill of abuse, postal workers decided to engage in a wildcat strike in March 1970 “when workers at the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 36 in Manhattan, New York voted to strike against the recommendations of their union leadership” (p. 7).

Over “210,000 workers” participated in the wildcat “in all parts of the postal service, from the letter carriers to office clerks, demonstrating how the frustrations of regular work life could result in a form of solidarity rarely seen between low wage and other workers” (p. 7). Richard Nixon, deeply troubled by this militant worker activity, “immediately went on national television to try to get them back to work” (p. 7). However, Nixon’s “words, and especially his implied threat to use military forces to

deliver mail, only enraged more postal workers, and 671 more locations walked out across the country in response” (p. 7). The striking workers “not only paralyzed the mail system, but also affected the stock market, which suffered losses as the strike wore on – some even predicted the closure of the stock market entirely” if the strike went on long enough (p. 8). Thus, postal workers were able to collectively attack capital in one of its most representative forms – the stock market. By mid-March, “Nixon spoke on television once again, this time stating that military troops would fill in for postal workers” (p. 8). In the same television appearance, Nixon also declared a national emergency with “Proclamation 3972” (p. 8). Nixon sent in the National Guard “to perform basic mail services in seventeen New York post offices, while at the same time negotiating with the wildcat strikers” (p. 8). After the strike ended eight days later, not a single “postal worker lost a job. And very soon, the National Postal Reorganization Act became law, which renamed the entity the U.S. Postal Service and provided collective bargaining rights to the four major postal unions” (p. 8). These collective bargaining rights included “the right to negotiate on wages, benefits, and working conditions” (p. 8). Before the strike, the workers “had no such rights” (p. 8).

The Postal Workers’ Strike of 1970 in particular shows the power of militant collective action. The Nixon Administration was hostile towards unions, and the striking workers faced not only fines but incarceration for their actions. By lashing out as a united force, the workers were able to challenge the power structure and bring about meaningful changes that had before seemed impossible. It was not with institutional aid or by conforming to elite rules of engagement that the goals of the striking workers became

reality – it was through militant, disruptive, and risky tactics, traits that characterize the wildcat strike and distinguish it from other forms of worker action.

VI. REASONS FOR OPTIMISM

In February 2019, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, commenting on the recently released Bureau of Labor Statistics report which stated that 425,500 American workers had engaged in some sort of militant worker action (strikes, stoppages, etc.), stated “These strike statistics represent nothing less than a sea of change in America. Working people—completely fed up with an economic and political system that does not work for us—are turning to each other and using every tool at our disposal to win a better deal.” There are a few points worth noting here (besides Trumka’s apparent enthusiasm for worker activism that never seems to culminate in calls for federation-wide action – let alone the use of ‘every tool at our disposal’) that make the reemergence of American worker militancy of particular interest: first, that this new radicalism is emerging after the Supreme Court sided with antiunion forces in the *Janus vs. AFSCME* case, and second, that the workers are embracing tactics used by the industrial unions of the past – most notably the wildcat strike.

The *Janus v. AFSCME* case, which was a victory for “deep-pocketed backers” of union-busting, sought to “bankrupt unions and strip them of whatever power they still have” (Richman 2018:1). The plaintiff of the case, Mark Janus, claimed that his freedom of speech was being violated by the ‘fair share’ fee associated with working in a unionized workplace. A fair share fee is a percentage of money paid by nonunion

workers that goes to a union in order to help pay for the benefits of having a unionized workplace (representation, protection, sustained wage increases, etc.) Fair share fees, also called ‘agency fees,’ “are not just compensation for the financial costs of representation, but for the political costs of representing all the members in the bargaining unit and maintaining labor peace” (p. 2). Because the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees has open ties to the Democratic Party, Janus claimed that he was paying for political speech with which he did not agree. While it was pointed out by AFSCME’s attorney that their political fund is completely voluntary and one must agree to pay into it, and that it is illegal for unions to use dues money for political purposes, the Supreme Court still sided with Mark Janus, making it illegal for public sector unions to collect fair share fees. This essentially made ‘right-to-work’ the law of the land. AFSCME’s attorney also pointed out, interestingly, that “the agency fee is routinely traded for a no-strike clause in most union contracts,” and that the disappearance of such clauses could mean employers having “chaos and discord on their hands” (p. 2). One has to wonder whether a union is better off not making such a trade.

Exclusive Representation and Systemic Constraints

The American labor system is uniquely rigid, much to the benefit of employers. For example, the United States labor system involves what is called ‘exclusive representation,’ which is a feature of the institutionalization of the labor movement. Exclusive representation means that one union will oversee an entire workforce, eliminating competition between unions. This has historically led to the displacement of more radical unions in favor of boss-friendly business-unions, and the imposition of “a

political imperative” for the union “to defend the terms of any deal as ‘the best we could get’ (even if it includes concessions on benefits and work rules)” (p. 2). While docile, boss-friendly unions are rewarded “with a guaranteed right to exist and a reliable base of fee-paying membership,” the system “rewards employers with the far more valuable guarantee of the right to direct the uninterrupted work of the enterprise while union leadership has to tamp down rank-and-file gripes and discord” (p. 2).

Before this system was introduced following the New Deal, “unions *did* compete in individual workplaces for dues-paying members and shop floor leadership” (p. 3). In fact, competition between unions and “struggle within unions is beneficial for union democracy and collective bargaining outcomes” (Southworth & Stepan-Norris 2010:228). Furthermore, despite claims to the contrary, “direct competition in the form of rival unionism does not distract workers from their larger aim of self-organization; instead, competition enhances workers’ representation vis-à-vis employers by increasing union density” (p. 244). Prior to the restrictions inherent to exclusive representation, unions could garner support by appearing as the most radical option, and “would compete over who made the boldest wage and hour demands and who led the most disruptive job actions” (Richman 2018:3).

The uncertainty that thrived in this environment led to some of the most substantial moments of worker militancy in American history, as “no deal could bring lasting labor peace,” for “any union cut out of the deal had a political need to disparage its terms and agitate for a fresh round of protests” (p. 3). The “one-upmanship” between “rival anarchist and Communist unions,” which embraced syndicalism and industrial

unionism, and “a number of craft unions” led to “half a dozen industry-wide strikes between 1911 and 1934” (p. 3). This changed during World War II, when “unions pledged not to strike to maintain defense production” (p. 4). While there were a few instances of worker rebellion during WWII, and though there were hiccups of rage and militant worker protest actions thereafter, the labor movement emerged from the war much tamer and institutionalized than it had been before the war.

The Rebirth of Worker Militancy and Radical Solidarity

The aftermath of the *Janus v. AFSCME* case has been, to the chagrin of institutional antiunion forces and elites, a renewed enthusiasm for industrial union tactics, worker militancy, and coordinated disruption. Workers have taken the task of confronting capital upon themselves, collectively rejecting the restrictions placed upon them by bosses, the state, and business-unionism. This was clearly the case in the 2018-19 wave of teacher strikes. Notably, many of the strikes took the form of a wildcat strike, a tactic most commonly associated with syndicalist and industrial unions defined by workers striking without the approval of employers, the state, or union bosses. The wildcat strike is likely named after the black cat symbol of the Industrial Workers of the World, the ‘sabocat’ (‘sabo’ being short for ‘sabotage,’ another form of militant worker action), depicted fiercely with arched back, fangs bared – an omen of bad luck for the bosses of the world. The power of the wildcat is in its radicalism, militancy, and refusal of compromise.

The noticeable resurgence of militant worker tactics arguably began “with a dramatic wildcat strike in West Virginia in February 2018,” which was followed by “a wave of teacher strikes that swept the nation, moving from red states like Arizona and Oklahoma to blue California and Colorado” (French 2019:1). The wave of strikes “centered antiracist class-struggle demands that unite teachers and school communities,” contrasting them with the American teacher strikes of the 1970s which had the unfortunate consequence of exacerbating “tensions between the mostly white teachers and the communities of color they served” (p. 1). The striking teachers in the wildcat wave “also made clear that public education must be funded by reappropriating the wealth of corporations and the ultrarich, not by higher taxes or benefit cuts to working people” (p. 1). The teacher strikes, therefore, had an undeniable aura of class-based worker militancy unseen in the institutionalized American labor movement for decades.

The demands made by the striking teachers are significant, as their orientation is openly class-based: “smaller class sizes, more support staff for students, and ends to school closures and charter school expansion” (p. 1). The demands listed here are not simply teacher-centered (higher pay, etc.) – they are founded in the concept of community, shared experiences, and common strength and vulnerability. Because of this, teachers “won widespread public support for their cause” as they presented “demands on behalf of the entire working class,” and established “solidarity against a common enemy: the billionaires hoarding obscene wealth and trying to destroy public education” (p. 1).

The community- and class-based disposition of the teacher strikes “united parents and students” with the striking teachers, thus making the strikes more than just a battle

between the teachers and their employers (p. 5). The teachers in West Virginia “demanded that public education be funded by reversing corporate tax cuts and raising taxes on the state’s highly profitable natural gas industry” while teachers in Arizona “beat back a budget proposal that would have taken additional education funding from Medicaid and other social programs, instead putting forward a ballot initiative to fund schools by taxing the rich” (p. 5). In Los Angeles, “teachers were clear that their fight is a fight for students and the community against privatizing billionaires” (p. 5). The striking teachers in Oakland were able to achieve “historic gains” by framing their strike as an “antiracist class struggle” uniting “parents, students, and other community members against billionaire privatizers, their front groups, and a bought-off school board” (p. 6). By conducting themselves as a militant, unified front within the frame of the greater struggle between classes, Oakland teachers were able to achieve “class-size reductions; reduced caseloads for counselors, nurses, and other support staff; and significant pay raises for teachers” (p. 6). Perhaps most significantly, however, “they won a promise from the Board of Education president to introduce a resolution calling for a five-month pause on school closures and a promise from the Board of Ed to vote on a resolution calling for an end to charter school growth in the Oakland Unified School District” (p. 6).

The strike that ignited the brushfire of militant worker activism, the West Virginia wildcat, deserves considerable attention, especially from social movement activists hoping to understand the dynamic between the power structure and movements seeking to challenge it. The teachers initially conducted a “walkout over rising health insurance costs and stagnant pay” in February 2018, and by mid-February a settlement seemed to

have been reached “with promises from Gov. Jim Justice of a 5 percent pay raise for teachers” (Richman 2018:2). While union leadership “initially accepted the deal in good faith,” the “rank-and-file teachers refused to end the walkout” (p. 2). Every public school in West Virginia “remained closed for nine days due to the strike, until the West Virginia legislature voted to approve a 5 percent pay increase for *all* state workers as well as a formal labor-management committee to deal with the healthcare problem” (p. 2). The action taken by the rank-and-file West Virginia teachers starkly resembled militant worker activity prior to the National Labor Relations Act.

Wildcats are often characterized by “temporary slowdowns or quick work stoppages in a smaller segment of a wider operation,” and can be sparked “over a sudden change in work rules or the belligerent actions of a supervisor,” among other things (p. 5). Typically, “an official union representative rushes to the scene to attempt to settle the dispute with management and encourages the workers to return to their jobs” (p. 5). Wildcats are also characterized by their illegality, as many wildcat strikes are also “sparked by out-of-control inflation and intolerable speedups,” meaning that workers carrying out a wildcat strike may not be simply lashing out against a “violation of their collective bargaining agreements but” (p. 5) against the very terms of the collective bargaining agreement.

Wildcats can also involve acts of sabotage (the name deriving, after all, from the ferocious ‘sabocat’). While the heyday of the wildcat strike might rest in the pages of history before the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, there have been notable occasions in which the black cat has awoken from its slumber after the implementation of

the NLRA. For example, workers in the Lordstown, Ohio General Motors factory in 1972 took to “throwing a few loose screws in a gas tank, in hopes that the ‘error’ would be caught by quality control and shut the line down for a few minutes of blessed relief” (p. 6). While the leadership of the United Autoworkers (UAW) “prioritized wages in bargaining,” “the workers at Lordstown wanted to slow the pace of work” (p. 7). This led the Lordstown workers to go “on a wildcat strike that lasted for 22 days, until management settled a slew of grievances and agreed to rehire a number of laid off positions in order to reduce the pace of work” (p. 7).

The striking teachers in West Virginia schools were faced with “a peculiar framework: no contracts or formal collective bargaining, but a degree of official union recognition – including dues check-off – within a highly litigious tenure and grievance procedure with statewide pay and benefits subject to legislative lobbying” (p. 8). Such an environment appears “perfectly crafted to sap unions of their potential militancy,” leading to West Virginia teachers having “some of the lowest pay rates in the nation, along with rising healthcare costs,” and these hostile conditions influenced the teachers’ “decision to walk off the job” (p. 8). The conditions in which the wildcat strike in West Virginia emerged, both in the schools and in the general political atmosphere, make the strike remarkable. The teachers went up against not only a school system but also a political apparatus that could have imprisoned them for the action they took, and against this goliath the teachers arose victorious. Small wonder, then, that this action inspired the wave of strikes by teachers who followed its example.

The wildcat strike serves as an example of the types of tactics that are useful to movements seeking to challenge the power of the elite while mitigating the risk of cooptation or institutionalization. The militancy, collectivism, and directness at the point of capitalism's primary contradiction give power to the wildcat, and since the signing of the National Labor Relations (1935), Taft-Hartley (1947) and Labor Management Disclosure and Reporting (1959) Acts, the illegality of such action has reinforced this power. After the National Labor Relations Act was signed into law in 1935, "working people lost control over" striking, as such action "became illegal as long as an employer contract was in place" (Weber 2018:1). Taft-Hartley and the Labor Management Disclosure and Reporting Act "went even further," with Taft-Hartley requiring "a sixty-day notice of an impending strike," and the Labor Management Disclosure and Reporting Act determining that if a union supports "the strike of another union ('secondary strike'), it could be held liable for damages" (p. 1). Thus, union members have been unable to carry out any effective militant actions with the blessing of the law for quite some time, and this has led to a resurgence in illegal worker actions – such as the wildcat – as workers have come to realize that playing by the rules of the elite is no way to bring about change. When workers engage in wildcats, they "throw the rules right out the window" by "walking off the job and protesting without the permission of their respective union" (p. 1). This is "highly illegal" and "highly effective" (p. 1). Understanding the contexts in which wildcat strikes develop can help one determine why they happen and why they're effective. The West Virginia teacher strike is among some

recent notable examples, but there is a rich history of wildcats in the United States that is worth reviewing – especially for social movement activists.

The West Virginia teacher strike, which involved “some 20,000 classroom teachers and thousands of other employees” shutting down schools across all of the state’s 55 counties, “inspired teachers in other states to take a stand, injecting much-needed militancy into a waning labor movement and fundamentally reshaping the struggle for public education” (Karp & Sanchez 2018:7). The teacher strikes that followed West Virginia in states such as Colorado, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Kentucky represent a wave of “rebellions against the austerity and privatization that has been driving federal and state economic policy for decades” (p. 8). Most of the strike actions took place in ‘right-to-work’ states, “which have seen the steepest cuts in school funding and sharpest erosion of teacher pay and benefits” (p. 8). While the movement was sometimes referred to as a series of “red state revolts,” there were strikes in the ‘purple’ state of Colorado and the ‘blue’ state of California as well. Regardless of political leadership, the states embrace similar economic policies, as “in ‘red states’ and ‘blue states’ alike, budget and tax policy has been used to erode social services, shrink public space, undermine union power, and transfer wealth upward, all the while making the lives of working people harder” (p. 8).

The hardships faced by educators across the country is a symptom of a broader economic assault on the working class, and “cuts to teacher pay are part of larger slashes to school funding” (p. 8). Underfunded public schools have been a consistent characteristic of the American education system, and in many states, this problem is

accelerating. “In 2015, 29 states were providing less total school funding per student than they were in 2008” (p. 8). The underfunded schools provide a context for the teacher strikes: the actions taken by the teachers exist within a broader universe of economic assaults on already vulnerable communities, and therefore cannot simply be branded as contained strikes by workers within an enclosed environment (shop, factory, etc.) The teacher strikes serve as an example of a wide, inclusive working-class social movement that recognized the strike, and more specifically the wildcat strike, as the most effective method of lashing out against the power structure. The cutting of teacher pensions and health benefits and slashing of public education budgets parallel “more than a decade of bipartisan corporate ‘reform’ that included test-based evaluation plans, reduced job security, the expansion of privatized charters, and the erosion of professional status” (p. 8).

The strikes were, then, not only disruptive actions against low wages and large class sizes, but militant reactions to a corporate elite “determined to press ahead with their plans for austerity and privatization” (p. 8). Viewed in this context, the wave of teacher wildcat strikes appears to be an indication of a greater rumbling of working-class consciousness, organization, and militancy unseen since the 1930s. The connection between reactionary elite institutions and establishment politicians is more than a suspicion, and this has become more apparent to working class citizens of the United States as time has rolled forward.

In the case of the striking teachers in Arizona, the governor, Doug Ducey, “and a Republican Legislature tried to quell the rebellion by belatedly promising pay increases

and some modest restoration of school funding cuts” while Ducey was working with the Koch brothers in “pursuing the wholesale privatization of Arizona schools through voucher and charter schemes” (p. 8). The control of the United States government by the ruling class has been more or less obvious since the ‘Gilded Age,’ probably much earlier for those paying attention, and the influence of the corporate elite has become increasingly blatant in the education sector. During the 2018-19 teacher wildcat strikes, “the right-wing State Policy Network, funded by the billionaire Koch Brothers and the Walton Family Foundation, put out a list of talking points in April to advise legislators on how to discredit teacher strikes” (p. 8).

However, it is not just ‘conservative’ elite groups and politicians urging privatization and austerity. Obama’s Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, “declared austerity for school budgets ‘the new normal’ and ‘an opportunity for innovation’” (p. 9). Bipartisan support has been enthusiastically given to the “expansion of privatized charters, erosion of teacher pay and job protections, and test-based teacher evaluation” (p. 9). The Education Law Center (ELC) found that “several Democratic controlled states rank among the bottom in terms of teacher pay, when that pay is adjusted for the cost of living, the results reveal an erosion of living standards that penetrates deep into Democratic-controlled territory” (p. 9).

Despite the attempts by corporate elites and their pet politicians to nudge public policy in an anti-teacher and anti-union direction, teachers and strike actions have overwhelming community support, and this is another ingredient in the power of the wildcat teacher movement. A poll conducted by Associated Press-NORC “found that 78

percent of the U.S. population think that teacher pay is too low and a majority supports the use of strikes to win better pay” (p. 9). The public, therefore, must be ignoring the corporate media, which, with “headlines like ‘Rotten Apples’ and ‘Why We Must Fire Bad Teachers’” blames “educators for the failures of” public schools “while ignoring” the impacts of austerity on communities, schools, students, and teachers (p. 9). This community support draws attention to an important factor in the success of the striking teachers and of collective action in general: challenges to the power structure must be contextually tied to the greater battle between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in order to be properly articulated and thus effective.

Another Era of Red Unionism?

The wildcat teacher strikes were, one could argue, indications that the American working class is prepared to begin taking risks again, and this is a valuable lesson to activists involved in any social movement dedicated to effectively challenging the status quo. Teacher and union activist Emily Comer, in an interview with *Jacobin*, described her wildcat strike experience as one in which “West Virginians came together en masse and held each other up” (Blanc 2018:3). “My colleagues and I leaned on each other heavily,” Comer said, “emotionally, for quick information, for everything. Our communities leaned on each other to feed kids, to provide childcare. Parents were patient and understanding,” and the “most amazing part of this struggle has been the real sense of community across West Virginia” (p. 3).

The sense of community, common struggle, and shared working-class experience which characterized the teacher wildcat strikes of 2018-19 has been observed in more recent examples of worker activism. Strikes by Instacart and Amazon workers facing increasingly dangerous working conditions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic are worth mentioning, as is the case of graduate student workers at UC Berkeley who, in March 2020, began a wildcat strike “pledging to withhold grades and fully cease all work duties in support of a cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, from UC administration” (Finman 2020:1). The striking UC Berkeley workers circumvented the leadership of their union, UAW Local 2865, and organizers of the strike stated that “the COVID-19 pandemic made the fight for COLA especially important, specifically for the reinstatement of the graduate student workers at UCSC, who allegedly lost their health care with their jobs” (p. 2). Waiting for approval from the union bureaucracy was not an option for the Berkeley strikers. During the uprisings which took place across the United States after the murder of George Floyd by officer Derek Chauvin, the ILWU, a union with a history of being ‘Red’ and rebellious, shut down the entire West Coast in an act of solidarity with the activists engaged in the new era of civil rights struggle. Since March 2020, Payday Report’s ‘Strike Tracker’ has identified over 1,100 strikes across the U.S.

It is also worth noting that Sara Nelson, the International President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO, declared at a 2019 AFL-CIO dinner that the government shutdown of the time could be brought to an end by a general strike. General strikes, during which a substantial number of workers in all industries and sectors take part and effectively shut down the economy (or at least a portion of it) have

been relatively rare in American history. The mere fact that Nelson, a labor leader in the dominant federation, the moderate, Democratic Party-dominated AFL-CIO, even hooked the words 'general' and 'strike' together deserves consideration. One would have to dig into the pages of American history to find the last time a leader of the AFL or CIO, let alone the AFL-CIO, suggested such militant action, or whether such action was ever suggested before Nelson. Taken alongside the recent working-class militancy mentioned above, one has to ask: could this be an indication that the working class is waking up?

Chapter Six: Critical Engagement and Application of Theory

Summary

The historical case study having been thoroughly examined, I now move on to the critical application of the theories described in the first and second chapters to labor as well as social movements in general. I examine political institutions and organizations outside of the United States in order to compare nations which can be said to inhabit a sort of ‘middle ground’ between the vicious capitalism which characterizes the United States and the ideal of an alternative, which I call ‘communism.’ Specifically, I address Canada and Australia, nations with comparable histories to the United States, and explore their divergent political paths. I hope to show through the analyses in chapter six that 1) Marxist theories are superior to non-Marxist theories; 2) The ‘middle ground’ is largely an illusion; 3) Capitalist domination exists and thrives even in nations which claim the contrary; and 4) Hope for challenging the dominance of the power structure can be found only in class-conscious labor movements beyond the influences of capital, the state, and the nonprofit sector.

I. CONVENTIONAL THEORIES

Cooptation Strategies and the Four-Stage Model

Coy and Hedeem’s model of cooptation, which provides a structural foundation for ‘moments’ in the process of cooptation, does a fair job at outlining the tactics used by the ruling class in maintaining dominance and disarming challenges to the power structure. As I suggested earlier, the second and third stages are of particular importance,

as the second stage (adoption of language and tactics; introduction of moderate/elite-friendly actors) establishes the conditions necessary for the third stage (assimilation of movement leadership, activist members, and participants; transformation of program goals), and the third stage is really where the cooptation takes place. Perhaps the primary shortcoming of the cooptation model is that it is void of political perspective – that is, it effectively explains *how* but gives only slight consideration to *why* cooptation happens, at least in terms of the power structure.

When the cooptation model is applied to the American labor movement, it is clear that the elite institution which is most responsible for its institutionalization is the Democratic Party, although one can argue that the conservatism of the AFL made it susceptible to cooptation by business interests long before the New Deal. Thus, there are numerous layers to the situation, but all things considered, the Democratic Party is undoubtedly the elite institution which acted as the primary coopting force of the labor movement.

The Democratic Party became somewhat engaged with the labor movement before the New Deal, but the Roosevelt years are, I claim, the period in which Democratic Party politics became entrenched in the values of the mainstream labor movement. What allowed FDR to proclaim in October 1936 that it was his “Administration which saved the system of private profit and free enterprise after it had been dragged to the brink of ruin” was not coercion or the unleashing of the violent forces of the state apparatus upon the rebellious working class, but the adoption of ‘radical’ language (“people’s Government,” “concentration of wealth and power,”

“monopoly,” “economic freedom,” etc.) which ‘spoke’ to the American working class, and the concessions made by the New Deal programs which, one cannot disagree, improved the lives of American citizens, albeit with tremendous limitations. In specific regards to labor, the Wagner Act (NLRA) of 1935 expanded union power, abolished ‘company unions,’ and established rules of engagement on the job which were beneficial to workers. Later much of this would be undone by neoliberal forces in the American government, but it was enough to ensnare labor in the tentacles of the Democratic Party and shift attention away from the revolutionary goals of industrial unionism and towards maintaining the war effort and supporting the Democrats when they needed it.

Since the late 1940s, the New Deal programs which convinced labor that the Democratic Party ‘had its back’ have been continually challenged, assaulted, and dismembered. The Democratic Party, rather than fighting against these assaults from the far-right, has used this situation as an opportunity to further ensnare labor. In short, the consistent threat of ‘probusiness Republicans’ is wielded as a sword which drives union workers (with few exceptions) to the polls to vote for the Democrats, and the AFL-CIO throws heaps of money at Democratic candidates simply for the reason that, historically, Republicans have been just a bit meaner to labor. Never mind that it was Clinton, a Democrat, who signed the neoliberal and antilabor NAFTA into law, or Obama who oversaw the dismantling of collective bargaining rights in Wisconsin and did nothing to prevent it despite his promise to ‘put on a soft shoe and walk the picket line.’

The cooptation of labor’s militant language, the concessions made during the New Deal years, and the persistent threat of the GOP have been enough to keep mainstream

labor linked to the Democratic Party in a one-sided relationship that has brought very little to the labor movement since the days of FDR. “The New Deal picked up and modified many old radical, third-party ideas and put them into a halting kind of practice,” thus destroying “any reason-for-being of a national third party” and sidetracking “independent labor organization in politics on an immense scale” (Mills 1948:181). Now, labor is trapped in a cycle of ‘lesser-of-two-evils’ politics, unable to see beyond the ‘main drift’ or the limitations of playing by the rules of the power structure. The mainstream American labor movement “follows the ideology of traditional business unionism, which developed when organized labor was a minority stratum in the skilled labor market” as well as “liberal state unionism, which grew from the traditional business unionism in contact with mass industry and from the welfare state notions of the New Deal” (p. 239).

Resource Mobilization Theory

There is no doubt that resource mobilization theory has much to contribute to the study of social movements as well as social movement cooptation by elite forces. After all, much consideration is given to the fact that the need for resources in itself is a pathway to cooptation by sources of funding, which are oftentimes elite institutions of some form or other. It is here, however, that one finds the primary ‘problem’ with resource mobilization theory: “Proponents of the resource mobilization model depict segments of the elite as being willing, at times even aggressive, sponsors of social insurgency” (McAdam 1999:38). In fact, there is “an abiding conservatism” which characterizes actions taken by elites, even when in appearance the contrary seems to be

true (p. 38). There is, thus, a reluctance on the part of the ruling class to provide a 'space' for challenges to its legitimacy and power.

In other words, resource mobilization theory contends that social movements *must* obtain 'permission' to exist from institutions of the power structure in order to garner the legitimacy and support necessary for the achievement of the movement's goals.

However, if one is to assert that "elite groups are unwilling to underwrite insurgency," then "the very occurrence of social movements indicates that indigenous groups are able to generate and sustain organized mass action" *without* elite permission (p. 39). The critiques of resource mobilization theory presented here are tied to McAdam's 'political process theory,' which, while arguably closer philosophically to Marxism, has limitations of its own. Regardless, I claim that social movements need not necessarily rely on elite institutions, financial support, media, or other resources for mobilization and success. Take, for instance, the IWW, an organization which from the moment of its birth did practically nothing to garner the support of anyone beyond the working class. The Wobblies did not beg elite institutions or political parties, both mainstream and 'alternative,' for resources. The power of the Wobblies and the radical unions of the American past was in the material conditions present, the opportunities to define their movement found in the shared experiences of workers in all industries of all 'identities.'

Thus, while resource mobilization theory has much to offer, it cannot fully provide what is necessary for a complete understanding of social movements and their relation to the power structure. However, when viewed from a perspective which considers cooptation as a means of controlling social movement behavior, resource

mobilization theory takes a shape which allows one to see that the perpetuation of the notion that movements must acquire support from elite institutions (and thus must become compromised) to succeed is an ideological control mechanism designed to keep movements swimming into the nets of the ruling class. Here, there is tremendous value in resource mobilization theory.

McDonaldization

When applied to the labor movement, McDonaldization as a theory provides insights into the mechanization of the worker as well as the ways in which the working class becomes further alienated through production and consumption of predictable and oftentimes poisonous products. One critique which can be leveled against Ritzer's assertion that the worker inevitably becomes mentally numb in the production process in the McDonaldized workplace comes actually from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Ritzer does, to be sure, acknowledge that "some workers prefer effortless, mindless, repetitive work because, if nothing else, it allows them to think of other things, even daydream, while they are performing their tasks" (Ritzer 2019:101). However, he does not go as far as Gramsci, who suggested that Taylorism and assembly-line work could lead to consciousness of one's position – something which deeply concerned the overseers of the 'trained gorilla': the industrialists "have understood that 'trained gorilla' is just a phrase, that 'unfortunately' the worker remains a man and even during his work he thinks more, or at least has greater opportunities for thinking, once he has overcome the crisis of adaptation" to 'scientific management' "without being eliminated" (Gramsci 1971:310). Gramsci continues: "and not only does the worker think, but the fact that he gets no

immediate satisfaction from his work and realizes that” the bosses “are trying to reduce him to a trained gorilla, can lead him into a train of thought that is far from conformist” (p. 310). Gramsci says the concerns of the industrialists “about such things” is evident “from a whole series of cautionary measures and ‘educative’ initiatives” (p. 310) pushed by Ford and other bosses.

Thus, the missing component of Ritzer’s McDonaldization is, as with resource mobilization theory and the model of cooptation offered by Coy and Hedeem, the absence of an explanation as to *why* such occurrences are taking place. It is true that hints are offered by all three of the above mentioned contributions to this project, but the lack of a philosophical or political standpoint, I claim, weakens the assertions made by the thinkers involved. It is as though the theorists have ‘no skin in the game,’ and this, in my view, is problematic – one cannot claim impartiality for there is undeniably assumptions and influences which participate in the construction of analyses and sociological explorations.

II. THE MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

Now that the ‘conventional’ theories involved in the crafting of this project have been clearly defined and established, I can move on to Marxist theory, as described in the third chapter. I do not, as in the third chapter, ‘break up’ the theories and theorists of the Marxist tradition here. Rather, I attempt to ‘combine’ the theories of Marx, Lenin, Gramsci, and Althusser into a coherent and potent critique of the power structure, social movements, and cooptation.

Only an analysis including Marxist theory to a substantial degree, I claim, is capable of providing what is necessary for an incisive exploration of the nature of the power structure and the ways in which it maintains its domination. This is apparent in consideration of the history of the labor movement in the United States. Is one able, after all, to examine the explosive moments of class-conscious fury described in the fourth and fifth chapters presented here, from strikes to direct conflicts with police and military, without acknowledging that inherent to the economic system is class struggle and class domination?

Even a cursory glance at U.S. labor history shows in particular two fundamental aspects of the power structure which support my assertion regarding the importance of Marxist theory. First, the class dynamics in the U.S. which, since the earliest days of the empire, have been observed and critiqued by theorists and political philosophers both in the United States and, perhaps more interestingly, abroad, are stark and undeniably indicative of ruling class domination and of the subjugation of the working class. Second, that neither a strong, radical labor movement nor viable labor (socialist) party has persisted in this sociopolitical environment is a clear indication that something must be occurring on the ideological level which can best be diagnosed through the lens of Marxist theory.

Lenin's suggestion that the United States is a particularly egregious example of capitalist domination is worth considering here, as is the attention given to the U.S. by Marx before him and Gramsci after both. Lenin would perhaps argue that the reason for the absence of potent radical alternatives (that is, *viable* alternatives) to bourgeois

business unionism and conservative parliamentary politics in the U.S. is that there has not developed here an organized and disciplined cadre of revolutionaries to lead such alternative organizations. This is obviously a simplistic view of Lenin's assertions regarding class consciousness and the labor movement, but there is, I claim, truth in it. I would also suggest that, if this assertion were to be posited by Lenin or anyone else, it would be largely incorrect. There have been revolutionary vanguards in the United States, and there have been radicals demanding the overthrow of the American power structure, or at least portions of it, arguably since the earliest days of the Republic (Pennsylvania Mutiny, Shays' Rebellion, etc.). Thus, the question becomes: why, even with the revolutionary movements against the state, the radical unions such as the IWW, and concerted efforts from various left-wing groups to develop a progressive alternative political party, has there been no enduring successful counterhegemonic movement in the United States? I claim that the answer, which Marxist theory helps to reveal, is in the pervasiveness of the dominant ideology of the ruling class in the United States.

A closer look at a few contributions to Marxist theory and what I call 'the Marxist perspective' can aid in the establishment of the argument posited above. First, in *The Economic Manuscripts of 1857-59*, Marx (1979 [1857-59]) writes that the United States is

a country where bourgeois society did not develop on a feudal basis, but has been itself the starting point; where bourgeois society does not appear as the enduring result of a movement which went on for centuries but as the point of departure of a new movement; where, unlike all previous national formations, the state was

from the outset subordinate to bourgeois society and to its production, and could never pretend to be an end in itself; where lastly bourgeois society, combining the productive forces of an old world with the huge natural territory of a new world, developed on a previously unknown scale and with unprecedented freedom of movement, far outstripping all work previously done to master the forces of nature, and where finally the contradictions in bourgeois society seem to be merely transitory elements. (P. 64)

I begin with this quote from Marx because it constitutes the perspective from which one should scrutinize the United States, and from this footing the answer to the problem of the power structure becomes apparent. The nature of the American political and economic systems, which together establish the power structure and the social relations (relations of production and *in* production) therein, can only be understood from a starting point of historical value. The United States is different, fundamentally so, from the ancient civilizations of Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The ancient societies of North America were displaced and nearly vanquished through the genocidal campaigns of Europe and the pirate government established by British elites on the continent. The only hereditary vision carried across the Atlantic was that of expansion and accumulation – of bourgeois conquest and power. Abandoned were the traditions, gods, morals, and legacies which characterized civilizations of ancient Europe. From this position, the development of an all-encompassing ideology of endless production and aggregation was already in the making. The ‘God’ of capital was thus able to, as

described by Althusser (1970) in a different context, reflect itself in its subjects through the force of ideology in a way completely unique to the United States.

The situation in the United States caused Marx (1847) earlier to proclaim in *Moralizing Criticism and Critical Morality* that nowhere “does social inequality obtrude itself more harshly than in the eastern states of North America, because nowhere is it less disguised by political inequality” (Marx 1979 [1847]:64). The philosophical and political foundation of ‘equality’ as established in the U.S. by declaration and constitution simultaneously allows for the brutality of industrial capitalism and exploitation while preventing a finger from being pointed at the institutions of the society – for how can one suffer at the hand of another in a society which in its ‘declaration of independence’ claims *all men are created equal*? The strength in the ideological power structure in the United States is in its proclamations of openness, fairness, and egalitarianism. These philosophical standpoints bolster ruling class domination in a way that heritage, monarchy, or divine mandate could never accomplish – namely, because they imply an inherent legitimacy of the system in the eyes of the ruled.

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971) critiqued ‘Americanism’ alongside ‘Fordism,’ and it is worth noting that he states that both “derive from an inherent necessity to achieve the organization of a planned economy” (Gramsci 1971:279). Gramsci is not using the term ‘planned economy’ in the simple manner which suggests the mere centralization of economic machinery, although that is certainly part of what he means. One should consider where he moves beyond this centralization, into the sphere of the social and ‘private’ lives of workers, which he says were of great interest to

industrialists. Gramsci suggests that Prohibition (of alcohol) “was a necessary condition for developing a new type of worker suitable to ‘Fordised’ industry” (p. 279), and thus the time spent outside of the workplace and the ways in which workers spent that time gained a place of importance in the minds of the bosses. In his examination of the ‘sexual question,’ Gramsci says “It is worth drawing attention to the way in which industrialists (Ford in particular) have been concerned with the sexual affairs of their employees and with their family arrangements in general” (p. 296-97).

This all has to do with the ‘rationalization’ of the American economy, of production and labor, and I claim that this rationalization bled into the ‘private’ or ‘personal’ lives of workers, causing them to adopt the characteristics of the capitalist economic machinery which constitute the ‘guts’ of the power structure. One abstains from drink or sexual promiscuity, in the case of Gramsci’s analysis, so they may be productive at the factory the next morning. This is, to be sure, too simplistic of an image of the situation, but it can undoubtedly be applied to a variety of scenarios, all of which add up to the premise that workers in the American socioeconomic structure regulate their behavior according to the needs of industry *even when they are not working*. This rationalization of production and labor was, according to Gramsci, relatively easily accomplished through “a skillful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda)” (p. 285).

Thus, the whole of American life was made to revolve around production. In these conditions, “Hegemony,” says Gramsci, “is born in the factory” (p. 285). The

workers in this arrangement “in which the ‘structure’ dominates the superstructures” (p. 286) are rationalized along with the organs of industry. These conditions, I claim, are largely responsible for the lack of coordinated, revolutionary challenges to the status quo in the United States. “In America,” says Gramsci, “rationalization has determined the need to elaborate a new type of man suited to the new type of work and productive process” (p. 286). This ‘new type’ of worker is conditioned to be incapable of concerted radical action, and when (s)he engages in labor action or other forms of movement activism, it is with the mindset established by the power structure – to think beyond its restrictions, if not impossible, is terribly difficult.

American society is also unique in its lack of ‘traditional intellectuals,’ and the “massive development, on top of an industrial base, of the whole range of modern superstructures” (p. 20) in conjunction with this lack has led to a uniquely American equilibrium based on the necessity of “a unitary culture” (p. 20) created and maintained around production. According to Gramsci, this “explains, at least in part, both the existence of only two major political parties, which could in fact easily be reduced to one” as well as “at the opposite extreme the enormous proliferation of religious sects” (p. 21) in the United States. In short, American society is uniquely ‘baseless’ as well as diverse and without one true ‘culture’ – that is, beyond the culture established by production.

Gramsci asserts that the state apparatus and ideological apparatuses within the power structure “raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level” that “corresponds to the needs of” production “and hence to the interests of the

ruling classes” (p. 258). In particular, Gramsci suggests that the “positive educative function” (p. 258) represented by the school and the “repressive and negative educative function” represented by the courts are the “most important State activities” (p. 258) in the molding of the minds of the working masses. However, there are “a multitude of other so-called private initiatives and activities” (p. 258) in addition to the schools and courts “which form the apparatus of the political and cultural hegemony of the ruling classes” (p. 258). The power structure depends on the state as an ‘educator’ – an apparatus which establishes the foundational thoughts and perceptions of the masses and instills a sense of what is ‘legitimate’ and what is ‘unacceptable’ even in terms of how one is to challenge the structure. This is accomplished largely through ideological ‘buffer zones’ represented by nonprofit organizations and sanctioned ‘movements,’ which I analyze in more depth in the next section.

Before moving on, it is appropriate to revisit Engels’ (1979 [1887]) assertion regarding the absence of consciousness of class in the American public, as I argue that this lack of consciousness of class, which naturally inhibits class consciousness, is largely a result of the above mentioned sense of legitimacy attributed to the power structure in the United States. How could, one would ask in the absence of class analysis, something as dividing and totally inegalitarian as *class* exist in the free society of the United States? Even in acknowledgment of ‘rich’ and ‘poor,’ class in American society remains somewhat elusive – at least in the sense that it has gone unexamined and unrecognized as a motivational social force in the power structure.

Engels correctly suggests that one of the primary reasons that socialism has historically been considered ‘foreign’ or ‘Unamerican’ in the United States is that, because of the lack of consciousness of class and subsequently of class consciousness, there has been no perception on a mass scale of “class struggle between workmen and capitalists” (p. 283). Of course, there have been, in fact, struggles between the owners of property and workers (including slaves) since the ‘founding’ of the United States, but because there was not a comprehensible perspective which could explain *why* these conflicts erupted, one could not say with security that something structural was to blame. Thus, after generations of uncertainty and confusion, and continual exposure to the ‘extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda’ mentioned by Gramsci, one was moved to believe that “Socialism was a thing of foreign importation which could never take root on American soil” (Engels 1979:283).

Engels does not say this in order to demean the United States as an inherently reactionary society but rather quite the opposite. He points out that even when American public opinion did not acknowledge the existence of classes in the United States, “the coming class struggle was casting its gigantic shadow before it” (p. 283). While “no one could then foresee that in such a short time the movement would burst out with such irresistible force,” Engels says, “would spread with the rapidity of a prairie-fire” (p. 283), the United States, with its lack of ancient civilization or traditional culture, was capable of producing a spontaneous surge in worker rebellion and activism unhindered by the weight of the past.

Thus, while the absence of true ‘culture’ allowed production to dominate as the primary social and political force in the United States, there is also revolutionary potential in being unshackled from heritage and custom. The American working class has a unique burden, and I claim this too plays a role in its continued subjugation: it must reinvent itself as a radical, militant body, first by embracing the existential freedom of being without culture in the traditional sense, and second by developing an organic working-class culture of its own. This daunting task overwhelms the worker, having perhaps just been made conscious of his/her position, and the paralysis which ensues aids in the continuation of the rule of the bourgeoisie. There is hope, however, in coherent and disciplined direct action sustained through the development of a working-class program which can act simultaneously as the representation of class consciousness as well as its wellspring.

Earlier, I asserted that participation in working class action (strikes, work stoppages, etc.) has the remarkable consequence of introducing class consciousness. Engels seems to agree, as he describes how “The spontaneous, instinctive movements of” the rebellious American workers “over a vast extent of country,” and “the simultaneous outburst of their common discontent with a miserable social condition, the same everywhere and due to the same causes, made them conscious of the fact, that they formed a new and distinct class of American society” (p. 284). Lenin (1977 [1899]) agrees as well, writing in his essay “On Strikes”: “Everywhere, in all the European countries and in America, the workers feel themselves powerless when they are disunited; they can only offer resistance to the employers jointly, either by striking or

threatening to strike” (Lenin 1977 [1899]:313). According to Lenin, strikes foretell the emergence of a working-class movement. “Every strike reminds the capitalists that it is the workers and not they who are the real masters,” Lenin says, “the workers who are more and more loudly proclaiming their rights. Every strike reminds the workers that their position is not hopeless, that they are not alone” (p. 315). I will revisit this topic in the final chapter.

Thus, there is a need on the part of the ruling class, if it would maintain its control over society, to harness this empowering sensation and neutralize it. This, I claim, comes in the form of institutionalized activist organizations (including mainstream labor unions) and their sanctioned protests, marches, and demonstrations, all of which amount to pageants of discontent that do nothing to harm the power structure. I can recall, for example, during the Women’s March in Cleveland, Ohio that took place shortly after the election of Donald Trump, a protester holding a sign which read “If Hillary won we would be at brunch right now.” This mentality that assumes the system is fine so long as aberrations do not upset its balance is precisely the mindset which the ruling class fosters in the dominated classes, and it does so through cooptation and the establishment of ‘buffers,’ which I now move to describe in the next section.

III. THE MAKING OF THE ‘MIDDLE’

In order to clarify my statement above regarding the moderation of political radicalism as a direct consequence of engagement in parliamentary politics as well as to explore the existence of a sociopolitical ‘middle ground’ between capitalism and the ideal

alternative, which I call communism, I draw on a few examples from the United States and nations which are said to occupy other political spaces. First, it is important to answer the question which I may have hinted at earlier, which is: why is there no viable labor (socialist) party in the United States?

In contrast to other countries with ties to the old British Empire, such as Canada and Australia, the United States has not witnessed the development of a viable labor (socialist) party with mass support, although one must acknowledge that there have been a vast number of small left-wing parties which have sprouted in the U.S. over the years, some of which have even won positions of influence on the level of local politics. However, there has not yet emerged in the United States a political party of leftist orientation that has risen to the stature of labor parties in comparable nations. There are multiple reasons for this which deserve consideration.

In the case of Australia, the primary difference in national character which allowed the Aussie working class to build a labor party was in the militancy of mainstream Australian organized labor and the tameness of left-wing sectarianism in comparison to the vitriolic ideological differences which define the American Left (Stromquist 2010:313). Besides the divisions between different American leftist tendencies, there was also the conservatism of Gompers and the AFL leadership which stood directly in the way of the creation of a labor party, and one should add that this was done in opposition to the rank and file's "overwhelming support of the new AFL Political Programme" (p. 314) which would have established a labor party as a priority. Thus, while "all signs pointed toward the formation of a British- (or Australian-) style labor

party” in the United States, the progressive unionists were met with only disappointment as the AFL leadership crushed the possibility through “clever maneuvering” (p. 315) at the December convention of 1894. It should be noted, however, that Australia’s Labor Party has a right-wing faction which prevents it from being completely devoted to the ‘democratic socialism’ which it proclaims as its political ideology in its constitution – the cost of doing business with ‘the enemy.’

The divergent paths taken by the United States and Canada is of particular importance to this project, as it clearly shows the power of cooptation in preventing the emergence of alternative political programs when compared to coercive tactics. The ‘reflection’ model of politics, which suggests that political parties reflect the national character of the countries in which they materialize, is wholly incapable and often ahistorical in its assertions, and thus one would be wise to turn to the ‘articulation’ model, which in contrast with the reflection model “holds that parties actively shape political conflict by ‘naturalizing’ certain cleavages and coalitions within structural constraints” (Eidlin 2016:505). An examination of the political environments of the United States and Canada after the Great Depression, which deeply impacted both nations in the 1930s, reveals the importance of ruling political party maneuvers, the most prevalent of which can be identified as ‘cooptation’ and ‘coercion.’

In both the U.S. and Canada, “ruling party responses to labor and agrarian unrest during the Great Depression determined which among a range of possible political alliances actually emerged” (p. 488). In the United States, the Roosevelt Administration “and the Democrats adopted a *co-optive* response to farmer and labor insurgency” while

in Canada the “Liberal and Conservative parties shared a *coercive* response” (p. 489). The cooptation response of FDR and the Democratic Party absorbed left-wing challenges into the Democratic Party, thus closing any opening for the development of a labor party. Canada, in contrast, provided a space for the establishment of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a precursor of the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP), through the coercive and exclusionary approach taken by its ruling class political parties. Despite the similarities in the socioeconomic conditions in the two nations, including broad support for independent left-wing political parties (ILTPs), the cooptation route taken by the Democratic Party eliminated the potential of a viable labor party from emerging, and thus support of ILTPs diminished whereas the coercive approach taken by the Liberal and Conservative Parties of Canada cause an increase in ILTP support. In short, in “the United States, farmer and labor groups were absorbed into the Democratic Party's New Deal coalition, undermining ILTP support,” while “In Canada, the Liberals' and Conservatives' failure to absorb those groups left space for the CCF (precursor to the NDP) to articulate an independent farmer-labor alliance, bolstering ILTP support” (p. 505).

I again address the fact that, although the New Democratic Party (NDP) of Canada occupies a political space to the left of both mainstream political parties in the United States, it has not fundamentally changed the economic problems facing the Canadian working class. Its presence is not enough – it is, arguably, an assisting factor in the maintenance of Canada’s ‘open and inclusive’ national image. The same can be said of Australia’s Labor Party, and it nearly goes without saying that this is also the case for

the Labour Party in the UK, which has made a sport of sniping members of its party which sit to the political left of Tony Blair (even stooping to gruesome character assassination campaigns). The presence of political parties bearing the name 'Labor/Labour' is not enough.

Chapter Seven: Prospects for the Future

It is apparent that the proletariat and the radicals who yearn for liberation and egalitarianism have much work to do. It is hoped that, through the examinations of conventional and Marxist theories, the American labor movement, cooptation, and international sociopolitical conditions, a fresh outlook may be achieved which can aid in the development of an effective, militant, working class revolutionary movement. I make no claim that there is anything essentially new about what has been provided in the pages of this project, but I suggest that there is value in the way in which the separate sections can be put together and, through some form of dialectic, thrust into being a new perspective, one which I now describe in full.

The future of the struggle for the liberation of the working class, a struggle which one must assert will continue to be fought by the working class itself, is dependent on multiple factors, the absence of any of which will continue to drive the proletariat into a brick wall. First, the working class must achieve consciousness of class and class consciousness. Second, the working class must develop its own organic intellectuals who are capable of disciplined leadership and maintaining the philosophy of praxis. Third, the working class must eschew bourgeois political parties as well as institutionalized labor organizations and must develop its own organs of militant unionism and politics. Fourth, the working class must maintain its militancy through consistent engagement in disciplined direct action. Fifth, the working class must be internationalist. Sixth, the working class must be prepared to disregard the 'old gods' and dogmas when they lose potency, and continually build consciousness through the correction of contradiction.

Though these suggestions are approximate, I claim taken together they are capable of constructing an effective, militant working class movement that is immune to the pitfalls of cooptation, professionalization, and institutionalization.

Class consciousness is, of course, where the new militant working class movement must begin, and this also means building the consciousness of class. One can be aware that they make less money than a millionaire, or that they ride the bus while the bourgeois drives an expensive car. This awareness, however, is not class consciousness, and it is not consciousness of class. To clarify, I assert that class consciousness is an awareness of one's position in a system, and the ways in which that position restricts the ways in which one relates to their environment and other people. Consciousness of class, on the other hand, is an awareness that there are *classes* and a society constructed around them.

I claim that consciousness of class is a prerequisite to acquiring class consciousness, for if it were otherwise, simply having less possessions or resources than another person would lead one to achieve class consciousness, and this is surely not the case. The attainment of consciousness of class and of class consciousness may happen in the same facility, namely the workplace, and can occur when one is able to recognize that their position is not unique to them but is shared by others, and that this shared position is in no way accidental. One may achieve consciousness of class and remain stuck in an estimation of class as 'class in itself,' but from garnering an understanding of one's class interests, and the ways in which the power structure prevents the satisfaction of these

interests, one is able to make the jump to class consciousness, the comprehension of 'class for itself.'

The working class, as with any other class, produces its own intellectuals, but more often than not, these intellectuals flee the class of their birth in pursuit of the more promising plateau offered by the bourgeoisie. I claim that working class intellectuals must put their own individual interests aside and remain in the working class so that they may spread consciousness of class and nurture class consciousness, thus establishing the groundwork for a movement of the organized, militant working class. It is true, one must admit, that many of the examples of revolutionary intellectuals offered by history, from Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky, to Castro, Guevara, and Sankara, were born into relatively privileged families, or at the very least had some form of higher education and opportunities for professional development within their grasps. However, I assert, staying true to the General Rules outlined by Marx (1864) for the International Workingmen's Association, "That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves," and therefore, bourgeois professional revolutionaries cannot and will not lead the working class to its emancipation. Therefore, organic intellectuals of the working class are an imperative force in the development of an effective movement.

As cooptation and the institutionalization of social movements and activism have been central themes presented in this project, I must posit that engagement with bourgeois political parties and conservative, institutionalized labor organizations is out of the question for a movement seeking to challenge and dismantle the power structure.

There is no hope for the liberation of the working class in the Democratic Party, nor in the AFL-CIO (although the more progressive affiliates of the dominant federation might have a slim chance). Independent labor unions, including the ILWU, the 'Red Fortress' (UE), and the still breathing IWW, are organizations which deserve one's admiration, as they have shown how to engage in battle with both the bosses and the dominant labor federation and retain autonomy and dignity. The model of the IWW, based on industrial unionism, class consciousness, and the irreconcilability of the interests of workers and capitalists, provides in particular a vision of what the political and economic organs of working class militancy must achieve. The boldness of conviction and the tenacious devotion to class struggle and working class democracy which characterized the Wobblies in the past, and characterizes Wobblies today, are contagious. The militancy of industrial unionism and the chutzpah inherent to industrial unionist tactics generates and enflames class consciousness.

I claim that the primary organ of working class militancy cannot be merely a political party nor merely a labor union, but must be a synthesis of both. The workers' organization must be prepared to confront bourgeois elements in the political arena as well as in the field and factory. It must, without falling into the trap of bourgeois parliamentary politics, expose the illegitimacy and connivance of the political systems of the power structure, and must simultaneously speak the language of progress to workers, both urban and rural, while with open arms declaring itself as the vehicle of their liberation. The amalgam of working class political party and radical industrial union will have moral authority over the liberal, bourgeois political establishment as well as over the

institutionalized labor organizations which do little to bring direct, tangible benefits to the toiling masses. The corruption and mendacity of the ruling political parties, which constitute in essence one party of the ruling class, can be directly confronted and exposed as can the conservative timidity of the institutionalized labor movement. The vessel with which the working class must challenge the power structure will be a fusion of revolutionary communist politics and militant, industrial solidarity unionism.

The organized working class must be consistently engaged in disciplined direct action, which, as both Engels and Lenin suggested, can produce the sensations of power and connectedness necessary for the maintenance and progression of the proletarian liberation movement. I include the word 'disciplined' to differentiate the direct action of the organized and mobilized working class from that of the disorganized, unstructured, and aimless actions which characterize some anarchist and nihilist tendencies. It must also be clearly stated that the direct action does not need to be violent, although it likely will produce conflicts during which the working class must be prepared to defend itself by all means necessary. One can look to the 1919 Seattle General Strike, the 1936 Flint sit-down strike, and more recently the 2020 General Strike in India, among other moments of concerted proletarian action, and what becomes immediately recognizable is that meaningful actions must be highly organized, concerted, and carried out with discipline. The riot can be a meaningful tactic, to be sure, but shutting down and/or seizing the machinery which allows the power structure to function does much more than a thrown brick.

Through disciplined direct action, class consciousness is produced and sustained in participants. It is also through direct action that workers begin to discern how the new society, born from the ashes of the old, will operate. The relations of production established within the power structure lose legitimacy, having lost their meaning and purpose, that of the continued subjugation of the working class, and thus new relations based on egalitarianism and human decency will emerge. It is through disciplined direct action, through sustained conflict with the power structure, that the workers will develop the world to come.

The liberation of the working class cannot be achieved by one country – the human liberation project is international. Thus, the working class movement must reject nationalism, chauvinism, and bigotry in favor of militant internationalism. This is, in my view, completely consistent with the concepts of national self-determination and anti-imperialism. Capitalism is no longer simply ‘monopoly capitalism’ – it has, as Marx predicted, spread across the world, infecting every nation without prejudice. Thus, the global proletariat’s battle against capital, which admittedly takes differing forms from nation to nation, must be a priority for the organized working class.

For the ‘Western’ and developed nations this struggle takes place within the ‘belly of the beast,’ where the administrators of industry make their homes. For the undeveloped and terribly exploited nations of the ‘Global South,’ the battle is to be waged against industrial puppet regimes and the overseers of the fields and sweatshops. Working people of the developed nations have a moral responsibility to conduct themselves with a sense of mercilessness against the managers of industries which

establish themselves abroad to extract profits from the desperate workers, among them children, who toil in sweatshops, crop fields, and dilapidated factories, producing commodities for consumption in the developed nations. The organized working class must reject 'socialism in one country' – as Fannie Lou Hamer said in her 1971 speech at the founding of the National Women's Political Caucus, "Nobody's free until everybody's free."

Finally, the working class must disregard the assumptions and assertions of the past which have failed in the liberation of the proletariat. The new movement of the working class must simultaneously proclaim: "The contradictions are continually ripening, the capitalist order is a cruel and obscene farce, and it must be overthrown for our liberation," and "The twentieth century is over – a new vision of socialism is necessary." In the acknowledgement of the dialectical propulsion of the material through time, it is necessary for the contradictions of past assertions, even those made in the spirit of proletarian revolution, to be addressed and corrected, and the incorrect ideas of history must be disregarded in favor of a bold, new vision of working class liberation.

Nostalgia will get the working class nowhere. The proletariat must dig through history, ransacking its coffers and holding tightly that which is worth keeping, and without hesitation it must dismiss that which has failed to bring about freedom and dignity for the working class. Only through this process can the working class creatively and efficiently critique both the past and the present. Only through such critiques can the proletariat begin the construction of tomorrow's world.

All of these assertions taken together, I claim, can set the international working class on the path towards liberation. Of the utmost importance, however, is that the proletariat obsessively retain and cherish its sincerity and optimism – not any foolish hopes of the situation improving on its own, but the aggressive and rugged belief in the ability of the working class to fundamentally change the world for the better. This can be accomplished by acknowledging the mistakes of the past, taking note of the pitfalls and traps set before social movements by the institutions of the power structure, and acting in accordance with the philosophy of praxis. As Gramsci is credited with saying, one must live without illusions without becoming disillusioned. The threats of cooptation, institutionalization, and dismemberment are ever present, waiting to ensnare those who seek to challenge ruling class domination and change society, and render them incoherent and impotent. One must confront with courage and enthusiasm the challenges which are endemic to the capitalist power structure. With fearlessness and determination, the working class in its entirety must exclaim, as Eugene V. Debs did before the court prior to his imprisonment: “the midnight is passing, and joy cometh with the morning.”

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