the CIO 1937 to 1950

"Trade unionism is the conservative movement of our time. It is the counterrevolution...It is also a complete repudiation of Marxism."1 (Tannenbaum)

"And the (Communist) Party...must bear in mind...that they (the trade unions) are, and long will remain, an indispensible 'school of communism' and a preparatory school that trains the proletarians to exercise their dictatorship..."2 (Lenin)

In attempting to analyze the 1949 expulsion of the eleven Communist, left-led unions from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), the preceeding quotes offer an interesting context in which the analysis can take place. Was the expulsion inevitable? Did it merely reflect the obvious according to Tannenbaum? Could Lenin have been so utterly lost? Or, on the other hand, did the expulsion result from the faulty ideological understanding and resultant bad practice of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA)? Could Tannenbaum's seemingly correct prediction of the "repudiation of Marxism" have been a result of the weaknesses within the CPUSA rather than a vindication of his theory? Or, from another point of view, the expulsion, per se, may prove nothing. That is, that there is no evidence to conclude that the expulsion of the CP meant the end of communism in the trade union movement, for it could simply be the logical outcome of the CP's failure to master Marxism-Leninism.

This paper will examine the nature of the CP and attempt to prove that the weaknesses of the CP were the primary factor that led to their expulsion from the CIO (and that of their "fellow travellers"). If the hypothesis is proven correct, we can deduce no more from it than the fact that Lenin may not have been wrong in his analysis. Such a deduction, however, certainly has far-reaching implications for working men and women of all countries.

Before proceeding to the main position of this paper, it may be fruitful to clear up a misconception that might have arisen from Lenin's quote. Communists would agree with Tannenbaum that the essence of trade unions are reactionary. In fact, no less a communist than Karl Marx stated: "They (trade unions) are fighting with the effects but not the cause of those effects."3 The essence of trade unionism, which implies an acceptance of capitalism, is reactionary. Rather than trying to "cure the malady"4 they offer a form of organization which can aid the working class in coping with this

malady. Therefore, they cannot be considered to have a progressive essence. The difference between Tannenbaum and the communists arises with the ideology of dialectical materialism. The communists believe that, with the introduction of and adherence to the science of Marxism-Leninism by the masses, the trade unions can be turned into their opposites. That is, the economic battles with the capitalists will become secondary and "abolition of the wage system"5 will be the cry. So, the predominance of a conservative leadership (both organizationally and politically) in the trade union movement can be viewed in two ways. Vis-avis Tannenbaum, the present leadership is reflective of the motive-force of the movement6 and represents the only possible direction; or, vis-a-vis Lenin, the conservative leadership has been able to develop because of the "bourgeois ideology" within the ranks of the Communist Party7 and can be reversed under the leadership of true communists.

In 1937, one year after the birth of the CIO, William Z. Foster, a leader of the CP, in addressing an audience of the Young Communist League, said: "It is not enough to support the CIO, we must become the leaders of these movements."8

Given the fervor of the labor movement of the late 30's, the "class solidarity" and denunciation of the "red-baiting" and other divisive tools of the bosses, the CP had made significant gains in the short space of one year. By 1938, it was estimated that 40% of the CIO was under at least "significant control" of the CP.9 Labor leaders who years later engineered the ousting of the CP from the CIO, played a significant role in building its strength during this period. Walter Reuther provides a typical example in a speech to a United Automobile Workers local in 1937:

So now the bosses are trying a new stunt: the red scare... They pay stools to go whispering around that so-and-so, usually a militant trade union leader, is a red. They think that will turn other workers against him... No union man worthy of the name will play the bosses (red scare) game. Some may do so through ignorance. But those who peddle the red scare and know they are doing so are dangerous enemies of the union.10

Other leaders such as Joseph Curran, M. Hedely Stone of the National Maritime Union (NMU); Albert J. Fitzgerald, Julius Emspak, and James J. Matles of the United Electrical Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE); Michael Quill of the Transportation Workers Union (TWU); and many others were associated with pro-CP forces in the late 30's and early 40's.

On the political front, the CP vacillated like a yo-yo. From 1936-1939, they supported the Roosevelt administration as representing a victory over monopoly capital; from August, 1939 through June, 1941, they turned around and attacked this administration as having capitulated to the reactionaries by entering into the Lend-Lease Program with Great Britain and in other ways following an imperialist, war-mongering position. From July, 1941 to the end of the war, the CP fully supported Roose-velt and all other "anti-facist" forces. Because most of these positions were fairly popular amongst large sections of organized labor, the CP was able to maintain its base throughout these flip-flops. The only ill-effect they suffered was amongst the rank and file who admittedly felt a little foolish when such contradictory positions were offered in such rapid succession.11 Whatever antagonisms were developed toward the CP amongst rank and file CIO'ers, due to changes in the line, it is safe to assume that these antagonisms would be somewhat greater amongst the pro-communist CIO leadership. By virtue of their positions and the public stand they would have to take, vacillations in Party policy would have been more uncomfortable to tolerate.

Throughout the war years, the CP policy of "nostrike pledges-all out for the war against facism," was a little too patriotic for some union leaders. In 1944, members of the United Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Employees Union went out on strike against Montgomery Ward because of the company's refusal to abide by an order of the National War Labor Board. Not only did the CP denounce this strike, they went one step further when Harry Bridges of the ILWU told Montgomery Ward that they could transfer the work orders from the struck plants to the St. Paul plant which was an ILWU local.12 After an investigation into the affair, the National Headquarters of the CIO reaffirmed their support for the Montgomery Ward strikers and in that way, dealt a severeblow to the "militant-left" cover of the CP.13 John L. Lewis" feelings of "growing weary of these fakers" (CP and pro-CP forces) had a prophetic ring as the World War II drew to a close.14

After World War II, the divisions within the CIO became more expansive. Pro-communist and anticommunist forces became more and more polarized as the hostility between the United States and the USSR increased. The question of CIO support for the Marshall Plan was the lfocus around which the different forces grouped. Additionally the procommunist forces backed Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party in the 1948 election.

With the passing of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, and Truman's actions to veto the bill, the national CIO sought to support Truman in the upcoming election. The CP, however, was out to back Wallace and build the Third Party. Running against Truman was Republican Governor Dewey. The non procommunist forces on the executive board of the CIO correctly reasoned that support for Wallace (who had no chance of winning) would split the Truman vote and further chances for Dewey getting elected. Any less than the traditional Democratic Party support would have proved particularly injurious to the fight for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act. Mike Quill, of the Transport Workers Union, who split from the communist camp, specifically because of the CIO's backing of Wallace, brought the

issue to the floor of the CIO's 1949 convention: Here he was (Harry Bridges of the ILWU) on strike (September-November, 1948) on the West Coast, his membership walking the picket lines for some 67 days, the Employers Association were waiting hour by hour for Dewey's election, and what was Harry doing? Harry was peddling the Wallace vote up and down the state of California, and had Wallace gotten a few more votes in a few key states we would have Governor Dewey as President of the United States today.15

When the Eleventh Constitutional Convention of the CIO convened on October 31, 1949, there was no doubt in anybody's mind as to what would happen. On November 1, 1949, George Baldanzi, secretary of the constitution committee, urged the body to accept the ammended constitution of the CIO, which was to read:

No individual shall be eligible to serve either as an officer or as a member of the Executive Board who is a member of the Communist Party...16



CIO organizes steel workers, Homestead, Pa., 1936

Before the debate began, Albert J. Fitzgerald, national secretary of the UE, the third largest union in the CIO, representing 500,000 workers, led his 17 member delegation out of the convention hall. Secretary Baldanzi went on to propose further amendments to the constitution:

The Executive Board shall have the further power, upon two-thirds vote, to revoke the Certificate of Affiliation of or to expel or take any other appropriate action against any national or international union or organizing committee the policies and activities of which are consistently directed toward the achievement of the program or the purposes of the Communist Party...17

The Committee on Resolutions further recommended the UE and United Farm Equipment and Metalworkers of America (FE) be expelled from the CIO on the grounds that:

We (the CIO) can no longer tolerate within the family of the CIO, the Communist Party masquerading as a labor union (e.g. the UB and the FE). 18

In addition, charges were brought against ten international CIO unions for following the program of the CP. Investigative committees were established by President Murray. All but one of the unions were subsequently expelled.19

Twelve years had passed since William Z. Foster had announced to the Young Communist League the CP's intention of becoming the leadership of organized labor. The response of the CP leadership to the proceedings of the 1949 CIO convention made very clear some of the most serious weaknesses which eventually led to its ignominious defeat. We shall return later to examine the proceedings.

MAIN WEAKNESS: RIGHT OPPORTUNISM

The weaknesses of the CP were sonumerous and so varied that it is difficult to point out which among them were of primary importance. Upon close examination, however, the party's crass "right" opportunism, failure to concentrate on the rank and file union members and failure to put socialism (the dictatorship of the proletariat) forward in a mass way, appear to be at the root of all their bad practice. While practice follows from theory (and thus, the basis for bad practice can be found in theoretical shortcomings) it would be more productive to scrutinize the practice of the CP rather than focusing abstractly on their ideology.

As was pointed out earlier, during World War II, the line of the CP was "all out for the war against fascism." They backed Roosevelt as well as all other "Patriotic" forces to the hilt. However, they made absolutely no class distinctions between big business and working class forces. Such a line in practice inevitably led to backing the forces of reaction (big business). The CP did not involve itself in the fight for black liberation (for that would divert the war effort): they attacked the coal mine and Montgomery Ward strikes as being "fascist-oriented" because they halted production and thus hindered the war effort. In later years the CP was self-critical of its role during the war of not protecting the living standards of the working class.20 While this is true, it is far short of the mark. Their opportunist conception of "national unity" and their failure to fight racism created incorrect illusions about the nature of big business. The capitalists fought against Hitlerism to protect and expand their policy of imperialism. The working class fought out of a desire to fight fascism, which is the most vicious form of exploitative capitalist rule.

These contradictions were all brought out in a huge attack by the anti-communists at the 1949 CIO conventions. Joe Curran of the NMU spoke from the floor of the convention hall in favor of the "anticommunist" clause. Sounding more "left" than the CP, he spoke of his reaction to the five year "no strike pledge" that was pushed by the CP during the early part of 1945:

They (the CP) came in and proposed that we adopt a policy that there should be no strikes after the war... I knew, as a trade unionist, that when the war was over, the same employer who was working with me across the table to win the war was going to go back to the old tactics of fighting us at every turn of the road when we sought an extra dime. So how could I pledge with him that he would deal in good faith after the war was over, how could I pledge no strikes after the war?21

Walter Reuther then attacked the CP's failure to fight racism:

They (the CP) pose in America as the only true champions in the fight against racial prejudice and discrimination. The record on that score is also clear, that during the war, when we fought in our union in shop

after shop against discrimination, they said, "Go easy boys, go easy. We will wait and fight that out after the war is won."22

Had the CP fought to clarify the differences in goals of the working class and big business, had they fought to organize for the war effort independent of the Sewall Avery's and the J.P. Morgans, they would have strengthened their forces and heightened the class consciousness of all working men. The CPUSA tailed behind big business, submerged the politics of the working class forces, and created damaging illusions about the nature of capital. All of which resulted in a set back for the kind of consciousness which had built the CIO.

The CP did not stop at submerging their politics in uniting with big business; it also submerged its working class politics in dealings with top labor officials. John L. Lewis provides a more than adequate example: Lewis had always been an avowed anti-communist although he quite opportunistically used the strength of the CP to help build the CIO. It was reported that in the early days of the CIO, Lewis had fired a CIO official upon learning that he was a member of the CP.23 It was obvious, even to the CP, that Lewis, as well as Murray, Reuther & Co., were merely using them to build the CIO and that when the opportunity arose they would be dumped. Throughout the war years and even as late as 1948; these men were never attacked by the CP as being anti-communist, they were never critized for their liberal or conservative politics which were contrary to the interest of the working class.

In October of 1948 French coal miners, under the leadership of the French CP, went out on strike and met massive repression. A number of workers were shot and killed by the French Army which had been called in to break the strike. Lewis, in a letter to William Green of the A.F. L. attacked Pres. Truman and the Marshall Plan because Marshall Plan money was being used by the French governbetter than to see the CP smashed.

Another key weakness of the CP was its failure to concentrate its work among the rank and file members. In a criticism of Earl Browder, expelled former General Secretary of the CP, W.Z. Foster correctly points out this mistaken policy:

Browder, with no mass union organizing experience and no talent for an appreciation of such work, preferred to maneuver opportunistically with top union and political leaders. 25

Browder thus set the course for the party. All of the CP's best men and women fought to become officials within their respective unions. In that way they could work with other officials to set a pro-



The sit-down strike sparked the organization of the CIO in the 1930's

ment to shoot French coal miners. It is of importance to note that Lewis complained only because the workers were "his own kind," i.e. coal miners. At any rate, the President of the French Labor Federation attacked Lewis for criticizing the Marshall Plan and reminded Lewis that the Federation did not support this strike because it was communist led. Learning this, Lewis made no further comments. In spite of the fact that Lewis complained merely because it was coal miners (as opposed to other workers) who were being killed, and he stopped complaining after he found out it was a "communist-led" strike. On November 1, 1948 the CPUSA praised Lewis by stating his "actions hit the Marshall Planners like a thunderbolt."24 What crass opportunism! Rather than attacking Lewis for his narrow craft chauvinism and unbelievable anticommunism, Lewis is praised by the CP in order to win wider support for their fight against the Marshall Plan. It becomes easy to see how the CP dug its own grave. They went out of their way to praise labor leaders who would have liked nothing

gressive course for the union. However, in order to attain positions of union leadership, it was necessary to "play down" politics. While a vast majority of the rank and file would support "left" officials, it was too much to ask for support of an open communist. The best cadre the party had were forced to play a reformist role as union leaders.

In addition, they could not carry out day-to-day work amongst the rank and file since they were in a positions of leadership. The burden of day-to-day work—organizing in the shops, carrying out the party's line to the masses—fell on the shoulders on the lesser-skilled cadre. Whatever contribution these lesser-skilled cadre could have made was seriously curtailed by the disastrous position taken by the national committee of the CP in 1939. W.Z. Foster who had correctly pointed to Browder's opportunism, displayed his own ineptness in the following:

As an example of the Party's co-operative spirit, (in building the CIO) in 1939 it liquidated its system of trade union fractions and shop papers. The party's trade union fractions—educational groups of communists in the local unions (read: party cells organized to carry out the mass work of the party) were dissolved to end all fears that they were formed for the purpose of controlling the unions. The Party's shop papers, which had performed invaluable services in the initial stages of the CIO campaigns, were also given up for the same general reasons.26

How could party work be carried out among the rank and file if there were no disciplined collectives to meet and discuss the work; to carry out criticism and self-criticism; to improve their work; and to meet collectively to discuss how the party line could be applied to their particular situations. The answer is simple. It couldn't and it wasn't. The party was thus rendered so ineffective it might as well have ceased to exist as far as the rank and file union members were concerned.

Another point should be made in connection with the above hari-kari practice of the CP. Was not the CP "red-baiting" itself? Wasn't it saying, in effect, that in order to build the CIO the Communist Party should stop its work with the rank and file? What other impression could a union member have?

Hand in hand with the party's opportunism and their lack of rank and file organizing went their failure to attack anti-communism or to put communism forward as the social system that the masses should fight for. The latter was far and away their main weakness. For example, at the 1949 convention of the National Maritime Union, Joseph Curran, President of the NMU and one of the leaders in the anti-communist camp of the CIO executive board, put forward a constitutional amendment to bar communists from the NMU. After Curran spoke for five minutes of the horrors of communism, and how the CP was wrecking the CIO, Dow Wilson (at that time a CP'er) responded by saying:

Yes, you have your right to be anti-communist, and I will defend your right to be anti-communist, but for Christ's sake, don't be anti-union!27

At the CIO convention in 1949, Reuther, Murray, Quill, Mazey, Rieve and others spent hours attacking the CP and communism, in support of the resolution to bar communists from leadership, saying such things as:

We are all aware of the fact that there exists within the CIO a small but noisy minority, apparently wired for sound and advocating policies and principles that are contrary to the best interests of the labor movement of the United States, and particularly to the CIO.28

The CIO will no longer be run by a goulash of punks, pinks and parasites.29

Last year when 16,000 members of the International Oil Workers were on strike in California. ..people came out on the picket lines purporting to be members of the CIO, showing dues cards, paid up dues cards in the CIO organization, extending the left hand of fraternity to our people while their right hand was plunging into the backs of those workers the dagger of communism. ..30 They (the CP) formulate their own policies without exception, not upon the needs of American workers, but upon the needs of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union.31 In the countries where the Communist Party has had their time of reign, where they seized political power, what has happened to the free trade unions? They have been destroyed, their leaders have been murdered and thrown into prison camps...32

What was the response of the CP to these attacks? Did they say once that the CP stands for the American working class? Did they defend the policies of the Soviet Union or point out what they considered to be the positive aspects of the Soviet Union? Did they in any way defend the theory of communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat? Harry Bridges' response was typical of all the CP spokesmen:

Now you have the false whiskers, communism. It is the issue we have argued about for the last 18 months, and that is no opposition in the CIO, no minority opposition.33

Even Ben Gold, the militant leader of the Fur and Leather Workers Union, the only member of the CP to stand on the floor of the convention and admit his party affiliation, echoed Bridges' capitulation to anti-communism:

We fought for a long number of years for our rights and you cannot deprive my Union of these rights. It is not a problem of Ben Gold; the problem is much deeper. You cannot cover it up by raising the question of communism.34

But as hard as they tried to avoid it, the issue remained crystal clear to everyone at the convention: When Harry Bridges says communism is not the issue here—Harry, you are lying like hell and you know you are.35

Communism was the issue. The failure of the CP to put communism forward in a mass way, to win people to fight for communism, made it relatively simple for the anti-communists to engineer their expulsion. Had the CP attempted to win the masses of workers to a communist outlook they might have had a base within the CIO which might have prevented their expulsion.

In discussing the convention and its political importance, the CP, in its organ, **The Daily Worker**, continued to ignore the major issue; the issue of communism. There were no articles on the significance of the convention and what it meant to the workers of the U.S. and the international workers movement. There was no evaluation of the reactionary role of anti-communism in the trade union movement. Albert J. Fitzgerald, President of the expelled UE and member of the CP, gave the following "incisive" analysis of the UE's expulsion:

Walter Reuther's resolution expelling the UE

from the CIO proves UE's charge that the CIO leadership abandoned trade unionism for politics.36

On November 4, 1949, the following headline appeared on page 6 of **The Daily Worker**, a headline which summarized in nine words the three major weaknesses of the CP which allowed for their expulsion:

"UE SUES TO BAR SPLITTERS FROM USING UNION'S NAME." First, it displays the crass right opportunism of the CP. Somehow they were going to have adjudicated the anti-communist onslaught they suffered by putting their case before the courts of the ruling class—those people who had the greatest stake in anti-communism. Second, no attempt is made to involve, much less rely on the rank and file in the fight for control over the UE. Finally, the point stressed by the CP was that they were "splitters," not anti-communist splitters, merely splitters.

In evaluating the practices of the CP, it is vital to note that it was the party leadership which was responsible for the party's failures, not the rank and file. Rank and file CP'ers were among the most militant fighters for their class and in spite of the policies of their leadership, played a leading role in organizing and striking against their bosses.

Furthermore, it is important to keep in perspective the reactionary role of the right-wing leadership of the labor movement. While the CP was rife with weaknesses, the right-wing anti-communist CIO leadership can in no way be considered to be the champions of the working class. An unfortunately typical example of this was the strike of the International Fur and Leather Workers Union, in Gloversville, N.Y. in 1949-1950. Locked out over a wage dispute, IFLWU organized a strike. The Tanners Association first tried red-baiting to break the strike. This was unsuccessful. Then on August 25, 1949, a meeting was held—attended by the Association, "loyal employees," and organizers of the AFL United Leather Workers Union. "The meeting mapped out the plan for the AFL to enter the picture and break the strike."37

When the AFL-Tanner schemes were rejected by the workers, the Tanners turned to the CIO, who readily complied. With their aid in setting up a company union, the Tanners Assn. called for a return to work. Labor historian, Philip Foner describes that day:

On the day of the "return to work" a reign of terror gripped the cities of Gloversville and Johnstown. Some three-hundred clubwielding police, deputized thugs and goons took over the two cities and held it in a strikebreaking seige. Most shameful of all, at the very same time, national CIO representatives (one of which was Allan Haywood, CIO—Vice President and Executive Board member) were joining hands with the deputized goons, with union-smashing employers, anti-labor politicians, and the boss-controlled press in an effort to smash this bitterlyfought strike. 38



Roosevelt called out 3,000 soldiers of the 15th Infantry to face No. American Aviation strikers, June 1941 12 51 W

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The CIO leaders urged the strikers to return to work, organized scabs to break through the lines and then immediately signed them into the CIO Textile Workers Union. "The national CIO had granted charters to scab shops where conditions won in 17 years of struggle were eliminated."39 As a result, the CIO was finally able to break this strike.

At this point we can return to the Lenin-Tannenbaum debate, mentioned at the beginning of the paper: Are unions by definition reactionary or can they be schools of communism?

After examining the role of the so-called "Communist" Party in the thirties and forties, several relevant facts are brought forth:

1) During the early part of the 20th century,

FOOTNOTES

- Frank Tannenbaum, A Philosophy of Labor, p. 3.
 V.I. Lenin, Left-wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder,
- p. 41.
- 3 Karl Marx, Value, Price and Profit, p. 27.

4 Ibid., p. 28.

5 Ibid.

- 6 Tannenbaum, op. cit., p. 3.
- 7 Lenin, op. cit., p. 36.
- 8 Max M. Kampelman, The Communist Party vs. the CIO, p. XI.

9 Ibid., p. 18.

10 United Automobile Worker, Special Convention Edition (1937) in "Report on the State of your Union."

11 Some historians feel that this shifting of the line, back and forth was one of the CP's more serious errors. However, I would tend to doubt that since the CP did not lose much strength before the end of World War II when these shifts in the line occurred.

12 Kampelman, op. cit., p. 33.

- 13 Jack Barbash, Labor Unions in Action, pp. 212-4.
- 14 Saul Alinsky, John L. Lewis, An Unauthorized Biography, p. 311.
- 15 CIO Preceedings, 1949, p. 273.

16 Ibid., p. 240.

17 Ibid., p. 288.

18 Ibid., p. 302.

- 19 Kampelman, op. cit., pp. 160-2.
- 20 William Z. Foster, *History of the Communist Party, USA*, pp. 408-21.
- 21 CIO Preceedings, op. cit., p. 260.
- 22 Ibid., p. 268.
- 23 Alinsky, op. cit., p. 154.
- 24 Daily Worker, Nov. 1, 1948, p. 8.
- 25 Foster, op. cit., p. 348.
- 26 Ibid., p
- 27 Erie Johnson, "The Assassination of Dow Wilson," in *PL*, July-August, 1967, p. 25.
- 28 CIO Preceedings, op. cit., Mike Quill, p. 274.
- 29 Ibid., O.A. Knight, p. 242.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., Walter Reuther, pp. 267-8.
- 32 Ibid., p. 269.
- 33 Ibid., Harry Bridges, p. 252.
- 34 Ibid., Sen. Gold, p. 244.
- 35 Ibid., Mike Quill, p. 273.

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- 36 Daily Worker, November 3, 1949, p. 11.
- 37 Philip S. Foner, The Fur and Leather Workers Union, p. 669.

unions served as fairly effective tools of the working class.

2) The CP was anything but communist. Its rotten policies of class collaboration, of opportunism, its failure to fight capitalism and its state apparatus, its failure to fight for socialism, and its failure to fight racism and anti-communism represented a mockery of the principles of Marx and Lenin.

Therefore, there is no historical basis for rejecting Lenin's analysis of trade unionism. Concommitantly, the experience of the CPUSA does not provide the basis for accepting Tannenbaum's characterization of trade unionism as the complete repudiation of Marxism. It remains to be seen what the role of the trade union movement would be like under the political leadership of a true communist party.

38 Ibid., p. 671.

39 Ibid., p. 672.

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