

The Origins of the McCarthy Era —Part II

War at Home — Hot and Cold

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Just as revolutions brewed in France, Italy and Greece after World War II, the U.S. was also affected by similar conditions, though not nearly so deeply. In 1945, the U.S. ruling circles knew they would face fierce opposition at home after the war. Although they still had no clear ideas as to the depth of the crisis worldwide, they did perceive that they had to attack two obstacles to avoid postwar crisis. One was the leadership of the Communist Party, U.S.A., which in 1937, led hundreds of thousands of people under the banner "Forward to a Soviet America." After the war, its membership had risen to its all time high of 74,000. Secondly, the bourgeoisie knew it had to strike at the workers' spontaneous resistance and basic organization, the trade unions, whose membership had also risen by the war's end.

By 1950-54, what is popularly known as the McCarthy era, the ruling class had smashed the independent organizations of the workers, and driven the CP into hiding. However, the period immediately preceding McCarthyism, was one of destabilization and of crisis. 1945-50 had the biggest strike waves in U.S. history, and with it the working class's great hopes and promise. As the workers and capitalists confronted each other in massive strikes, the period also saw some of the workers' greatest shame, the capitulation of the Communist Party, U.S.A. These five years are most crucial to understanding why McCarthyism came about.

The CP's capitulation to the bourgeoisie and to the McCarthy attacks, left the workers leaderless and disorganized. This situation led to the rout culminating in 1950 when McCarthy started his speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, by claiming to have in his hand a list of 205 people known to Secretary of State Dean Acheson to be Communists and still working in the State Department.

This three-part series examines the period that created the McCarthy era. In part I (Workers Viewpoint, May 25), we examined the U.S. bourgeoisie and summed up that the U.S. capitalists, although the strongest capitalists worldwide, were weak in comparison to the strength garnered by socialism and the Soviet Union during and after the war. The U.S. capitalists reacted in large part to crisis after crisis after the war.

Workers Rally Around 30% Demand

In 1941, as part of their pledge to fight fascism, the unions agreed to a no-strike pledge for the duration of the war. As the war drew to a close in 1944-45, wildcat strikes, called "quickie strikes," became more frequent and more common. By 1945, both labor and the capitalists girded for a showdown after the war's end and the ending of the no-strike pledge loomed.

The war's end brought the biggest strike wave ever in American history. 3.5 million workers struck in 1945. In 1946, 4.6 million more workers struck. Strike figures since have never been so high.

The strike wave concentrated in basic industries. For the first time, General Motors, then America's largest industrial corporation, was completely shut down. The steel strike in 1946, was the largest to this day. All four major rubber companies were struck at the same time. 43,000 oil workers walked on Sept. 17. Railroad workers hit the bricks as did textile, electrical, maritime and lumber workers, meatpackers, truck drivers and city utility workers.

Almost every strike rallied to the same demand — 30% increase in wages. The strikes lasted four times the length of war-time strikes. And they won tremendous victories in their wages.

These concessions were wrung not just from the capitalists, but from the government. Strikers came into direct conflict with the government. The government exercised wartime powers in peacetime, and demanded that workers halt strikes "against the government," and sent the Navy to seize the oil fields from striking oil workers. When railroad workers struck on May 23, 1946, halting rail traffic from coast to coast, Truman threatened to send the troops to run the rails, and to draft all strikers. Although they belonged to one of the most conservative unions, the railroad workers defied Truman's seizure of the railroads for over 48 hours before returning to work. Even though Truman seized the mines, and sent 150 soldiers to Madisonville, Kentucky, 400,000 striking miners forced the government to accede to their demand for a health and welfare fund — the first ever in their history and for decades the best in any industry — to be paid by a small levy on each ton of coal mined.

Basis For Strike Wave

Why were the workers so relentless and determined to win their demands? During the war, workers' overall incomes rose and employment also rose, but the exploitation of more and more people by government force had increased. The workers footed the enormous costs of WWII — 41% of the war costs were paid by taxes. Taxation was for the first time extended to the lowest income brackets, taxing broader strata of people, while industry received 400% returns through more favorable tax depreciation rates.

Due to the rise in inflation during the war, workers were robbed of their incomes at faster and faster rates. By 1948, food costs increased over 115% and clothing prices rose 101%.

By 1944, the monopolies began massive layoffs. Between V-E day (May 2, 1945) and V-J Day (Aug. 14, 1945), more than a million workers lost their jobs. By 1949, unemployment rose to 6%. This was the material basis for the workers' disaffection and their demands. And there were social reasons as well.

Strike Gains Legitimacy

During the war soldiers risked and gave their lives to the fight against fascism. Families were separated for years. Women at home shouldered the entire burden of raising families, never knowing if they would be reunited with their men again. Indeed many were not reunited. The people made Herculean sacrifice to fight for a world without fascism, to end war and to live a better life in peace.

Congress's proposal in 1945, to maintain high levels of troops abroad to stave off revolution in other

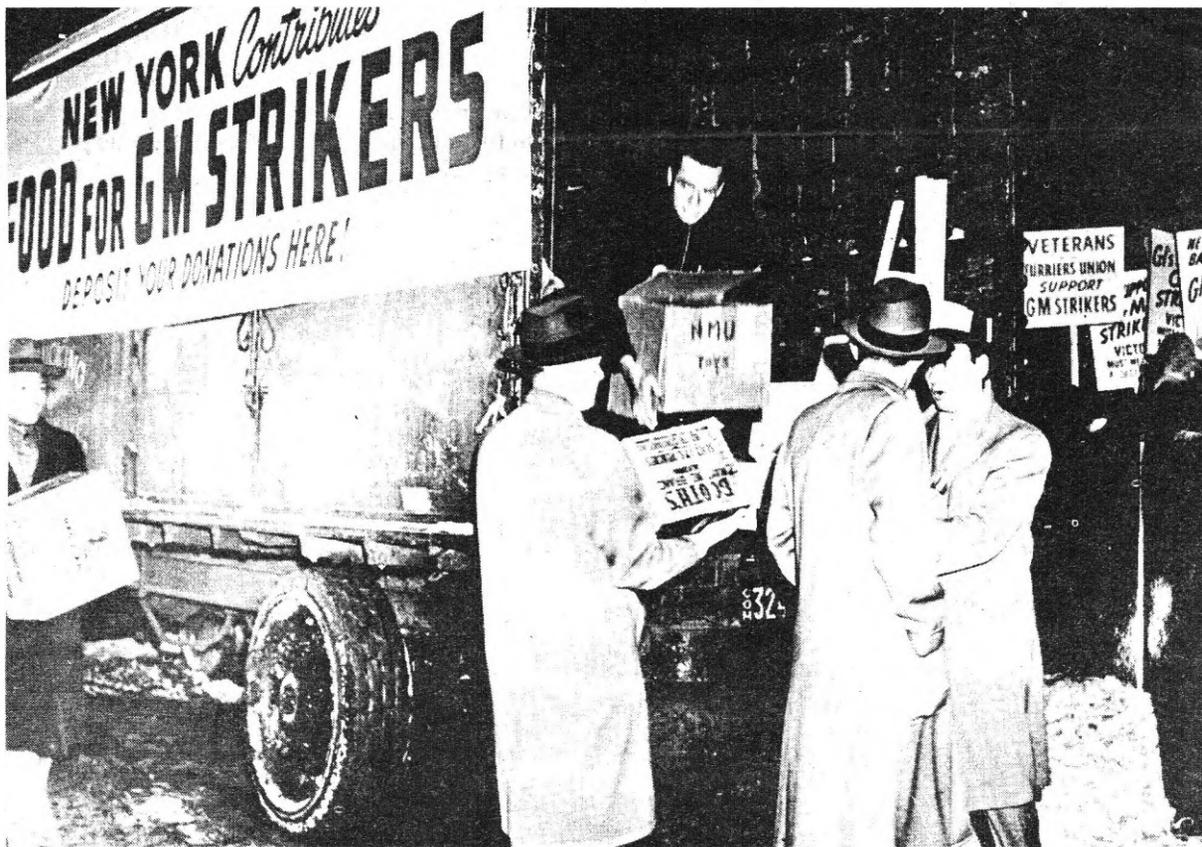
This same sentiment forced Congress to vote down Truman's proposal for a peacetime draft in 1946.

The strike wave of 1945-46 became a legitimate avenue of dissent for GIs. They went from the front lines to the unemployment lines. Instead, many stood picket line duty, wearing their uniforms and carrying picket signs reading, "From Bullets to Bull" and "One Front Now — For a Living Wage." In Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York and Illinois, war veterans marched and paraded on city halls to back the strikers' demands to halt police intimidation and for employment.

While a "full employment" bill was hotly debated in Congress, there were mass demonstrations of jobless CIO members. On Aug. 21, 1945, some 7,000 CIO workers demonstrated through Chicago's Loop with banners, "Negro and White Unite for Jobs." Richard T. Frankenstein, the United Auto Workers First Vice-President, who had won the most votes in the Aug. 7 primaries for mayor of Detroit (he lost the election 274,455 to 216,917) demanded that \$30 billion in unspent war appropriation be used for severance pay for the jobless.

50,000 people filled New York's Madison Square Garden; 25,000 shipyard workers marched on Aug. 28 in Camden, N.J.; 30,000 marched in San Francisco. In Detroit on Sept. 4, more than 20,000 marched to Cadillac Square to join scores of thousands demonstrating against layoffs of 300,000 from the war plants.

The support for the strike wave broadened and became even more legitimate as mass and citywide strikes were held to support it. On Jan. 3, 1945, in Stamford, Ct., 30 local unions of the CIO and AFL combin-



1945 and 1946 strikes received broad support and respect. Unions in New York collected food and toys to be distributed at Christmas.

countries, fueled a surge of protest "to bring the boys home" that pressured the Pentagon to release 12 million soldiers at one time instead of discharging 2 million soldiers over a period of a year as they had proposed. It was partly proletarian internationalism when GIs staged protests to return home from Guam, the Philippines and China.

After hearing a long anti-Soviet tirade about why the troops had to remain in Rome after the war, one soldier remarked, "I thought we were allies fighting one war. I've never been told there was any possibility of a war with Russia over some mystical ground about fundamental differences from the American way of life. Has the U.S. government been fooling me?"

According to Drew Pearson, on Sept. 15, 1945, when General Harry Lewis Twaddle, commander of the Ninety-Fifth Division, assembled the troops to explain occupation duty in Japan, "The boos from the soldiers were so prolonged and frequent, it took him 40 minutes to deliver a 15-minute speech." It struck the soldiers most sharply after the war they were protecting other peoples interests, not their own.

ed in a 24-hour general strike to aid 3,000 striking machinists against the brutality of city and state police. In Lancaster, Pa., workers engaged in a two-day citywide strike and demonstration on Feb. 1946 to stop police attacks on AFL transit strikers, and to win a contract for them. An estimated 20,000 AFL and CIO workers struck and demonstrated in Houston on Feb. 26, to force City Hall to deal with 700 striking members of the AFL City-County Employees Unions.

This surge in mass activity was channelled into the demand of 30% wage increases. It focused on the crisis of the U.S. economy, which was driven by inflation and unemployment. An underlying cause was the massive anti-fascist sentiment for greater democracy and better living standards. During the wartime years, many had joined the CP. They sought new ideas and new solutions. Many examined the Soviet Union, probing and questioning the ideas of communism.

Crisis Inevitable

The ruling circles were driven into more of a frenzy. On one hand, without the government's force and

troops they doubtless could not have withstood labor's demands as long as they did. On the other hand, they demanded an end to price controls and government regulation. With the demand for consumer production, small monopolies saw it as a chance to recoup losses during the war. The biggest monopolies who had benefited the most off war contracts saw it as a chance to mop up.

In 1946, spokesmen of the manufacturing and business organizations appeared before hearings of the House Banking and Currency Committee and threatened continuation and the withholding of consumer goods unless the already flimsy price controls were eliminated. In 1946, the meat industry withheld 90% of all its meat from the market and curtailed production to press Truman to end price controls.

The U.S. capitalists could only go in one direction to step up their attack on the working class.

Public Opinion Fluid; Capitalists Whip Up Counter-Trend

After the end of WWII, the U.S. monopoly capitalists worked overtime to swing public opinion in their favor. The National Association of Manufacturers (NAM, which represented over 17,000 affiliated companies of which 60 were dominant), spent several million dollars every year stimulating the belief that the Wagner Act, the union shop and the repeal of the "right to work" laws were all products of Moscow's machinations. Also, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce initiated its own campaign. In December 1945, it commissioned a report on the menace of socialism to Europe and its effect upon this country. They published two influential booklets, "Communist Infiltration of the U.S.," in 1946, and "Communists Within the Labor Movement," in 1947; both sold 500,000 copies.

The newspapers reported that this tactic was not working given the prestige of the Soviet Union in the United States. Cyrus L. Sulzberger, a leading correspondent of the New York Times, wrote on March 21, 1946, "The momentum of pro-Soviet feeling worked up during the war to support the Grand Alliance had continued too heavily after the armistice. This made it difficult for the Administration to carry out the stiffer diplomatic policy required now. For this reason, these observers believe, a campaign was worked up to obtain a better psychological balance of public opinion." In 1947, Senator Vandenberg told Truman, if he expected to get the spending appropriations for Europe from Congress, he would have to "scare the hell out of the country."

Public opinion remained fluid. On March 5, 1946, Truman imported Churchill to his hometown of Fulton, Mo., to give his "Iron Curtain" speech in which he denounced "communist fifth columns" which were "everywhere." The public sentiment against Churchill's speech was so great that even Truman had to disassociate himself from the speech. Undersecretary of State, Dean Acheson, excused himself from even appearing at a dinner given for Churchill in New York. At first the polls showed that 40% of the public opposed Churchill's speech and only 18% favored it. Yet a month later, another poll showed 85% approving Churchill's speech.

Another indication of the fluid public opinion was a 1945 poll in which only 3% believed that a new war was inevitable. By 1948, the figure had risen to 32%.

While in 1946, workers threw their huge weight in protest focusing on the economic situation, Truman and the red-baiters harped most successfully on one theme, that American democracy, the American way of life had defeated fascism, and it was the only way for the whole world, and it was unbeatable. By tying this theme to international issues about which people knew relatively less than their immediate experience with the economy, the bourgeoisie were also able to whip up a backward counter-trend of chauvinism and patriotism.

This can be seen in the red-baiting work of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists and the work of the reactionary Father Rice, who lobbied opinion in the unions, tying Communism and the alleged persecution of Catholics in Eastern Europe. For example, in Pittsburgh, the left had built up a considerable following among the Polish, Croatian and Hungarian working class communities during the war. By 1947, Pittsburgh was awash in anti-communist red-baiting in response to the capitalists' portrayals of the martyrdom of Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop Stepinac.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion went on witch hunts of their own. Their favorite speaker was J. Edgar Hoover who announced at their convention in 1947 that the 74,000 American Communists — the "masters of deceit," the ultimate threat to Western civilization and its "Judaic-Christian heritage" — represented a larger percentage of the population than Lenin's Bolsheviks in 1917. These organizations contended for the leadership of veterans. In Oct. 1947, 5,000 vets in Trenton, N.J., prevented the Mercer County CP organization from meeting to hear Gerhart Eisler, a well-known communist.

Anti-semitism and racism raged. Out of 29 Post Office employees under investigation for disloyalty in Cleveland, four were Jews, and 23 were blacks. There



These pickets of Local 93 UAW in Kansas City were typical of those across the country.

were 142 lynchings of blacks. By 1951, when the CP and independent unions were pretty much dismantled, the violence peaked. In 1951, seven black men were electrocuted for a rape which never occurred. Also in 1951, H.T. Moore, a black NAACP leader in Florida and his wife were murdered in a brutal bombing.

Violence against communists and progressives seethed. The government initiated its attack through the 1947 indictments of 14 communist leaders, the Congressional Hollywood 10 hearings, and investigation by Immigration and Naturalization into the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born. In 1949, a mob attacked Paul Robeson at a concert in Peekskill, N.Y., which 15,000 people attended. Henry Wallace's 1948 Progressive Party presidential campaign was met with guns in West Virginia, kidnappings in Georgia, and stonings in Illinois. Robert Now, a 28-year-old port agent of the National Maritime Union and chairman of the local Wallace-for-President Committee, was murdered in cold blood by an anti-communist member of the NMU.

As Truman came out with the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan which played up both chauvinistic and humanitarian sentiments of the workers, he quickly enacted a great deal of the legislative and executive machinery later to be used full force in the McCarthy Era. Ten days after he proclaimed the Truman Doctrine, he signed Executive Order 7835 which established the loyalty and security program for all federal employees, and he revived the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations. The same act established the CIA.

By 1946, although the CIO had begun to attack communists and militants, the Marshall Plan was used to force through acceptance of the Taft-Hartley Act and of the ousting of communists and wayward unions from the CIO.



Anti-communists picket 1949 Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace at Waldorf-Astoria, New York City. The picket sign protests attendance of Dimitri Shostakovich, great Soviet composer, at conference. The State Department had led the attack on the conference by raising they would deny entry to some foreign intellectuals to attend the conference because Russia was even worse about allowing free entry. Anti-communist intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger, Mary McCarthy and Sidney Hook joined in attacking the conference.

Appearance and Essence of Workers' Sentiments

By 1947, William Z. Foster, Communist Party leader and leading party theoretician, concluded that the workers had, in today's terms, "turned to the right." He wrote, "Not only have these two parties (Democrat and Republican) succeeded in winning the open political allegiance of the vast bulk of trade union members and leaders, but they have also definitely stamped their capitalist ideology upon the workers' organizations... With American capitalism in this relatively favorable position, there has been a tendency for our trade union leadership (also the workers) to look away from socialism or even the nationalization of industry under capitalism and to fall victims to the capitalist illusions so assiduously cultivated during recent decades in the United States."

Foster misread the entire situation. The question was not whether the masses were won to socialism or not, and it was not whether the masses turned right or left on their positions. Only the most advanced among the people will really understand the idea of socialism and communism and propagate it among the masses. The masses on the other hand, mostly unfamiliar with socialism, will not make revolution by ideals, but will make revolution by necessity. Their stands will not be so clear cut as pro-socialism or pro-capitalism, but will voice the demands they see as necessary for their survival.

McCarthyism had no mandate from the people. In 1945-46, and up to 1947, the unions and the workers' spontaneous consciousness was even stronger than before the war due to the rise in union membership, the prestige of the Soviet Union and the masses' immediate experience with war. The strike wave of 1945-46 shows that the workers were determined to fight, that their demands gained broad support and legitimacy from other strata of the population.

The fact that the government nationalized four industries in response to strikes shows that they were in a weak position, something the workers could take better advantage of if they had had the leadership. The fact that the capitalists whipped up vicious anti-communism, chauvinism and racism shows the bourgeoisie was forced to contend for public opinion only through force, and the most vicious reaction and intimidation.

Even though the government took advantage of the respect people had for it built up from the war, people continued to resist it even at the height of anti-communist hysteria. 212,000 miners left the mines in protest of the Taft-Hartley Act, which restricted the unions' right to organize, restricted plant elections, restricted strikes and union political actions. It also required union officials to sign non-communist affidavits and gave Truman the right to nationalize industries. The miners just said, "Let Taft and Hartley mine the coal." On July 4, 1947, CIO Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding workers called out some 132,000 east coast workers for 84 days despite Taft-Hartley threats.

Even the Korean war, at the height of McCarthyism, was very touch and go for the bourgeoisie in rallying the people's support. In Nov. 1951, one year after the Korean war had begun, 56% of the people thought the war "utterly useless," according to a Gallup poll. One month later, a poll showed 70% favoring a power peace conference. Eisenhower was elected mainly because of his campaign promise to go to Korea to help negotiate an end to the war.

Long before Foster's statements in 1947 the CP had given up the fight. By their own admission, they state, "In the Party and the Left especially from 1949 to 1953, there were strong tendencies to view war and fascism as inevitable." Their capitulation, which was fostered long before McCarthyism, led to workers being defenseless and leaderless in face of the bourgeoisie's vicious counter-attack. More on the Communist Party, U.S.A. in Part III.