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Towards a Prosopography of the American Communist Elite: The Foundation Years, 1919–1923

John McIlroy and Alan Campbell

Modern interest in prosopography in America is sometimes traced to Charles Beard's work on the class background and economic interests of the Founding Fathers.¹ Its roots reach back to the classical world and it is frequently associated with practitioners of ancient and medieval history.² Prosopography may be defined as a form of collective biography in which the common and diverse characteristics of a specific population of social actors are enumerated, analysed and compared by reference to selected categories, usually their origins, inherited class position, ethnicity, gender, religion, education, occupation, affiliation, and experience. The aim is to establish variables, correlations and patterns within the group. There are different views on what is involved. But optimally employed, the technique adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods, numeric analysis and case studies of protagonists: the aspiration is to both recuperate and analyse, to assemble the collective and interrogate characteristics of the population without losing sight of the individuality of its members. As

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¹ Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1913).

² Katharine Keats-Rohan, ed., *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The Prosopography of Britain and France from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1997).

the literature demonstrates, some studies privilege statistical methods over vignette and mini-biography – or vice versa.³ Twentieth-century prosopography investigated a variety of subjects: intellectuals, scientists, military and religious personnel, business and political elites and, on a larger scale, members of social movements and political parties – with the purpose of assembling information which may restore or reaffirm the significance of agency and the background and characteristics of historical actors, help penetrate institutional façades, and shed light on how things worked in practice.⁴

Drawing on collective biography – more precisely group biography – prosopography utilizes biographical dictionaries which, together with individual biography, autobiography, primary sources and the related historiography constitute its raw materials.⁵ Prosopography depends on reliable data, well-demarcated samples, and statistical rigour. Its starting point is the “lexicon,” “biographical dictionary” or database constructed by researchers, which distils relevant information on the group under scrutiny. The second stage entails analysing the data by reference to the chosen categories – age, gender, origins, ethnicity, and so forth.

Difficulties may occur when the database is incomplete or information about pertinent aspects of known individuals’ lives is absent or insufficient. Such lacunae are not an absolute barrier to useful work. It is a matter of degree: evaluation depends on how incomplete the database is, how significant the gaps are, and whether there is sufficient evidence from which to postulate plausible conclusions. Neither too much nor too little should be made of what is a

³ For discussions, see Lawrence Stone, “Prosopography,” in Lawrence Stone, *The Past and Present Revisited*. (London and New York: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1987), 45–73; Katharine Keats-Rohan, “Biography, Identity and Names: Understanding the Pursuit of the Individual in Prosopography,” in *Prosopography Approaches and Applications: A Handbook*, ed. K.S.B. Rohan (Oxford: P & G Publications, 2007), 139–82; “Guide to the Principles and Practice of Prosopography” at: https://prosopography.history.ox.ac.uk/course_syllabuses.htm.

⁴ The work of Lewis Namier was influential, commencing with Lewis B. Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1929). Pioneering work in the United States included C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); David J. Rothman, *Politics and Power: The United States Senate 1869–1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966); Jackson T. Main, *The Upper House in Revolutionary America, 1763–1788* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

⁵ For a contrary view, which posits a firm distinction between prosopography and group biography, see Barbara Caine, *Biography and History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56–58, 61–65.

valuable addition to conventional approaches and prosopography has attracted differential interest from historians. Its advancement may lie through amassing micro-studies focussed on period, place and personnel; or through larger-scale projects.⁶

When employed to study Communism, prosopography works best when reliable data pertaining to a precisely delineated community is mustered – although even with well-defined populations, problems arise.⁷ It has proved less robust as a means of exploring the extended and diffuse membership of national parties.⁸ The technique has been utilized sparingly in the study of American Communism where, as with so much else, the story starts with Theodore Draper. One of the many virtues of his foundational texts was the importance they accorded agency and the factors which formed key protagonists. His narratives were pervasively peopled and peppered with insights into the origins, personalities, and political development of his actors.⁹ In a small way, he also pioneered prosopography. Highlighting the importance

⁶ See the discussion in Stone, “Prosopography,” 71–73, which emphasises the difficulties with large-scale studies researched by academic teams.

⁷ Evan Mawdsley and Stephen White, *The Soviet Elite: From Lenin to Gorbachev: The Central Committee and its Members* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); William Chase and J. Arch Getty, “The Moscow Bolshevik Cadres of 1917: A Prosopographic Analysis,” *Russian History*, 5, 1 (1978): 84–105. In contrast, and although almost complete lists of students were accessible, a study of Communists attending the Comintern’s International Lenin School, drew conclusions from a database which included only an unrepresentative minority – 27% of the known population. There were gaps in the database’s information on many of the 27% of students: see Gidon Cohen and Kevin Morgan, “Stalin’s Sausage Machine: British Students at the International Lenin School, 1927–1937,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 13 (2004): 51–76; Alan Campbell, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin and John Halstead, “The International Lenin School: A Response to Cohen and Morgan,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 15 (2004): 51–76, and Alan Campbell, John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin and John Halstead, “British Students at the International Lenin School: The Vindication of a Critique,” *Twentieth Century British History*, 16 (2005): 471–488. For a complete list of British students, see the Appendix to John McIlroy, Barry McLoughlin, Alan Campbell and John Halstead, “Forging the Faithful: The British at the International Lenin School,” *Labour History Review*, 68, 1 (2003): 99–128.

⁸ The historiography of national parties has provided little in the way of prosopography, although some valuable studies employ group biography rather than statistical analysis – see, for example, Neal Wood, *Communism and the British Intellectuals* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1959); Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Free Association Books, 1988); Yuri Slekhine, *House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017). Larger-scale endeavours have sometimes proved over-ambitious. One study commences, “Very loosely we have taken what may be described as a prosopographical approach,” but concludes: “No attempt was made to identify a representative sample of communists ... the information in many cases is fragmentary, sometimes relating to a single aspect of an individual’s life ... Simple statements that we have identified groups of cases sharing particular characteristics have no quantitative significance either in absolute terms or as a proportion of CPGB members”: Kevin Morgan, Gidon Cohen and Andrew Flinn, *Communists in British Society, 1920–1991* (London: Rivers Oram, 2007), vi, 279, 280, 281.

⁹ Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957); Theodore Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia* (New York: Viking Press, 1960). Reviewing *Roots* in *The New York Review of Books*, Arthur Schlesinger remarked: “The use of personal sketches as a means of getting at larger

of the cadre in Leninist organizations, Draper offered a brief discussion of the background and careers of a number of leaders.¹⁰ His data was based on self-reported information about 43 American Communists compiled by Solon De Leon, an activist in the Workers Party of America (WP), who edited *The American Labor Who's Who*. Extracted from a text which contained brief profiles of a wider range of politicians and functionaries, Draper's sample was small; the criteria governing its construction remained opaque; and it was restricted to 1925.¹¹ Nathan Glazer's work in the early 1960s represented some progress. Glazer attempted anatomization of the party membership, the movement rather than its elite. His book documented important trends, but its treatment of the 1920s was restricted, focussed on immigrants, and hinged on statistics rather than life-histories.¹² A return to examination of the leadership, this time on a more scientific scale, awaited publication of Harvey Klehr's *Communist Cadre* in 1978.¹³

Understanding its leadership, the book argued, is indispensable to understanding a revolutionary party. Like Draper, Klehr acknowledged differentiation between leaders and led, between national, regional and local leaders, and between members themselves, in terms of experience, activism and commitment – particularly between those the party retained and those passing through. The cadre demanded attention because, as the organizing agent of the

issues increases the readability of Mr Draper's book and enlarges one's understanding of the human dimensions of American Communism" – quoted in Viking Press publicity for the book. For recent discussion see John Earl Haynes, "The Elephant in the Living Room": Theodore Draper and the Historiography of American Communism," *American Communist History*, 8, 1 (2009): 3–9; Bryan D. Palmer, "What Was Great About Theodore Draper and What Was Not," *American Communist History*, 8, 1 (2009): 15–21. For our views on some of the issues, see John McIlroy, "Rethinking the Historiography of American Communism: A Comment," *American Communist History*, 2, 2 (2003): 195–202; John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "Some Problems of Communist History," *American Communist History*, 4, 2 (2005): 208–14.

¹⁰ Draper, *American Communism*, 200–201.

¹¹ Draper pointed out – *American Communism*, 477, note 33 – that more than 43 Communists were listed in *The American Labor Who's Who*, ed. Solon De Leon, in collaboration with Irma C. Hayssen and Grace Poole, (New York: Hanford Press, 1925). Max Shachtman, who himself figured, identified 61: Max Shachtman, "A Rejoinder to Theodore Draper," *The New Internationalist*, 24, 1 (Winter 1958): 55. Inspection of Draper's selection suggests that at least 16 were not members of the CC in 1925 while some – Ellis Chryssos, Joseph Pidulski, Abraham Vaclav – were hardly leaders of the first rank.

¹² Nathan Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1961).

¹³ Harvey Klehr, *Communist Cadre: The Social Background of the American Communist Party Elite* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1978).

party, it was crucial to democratic-centralist regimes. It constituted a central, collective actor, imparting to Communism much of its drive and influence, mobilizing members to execute policy, and functioning as director, educator and interlocutor between rank-and-file Communists and the Comintern. But how do we define “the cadre”? Klehr reviewed attempts by earlier writers to distinguish cadres from members by reference to the intensity of their commitment, their knowledge, discipline, location in the organizational hierarchy, and standing as party employees.¹⁴ The discussion reveals definitional difficulties. “Cadre” was initially a military term denoting the nucleus of officers who commanded and trained the ranks. It became intrinsic to the Comintern discourse of a vanguard party in which the cadre was equated with Lenin’s notion of a nucleus of “professional revolutionaries” in *What Is to Be Done?* More recently, it has been argued that Lenin did not exclusively identify the “professional revolutionary” with full-time, specialist party workers. Rather, the term primarily referred to expertise and to leaders at all levels who had acquired skill in the trade of revolution – the party’s political craftsmen. It could cover local organizers and agitators well-versed in Bolshevik theory and practice, adept in strategy and tactics, as much as national leaders, lay activists as well as paid functionaries. Nonetheless, through the 1920s, as bureaucratization and centralization proceeded in the Soviet party and state, the Comintern and its affiliates, the accent was on hierarchy and creating an echelon of full-time officials and representatives.¹⁵

¹⁴ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 6–9, discussing, *inter alia*, Philip Selznick, *The Organizational Weapon: A Study of Bolshevik Strategy and Tactics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952); Frank Meyer, *The Moulding of Communists: The Training of the Communist Cadre* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1961); and Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History* (1957; New York: Praeger, 1962), 536–542.

¹⁵ See, for example, Paul LeBlanc, *Lenin and the Revolutionary Party* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1990), and particularly Lars T. Lih, *Lenin Rediscovered: What Is to Be Done? In Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 459–469. See also Chase and Getty, “Moscow Bolshevik Cadres”. Identification of cadres with centralization and full-time staff went hand in hand with the use of the term to denote the expanding body of professional specialists in all sections of the Soviet state.

Applied to the WP, the cadre could include members of leading committees, district organizers, federation leaders, and staff of the party press¹⁶. In terms of locating a well-defined, sizeable, representative but manageable population, covering both national and local cadres and amenable to research, Klehr took a step forward in comparison with Draper's heterogeneous sample: "There is one readily identifiable group of party leaders who can provide a clear picture of the party cadre – the members of the Central Committee. A study of Central Committee members can bypass the problems of sample selection ..."¹⁷ The Central Committee (CC) was the party's governing body between conventions; through the 1920s its composition varied between 10 and 44 members, fluctuating thereafter. All the significant party leaders served on the CC and it seems indisputable that, while not exhaustive, it provided a reasonable cross-section of the cadre. As it evolved, the committee was not subject to election in direct democratic terms; it was the product of factional slates and, therefore, internal party struggle, changing conceptions of which groups demanded representation, and, eventually, overarching everything, the approval of the Comintern. Through the 1920s, caucuses were allocated seats in proportion to membership support and Comintern ordinance. As Klehr observed, examination of committee members could yield insights into the party, its trajectory, and who steered it.¹⁸ In that context, *Communist Cadre* assessed the role and background of 212 Communists elected to successive CCs between 1921 and 1961 with reference to date and place of birth, ethnic and religious origins, education, and occupation. Klehr's profile of the leadership, which he compared with what

¹⁶ The Workers Party of America became the Workers (Communist) Party in 1925 and the Communist Party of the USA in 1929. For simplicity we have used WP throughout this paper.

¹⁷ Klehr *Communist Cadre*, 10–11. "Central Executive Committee" was the term employed in the early years. For uniformity, we have used the later "Central Committee" (CC) throughout.

¹⁸ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 11–12. For contemporary descriptions of factionalism in the WP, see James P. Cannon, "For the Liquidation of Factionalism" and James P. Cannon and William W. Weinstone, "Theses on the Factional Situation," in *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism: Selected Writings and Speeches, 1920–1928* (New York: Prometheus Research Library, 1992), 392–426, 427–95. From 1923 the main factions were led by William Z. Foster and Charles Ruthenberg – subsequently by his collaborator Jay Lovestone – with smaller groupings coalescing around Ludwig Lore from 1923 and James P. Cannon from 1925.

was known about the membership, constituted a landmark in the historiography. However, he never used the term “prosopography”. His text was presented as a statistical survey which furthered the “systematic and empirical investigation of the leadership of American Communism.”¹⁹

The volume was well-received. Draper commended “the cool, careful, critical political intelligence” which informed it. Klehr’s “contribution to our understanding of American communism”, he judged, “both subtle and substantive ... he has been both imaginative and ingenious in his search for and design of his material.”²⁰ Times and fashions change: from the 1980s, influenced by “the new labor history” and its accent on “history from below,” scholars turned their gaze from the elite to rank-and-file Communists, their local activity, and occupational and social attachments. The new locus of investigation was welcome: it is a truism that a combination of “history from above” and “history from below” is necessary to fully comprehend an institution or movement and that research into elites should be complemented by the study of “ordinary Communists” – although how the two are related has occasioned controversy.²¹ From that balanced perspective, criticism of *Communist Cadre* by those who champion work on the grassroots appears contrived.²² Surveys which claim to remedy the alleged deficiencies of Klehr’s text by going beyond the elite to

¹⁹ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 3.

²⁰ Theodore Draper, “Foreword” in Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, no pagination.

²¹ For an early justification of the turn, see Maurice Isserman, “Three Generations: Historians View American Communism,” *Labor History*, 26, 4 (1985): 517–45; for later reflections, Maurice Isserman, “Open Archives and Open Minds: ‘Traditionalists’ versus ‘Revisionists’ after Venona,” *American Communist History*, 4, 2 (2005): 215–23. For critiques, see Bryan D. Palmer, “Rethinking the Historiography of United States Communism,” *American Communist History*, 2, 2 (2003): 139–73; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, “The Historiography of American Communism: An Unsettled Field,” *Labour History Review*, 68, 1 (2003): 61–78; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians of Communism and Espionage* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2003).

²² Morgan et al., *Communists and British Society*, 279, asserts that Klehr “focused on ‘party-career data’ and the detailing of Soviet connections in a manner seemingly predetermining the construction of a ‘total’ party member.” Klehr’s survey included some information about the origins and background of his subjects and their prior and subsequent political commitments and distinguished the elite from other sections of the membership. Moreover, for the most part, the revolutionaries he surveyed, unlike lay members, combined personal and *occupational* commitments to Communist politics. Everything we know about them suggests that they were as close as we are likely to get to a “total party member.” The question of their extramural interests is worthy of pursuit; its neglect by a pioneering political historian surely understandable and certainly pardonable.

investigate the rank and file and their extra-party preoccupations are themselves of questionable rigour.²³

The four decades since the monograph appeared have seen the opening of the Soviet archives, a significant extension of the literature of American Communism, a proliferation of biographies of individual leaders,²⁴ and the publication of biographical dictionaries.²⁵ There has been no advance of the approach initiated by Draper and taken forward by Klehr.

Communist Cadre remains the starting point for future research.²⁶ It is worth looking at it again to reassess and where possible expand on its findings. Statistical surveys will always have a place in the historiography. But a limitation of the book is the emphasis it places on numeric analysis unleavened by life-histories, so that the individuality of actors may be obscured in their aggregation. Klehr gleaned a wealth of hitherto hidden information about leading Communists from diverse sources; beyond the tables and the statistical accounting,

²³ See notes 7 and 8 above. And compare the critical comments in John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "A Peripheral Vision: Communist Historiography in Britain," *American Communist History*, 4, 2 (2003): 146, with Morgan et al., *Communists in British Society*, 279 and 325, note 19.

²⁴ Arthur Zipser and Pearl Zipser, *Fire and Grace: The Life of Rose Pastor Stokes* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989); Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994); James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Paul Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey, 1892–1953, and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1995); James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Ted Morgan, *Covert Life: Jay Lovestone: Communist, Anti-Communist and Spy* (New York: Random House, 1999); Thomas L. Sakmyster, *A Communist Odyssey: The Life of József Pogány/John Pepper* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012); Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of The American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); David Lee McMullen, *"Strike": The Radical Insurrection of Ellen Dawson* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2010)

²⁵ Bernard K. Johnpoll and Harvey Klehr, eds., *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left* (New York and Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), contains biographies of 120 Communists. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, eds., *Encyclopaedia of the American Left* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992) has typically briefer entries on 55 Communists.

²⁶ There has been some analysis of Communist autobiography. See, for example, James R. Barrett, "Was the Personal Political? Reading the Autobiography of American Communism," *International Review of Social History*, 53 (2008): 395–423, which concentrates on what such texts reveal of their authors' personal and emotional attitudes. Kathleen A. Brown and Elizabeth Faue, "Social Bonds, Sexual Politics and Political Community on the US Left, 1920–1940," *Left History*, 7, 1 (2000): 1–37, points out that the historiography concentrates on ideology and politics at the expense of culture, personal feelings, emotions, sexuality, family and personal relationships of Communists. Expanding the canvas as suggested by these authors may be useful. But such an approach raises significant research problems and is questionably pertinent in relation to leaders of past generations whose preoccupations were dominated by politics as conventionally and contemporaneously conceived.

only a little found its way into the text.²⁷ The survey's sweep and painstaking analysis of forty years of Communist history is an undoubted strength. But it raises questions about the particularity of specific periods within a timespan running from Warren G. Harding to the Bay of Pigs. In some instances, findings are broken down for each CC. In other cases, the data is not disaggregated. This makes it difficult to elaborate on trends in leadership composition in the very different political and party contexts which prevailed at specific points in the 1921–61 timeline. Finally, the study excluded members of CCs from 1919 until December 1921, on the understandable grounds that information was difficult to access, many of these representatives played little subsequent role in party leadership, and the formation of the WP drew a line between the confusion and fragmentation which preceded it.²⁸

In comparison our research is small-scale: it breaks down and builds on Klehr's study of CC representatives, focussing on members of these committees during the first decade of American Communism. Rarely revisited in the aftermath of Draper's *tour de force*, the significance of the 1920s has recently been reasserted.²⁹ Our purpose in returning to the elite is to amplify Klehr's work by combining quantitative analysis and group biography; and to expand upon Draper by providing more "personal sketches." Putting flesh on the statistics and recuperating actors beyond the elect deemed worthy of extended biography, may deepen our comprehension of the foundation of American Communism. The present article fills a

²⁷ Contemporary reviewers saw the book primarily as a survey in the political science mould; see the review by Paul A. Smith, *American Political Science Review*, 74, 2 (June 1980): 504–5; and also Ronald J. Grehle, review, *Journal of American History*, 66, 3 (December 1979): 711–12.

²⁸ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 14.

²⁹ See, for example, Palmer, "Rethinking the Historiography", and the responses from James R. Barrett, John Earl Haynes, Melvyn Dubofsky and John McIlroy in the same issue; Bryan D. Palmer, "American Communism in the 1920s: Striving for a Panoramic View," *American Communist History*, 6, 2 (2007), 139–50; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*; Jacob A. Zumoff, *The Communist International and US Communism, 1919–1929* (Chicago, ILL: Haymarket Books, 2015). A critic of the historiography, writing in 2007, claimed that it had "lost Draper's key insight ... that the 1920s were the defining period in the history of American Communism": John Holmes, "American Jewish Communism and Garment Unionism in the 1920s," *American Communist History*, 6, 2 (2007): 173; another scholar observed: "The 1920s, so long left largely untitled after the researches of Draper now seem overdue for consideration": Palmer, "American Communism in the 1920s": 147.

gap by concentrating on the neglected period 1919–1923 and those cadres whose leadership role was restricted to these years. Communism at this time was indubitably chaotic and clandestine and information is still hard to acquire. Nonetheless, the period remains critical and its leaders merit renewed scrutiny. Informed by belief that microstudies represent a way forward, our approach remains, to a degree, tentative and exploratory.³⁰ We have brought together the information currently available on the party cadre in this era to establish a more complete picture but also to test the extent to which discoverable data can sustain a more developed prosopography. To that end, we studied 5 CCs between 1919 and December 1922 and assembled a compendium of basic biographical details on 56 Communists who served on them.³¹ We followed Klehr in restricting our sample to full members at the expense of alternate and candidate members and have made brief reference to leading activists who contributed to the foundation of American Communism without appearing on CCs.³²

1919, it will be recalled, witnessed the advent of rival parties, the Communist Party of America (CPA) and the Communist Labor Party (CLP). Despite a partial merger in 1920 which created the United Communist Party (UCP), the CPA maintained its organization,

³⁰ For examples of prosopographical microhistories, see McIlroy, McLoughlin, Campbell and Halstead, “Forging the Faithful;” John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “The British and French Representatives to the Communist International, 1920–1939: A Comparative Survey,” *International Review of Social History*, 50, 2 (2005): 203–40; John McIlroy, “The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy and the Stalinization of British Communism, 1928–1933,” *Past and Present*, 192 (2006): 187–226.

³¹ Taken together, these CCs contained the majority of the early cadres. But as noted earlier, CC membership did not exhaust the category. To take one instance, a more complete study would take account of leaders absent from the CC at particular points – a handful of examples illustrate our point. Juliet Stuart Poyntz (1886–1937), a Columbia academic who joined the WP with the Workers’ Council, was a leader in “women’s work” and labor education, and prominent in the Lore group prior to 1925. A candidate member of the CC, Poyntz graduated to undercover work before her mysterious disappearance in the 1930s. Ella “Mother” Bloor (1862–1951) was an experienced organizer who, after activism in the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and Socialist Party (SP), helped establish the Communist Labor Party (CLP). Bloor attended the first two congresses of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) and became one of America’s best-known Communists in the 1920s, although she only reached the CC in 1930. Her son, Harold Ware (1889–1935), became a farmer after graduating from Penn State and was the WP’s agricultural expert, spending long periods in the Soviet Union as an adviser. A CLP founder and alternate member of the WP CC, he was alleged to have coordinated a group of lawyers in the Agricultural Department which acted in the Russian interest. Tom O’Flaherty (1889–1936), originally from Ireland, was another CC alternate member. A fixture of the Foster and then Cannon caucus, O’Flaherty was expelled as a Trotskyist in 1928 and returned to Ireland in the early 1930s.

³² Klehr also collected where possible information on alternate members and other prominent Communists, 191 in total. He used this information sparingly but made brief comparisons with CC members: *Communist Cadre*, 15, 101–14. The practice of electing alternate and candidate members was introduced from 1921.

dominated by the foreign language federations. It was only towards the end of 1921, after severe state repression and pervasive internal in-fighting, that the united WP emerged from the underground. It was early 1923, in the aftermath of the Bridgeman Convention, which demonstrated the resilience of ultra-leftism, and Comintern determination to eradicate it, that clandestinity was formally and finally rejected.³³ December 1921 and the advent of the WP has been taken as a watershed; later Communists considered it their first convention. Yet if we grant due weight to key elements, unity, legality, centrally organized activity, intervention in the labor movement and civil society, and an ordered, if factionalized, internal life, it was 1923 before the WP became anything like an effective actor in American politics. That spring saw the underground party hold its last convention. Periodization is perennially problematic; organizations are always in flux. But it seems preferable to consider 1923 as the point at which a party in more than name took the field while acknowledging that developments between 1919 and 1922 and the leaders who influenced them, were distinctive but intrinsic to subsequent history.³⁴ We have therefore treated 1919–1923 as “the long foundation period.”

Looking at matters in this way foregrounds questions about continuity and disjuncture in leadership personnel. To what extent were key positions in the WP occupied by those who directed its predecessors? Can we make distinctions between those influential in the birth of American Communism and those prominent in its infancy? To what degree did activists who played secondary roles in the CPA and CLP advance to the forefront in the WP? Do patterns emerge in relation to leaders formed in the different traditions of the Socialist Party of America (SP), the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)? Study of the early CCs may help answer such questions while adding detail to Klehr’s study. Similar questions may be posed concerning stability and scission in leadership

³³ Draper, *Roots*, remains an indispensable guide; see also Zumoff, *Communist International*, 24–73. These comments simplify a much more complicated situation.

³⁴ Draper, *American Communism*, 21, observed from the vantage point of 1919: “The next three years 1920–1922, maybe called the dark age of American Communism ...”

personnel between 1924 and 1927 and the relationship of elite re-composition to the political turmoil of the Comintern's Third Period from 1928. An essay in the next issue of this journal will address these questions.³⁵ The present paper examines compositional trends in the leadership before 1923 and provides "personal sketches" of activists who played little role in it thereafter. It possesses few claims to originality in relation to the material marshalled. However, it provides a concentration and synthesis not to be found elsewhere and offers an analytical overview of trends in leadership composition and leading personalities, many relatively obscure, which integrates a range of primary and secondary sources.³⁶

The early Communist leadership in profile, 1919–23

Tables 1–5 list the members of CCs of the CPA, CLP, UCP and WP between 1919 and December 1922. Information on the 56 Communists who sat on these bodies contained in our "Lexicon" is tabulated in the **Appendix** which provides the basis for our statistical calculations. There are a handful of discrepancies in the sources but these tables include the large majority of those who played a leading part in the new movement and constitute the single significant sample covering its first four years in their entirety.³⁷ If we look first at origins, Draper suggested, and Glazer confirmed, that the large majority of early American Communists were foreign-born to the extent that between 1919 and 1922, some 90 percent of

³⁵ John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, "The Leadership of American Communism, 1924–1929: Sketches for a Prosopographical Portrait," *American Communist History*, 18, 4 (2019), forthcoming.

³⁶ We are particularly indebted to the invaluable contributions of Draper, Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Bernard K. Johnpoll, as well as the assiduous recovery of documents and biographical information by Tim Davenport. But we draw on a wide range of primary and secondary material. We have also critically consulted a variety of internet sites, including genealogical search engines, and Wikipedia contributions which on occasion provide otherwise unobtainable detail.

³⁷ The tables are based on Draper, *Roots* which reproduced the lists published in the Communist press, and the lists reconstructed by Tim Davenport on his "Early American Marxism" website: see at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>. We have selected the founding committees for the CPA and CLP in 1919 and the UCP in 1920 and the first two WP CCs elected in December 1921 and December 1922 to provide a manageable and clearly defined sample as well as a chronological spread across the years under consideration here.

Table 1. Communist Party of America Central Executive Committee (CEC) elected at Founding Convention, September 1st–7th 1919

Charles E. Ruthenberg (National Secretary); Lewis C. Fraina (International Secretary); John Ballam; Alexander Bittelman; Max Cohen; Charles Dirba; Daniel Elbaum; Isaac Ferguson; K.B. Karosses; Jay Lovestone; Paul Petras*; John Schwarz; Oscar Tyverovsky; Harry M. Wicks. International Delegates:** Nicholas Hourwich; Alexander Stoklitsky

Notes

*Rose Pastor Stokes replaced Petras.

**We have treated Hourwich and Stoklitsky as members of this CEC.

Sources: Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism*. (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 427; Tim Davenport, “The Communist Party of America, 1919–1946, Party Officials: Communist Party of America, 1919”, at:
<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>

Table 2. Communist Labor Party CEC elected at Founding Convention, August 31st–September 5th 1919

Charles Baker; Max Bedacht/Ludwig Lore*; Alexander Bilan; Jack Carney; Benjamin Gitlow; Ludwig E. Katterfeld; Edward I. Lindgren; John Reed; R.E. Richardson; Arne Swabeck; Alfred Wagenknecht (Secretary).

* Lore was elected to the chagrin of the organizers who ordered a re-run which installed Bedacht.

Sources: Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 180–81; Tim Davenport, “The Communist Party of America, 1919–1946, Party Officials: Communist Labor Party of America, 1919”, at:
<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>

Table 3. United Communist Party CEC elected at Founding Convention, May 1920.

Max Bedacht; James P. Cannon; Isaac Ferguson; Louis Hendin (resigned); Ludwig E. Katterfeld; Edward I. Lindgren; Reinhart; Charles E. Ruthenberg; Charles E. Scott (aka Charles Johnson, Karlis Jansons); Alfred Wagenknecht (secretary).

Source: Tim Davenport, “The Communist Party of America, 1919–1946, Party Officials: United Communist Party of America”, at:

<https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>

Table 4. Workers Party of America (WP) CEC elected at Founding (First) Convention, December 1921

John Anderson; Elmer T. Allison; Henry Askeli; Alexander Bittelman; James P. Cannon; J. Louis Engdahl; Caleb Harrison; Meyer Loonin; Ludwig Lore; Jay Lovestone; Robert Minor; Marguerite Prevey; J.B. Salutsky; Arne Swabeck; Alexander Trachtenberg; William Weinstone; James Wilenkin.

Chair: Cannon. Secretary: Harrison, replaced by Allison, replaced by Charles E. Ruthenberg, who had been in prison.

Source: Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 450.

Table 5. WP CEC elected at Second Convention, December 1922.

Israel Amter; Alexander Bittelman; Earl Browder; James P. Cannon; William F. Dunne; Marion L. Emerson; J. Louis Engdahl; William Z. Foster; Abram Jakira; Ludwig E. Katterfeld; William F. Kruse; Edward I. Lindgren; Ludwig Lore; Jay Lovestone; Theodore Maki; Robert Minor; Michel Nastasiewsky; Moissaye Olgin; John Pepper; Charles E. Ruthenberg; Rose Pastor Stokes; Alexander Trachtenberg; Alfred Wagenknecht; William Weinstone; Harry M. Wicks.

Source: Draper, *Roots of American Communism*, 457.

party members were allocated to the language federations.³⁸ In re-exploring the subject in relation to the leadership, we have finessed Klehr's distinction between immigrants and native-born Americans and employed a three-fold classification: immigrants; those born to immigrant parents, i.e. first-generation Americans; and Americans with a longer native lineage. Our justification is that although members of the second category did not suffer the dislocation of leaving the old country, they may have encountered at least some of their parents' subsequent problems: prejudice and discrimination frequently continued into the second generation.

Eliding individual distinctiveness, experience and response, such categories are inevitably arbitrary. Depending on circumstances, an immigrant from Canada like Isaac Ferguson or Margaret Prevey, or from England via Ireland like Jack Carney, may have undergone a less discriminatory encounter with American society than a Finn like Henry Askeli or a Pole like Daniel Elbaum. All experienced oppression and exploitation but to different degrees. Gender, religion, education, membership of oppressed nationalities, experience of racism and assimilation into countervailing communities and sub-cultures, add further dimensions, as does age. The immigrant category contains, on the one hand Ludwig Lore, who emigrated from Germany as an adult of 28, and Alexander Bittelman, who arrived from political exile in Archangelsk, Russia, aged 22; and, on the other hand, John Ballam, born in London, England, to Dutch parents in 1882 who came to the USA aged 2, and Rose Pastor Stokes, who reached Cleveland, Ohio, from Augustow in Russian Poland via London when she was 11. The Americans also constituted a small but diverse category: ultimately everyone's antecedents involved immigration, but our group embraces scions of established Anglo-Saxon families like Robert Minor and John Reed, as well as blue-collar workers like Elmer Allison and the aspiring accountant from mid-West farming stock, Earl Browder.

³⁸ Draper, *Roots*, 188–92; Glazer, *Social Basis*, 38–40; Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 21.

Details of the origins of 55 out of 56 CC members were available and are noted in the **Appendix**. Of the 55, 37 (67%) – a remarkably high proportion – were immigrants and a further 8 (15%) were children of recent immigrants, while only 10 (18%) were classified as Americans. However, we have to remember that party members more generally were overwhelmingly foreign-born and so the proportion of immigrants in the leadership, while dwarfing the percentage of immigrants in the American population, was less than it was among rank-and-file Communists.³⁹ A majority of immigrant leaders – again this is remarkable and distinctive among Comintern affiliates around the world – 25 out of 37 (68%), came from the Russian empire, and reflected the nationalities within it. Of the 25, 5 hailed from Latvia, 4 from Lithuania, 2 from Finland, 3 from Russian Poland, 4 from the Ukraine, 1 from Belarus – and 6 from other areas of Russia. A further 2 came from Russian and Latvian families. The Tsars’ ethnic minorities contributed more leading Communists than the ethnic Russians.⁴⁰ Four of the immigrant cohort (11%) were from Germany (with a further 2 from German immigrant families), two (5%) from Hungary, while one each came from Denmark, England, Ireland and Italy. The strong representation from Imperial Russia may stem from a diaspora marked by antagonism to autocracy, national subjugation, and attraction to the emancipatory promise of the new Soviet state. It merits further examination – as does the scant representation of the Irish and Italians.

The ethnic distribution of the leadership was different from that of the party as a whole. **Table 6** compares the origins of immigrants in our group with membership of the WP

³⁹ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 24. The percentage of immigrants in the US population as a whole in 1920 was 13.2%: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time>.

⁴⁰ Draper, *Roots*, 190, estimates that in 1919, “the Russian members represented almost 25 per cent of the total and the entire East European membership accounted for 75 per cent ... 90 per cent of both parties came from the foreign language federations.” Unlike Klehr, who treated the Finns as distinct from other minorities in the Russian empire, we have placed them at the end of a geographical and political spectrum. Their distinctiveness was certainly real and until the early 1900s when Russifying imperial administrations began to chip away its rights, the Grand Duchy of Finland enjoyed greater autonomy than, for example, its Baltic neighbours. By 1917 a powerful national consciousness boosted by the war, fuelled in Finland an independence movement comparable in strength to that of Poland.

Table 6. Comparison of the membership of the largest WP language sections in 1922 with the ethnic background of CC members who were immigrants or from immigrant families 1919–1923.

Language Federation	Average membership 1922	% of total WP Membership	Number of immigrant/immigrant family members	% of CC who were immigrants or from immigrant families
Finnish ¹	5,846	48	2	4
English-speaking	1,269	11	6	11
South Slavic	1,077	9		
Jewish ²	975	8	19	35
Lithuanian	677	6	4	7
German	463	4	6	11
Lettish[Latvian]	397	3	6	11
Russian	379	3	8	15
Hungarian	313	3	2	4
Polish	110	1	3	5
Ukrainian	87	1	4	7
Total membership	12,058			

Notes

1. The Finns are a special case as the Finnish Federation only affiliated to the WP in 1921.

2. Klehr makes the point that the Jewish federation was both exclusive, in that only Jews could be members, but not inclusive, insofar as some Jews would be members of other language federations such as the Lithuanian or Polish and in particular the Russian organizations, and that assimilated Jews might join the English-speaking section. (Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 28).

Sources: “The Membership of Our Party,” Microfilm of the files of the Communist Party of the USA in the Comintern Archives, 1919–1943 (hereafter Files of the CPUSA), Reel 52, delo 739, frame 5, New York University: Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives; Appendix.

language federations in 1922. The Russian Federation contained only 3% of total party membership; but if we include the Finnish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian federations, the former Imperial Russian contingent constituted 62% of WP membership in 1922, somewhat greater than the representation of these groups in the leadership. However, if we break that composite category down, we can see that the Finns were greatly under-

represented on CCs and other nationalities in the Russian *imperium* were significantly over-represented – particularly as most members of the Jewish, Yiddish language federation, appear to have come from the Russian empire.

Analysis is clouded by the fact that the Finnish Federation only affiliated to the WP in 1921 and its size in 1922 distorted the ethnic composition of the party as a whole. If we discount, the exceptional Finnish figure as an outlier, the Imperial Russian presence in our total CC sample is much greater compared with the party as a whole in 1922: 45% against 14% (or 22% if the predominantly Russian Jewish Federation is included). To some extent, our sample from 1919–1923 reflects the greater presence of party members from the Russian empire in the immediate post-1917 period whereas the language federation figures for 1922 reflect the loss of many such members through disillusion with the new venture, repression in America, deportation, and desire to return to construct Soviet society – factors operating from 1919.⁴¹ In contrast, under-representation of other groups in both party and elite is affirmed by the fact that in 1920, the Italians made up 11.7% and the Irish 7.6% of America’s foreign-born population.⁴² The Italian Language Federation’s 138 members constituted just over 1% of the total WP membership in 1922. The sole Italian in our elite sample was Louis Fraina while Jack Carney was the only immigrant from Ireland.

Important though such information on the national origins of our cohort is, geography may not tell the whole story of ethnic and cultural identity. Information on the religious backgrounds of members of our group is often lacking. However, almost half of the Russian empire group of immigrants and children of immigrants in our sample, 15 out of 27 (56%), were of Jewish origin. Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement, which stretched from the

⁴¹ *Records of the Fifth Regular Convention of the Federation Russian Branches Communist Party of America, held in the City of Detroit, August 20 to 28th, 1919.* (NY: CEC, Federation of Russian Branches CPA, 1919), cited: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/1f/1fedrussian.html>.

⁴² *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, [1921], 63 at: <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/statcomp/documents/1921-02.pdf>

Baltic to the Black Sea, may have considered themselves to be “Russian Jewish” as much as, or rather than, Jewish Lithuanians or Jewish Ukrainians, although the homogeneity of the former identity should not be exaggerated. Alexander Bittelman, born in Berdichev in the Ukraine, recalled his mother’s criticism of the form of Yiddish spoken by a “Litvack” (Lithuanian).⁴³ One German, one Hungarian and one Canadian were also Jewish while one was born in England of Dutch Jewish parents. Of the total of 55 whose origins were documented, over one third, 19 (35%), were from Jewish families. Reflecting a diaspora influenced by the double burden of the knout and institutionalized anti-Semitism, this finding testifies to the radicalism of at least some sections of the Jewish community; indeed, it may understate the position as in some cases religious origins were unclear. Once more, the CC sample diverged from the party as a whole since the Jewish Federation only accounted for 8% of the party membership, even allowing for the fact that Jews might be members of other federations – particularly the Russian. Eight of our sample were known to be from Catholic families and 5 from various Protestant denominations. It is also reasonable to infer that some non-Jewish immigrants from the Russian empire for whom we lack such data had roots in Catholicism in the case of those from Poland or Lithuania or the Eastern Orthodox church for those from the Ukraine.

Covering 1919–1922, these figures overlap with those given by Klehr for the 1921 and 1922 committees and in these cases, there are differences and similarities. Of the 17 members of the 1921 CC, we found that 12 were immigrants, 3 were Americans and 2 were from immigrant families, a US-born total of 5 (29%) slightly higher than Klehr’s estimate of American CC members (25%).⁴⁴ Of the 25 members of the 1922 committee which he also studied, we found 3 Americans – Marion Emerson, Robert Minor and Harry Wicks; and 8

⁴³ Alexander Bittelman. “The World of Socialism and Revolution,” extract from unpublished memoir (1963), in *Jewish Radicals: A Documentary History*, ed. Tony Michels (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 51.

⁴⁴ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, Graph 1, 25.

activists – Israel Amter, James P. Cannon, William F. Dunne, J. Louis Engdahl, William Z. Foster, William Kruse, Edward Lindgren and Charles Ruthenberg – from immigrant families. This 44 per cent is slightly lower than Klehr’s calculation that 48 per cent of the 1922 committee were American-born.⁴⁵ However, we found 7 out of 17 of the 1921 CC (41%) were Jewish, which is in line with Klehr’s figure of 42.9 per cent. Of the 1922 CC, we found 10 out of 25 (40%) were Jewish which is identical with Klehr’s figure.⁴⁶

It is notable that only 3 women figured in our sample of 56 which contained not a single black Communist. There are no precise estimates of the number of female Communists during the foundation period. However, the conclusion that throughout the decade “women made up 15–20 per cent of the party’s membership,” seems plausible and there is little reason to believe things were significantly different between 1919 and 1923.⁴⁷ Estimates of black membership before 1929 range from 50 to 200.⁴⁸ There is little reason to think numbers were higher in the early years, indeed they may well have been smaller than these figures indicate.⁴⁹

The average age in 1919 of the 49 in the sample of 56 for whom birthdate was ascertained was 33.5 years. In early twentieth-century terms, this was a mature rather than a juvenile or precocious cohort but the overall figure cloaks diversity. At one end of the spectrum, James Wilenkin was 49 and Prevey, 47, in 1919; at the other extreme, William Weinstone and Lovestone were 22. The largest age cohort, 28 (57%), was born in the 1880s, followed by 14 (29%) in the 1890s and 7 (14%) in the 1870s. However, it is difficult to talk

⁴⁵ Ibid., Graph 1, 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Graph 2, 46.

⁴⁷ Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, *The American Communist Movement: Storming Heaven Itself* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 56, where it is remarked that most [women] were members as a consequence of husbands taking out family memberships.” In comparison, women were estimated to comprise 17 per cent of the SP membership in 1914–1915: Sally M. Miller, “Other Socialists: Native-Born and Immigrant Women in the Socialist Party of America, 1901–1917,” *Labor History*, 24, 1 (1983): 86.

⁴⁸ Draper, *American Communism*, 551, note 93.

⁴⁹ Draper, *American Communism*, 350; Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 56; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 287, reports a single black member in 1919, fewer than 100 for most of the decade, and less than 300 in 1929.

meaningfully of generations: for instance, Lore and Prevey were of similar age but formed on different continents in different circumstances; and while the similar experience of Lovestone and Weinstone gives some encouragement to that approach, individual traits and reaction to events are also important. The context in which older members of the sample came to politics was the upsurge of socialism and growth of the Second International in the final quarter of the nineteenth century and the intensification of working-class activity signalled by the big strikes of the 1890s. But it was experienced differently in European countries and America and by individuals on each continent.

The class conflict of the early twentieth century and the emergence of the SP (1901) and the IWW (1905) reflected and strengthened the political direction those born in the 1890s took, while the war represented a key experience not only for the younger elements but also for their elders. Individual reactions were again diverse. Supporters of the war like J.B. Salutsky and, for a time, Stokes, those who veered between equivocation and support like Foster, and opponents like Ruthenberg, Alfred Wagenknecht and Benjamin Gitlow, are all represented in the **Appendix**. What can be said is that in general terms but differentially, the group underwent politicization in response to events in Europe and America before 1917; but the Russian Revolution ignited a further change which established the Soviet Union at the centre of the consciousness of hitherto disparate elements and motivated adhesion to the revolutionary perspective and strategic orientation of the Comintern.

Under the general radicalization, the various paths the group took towards Communism demonstrated different takes on what was happening and different levels and tempos of commitment. In a left-wing milieu, where the American revolution seemed months away, some, for example, Reed, Fraina, Gitlow and Charles Scott, moved quickly towards not simply embracing but organizing American Bolshevism – although they possessed inadequate knowledge of the Russian original. Others, such as Engdahl, Foster, Minor, and

Alexander Trachtenberg, took their time; 1919 was crucial but the enrolment process stretched into 1921. The reactions of the 52 activists for whom information is available are summarized in the **Appendix**: 75% joined one of the contending parties in 1919, 10% became Communists in 1920 and 13% affiliated in 1921. Although some would not last the pace, the sample can be contrasted with a variety of socialists of different persuasions, notably Victor Berger, Eugene Debs, Morris Hillquit, Vincent St John or Louis Boudin, as well as a host of lesser lights who, for a range of reasons, refused to enrol in the Communist crusade.⁵⁰

Distinctions between individuals cannot be reduced to age and events – prior political experience and previous allegiances played their part. The overwhelming majority of the cohort – 51 out of 56 (91%) came to Communism via activism in the SP. This confirms that party’s ascendancy on the pre-Communist American left; but it is difficult to draw general conclusions from the figures about the impact of the SP experience on future Communist leaders. The SP was a broad, and within limits, tolerant church, certainly compared with Communist parties; its ethos was distinctive at different times and in different places, and membership meant different things to different people. The affiliation to it of some future Communists was brief and negative; some in that category, like Browder and James P. Cannon, re-joined after 1917 when the SP left was reconfigured as a potential bridge to Communism. Others like Ludwig Katterfeld and Alfred Wagenknecht enjoyed a longer and more positive tenure.⁵¹ A tiny minority in our sample seem to have been untouched by the SP: Caleb Harrison, prominent in the SLP, John Pepper, who was participating in the

⁵⁰ “Big Bill” Haywood (1869–1928), an IWW founder expelled from the SP in 1913, fled to Moscow in 1921 after conviction under the Espionage Act. He was never a party activist in America but worked with the RILU in the Soviet Union.

⁵¹ For a useful exchange about the continuity between American Communism and earlier socialism in terms of ideas and personnel, see Max Shachtman, “American Communism: A Re-Examination of the Past,” *The New Internationalist*, 23, 4 (Fall, 1957): 207–45; Theodore Draper, “A Reply to Max Shachtman”, *The New Internationalist*, 24, 1 (Winter 1958): 49–53; Max Shachtman, “A Rejoinder to Theodore Draper”, *The New Internationalist*, 24, 1 (Winter 1958): 53–58.

Hungarian insurrection and the “March Action” in Germany, and Harry Wicks, briefly a member of the Socialist Party of Michigan group, which split from the CPA. Arne Swabeck was identified with the IWW. Eleven of the group had been active in the IWW at some point, 2 were in the Syndicalist League and 3, in addition to Harrison, had at some stage been SLP members.⁵² Two claimed to have been active in the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (RSDLP), 3 had been members of the Russian Jewish Labor Bund, 2 had been members of the German Social Democratic Party (SDP), 2 had participated in the Latvian SDP and one in the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland (SDKPiL).

While many, whether syndicalists or more conventional Second Internationalists, saw 1917 as the fulfilment of their earlier beliefs, for those who stayed the pace, Soviet Communism would prove transformative. Over time, it eroded key aspects of, if it did not obliterate, its adherents’ pre-Communist politics. Nonetheless, in the foundation period itself, it is possible to discern Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht’s background as SP organizers reflected in their activity. With Browder, Cannon, and Foster, we may view their early life and experience of syndicalism as broadly influencing their stress on Americanization and trade union work, although their ideas on how to organize in industry were changing, and Browder and Foster were moulded by European syndicalism as much as by the IWW. Neither the latter nor his flirtation with anarchist ideology appear to have left a mark on Minor.

Membership of the SLP may arguably have inculcated a taste for dogmatism, authoritarianism, and an ideological fountainhead represented earlier by Daniel DeLeon; but,

⁵² Arguably, the most significant SLP member to embrace Communism – Fraina has a case as a former member – was Boris Reinstein (1866–1947). Born into a Jewish family in Rostov, Reinstein was a political exile who found refuge in Buffalo working as a druggist. He was attracted by Daniel DeLeon’s ideas and became active in the SLP and its trade union wing, the “Detroit IWW.” Attending a conference in Stockholm on behalf of the SLP, he travelled into Russia where, severing ties with the DeLeonists, he worked in the Soviet government and Comintern. Reinstein played a noteworthy role in American affairs during the foundation years, serving on the American Commission in Moscow in 1922 and visiting the US with a Comintern delegation the same year: Draper, *Roots*, 148–150, 356–364; Andrew Kier Wise and Penny Messenger, “Anna and Boris Reinstein and the Socialist Response to the First World War,” in *Intellectuals and the First World War: A Central European Perspective*, ed. Tomasz Pudlodec and Kamil Ruzla (Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 2018), [no page range on web version]

on the record, only Fraina and Harrison, and perhaps Wilenkin, were significantly engaged and non-SLP Communists were not shy in demonstrating these qualities from 1919.

The SDP and Second Internationalism were considered by critics to have influenced Lore's trajectory, but he was also influenced by Trotsky and subsequently the German Federation. Amter's social-democratic past seems to have had little lasting impact: he evolved into a Stalinist weathervane. The Bund seems to have left little trace on the later politics of either Bittelman or Moissaye Olgin. Their earlier engagement with Bolshevism, however limited, certainly motivated Nicholas Hourwich and Alexander Stoklitsky and others who seem to have mechanically transferred their understanding of the Russian model to a very different environment and used the connection to influence the direction the CPA took. But again, their leftism and dedication to the underground was shared with activists from more conventional backgrounds. Ultimately and generally, whatever strands of earlier politics survived subsisted subordinately within the invasive, overarching and increasingly novel politics of the Comintern and it is difficult to isolate them as factors in later political developments. By the end of the decade, the majority had embraced Stalinism or Trotskyist, Bukharinite or related forms of post-1917 Soviet politics, or retreated into private life.

The **Appendix** suggests that few of the sample were born into the factory proletariat. Most were working-class in the sense they had to sell their labor power, but their parents had been lawyers; cooks; butchers; teachers; farmers; blacksmiths; shoemakers; carpenters; and painters – in societies which in America, Italy and Russia hardly conformed to Leninist models. The 56 had worked as barbers; musicians; painters; farmworkers; cigar wrappers; and a variety of white-collar occupations as clerks, book-keepers and journalists. Some had labored in factories, sawmills, foundries, and on the railways; many had been in itinerant and intermittent employment. Of those for whom previous occupational data is available, 21 can be broadly classified as originally manual workers and 29 as white-collar workers, although

there was also evidence of upward mobility between the two categories. Somewhat impressionistically, only 12 (21%) of our sample had anything resembling a history of significant trade union activism: taken as a whole, the group lacked robust roots in organized labor. Only Minor and Reed in America, Amter, John Pepper, Salutsky, and Trachtenberg, from abroad emanated from bourgeois backgrounds. Hourwich and Ludwig Katterfeld hailed from academic families, while the group contained a significant number who underwent higher education and may be broadly classified as intellectuals.

There are no specific figures for 1919–23, but the heterogeneous occupational background of its leaders probably resembled that of the party as a whole in these years. An early attempt to determine the industrial composition of the WP in 1924 painted a diverse picture. Archetypal proletarians in the metal trades and mining accounted for 15% and 9% respectively of the 13,556 members registered and building workers constituted 12%, the needle trades 9%. There were, however, large numbers working in miscellaneous occupations: for example, 4% were agrarian workers, 2% salesmen, solicitors and clerks, a further 2% were office workers, and smaller groups of Communists ranged from businessmen to barbers. Only 32% of the membership were in a trade union, a figure higher than our earlier estimate for the leadership.⁵³

Information on the educational background of our sample is incomplete and we lack any data on just over a third of the group. Our findings are therefore impressionistic. For those for whom information was available, 4 had only a few years rudimentary schooling. Elmer Allison was removed from his elementary school in fifth grade to help support his family and was largely self-taught; Foster had only three years at school before starting employment aged 10; Fraina, despite displaying a keen intelligence, left primary school aged

⁵³ “The Membership of Our Party”, Files of the CPUSA, reel 52, delo 739, frames 11–12, Tamiment Library & Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

13 to go to work; Pastor Stokes attended a free school for the poor in London between the ages of 7 and 9 before assisting her mother in sweated homeworking making bows for ladies' slippers. A number of others had some secondary education, such as Minor, who, despite a middle-class background, only attended school between the ages of 10 and 14. Some in this group, such as Edward Lindgren and Swabeck, went on to vocational training at trade schools, while others, including Cannon, Carney, Gitlow and Bill Kruse, attended evening classes. After leaving his Lutheran parochial school at 14, Ruthenberg studied book-keeping for ten months at business college.

A significant number underwent some form of higher education. **Table 7** shows that 22 – representing 39% of our total sample – for whom we have information attended university or its equivalent prior to 1919. Amter was a music student who composed an opera while studying at Leipzig Conservatory in Germany; Scott graduated from Liepaja Maritime College in 1904, which earned him the nickname “Captain” during the 1905 revolution. Browder, who left school before reaching 10, completed a correspondence course with Lincoln Jefferson College which awarded him an LLB degree in 1914. A number of others pursued more conventional university studies. Their experience ranged from St Petersburg to Topeka, from Bill Dunne's college studies in Minnesota, truncated due to financial hardship, to Olgin's doctorate at Columbia via study at Kiev and Heidelberg, and his fellow immigrant's, Trachtenberg, uncompleted PhD at Yale. Isaac Ferguson graduated Ph.B. at Chicago in 1910 and was awarded a doctorate in 1912. Among the Americans, City College and Washburn College featured, as well as Harvard. Most of these leaders, with the exceptions of Amter, Dirba, Elbaum, Lore, Pepper and Scott, had studied in America, although in 3 cases – Olgin, Salutsky and Trachtenberg – this was preceded by study abroad. The fathers of Hourwich and Katterfeld were professors in Russia and Germany respectively. Information on the educational attainment of the general membership of the WP and its

forerunners is lacking but, given its ethnic and occupational composition, it is clear that college graduates were greatly over-represented in our leadership cohort.

Table 7. CC Members 1919–23 with Higher Education

Name	Institution
Israel Amter	Leipzig Conservatory, Germany
Earl Browder	Lincoln Jefferson College, LLB by correspondence
Maximilian Cohen	n/a ¹
Charles Dirba	Riga Polytechnic Institute, Latvia
William F. Dunne	College of St Thomas, St Paul, Minnesota
Daniel Elbaum	n/a ²
J. Louis Engdahl	University of Minnesota
Isaac Ferguson	University of Chicago
Louis Hendin	University of Maryland
Ludwig Katterfeld	Washburn College, Topeka
Meyer Loonin	n/a ³
Ludwig Lore	Berlin University
Jay Lovestone	City College, New York; Columbia University
Moissaye Olgin	University of Kiev; University of Heidelberg; Columbia University
John Pepper	University of Budapest
Marguerite Prevey	n/a ⁴
John Reed	Harvard University
J.B. Salutsky	St Petersburg Law School; Columbia University
Charles E. Scott	Liepaja Maritime College, Latvia
Alexander Trachtenberg	University of Odessa; Trinity College; Yale University
James Wilenkin	n/a ¹
William Weinstone	City College, New York

Notes:

1. Both Cohen and Wilenkin practised as dentists, although it is not clear where they received their training. Not all dental training schools were affiliated with universities until the 1930s: Thomas M. Schulhein, “A Chronology of Dental Education in the United States”, *Journal of the History of Dentistry*, 52, 3 (2004): 97–108.
2. Elbaum trained as a chemical engineer in Poland before he came to the US.
3. Loonin was recorded as a student in in his naturalization record in 1909 and as a civil engineer in the US Census of 1920; the educational institution he attended is not known.
4. Prevey was a Doctor of Optometry (Opt.D.) according to her professional letterhead, but the awarding institution is unknown:

<http://visions.indstate.edu:8888/cdm/compoundobject/collection/evdc/id/9583/rec/2>

What stands out in regard to origins and early trajectory is the heterogeneity of the group, between but also within categories. This is underlined by the tiny female cohort. A former seamstress, by 1919 Prevey had become a middle-class professional and socialite, a fixture of the Debs group in the Ohio SP and the anti-war left. Emerson, whose married name was Sproule, was a working-class housewife and mother. Stokes was a Russian Jew, whose early life spanned Tsarist Poland, London's Victorian East End and the industrial section of Cleveland, Ohio. A former cigar wrapper who became a journalist, she was celebrated in the press as "the Cinderella of the sweatshops" when she married the radical millionaire, J. Phelps Stokes. She supported the war before reversing her position after 1917 and becoming a charter member of the CPA.

However, difference diminished as the group moved towards Communism and full-time engagement with politics after 1917. Charles Baker, Katterfeld, Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht were already officials of the SP and Foster in the AFL unions; Elbaum, Fraina, Louis Hendin, Lore, and Reed edited revolutionary papers; Hourwich and Stoklitsky were functionaries in the language federations; while Lovestone and Weinstone made a relatively seamless transition from student politics and Kruse from SP youth work to CC representatives. Occupational diversity dwindled as political enthusiasts morphed into professional revolutionaries, which became a requirement for CC membership, financed initially from federation and then from party funds and Comintern subsidies.⁵⁴ By 1922, activists on the party payroll were paid between \$25 and \$35 a week if single; between \$30 to \$40 a week if they had one dependent; and \$40 to \$50 a week if they supported more than one dependent. At this point, the average weekly wage of production workers in

⁵⁴ For the importance of the language federations in providing income for WP full-time workers, see Glazer, *Social Basis*, 72–73. For early Russian subsidies, see Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Fridrikh Igorevitch Firsov, *The Secret World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 20–29.

manufacturing was \$21.51. Party pay was precarious but relatively generous.⁵⁵ CC members gradually underwent homogenization and professionalization as full-time organizers, agitators, orators, administrators and journalists, cushioned from capitalist exploitation and sometimes from everyday proletarian experience. Geographically, the sample reflected areas where the SP left was strong, New York, Boston, Chicago and Ohio were represented but also California, Detroit, Kansas, Illinois, Michigan, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington.

If we compare those elected to the CPA and CLP CCs in 1919 – a total of 28 (see **Tables 1 and 2**) – with the 25 activists elected to the WP CC in December 1922 (see **Table 5**), we see that *within* the foundation period changes were occurring in the composition of the leadership. The 1919 cohort consisted largely of immigrants: 22 out of 28 (79%) while another 2 (7%) were raised in immigrant families and 3 (11%) were Americans. In contrast, only 13 of the 1922 CC's 25 members for whom such data was available were immigrants, (52%), although a further 8 (32%) came from immigrant backgrounds; 4 (16%) were American. The 1919 group included 8 members from a Jewish background (29%); by 1922 the 10 Jews on the CC represented 40% of its membership. Nastasiewsky's religious origins remain unknown. While no women appeared on the 1919 CCs, there were two – Emerson and Stokes – on the 1922 committee. No blacks appeared in either group. It is, however, important to bring out the significant discontinuity in personnel between 1919 and 1922. Of the total of 28 members of the CPA and CLP CCs in 1919, only 8 – Bittelman, Katterfeld, Lindgren, Lore, Lovestone, Ruthenberg, Wagenknecht and Wicks – served on the CC elected in 1922. While a small, experienced cadre was therefore emerging, the bulk of those elected in 1919 had already fallen out of leadership positions by the end of Draper's "dark age."

⁵⁵ Minutes of CEC, CPA, January 1922, 515/1/94, Russian State Archives of Socio-Political History, Moscow, reproduced at <http://www.marxistsfr.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1922/01/0100-cec-minutes.pdf> The exact wage depended on the job and locality For average earnings, see: <https://fraser.stlouisfed.org/title/60/item/20153/toc/340949>.

If we glance beyond the foundation years, 23 (41%) of the 56 leaders listed in the **Appendix** were re-elected to the CC between 1924 and 1929. Thus, the figures who dominated the leadership in the mid-1920s and later, first featured in it during the foundation years. However, 12 of the 23 (52%) were not elected beyond the 1920s: 6 – Cannon, Gitlow, Kruse, Lore, Lovestone and Swabeck – had been expelled by 1929; Ruthenberg died in 1927; Pepper was recalled to Moscow; Ballam and Wagenknecht were less influential in the 1930s. Of the remaining 9, Engdahl died in 1932 and Dunne was subsequently phased out. Amter, Bedacht, Bittelman and Trachtenberg remained in the leadership but were secondary elements in the Browder regime. The role and power of Browder and Minor in the directorate endured until 1944 while Foster survived ups and downs to maintain his position in the elite until his death.⁵⁶ This demonstrates a significant, but in numerical terms subordinate, element of continuity in leadership personnel.

For the first CCs in 1919 and 1920, 10 out of the 16 (63%) on the CPA CC, 5 out of 12 (42%) on the CLP committee, and 4 out of 10 (40%) on the UCP leading body, do *not* reappear on any subsequent CC lists in the 1920s. Even more dramatically, 40 (71%) of our 56 cadres made only one appearance on a CC between 1919 and 1923, although some were CC members subsequently. Moreover, it is important to stress that, as the **Appendix** shows, the majority of those who figured on CCs in the foundation years 1919–23, 33 (59%) out of 56, no longer featured after 1923. We shall examine their careers in the following section. However, a large minority took a further step and quit the WP. This perhaps reflects the position in the party as a whole where there is a consensus that rates of membership recruitment and withdrawal were always high. “The revolution,” Communists frequently observed, “is a devourer of men.” In a period of protracted and painful birth pangs, internecine conflict, uncertainty, and drastic state repression, many members renounced their

⁵⁶ See McIlroy and Campbell, “The Leadership of American Communism, 1924–1929”.

initial commitments for a mixture of personal and political reasons. Between 1919 and 1923 there was a real churn in human *materiel* and the cadre was not immune to broader trends.⁵⁷ Of the 56 CC members in our sample, 16 (29%) had, for a variety of reasons, ceased to be party members by 1923 – a fairly high rate of turnover although considerably lower than among the party membership. Overall, 27 (48%) were no longer members by the end of the decade. By 1929, 7 (12 %) of the leaders of the foundational years in our sample had left voluntarily, 9 (16%) had been expelled, 8 (14%) had quit the US to return to Russia or Ireland, and 3 (5%) had died (see **Appendix**). What stands out and overshadows continuity is disjuncture between the early leadership and those who consolidated the WP after the years of illegality and leftism. We examine this latter group in detail in an article dealing with the mid- and late 1920s.⁵⁸ Here we turn to look more closely at the majority of the 1919–1923 elite who did not survive the foundation period as CC members.

Lost leaders of 1919?

What happened to those who fell from prominence? Some, like the former SLP vice-presidential candidate Harrison, succumbed to personal problems and “vanished as unobtrusively as he had appeared.”⁵⁹ The departure of sections of the SP left was far from unobtrusive. When the Michigan SP group failed to have their way in debates over underground work and the CPA programme, led by Scottish-born shoe shop proprietor, John Keracher (1880–1950), and the Detroit toolmaker, Dennis Batt (b.1886), they refused to accept nominations for office and subsequently decamped to establish the Proletarian Party.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Klehr, *Communist Cadre*, 4. The figures aren’t reliable but in 1919 the CPA and CLP claimed a combined membership of well over 50,000. By early 1921, the UCP claimed it had over 12,000 members. On firmer estimates the WP had around 8,000 members in 1922 and under 10,000 in 1923 – see Draper, *Roots*, 188–89, 272, 390–91; Draper, *American Communism*, 26–27.

⁵⁸ McIlroy and Campbell. “The Leadership of American Communism 1924–1929.”

⁵⁹ Shachtman, “American Communism”: 220.

⁶⁰ Tim Davenport, “Formation of the Proletarian Party of America, 1913–1923, Part 1,” 21–26, at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/ppa/1933/0000-davenport-formationofppa.pdf>.

Others registered a more significant contribution to rooting Soviet Communism in America but left little imprint on its subsequent evolution. Polar opposites in origins and culture, Fraina and Reed embodied in different but equally powerful ways the first impact of Bolshevism on American socialism. Born in Italy and raised a Catholic in the slums of the Bowery, Fraina (1892–1953) was a self-educated veteran of the IWW at 21; as editor of the *Revolutionary Age* he had played an important part in establishing the CPA by the time he was 27.⁶¹ In contrast, Reed (1887–1920), who emanated from an Episcopalian business background, enjoyed an easier ride from private school and Harvard via Greenwich Village Bohemianism to professional journalism.⁶² Reed lacked Fraina’s scholastic, induction into Marxism as a protégé of DeLeon in the SLP. But, like Fraina, he opposed the war, embraced 1917, and, as editor of the *New York Communist* and *Voice of Labor*, had a hand in moulding the SP left. Here, their paths diverged again. Both were radicalized by events in America which provided fertile soil for their enthusiasm for 1917. However, Fraina accepted the immigrant-dominated CPA and came under fire for being too soft on the leaders of the Russian Federation; Reed’s emphasis on reaching the American worker, albeit through the IWW, motivated the CLP.

Both pushed the centre of gravity of the US left towards Moscow. Reed’s career has been seen as presaging the disillusionment which subsequently overtook thousands of

⁶¹ Buhle, *A Dreamer’s Paradise Lost*; Esther Corey, “Louis Corey (Louis Fraina), 1892–1953: A Bibliography with Autobiographical Notes,” *Labor History*, 4 (Spring, 1963): 103–131; James P. Cannon, *The First Ten Years of American Communism: Report of a Participant* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992), 46–51.

⁶² See Robert A. Rosenstone, *Romantic Revolutionary: A Biography of John Reed* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Eric Homburger, *John Reed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). Mention should be made of Fraina and Reed’s companions, Jeanette Pearl and Louise Bryant. Pearl, an SP activist who lived with Fraina before he went to Russia, was a close friend of Pastor Stokes and long-time advocate of women’s rights and opponent of racism. Active in the trade unions in Chicago, she campaigned to counter the accusations of spying and embezzlement levelled against Fraina. In Moscow he became involved with a Comintern translator who subsequently joined him with their child in Mexico. Pearl remained a WP activist into the 1920s. Benjamin Gitlow, *The Whole of Their Lives: Communism in America* (New York: Scribner, 1948), 12–14; Buhle, *Dreamer’s Paradise Lost*, 16, 94; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 208–210. Bryant, a leftwing journalist, who went to Russia with Reed, was never a party member. But she defended the revolution, notably in her *Six Months in Russia*; see Mary V. Dearborn, *Queen of Bohemia: The Life of Louise Bryant* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

revolutionaries. How deep his questioning of the Comintern leadership went remains disputed. What is clear is that when he died in Moscow aged 33 in 1920, his star was descending. Fraina, who popularized a basic Leninism, was dogged by allegations of spying and financial misappropriation.⁶³ An early victim of factionalism, personal rivalries, and Soviet determination to forge a leadership in its own image, he was despatched by the Comintern to Mexico and by 1923 had quit the WP. Reed's passage was meteoric. Fraina's reincarnation as Lewis Corey, a celebrated Marxist economist who briefly collaborated with the Lovestoneites in the 1930s and became a Fellow of the Brookings Institution and a college professor, gave the lie to Scott Fitzgerald's aphorism that there are no second acts in American lives. In this case, there was a third act. Despite his break with Marxism in the 1940s, Fraina/Corey's end illustrated how state repression devastated the lives of many leading Communists: he died a victim of state persecution living under the shadow of deportation to an Italy he had never known.⁶⁴

The eleven language federations affiliated to the SP, many of which switched allegiance to the CPA, constituted a complicating factor in the creation of American Communism. For many activists in the first years, the federation, not the party, operated as their primary focus of allegiance, and in the case of the Finns this would continue. The most powerful body in 1919, the Russian Federation, went back to 1909 while the Russian language newspaper, *Novy Mir*, was first published in 1911. In the aftermath of 1917, both were dominated by supporters of the Bolsheviks and Federation membership rose dramatically. By late 1919, 7,000 CPA members were organized in the Russian Federation; 4,000 in the Lithuanian Federation; 2,000 in the Latvian group; 1,750 in the Polish affiliate;

⁶³ For Reed's concerns, see Draper, *Roots*, 284–93. For the evidence against Fraina, see Richard B. Spence, "Catching Louis Fraina: Loyal Communist, US Government Informant or British Agent?" *American Communist History*, 11, 1 (2012): 81-99.

⁶⁴ Draper, *Roots*, 297–302; Esther Corey, "Lewis Corey", 104, 124; Harvey Klehr, "Leninism, Lewis Corey and the Failure of American Marxism," *Labor History*, 18, 2 (1977): 249–56. To complete the tragedy, Benjamin Gitlow testified against Corey in the deportation proceedings.

and 2,200 in the South Slavic organization. The Russian Federation, with its links to the Soviet state, was in the van of policy formation and the other groups generally followed its lead.⁶⁵ Its best known leader, Nicholas Hourwich (1882–1934), the son of the distinguished Russian, American, Jewish intellectual, Isaac Hourwich, had joined the RSDLP in 1899, before emigrating to America in 1910. Hourwich was remembered by a political opponent as “the theoretical and ideological leader of the Russian Federation ... short of stature and impressed by his own importance, his egotism knew no bounds.”⁶⁶ As one of the three editors of *Novy Mir*, which had earlier been associated with Bukharin and Trotsky, his credentials as an authority on revolution burnished by the prestige of his father, a member of the informal Soviet embassy in New York, and backed by the weight and prestige of the Russian and Slavic federations in the SP left wing, Hourwich engineered what those around Reed and Gitlow considered a premature break with the SP. Supported by the Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Jewish federations, he secured Russian dominance of the CPA and exercised it in a fashion which provoked proponents of Americanization to form the CLP. The bill against him included ultra-leftism, a taste for factionalism, and an apparently ingrained inability to accept the need to reach and organize American workers and begin to penetrate the factory proletariat. Arrested during the Red Scare, he returned to Russia where he argued the CPA case at the Comintern.

Hourwich was initially favourably received and promptly elevated to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI); Lenin and other luminaries became more critical as opinion tilted towards accommodating Bolshevism to American particularities and sponsoring American leaders. Hourwich’s emphasis on preparation for insurrection,

⁶⁵ Draper, *Roots*, 182–91; Maria Woroby, “Russian Americans,” in *Encyclopaedia*, ed. Buhle, Buhle, and Georgakas, 661–63; Nicholas J. Berejan, “Russian Immigrant Leadership in the Foreign Language Federations of the American Socialist and Communist Parties, 1917–1922,” (MA Dissertation, University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2012), 115–50.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: Ditton, 1939), 27. While written for a popular audience, there is no reason to doubt the validity of some of the book’s reflections.

antagonism to a legal party, and refusal to compromise with opponents were increasingly perceived as impediments to unity. After clashes at the Third Comintern Congress in 1921, he was instructed to remain in Russia where he lectured at universities into the 1930s.⁶⁷ His role in New York was complemented by that of his fellow Russian, Alexander Stoklitsky (b.1888), in Chicago. Translator-Secretary of the Russian Federation, Stoklitsky's claims to activity in the RSDLP were later questioned. At the time, they lent credence to his claims to leadership. A contemporary recalled "a stocky man with jet black hair and a Stalinesque moustache ... Stoklitsky was a fiery orator and passionate polemicist."⁶⁸ Others evaluated him as "a remarkable tactician."⁶⁹ But he had little conception of, and less appetite for, organized intervention in the American working-class movement. Deported during the Red Scare, he remained in the Soviet Union, becoming a party journalist.⁷⁰

Hourwich and Stoklitsky became emblematic of the sectarian phase of US Communism. But they had widespread support and were backed by a coterie of confrères in the CPA.⁷¹ Prominent among them was Oscar Tyverovsky (1893–c.1938). Contemporary government surveillance reports described him as "a Russian about 29 years old, dark hair and black eyes, dark complexion, 5'9" and weighs about 145 pounds ... resides in Newark and Jersey City."⁷² As a delegate to the Comintern's Third World Congress and a member of the ECCI, Tyverovsky mirrored Hourwich's views. He, too, remained in Moscow and was executed during the purges of the late 1930s.⁷³ Another CPA leader, its New York organizer,

⁶⁷ Zumoff, *Communist International*, 29–30, 176–77; "Russian Federations", at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/lf/lfedrussian.html>; Berejan, "Russian Immigrant Leadership," 99–105.

⁶⁸ Berejan, "Russian Immigrant Leadership", 98; Alexander Stoklitsky, Registration Card, Bronx, New York, 6 May 1917.

⁶⁹ "In Re: Communist Party Convention Chicago [September 1–7, 1919] by N. Nagarowe," edited by Tim Davenport, 5–6, at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1919/09/0907-nagorowe-cpaconv.pdf>

⁷⁰ Zumoff, *Communist International*, 29–30; communication from Jacob Zumoff, March 2019.

⁷¹ Davenport, "Formation of the Proletarian Party," 21–26.

⁷² Bureau of Investigation Confidential Surveillance Report of the Unity Convention: Woodstock NY, May 15–28 1921, at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1921/05/0528-ryan-unityconvention.pdf>.

⁷³ Draper, *Roots*, 275–279; John Riddell, *To the Masses: Proceedings of the Third Congress of the Communist International, 1921* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1239.

George Ashkenuzi, was elected to the UCP CC in May 1921 – a committee outside our sample. A dedicated factionalist, he was subsequently prominent in the “Left Opposition” and the United Toilers faction. His defiant advocacy of an underground party committed to revolutionary purism dissolved only after Comintern threats of expulsion. Reconciled to the WP and Americanization, Ashkenuzi remained active in the party into the mid-1920s as secretary of its Russian Federation, a member of the New York District Committee, and an organizer in the 1926 Passaic strike in New Jersey before returning to Russia later in the decade.⁷⁴

This group have been critically, even dismissively, treated by historians, who have reproached them for factionalism, lack of realism and failure to address American conditions. Their single-minded drive to achieve Russian control of the left was clear. Hourwich was recorded by a government agent at the CPA’s founding convention as asserting: “... since the Russians are the real, genuine Bolsheviks, the Russians must guide, lead and retain control of the Convention as well as the Communist Party.”⁷⁵ The situation was complex, the context critical to comprehending it. Creation of the Comintern in March 1919 preceded creation of the two warring parties by only five months during which it played, perforce, a restricted role.⁷⁶ Matters were further complicated by the arrival in New York the same month of Ludwig Martens (1874–1948) to head an informal embassy on behalf of Lenin’s government. The Russian Soviet Government Bureau was perceived by the leaders of the Russian Federation as both a threat – as an alternative power centre – and an opportunity to

⁷⁴ Draper, *Roots*, 335, 339–340; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 62, 66; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 69–70; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 132; “The Communist Party of America, 1919–1946, Party Officials: United Communist Party of America”, at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/cpa/cpaofficials.html>.

⁷⁵ “In Re: Communist Party ...”, 2. The usual caveats concerning agents’ reports apply.

⁷⁶ The personalities of our actors were one factor in factionalism. Coming from different organizations and traditions, they could be expected to exhibit political differences. Present in many infant Communist parties, factionalism in the US was exacerbated by the weight of the federations. The background and characteristics of protagonists, convinced of the rectitude of their mission, and prepared to organize to fight for it – attitudes legitimated by pre-1917 Bolshevik practice – should not be overlooked. For their part, the “Americanizers” and “Liquidators” were not slow to learn, and factionalism developed interactive momentum.

demonstrate their own legitimacy as instruments of the new state. The Bureau's primary purpose was to develop diplomatic and trade relations with America. In an early example of the potential for conflict between diplomacy and revolution, Hourwich insisted the Bureau support his Federation's endeavours to overthrow US capitalism, not do deals with it. Martens backed American Bolshevism but refused to acknowledge Hourwich's suzerainty over it. Born into a German family which ran a steel mill in the Ukraine, he had joined the Russian revolutionaries at an early age before qualifying as an engineer. Arriving in America in 1916 and engaging with the émigré community around *Novy Mir*, Martens returned to Russia after the February revolution. Back in New York, he concentrated on negotiations with US companies. But the tensions between the Bureau and the Federation added to the turmoil on the left and further alienated American leaders who looked askance at Russian quarrels. Deported in January 1921, Martens enjoyed a long career as a technical advisor in Soviet industry.⁷⁷

At least some of the problems plaguing the CPA and CLP derived initially from an urgency conditioned by belief in imminent revolution and the fact that the conventions governing relations between New York and Moscow were still under construction; the rules of the game remained rudimentary. An authoritative referee was only emerging, the Comintern was still taking shape and, compared with the future, it was relatively open and undogmatic. Americans and Russians were feeling each other out, communications and mechanisms for political exchange still evolving. Until 1922, Soviet policy accentuated "the revolutionary offensive": capitalism was crumbling, the workers of the world readying themselves to replace it and install "the dictatorship of the proletariat." Only after the failure of the German insurrection of late 1921 was there a decisive turn to accepting that capitalism

⁷⁷ Draper, *Roots*, 107, 161–163, 227–230; Frederick C. Giffen, "The Martens Mission," *International Social Science Review*, 73, 3/4 (1998), 91–102; Todd Pfannenstiel, "The Soviet Bureau: A Bolshevik Strategy to Secure US Diplomatic Recognition through Economic Trade," *Diplomatic History*, 27, 2 (2003): 171–192.

had gained a breathing space and there was a need to mothball for the moment “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Instead, Communists were instructed to develop united fronts with other working-class parties and long-term organized work within the “yellow unions.”

Not only leaders of the federations but many American-born Communists believed with Ruthenberg that 1919 America stood on the brink of insurrection; others envisioned the IWW, not the AFL, as the road to Americanization. The majority of would-be Bolsheviks needed time to restrain their enthusiasm for revolution and comprehend what Leninism – and specifically a united front tactic which combined collaboration with criticism of reformists, a vanguard party and a democratic centralist Comintern – entailed in practice.⁷⁸ Realization of the direction the Third International was taking and its implications for Americans was slow and could be painful. As Ballam reflected in 1922: “They [the Comintern leaders] care nothing for majorities. They will support a minority who will carry out their policies against a majority opposed to them ... You must obey the discipline first.”⁷⁹ Against this background, events from the impatient split from the SP, based on one-sided understanding of Comintern policy, to the final fight for unity and against undergroundism, affirmed the federation leaders’ impact on American Communism was significant if brief. It was dispelled when both immigrants and native Americans with more extensive experience of life in a liberal democracy with a distinctive, fissured working class, commenced to revise romantic conceptions of radicalized proletarian consciousness and impending revolution.

Other organized groups of émigrés from the Russian empire had an impact. Concentrated in Roxbury, Boston, immigrants from Latvia, replenished by refugees from repression after 1905, had engaged with the SP left in Massachusetts from 1908. What proved

⁷⁸ For a recent review of Comintern evolution and its impact, see John McIlroy and Alan Campbell, “Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern: A Historical Controversy Revisited,” *Labor History*, 60, 3 (2019): 165–92.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Draper, *American Communism*, 420. Ballam was referring to the Comintern’s dismissal of the Left Opposition/United Toilers’ claim to have the support of the majority of American Communists.

important to their role in the CPA was their contact with the Latvian Social Democratic Party which was linked to the RSDLP in their homeland. The Latvians were one of the strongest pro-Bolshevik tendencies beyond the Russian heartland. Influenced by the revolutionary exile, Fricis Rozins (1870–1919), a journalist and editor who settled in Boston in 1913, the Latvian diaspora was instrumental in left-wing initiatives such as the Socialist Propaganda League. Galvanized by events in Russia, Rozins was one of the signatories of the manifesto which presaged formation of the Comintern and before his early death an architect of the Constitution of the still-born Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic. After 1917, with only 1,200 members, the Latvian Federation advocated secession from the SP and punched well above its weight in the CPA, initially supporting the Russian Federation before adopting a more critical stance.⁸⁰ The number of Latvians in the Communist elite – 6 or 11% – (see **Appendix**) is a notable, although transient, phenomenon, for in 1920 there were only around 210,000 Latvians in America, or 0.2% of the total population, while by 1922 the 397 Latvians remaining in the Lettish Federation represented only 3% of the WP’s membership.⁸¹

One of their leaders in Boston, John Schwarz, practiced Bolshevism as he understood it but contributed to the stereotype – with the germ of truth amplified by the authorities – of the alien demagogue. A government agent reported: “less capable than Hourwich [Schwartz] is not shrewd and cares little for detail and form. He is a resolute rough leader of the mob [who] cares little for consistency and logic ... The shrewd leaders of the Federation are careful to have him in their midst to ensure against his opposition.”⁸² Success was limited as Schwarz left the CPA to join the CLP with Ruthenberg. Our lack of knowledge about him may reflect his efficiency as a clandestine operator. According to another Latvian activist, he

⁸⁰ Draper, *Roots*, 66–74, 189; Ieva Zake, *American Latvians: Politics of a Refugee Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transition Books, 2010); Zumoff, *Communist International*, 30, 32.

⁸¹ Calculated from “Foreign-born White Population by Country of Birth”, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* [1930], 38–39 at: <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1930/compendia/statab/52ed/1930-02.pdf?#>; and see Table 6, above.

⁸² “In Re: Communist Party,” 2.

“was the technician in underground work, getting out literature, maintaining contacts, places, and people for conferences, etc.”⁸³ Like his fellow countryman, Karlis Jansons, better known as Charles E. Scott (1882–1939), Schwartz’s contribution to American Communism was ephemeral. Active in the Latvian Social Democracy during the 1905 revolution, Scott was educated at the Maritime School in Liepaja. He subsequently fled to Germany and travelled on to England and America where he enrolled in the SP in Massachusetts, building the Latvian stronghold in Roxbury, before assisting in the creation of Communist organization in America and Canada. He never reappeared on the CC after 1920 but represented the WP at the Comintern and the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU). His loyalty in a long career as a Soviet functionary was unquestioned before his arrest by the NKVD and execution in Russia in 1939.⁸⁴

Alexander Bilan, born Alexander Kadikis in 1886, travelled a similar path from his birthplace in Riga through membership of the Latvian Social Democracy to exile in Siberia, followed by escape to London and thence America. Writing for the Latvian language papers, Bilan was active in the SP left wing after 1918. As a charter member of the CLP, he demonstrated that not all “Russians” clung to the CPA. A fervent supporter of the Comintern, he attended the Second World Congress in Moscow, serving on the tribunal which exonerated Fraina of spying. Thereafter, like Fraina, Bilan faded from prominence, never again figuring in the leadership. Another “comet,” John Anderson, born Kristap Beika in Latvia, affirmed the disproportionate but fleeting influence the language federations and particularly socialists

⁸³ “Memories of C.E. Ruthenberg by Charles Dirba: Excerpt from an Interview Conducted by Oakley C. Johnson and Ann Rivington, 1940, Handwritten index cards in C.E. Ruthenberg Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Box 9, Folder 2, Microfilm reel 5. Very heavily edited by Tim Davenport,” at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1940/0000-dirba-johnsoninterview.pdf>

⁸⁴ Draper, *Roots*, 269–70, 310, 363; Draper, *American Communism*, 108–9, 169, 210; “Karlis Jansons,” at: [https://lv.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=K%C4%81rlis_Jansons_\(revolucion%C4%81rs\)&veaction=edit§ion=2](https://lv.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=K%C4%81rlis_Jansons_(revolucion%C4%81rs)&veaction=edit§ion=2). For Scott’s activities in Canada, see Greg Kealey, “The RCMP. The Special Branch, and the Early Days of the Communist Party of Canada: A Documentary Article,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 40 (Fall 1992): 169–204, and in Mexico, see Daniela Spenser, “Emissaries of the Communist International in Mexico,” *American Communist History*, 6, 2 (2007): 151–70.

from this small Baltic nation, exercised on early American Communism. Prominent in the CPA. Anderson bowed to Comintern pressure by negotiating with Reed in Moscow a fusion pact with the CLP, a treaty which they swiftly laid aside. Engaged by Moscow, again with Reed, in an abortive attempt to finance US Communists by smuggling jewellery and currency into America, Anderson was charged by the CPA in May 1921 over his abandonment of the contraband, but on his return to the US he left the organization.⁸⁵

Yet another Latvian, the accountant, Charles Dirba, (1887–1969), joined the revolutionaries in Russia as early as 1903. He fled to America during the post-1905 crackdown and became active in the SP. Dirba never regained the overt influence he wielded during 1921–22 as a spokesman with Ashkenuzi and Ballam of the Left Opposition in the WP, an episode which culminated in his suspension by the Comintern and constituted a milestone in US acceptance of Soviet authority. He was never again elected to the CC. But he personified the conquest of sectarianism and the continuity between the succeeding phases of 1920s Communism. Far from disappearing, he continued to lead the party's Latvian group, edit its paper, and serve on the WP and later the CPUSA powerful Control Commission. He utilized the latter position to function as a confidential agent of the Comintern and is remembered as vigorously campaigning to introduce the methods of the Moscow trials into the American party.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ “The Case of John P. Anderson” at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1921/03/0322-dirba-andersoncase.pdf>; Notes by Tim Davenport to: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1920/09/0900-bilan-reporttocec.pdf>; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 44 and n.49.

⁸⁶ Draper, *Roots*, 184, 334–41; Draper, *American Communism*, 420; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dirba; Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 19–20, 251, 326–28. Mention should be made of another Latvian cadre and native of Riga, Nicholas Dozenberg (1882–1954), although he never served on the CC. Arriving in Boston in 1904, Dozenberg joined the SP and belatedly (he was working in Canada) the new American movement. He spent most of the decade as a backroom boy in the WP national office until, dissatisfied with the work and pay, he was reassigned to work as a Soviet agent. Outed in 1939, he testified against Browder: Draper, *American Communism*, 209–214; John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 209.

Discord, disunity and diversity: Russian, Polish, Finnish, German, Irish, American and other leaders.

A very different road, that of refusal to accept Comintern-administered jurisprudence and consequent adaptation to the reformist left and in time mainstream politics, was traversed by another antagonist of Tsarist autocracy, J.B. Salutsky (1882–1968). He graduated from Communism into work with the trade unions and A.J. Muste's American Workers' Party, eventually embracing Roosevelt's New Deal. Born in Zelva, Russia, the son of a timber merchant, Salutsky was active in the Jewish Bund, participated in the 1905 revolution and emigrated to New York in 1909. He studied at Columbia and became secretary of the SP's Jewish Federation. It is possible to discern anticipations of Salutsky's later development in his earlier politics. Ambivalent about the Bolsheviks, he supported the Allied war effort. He vacillated about joining the CPA, settling for activism in the Committee for the Third International and the Workers' Council which campaigned to muster greater support for the Comintern inside the SP, until aligning with Communism in 1921. He was representative of an immigrant type never really at home in the WP after the excitements of 1917 and prospects of an American revolution subsided; and the resilience of capitalism, the hegemony of Moscow, and the realities of Communist discipline became apparent, Salutsky was expelled in 1923 for publicly criticizing the party.⁸⁷

More an autodidact than a conventional intellectual, Meyer Loonin (b.1885) demonstrated greater staying power. He came from a Jewish family in Pesochno in Russian Poland and emigrated to the US in 1907. By the time of his naturalization in 1909, Loonin had become a student and subsequently practised as a civil engineer. In 1920, while National Secretary of the Jewish Federation of the CPA, he was arrested during the Palmer Raids but

⁸⁷ "J.B. Salutsky (1882–1968)," in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 348–49.

escaped deportation as he was able to prove he had become an American citizen. Following his departure from the CC, Loonin continued in a diminished but still noteworthy role as a party functionary, serving as National Organizer of the WP's Jewish Federation in 1924. He was a member of the WP Control Commission from 1927 to 1929 and one of the first incorporators of the International Workers' Order (IWO), the Communist mutual aid society, in 1930.⁸⁸

A fellow Pole, who also supported the Russian leadership of the CPA, Daniel Elbaum, was by occupation a chemical engineer. An activist in the SDKPiL, the party led by Leo Jogiches and Rosa Luxemburg, he emigrated to the US after the outbreak of the First World War and became an activist in the SP's Polish Federation. By 1919 he was editing the Polish-language paper *Głos Robotniczy* (*Worker's Voice*) and helped organize the Polish-American Communist group which affiliated to the CPA. Arrested in 1920 and charged with conspiracy to cause armed revolution, Elbaum lacked Loonin's luck and was subsequently deported.⁸⁹

Dr James Wilenkin's lengthy career on the left terminated at the end of our period. Born in 1870 in Simbirsk, in the Volga region of western Russia, the birthplace of Kerensky and Lenin (after whom it was renamed Ulyanovsk in 1924), he emigrated to the US in 1887 and was naturalized in 1892, qualified as a dentist and became a pioneer of the Russian Federation. Wilenkin supported the move towards a legal party and in doing so displayed familiarity with the recent arguments of Lenin and the Comintern. Elected to the CC of the WP in 1921, he also featured on the executive of the Friends of Soviet Russia in 1921–1922.

⁸⁸ Meyer Loonin, New York Naturalization Records, 1909; US Federal Census 1920, Brooklyn, New York; US Federal Census 1930, Bronx, New York; "Justice Department Combats Soviet Propaganda in U.S.," *United States Bulletin*, 12 January 1920, at: https://archive.org/details/unitedstatesbul1920babs_0/page/n43; "Jewish (Yiddish) Language Federations", at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/lfedjewish.html>; Testimony of Walter S. Steele Regarding Communist Activity in the United States, Committee on Un-American Activities, 21 July 1947, at: <https://archive.org/details/testimonyofwalte1947unit/page/n5>

⁸⁹ Mary E. Cygan, "The Polish-American Left," in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, ed. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 166–167; "Non-English Press of the Communist Party USA", at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-English_press_of_the_Communist_Party_USA; "85 Heads of Communists are Indicted by US Jury" at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1920/0124-milleader-communistsindicted.pdf>.

He returned to Russia in November 1922.⁹⁰ Louis Hendin (b.1895) played a more transient role before succumbing to apostasy. His trajectory underlines again the danger of treating national groups as politically heterodox, for unlike his countrymen, he returned to the SP. A Russian Jew who emigrated to the US from Suraz in the Ukraine in 1912 to work in a garment factory, Hendin converted to Communism as a reaction against exploitative working conditions and reading Lenin's *State and Revolution* and joined the SP Left and the Jewish Federation. By 1919 he had qualified as a dentist after studying at the University of Maryland, become a US citizen and settled in Baltimore. Originally espousing ultra-leftism in the CPA but opposed to the dominant role of Hourwich and Stoklitsky, he subsequently gravitated to the CLP and thence to the United Communist Party, co-editing a journal, *Proletarishe Shtime*, for the UCP's Yiddish speaking members.

Hendin resigned from the party's CC in November 1920 and at some point became one of American Communism's first heretics. Recognizing he had chosen the wrong fork in the road, he re-joined the SP, serving ironically much later as Executive Secretary of the Committee for the Preservation of the Socialist Party, formed by the SP "Old Guard" in 1934 to combat revolutionary socialists permeating the organization.⁹¹ Hendin's origin in the Ukraine was shared by Michael Nastasiewsky whose sole appearance on the WP CC came at the end of the foundation period. Elected in December 1922, he was active in the Ukrainian

⁹⁰ "J. Morris" [J. Wilenkin], "The Need for Legal Work," *The Communist*, 1, 3 (September 1921): 16–20, at: <http://marxists.anu.edu.au/history/usa/eam/year/year1921/downloads.html>. For the officials of the Friends of Soviet Russia, see <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/eam/other/fsr/fsrofficials.html>. Information on his return to Russia from Tim Davenport. The only "J. Wilenkin" in New York enumerated in the US Federal Census of 1920, James N. Wilenkin, described himself as a "Physician" in the field of "Dentistry".

⁹¹ Louis Hendin, Registration Card, Baltimore, 5 June 1907 [sic: 1917]; US Census, 1930, New York City; Melech Epstein, *The Jew and Communism: The Story of Early Communist Victories and Ultimate Defeats in the Jewish Community, USA 1919–1941* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1959); Emil A. Solanka, "The United Communist Party: A Bureau of Investigation Report, 16/6/20," reproduced at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/government/justicedept/1920/1206-solanka-theucp.pdf>; W.A. Swanberg, *Norman Thomas: The Last Idealist* (New York: Scribner, 1976), 170; Vernon L. Pederson, *The Communist Party in Maryland, 1919–57* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 14.

Federation and edited its daily paper, *Ukrainski Schodenni Visti*. Nastasiewsky did not follow Hendin out of the party and was a leader of the federation in the mid-1920s.⁹²

Like Hendin, Maximilian Cohen came from a Russian Jewish background but followed a distinctive political path as an oppositionist within the CPA. He was born in Mozyr, in the Minsk governate of Belarus, and in 1884 emigrated to New York at the age of 5. By the time of his naturalization in 1914, he too had trained as a dentist. Like Hendin, Cohen did not negotiate the transition from the confusion and turbulence of the foundation years to the cadre who consolidated a more disciplined Comintern section in the united front period. A former member of the SLP who became the secretary of the SP left wing and business manager of the *New York Communist*, he initially backed the Hourwich-Stoklitsky group in demanding a swift split with the SP. But he bridled at the CPA leaders' obstruction of fusion with the UCP and was expelled from the CPA in early 1921, forming the Unity Committee which took the Comintern's position. Cohen defended the CPA against what he regarded as unfair criticism of the language federations, while challenging its leaders' sectarianism in refusing to fuse with the UCP. The Comintern employed him in missions to Mexico and South America to nurture Communism across the continent.⁹³ Whether familiarity with the International's *modus operandi* bred or crystallized disenchantment, thereafter he dropped out of the WP, although he remained within the Communist orbit. Cohen was to be found sponsoring CPUSA fundraising and anti-fascist fronts into the 1930s. Unlike activists who perceived Bolshevism to be a form of voluntarism, the ideas of impending revolution in the USA that Cohen held in 1919–1920 were substantially based on apocalyptic capitalist crisis and an instinctive working-class response: "It's like the depositors in a bank ... so soon as doubt comes into their minds, there is a mass movement and a panic, they

⁹² *Worker*, 17 March 1923; *Daily Worker*, 1 March 1926.

⁹³ Maximilian Cohen, New York Naturalization Records, 24 April 1914; Maximilian Cohen, Registration Card, New York City, April 1918; Draper, *Roots*, 141–42, 145–47, 175, 269, 424–27; Draper, *American Communism*, 170; "Maximilian Cohen" at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maximilian_Cohen.

withdraw their money. The workers will be in the same position as the depositors in the bank.” In pre-Leninist terms which underplayed the role of the party, Cohen relied on “the gradual breakdown of the existing system,” combined with spontaneous mass action and “our propaganda,” to provide a socialist solution to the infirmity of American society.⁹⁴ Such faith could easily dissipate in disillusion.

The outstanding leader of the Finnish Communists in America in the years immediately following 1917 was Santeri Nuorteva (1881–1929). A teacher and journalist who rivalled Fraina as a popularizer of Bolshevism, Nuorteva returned to Russia in 1920 and never figured on party CCs. One of the few Finns who spoke Russian, he was crucial in building support for Communism among Finnish émigrés and prominent in the Russian Soviet Recognition League as well as Martens’ Bureau. He later worked for the Comintern in its attempts to cohere the fissiparous forces of American Communism.⁹⁵ The Finnish Federation of the SP was distinctive. Unlike other groupings based on immigration from Imperial Russia, it remained aloof from the CPA and the underground, before affiliating to the WP in 1921.⁹⁶ Although by 1922 and after the repatriation of many Russians, the Finns constituted by far the largest language federation, their independence and communitarian introversion ensured they never supplied a proportionately large number of cadres in the foundation years. (See **Table 6** and **Appendix**).

An early member of the WP CC, Henry Askeli (1886–1962), emigrated to the US in 1900, where he subsequently became a translator for a Chicago publishing company. He enrolled in the SP and was soon prominent in the Finnish Federation which he led into the

⁹⁴ Maximilian Cohen, testimony, 14 August 1919, before the Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, New York State Legislature, in *Revolutionary Radicalism* (committee report), 1920, at: <http://americainclass.org/sources/becomingmodern/divisions/text8/colcommentaryrs.pdf>

⁹⁵ Auvo Kostiainen, “Santeri Nuorteva and the Origins of Soviet-American Relations,” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 21 (1983): 1–13.

⁹⁶ Auvo Kostiainen, *The Forging of Finnish-American Communism, 1917–1924: A Study in Ethnic Radicalism* (Turku, Finland: The Migration Institute, 1978); Michael Karni, “Finnish Americans,” in *Encyclopaedia*, ed. Buhle, Buhle and Georgakas, 227–28.

WP, having taken his distance earlier from both the CPA and CLP. A newspaper editor, WP organizer and a leading light in the Finnish cooperatives, Askeli fell foul of the 1924–25 “Bolshevization” and the Comintern-inspired project to stamp out federalism, reorganize the language federations, remove the insulation of the Finns and their institutions from the party mainstream, and lay hands on their resources. Removed from his positions, he was expelled in 1928 as a “Trotskyist.” Askeli later worked as a chiropractor, ran a health resort in Cape Cod and continued to contribute to the Finnish press in the USA.⁹⁷ His fellow federation activist, Theodore Maki, a carpenter, born in Viipuri (Vyborg) in 1890, appeared more briefly; election to the 1922 CC proved to be his only appearance in the leading cadre.⁹⁸

Among the leaders of German origin listed in the **Appendix**, Ludwig E. Katterfeld (1881–1974), born in Strasburg, Alsace-Lorraine, into an intellectual family, worked as a farmhand after emigrating, joining the SP as a student in 1905. Together with Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht, Katterfeld was one of the few Communists who had held leading positions in the SP where he helped propel its left towards the Comintern. Advocating an underground party and resisting Comintern pressure, even after the 1922 Bridgeman Convention, he settled for WP orthodoxy, working in the production of the party press and taking up various organizing positions. As Stalinization developed, he exhibited little opposition but stood firm and was expelled in the purge of 1929 for refusal to yield control of *Evolution*, the independent paper he edited.⁹⁹ The engagement with Communism of other immigrants was more ephemeral. Isaac Ferguson (1884–1964), a Canadian Jew and Chicago lawyer, the son of a butcher, was, like Katterfeld, galvanized by 1917. A former Republican, Ferguson was a

⁹⁷ US Federal Census 1920, Chicago; *James P. Cannon and the Early Years of American Communism*, 574; Auvo Kostiaainen, “Radical Ideology vs Ethnic Social Activities: The Finnish-Americans and the Communist Party of the United States, 1923–1932,” *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 21 (1989), 30–39.

⁹⁸ Theodore Maki, Registration Card, Baltimore, 6 May 1917; Theodore Maki, Registration Card, New Jersey, undated [1942].

⁹⁹ Draper, *Roots*, 280–81, 438, note 30, 361, 381–82; “Ludwig Erwin Alfred ‘Dutch’ Katterfeld”, at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L._E._Katterfeld; Cannon, *First Ten Years*, 55–56, 62, 67, 70, 75, 77–78, 192.

charter member of the CPA and one of its most prominent leaders. A confederate of Ruthenberg who shared his confinement in Sing Sing, Ferguson quit the party on his release, becoming a civil rights lawyer.¹⁰⁰

Ferguson's career as a Communist leader began and ended with the foundation period. Jack Carney (1889–1956), a fierce opponent of the Russian Federation leaders and a leading light in the SP left and CLP, never figured on the CC beyond our period but continued as an active Communist until the end of the 1920s. Born in Widnes, England, Carney was brought up there by his grandfather following the early death of his mother and abandonment by his Irish immigrant father. Although a promising scholar, family circumstances necessitated his employment in the local chemical works. After his conversion to socialism by Jim Larkin in 1906, he moved to Ireland where he became a mainstay of trade unionism before emigrating to the US in 1916. "A born rebel who seeks instinctively to be the centre of every row," he came to prominence as editor of the socialist paper, *Truth*, published in Duluth, and a founder of the CLP. Married to the Chicago-born sculptor, Mina Schoenman, he successfully contested deportation and sedition proceedings but travelled to Ireland with Larkin in 1923 on the latter's release from prison. Carney came back to the US and edited *Labor Unity* in San Francisco before he relocated to Moscow in 1925 as the representative to the Comintern of the embryonic Irish party. He subsequently worked for RILU before returning to Ireland. From 1930 he collaborated with Larkin in endeavours to build trade unionism in Ireland but quarrelled with him in 1936 over Carney's support for the Spanish republicans; he ended his days as a journalist in London.¹⁰¹ The Irish influence on

¹⁰⁰ Draper, *Roots*, 138–39, 167–68, 174–75, 183–84; *American Labor Who's Who*, ed. De Leon, s.v. "Fergusson, Isaac Edward," 70; John Gerber, "Ferguson, Isaac (1888–?)", in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 132–33.

¹⁰¹ Draper, *Roots*, 78–79, 179, 181; UK Census, 1891, Widnes, Lancashire; Lawrence William White, "John ('Jack') Carney", in James McGuire and James Quinn, eds., *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Royal Irish Academy/Cambridge University Press, 2009), 358–59, which repeats Carney's claim that he was born in Dublin; Emmet O'Connor, *Reds and the Green: Ireland, Russia and the Communist International, 1919–43* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004), 27, 82, 126–27, 131–32, 137–38, 141, 156, 168, 188,

American Communism merits attention; it quickly dissipated, and the experience constituted a relatively brief episode in the careers of its major protagonists.¹⁰²

The Dutch influence was indirect, through the contributions to the SP's *International Socialist Review* of the politician and poet, Herman Gorter (1864–1927), and the socialist astro-physicist, Anton Pannekoek (1873–1960), whose ideas subsequently sustained “left-wing Communism,” incurred the wrath of Lenin, and provoked their break with the Comintern; and direct, through the participation of Sebald Justinus Rutgers (1879–1961), although he was never elected to the CC. A civil engineer who had worked in the Dutch East Indies before relocating to America, he was active in the SP from 1915 and a leading theorist of the Socialist Propaganda League and the SP left which he represented at the First Comintern Congress. Briefly head of the left-inclined West European Bureau of the Comintern in Amsterdam, Rutgers spent years developing the Kuzbass international workers' cooperative in Siberia, later working for the Comintern before returning to Holland in 1938.¹⁰³

The Balkans were represented during American Communism's birth pangs by the Macedonian, George Andreytchine (1894–1952) who personified pro-Bolshevik tendencies in the IWW. Following his arrival in America from Bulgaria in 1913, he was active in organizing miners and participated in the launch of the CLP before taking refuge in the

196, 220. The quote is from the *Duluth Herald* in White, “Carney,” 359. Richard Hudelson, “Jack Carney and the *Truth* in Duluth,” *Saothar*, 19, 129–39; James Curry, “Who is This Jack Carney?” 2015 Presentation at University of Michigan, Hatcher Gallery Recordings at: <http://leccap.engin.umich.edu/leccap/viewer/r/R7JV5a>.

¹⁰² Never members of its CC, James Larkin (1874–1947), born in Liverpool, England, but an adopted Irishman, and Eádhmonn MacAlpine were involved, together with Reed and Gitlow, in the creation of the CLP. Larkin, a leader of the SP left, was arrested during the Red Scare and sentenced to five years imprisonment. The Chief Magistrate in the 1920 Gitlow case observed: “Gitlow and Larkin are beyond doubt two of the most prominent leaders in this revolutionary scheme ... men of intelligence with considerable experience in public affairs ...”: <http://moses.law.umn.edu/darrow/trials.php?tid=14>. Deported back to Ireland, Larkin pursued a relatively brief career as a Communist and a longer one as a union leader, ending up as a member of Dail Éireann. The Belfast-born MacAlpine was an editor of *The Revolutionary Age* and the *Voice of Labor* and a member of the National Council of the SP left wing. He returned to Dublin in 1919 and was involved in early attempts to establish Communism in Ireland: Emmet O'Connor, *James Larkin* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002); O'Connor, *Reds and Green*, 27, 34, 37–38, 44–46, 52, 90.

¹⁰³ Draper, *Roots*, 66, 107, 232–34; Pierre Broué, *Histoire de L'Internationale Communiste, 1919–1943* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), 1078.

Soviet Union with Haywood. Andreytchine was subsequently engaged in RILU initiatives and took a continued interest in American affairs. A partisan of the Left Opposition from 1923, he nonetheless held various diplomatic appointments. After a period of exile, he returned to Bulgaria in 1945 before his arrest and disappearance in the early 1950s.¹⁰⁴

Beyond Europe, Japanese Communism played a small part in the shape of its animator, Sen Katayama (1860–1933) who studied in America before returning home in 1896. Back in the USA a decade later, he worked in New York with Lore – and briefly with Bukharin, Alexandra Kollontai and Trotsky – and emerged as a powerful voice in the SP left. Moving to Russia, Katayama, like Andreytchine, was never a CC member; but like Nuorteva and Rutgers, he was employed by the infant Comintern, heading its North American office in Mexico and fostering unification of the US groupings. He remained in Russia until his death.¹⁰⁵

As noted earlier, differences exceeded similarities among the female cohort of CC members listed in the **Appendix**, although two of the trio emanated from poor backgrounds. Born on Prince Edward Island, Marguerite Prevey (1872–1925) was originally a seamstress who emigrated to Boston in 1895. In 1901, together with her husband, Frank, a jeweller, she moved to Akron where she practised as an optician and became well-known in the SP in Ohio and nationally. An early socialist-feminist, she was a member of the party's women's committee in 1908 and 1909 and for a time acted as National Women's Organizer. Always on the left, she opposed the leadership's attempts in 1912 to exclude violence as a weapon in the socialist armoury. She was an enthusiastic supporter of Debs – her house functioned as his Ohio headquarters and she backed him financially. Prevey demonstrated organizational

¹⁰⁴ Zumoff, *Communist International*, 81, 88–90; Reiner Tosstorff, *The Red International of Labour Unions, 1920–1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 833.

¹⁰⁵ Hyman Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary: The Life of Sen Katayama* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964); <https://www.marxist.org/archive/katayama/index/htm>. Other Communists who spent time in the USA, such as the Italian leader, Giacinto Serrati (1874–1926) played little role during the foundation years.

acumen and was dubbed “the Joan of Arc” of the 1913 Rubber Workers’ strike in Akron: “Brimming with indignation, she preached a secular gospel of salvation through political action that was especially appealing to wealthy sympathisers.”¹⁰⁶ Typifying the SP left’s combination of propaganda, solidarity with industrial militancy and attraction to the IWW, she opposed the war and became a CLP charter member when the Ohio state SP affiliated to the new party. But she never seemed comfortable with the new creed. Prevey resigned from the WP CC in June 1922 as her branch had disaffiliated, wearied by the factionalism. Frank, who had become a realtor and Ford dealer, died in the early 1920s, and she lived for a period with Charles Baker. Another whose Communist career was restricted to the early years, Prevey succumbed to smallpox in Minneapolis in 1925.¹⁰⁷

Born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1883, Marion Emerson was married to William Sproule, a streetcar conductor, and by 1919 had two teenage children.¹⁰⁸ As Boston district organizer of the CPA, she was embroiled in “the Ballam affair” when the latter allegedly obtained money from her on false pretences. Emerson’s account of her midnight arrest and brief imprisonment in October 1919 conveys the sense of shock that some newly minted Bolsheviks experienced when encountering state coercion at first hand; as well as the surprise of the authorities acting on newspaper reports on discovering “ordinary” citizens rather than foreign agitators were uttering sedition. The speech which prompted her arrest is intriguing. Invoking “the true spirit of Americanism” reflected in the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and Horace Greeley as part of Communism’s lineage, Emerson mobilized Abraham Lincoln in defense of the new movement: “This country with its institutions belongs to the people ...

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900–1941* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 27.

¹⁰⁷ Nelson, *American Rubber Workers*, 8, 26, 27; Nick Salvatore, *Eugene Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 255, 291, 294, 319, 321, 322, 327; Darcy G. Richardson, *Others: “Fighting Bob” LaFollette and the Progressive Movement: Third Party Politics in the 1920s*, vol. 4 (New York: iUniverse, 2008) 59; Marguerite Prevy [sic], State of Minnesota Certificate of Death, 19 April 1925.

¹⁰⁸ US Federal Census, 1910, Lowell City.

Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it or their revolutionary right to dismember and overthrow it.”¹⁰⁹ Expressed before American Communists assimilated Leninist rigour, such sentiments would not resurface until “American exceptionalism” was briefly aired towards the end of the 1920s, and not on any significant scale until the popular front era. Emerson left the CPA with the group around Ruthenberg to join the CLP and although her sole appearance on the WP CC came in 1922, she remained a Communist into the 1930s, working with Browder in the RILU’s Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat and participating in undercover operations on behalf of the Russians.¹¹⁰

Rose Pastor Stokes (1879–1933) a Russian-Polish Jew, poet, playwright, advocate of legalized abortion and disciple of the birth control campaigner, Margaret Sanger, was likewise a long-term loyalist, retaining her membership from the first CPA convention until her death. Joining the SP in 1906 and re-joining in 1918 in solidarity with the left’s enthusiasm for the Russian revolution after resigning over her support for the war, Stokes added glamour to early Communism, becoming a leading member of the CPA and representing the WP at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922. When her marriage, troubled by cross-class, cultural tensions, broke up in 1925, Stokes formed a partnership with fellow Communist, Victor Jerome, later a member of the CPUSA CC. She continued active into the 1930s as a national speaker, journalist and strike agitator. She helped establish a higher priority for women’s work in the party, dying of cancer in a German clinic in 1933.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Marion E. Sproule, “Indicted,” *The Worker* [Boston], November 15, 1919 reproduced at: <http://www.marxisthistory.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/1919/1115-sproule-indicted.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States, Hearings Before the Sub-Committee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act ...[1956], A109, reproduced at: <https://archive.org/details/scopeofsovietact2123unit/page/n291>.

¹¹¹ Zipser and Zipser, *Fire and Grace*; Patrick Renshaw, “Rose of the World: The Pastor-Stokes Marriage and the American Left, 1905–1925,” *New York History*, 62, 4 (October 1981): 415–38.

In comparison, Charles Baker was a dowdy bird of passage. A coming figure on the SP left and the party's state organizer in Ohio, he had a long history of involvement in anti-war protests and industrial struggles. In summer 1917, Baker was arrested, along with Ruthenberg and Wagenknecht, and charged with making anti-conscription speeches urging men not to register for the draft. In 1919, together with James P. Cannon, he was charged with conspiracy to obstruct coal production. These charges hung over Baker's head until 1921 when he began a prison term. Like his friend Prevey, Baker represented pre-Communist traditions of militant struggle and was another emblematic victim of state repression after 1917. He became a CLP member in 1919, was elected to the CC at its first convention, and was briefly its national organizer before withdrawing from the party. He returned to the WP in 1921 and became an alternate member of its first CC. Baker was appointed Ohio organizer before dropping out of activity.¹¹²

In contrast, Elmer Allison (1883–1982), who seemed to personify the dogged American proletarian, persevered, although he never again figured on the CC. Initially a sawmill hand with scarcely an elementary education, he became a specialist shingle weaver who joined the SP around 1905. His sister, Hortense, married Wagenknecht, and his niece the lifelong CPUSA functionary, Carl Winter (b.1906), forging two of the kinship ties among Communist leaders. Allison himself married Rosa Rosen, from a Communist family, having divorced his first wife. He had edited and managed a socialist paper in Cleveland, Ohio, and subsequently worked for the WP Literature Department and stood for the Senate on the party's behalf in 1926. Allison ended as he had begun, laboring in factories until he was almost 80.¹¹³ Born in 1879 in Chicago, Edward Lindgren was well-known as a leader in the Brooklyn local of the SP, as a party propagandist, and prominent in the Left Wing. Lindgren

¹¹² Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 109–10, 140, 146–47; Draper, *Roots*, 95, 181, 450, note 128; information from Tim Davenport, April 2019.

¹¹³ "Elmer Allison", https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elmer_Allison.

was a founding member of the CLP elected to its CC. A printer, the son of a blacksmith of Swedish ancestry and a Swedish mother, he represented the UCP at the Second Comintern Congress and served on the 1922 CC of the WP. Subsequently a leader of the underground Goose Caucus, he never recaptured the leading positions he had occupied in the formative period and he eventually returned to his trade in the printing industry. If he sometimes seemed more a man of the SP than the WP, he was still a Communist in the mid-1920s.¹¹⁴

A more dubious character, Harry M. Wicks (1889–1957), also possessed an impeccable working-class background but was a longer-term participant in Communism, surviving into the popular front years. Wicks is usually classified as an American, although the FBI reported he was of Finnish descent.¹¹⁵ The son of an electrical engineer from Illinois, Wicks became a printer in Iowa. He was briefly on the SP executive in 1919 and subsequently a member of the Socialist Party of Michigan, which morphed into the Proletarian Party, before joining the WP – only to align himself with the breakaway United Toilers. Wicks’ sectarianism and “intellectual vanity” strengthened suspicion about his reliability. Occupying a variety of positions in the party, the Comintern and RILU, he faced charges of spying for employers and state agencies. Exonerated in 1923 but expelled on slender evidence in 1938, Wicks briefly supported Lovestone’s splinter group, later cooperating with the FBI.¹¹⁶ Ralph E. Richardson made a more fleeting appearance. Born in Montana in 1895, the son of a mine superintendent who had been drawn to the mining boom town of Silver City, Utah, by 1900, Richardson subsequently became a charter member of the CLP who sat on its Labor Committee and the party’s state organizer in Utah. Little else is

¹¹⁴ *American Labor Who’s Who*, ed. De Leon, s.v. “Lindgren, Edward Ivar,” 138–39; Draper, *Roots*, 139, 181, 261, 267–68; US Federal Census, 1880, Chicago; Edward Ivar Lindgren, Registration Card, New York City, 12 September 1918; information from Tim Davenport.

¹¹⁵ Auvo Kostianen notes that Wicks emanated from an area of Finnish settlement and his surname could attenuate the Swedish-Finnish or Swedish Wickström: communication to authors, July 2019.

¹¹⁶ Harvey Klehr, “Wicks, Harry (1889?–1957),” in *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Johnpoll and Klehr, 414–15.

known of him beyond his self-description as a “poor tramp wobbly” before the Workers, Soldiers, and Sailors Council on May Day 1919 in Salt Lake City.¹¹⁷

Reflections

This essay has proposed a prosopographical approach to American Communism. It has filled a gap in the historiography by presenting a statistical analysis of the revolutionary leadership during the genesis of the US party before focussing on those representatives who played no further part on the CC after 1923. The party, we argue, was only constituted in a meaningful sense as an organization capable of intervening in American society when institutional disunity was finally terminated in that year: the preceding phase we characterized as “the long foundation period”. It is, of course, possible to be more precise and identify February 1917–September 1919 as a preparatory period in which the materials, men and women who would lay the foundations, were assembled. Beginning with the creation of the CPA and CPL, endorsing Communists’ own definition of their leadership and subscribing to Klehr’s adoption of the CC as the best available embodiment of the cadre, we have supplemented his survey by examining activists elected to CCs in the missing years between 1919 and 1921. We have amplified Klehr’s approach by employing qualitative as well as quantitative methods, blending statistical analysis and mini-biographies to establish in human terms and in more detail the characteristics of the founding cohort. Concentrating on those whose time on the CC was limited to this period, we have restored to the historiographical tapestry a number of hitherto vestigial or fugitive figures and provided more information on others. In doing so, we have confirmed the diversity of the foundation cadre, demonstrated differences within national categories, traced the developing politics of leading representatives, and

¹¹⁷ US Federal Census, 1900, Silver City, Utah; Draper, *Roots*, 181; Andrew Hunt, “Beyond the Spotlight: The Red Scare in Utah,” *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 61, 4 (Fall, 1993): 368.

affirmed the complexity and uniqueness of human actors. We have also tested the limits of prosopographical technique in relation to “private lives.”

Exploring a plethora of sources, we have documented leaders beyond the CC, and produced a reasonably robust prosopography. Unevenness remains: satisfactory data was available for some Communists, less for others; more information was accessible on some aspects of protagonists’ lives than on others; genealogical findings were sometimes tentative and circumstantial. Those whose leading roles endured left more of a mark than supporting actors or militants who returned to an oblivion unamenable to penetration. Nonetheless, we have identified in basic detail all but one of our 56 subjects and their origins; the date of birth of all but 7; the prior political affiliations of 54; the date of joining the Communist parties for 52; and, while this is occasionally vaguer, the point at which they left or were expelled. Our study is weaker on inherited religion and duration of education, but this is compensated for in many cases by data regarding family background, occupation, personal characteristics and political activity. Paucity of evidence, and a lack of uniformity in what is available, may stem from the state of the sources rather than the fallibility of the historian. We have made a beginning and overall our study passes the test of significance, although it is not beyond improvement and extension by other scholars.

A further frontier proved more intractable. The kind and quality of information available about the interiority of Communist leaders of a century ago who did not share the sensibilities and concerns of more recent radicals restricts evidence-based recuperation of their relationships, emotions, sexuality and concerns beyond politics. It may be possible to unearth more about such matters as well as the Jeanette Pearls and Mina Schoenmans of American Communism who have left few traces in the archives. The conclusion that for the cadre of the 1920s, “politics, friendships and work fused into one another, and little or nothing existed outside party life,” may appear absolutist; it contains more than a modicum of

truth.¹¹⁸ The leaders of the foundation period were moving in that direction in 1919, although the process was uneven and incomplete. If they led distinctive and interesting “private” lives and were, to a degree, occupied with extra-curricular concerns, their thoughts and actions in these spheres, still less how they influenced their politics, have not come down to us in any detail. This verdict is in harmony with recent exploratory surveys which, despite their value, have not revealed a great deal of substance about the “private lives,” emotions, and feelings of the party elite of the 1920s.¹¹⁹

Our scrutiny of the leadership between 1919 and 1923 does not transform the picture presented by Draper and Klehr, although it expands and refines the detail. Americans made up less than a fifth of our sample of the cadre. It was dominated by recent immigrants: through the foundation years, over three-quarters of the CC members were immigrants or the children of immigrants emanating from many parts of Europe, although almost half our sample had their origins in the Tsarist empire. Their intersecting stories are part of the rich, intermeshed narratives of emigration to America; the particularities of different national and religious diasporas; and more specifically, and intriguingly for pre-Communist history, the richness and universality of the Second International and the global circulation of international socialism and its disciples before, as well as after, 1917. The average CC member was white, male and over 30. Female representation was tiny and episodic; black workers did not figure in the elite. The majority of CC representatives left full-time education at an early age, although over a third were college graduates. In terms of inherited religion, Judaism predominated – a third were from such a background, but there were significant minorities of Catholics and Protestants.

¹¹⁸ Draper, *American Communism*, 199.

¹¹⁹ See Barrett, “Was the Personal Political?”; Brown and Faue, “Social Bonds, Sexual Politics, and Political Community.”

An overwhelming majority had been formed as socialists before 1917 and had come to Communism via the SP. Their social origins were variegated, although few conformed to proletarian archetypes. From what we know about the party, the cadre reflected the membership's heterogenous occupational composition. There was also significant turnover of leaders within the foundation period. Over a third of our sample served on only one CC between 1919 and 1923. Looking to the future, the essay evidenced disjuncture: almost 60% of CC members between 1919 and 1923 did not feature on CCs after 1923 while almost a third were no longer members of the party by that date – underlining the volatility and transitional aspects of these years and the fragility of many allegiances forged in the cross-continental heat radiated by the Russian revolution. However, a minority – over a third – maintained their active belief in Soviet Communism, continued in the leadership into the 1920s, and in some cases remained key players into the 1940s. This battle-hardened group provided continuity and stability in the cadre and affirmed the significance of the foundation years to the future of American Communism. Our study also confirms, as might be expected, that the cadre of the early period remained distant from the Comintern model of a centralized, hierarchical, authoritative collective with military overtones, equipped with mastery of Russian theory and policy. It was at best a cadre under construction.

Cannon captured the ambition although he telescoped developments: “When we organized the Communist Party in this country in 1919, we deemed it unworthy of the dignity of a revolutionary leader to waste his time on some piddling occupation in the bourgeois world ... We decreed that no one could be a member of the Central Committee of the party unless he was a full-time professional party worker or willing to become such at the call of the party.”¹²⁰ By 1923, professionalism was still developing. If the WP never achieved the *commandiste* perfection rolled out in Comintern rhetoric, bureaucratic centralism advanced

¹²⁰ James P. Cannon, *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* (1943; New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 24.

through the “Bolshevization” of mid-decade and Stalinization from 1929. But the “officer corps” had its genesis and infancy in the foundation years; for the rest of the decade, its core would largely consist of those who had successfully survived them.¹²¹ The elite group came to Communism from 1917 imbued with the conviction that the Russian revolution presaged universal progress which would be orchestrated by the Comintern. Even in these early years, some fell away, others were downgraded. For those cadres whose faith and fortunes endured, commitment was cemented by what was, compared with many party activists, a privileged position. Insulated from the marketplace and some of the vicissitudes of working-class life, they were paid, if sometimes intermittently, to practice an emancipatory vocation they had freely aspired to. Involving organizing, administration, management, public speaking, journalism, public relations and continuing education, their work was consuming but personally rewarding. The alternative was “loss of job, profession, and even reason for existence.”¹²²

The incumbents were frequently isolated from wide layers of the working class and broader, typically hostile, American society, and the disconnect could be exacerbated by immersion in party affairs and hyperactivity. To take a paradigmatic case, Ruthenberg remarked in 1919 that Communists “stood outside the labor movement” and few party activists “knew anything about the trade union movement.”¹²³ The same applied to most members of the early committees. Some had experience of the IWW and a handful in AFL unions. Few possessed sustained involvement in day-to-day trade unionism and labor relations, of representing members and negotiating on their behalf, or holding office in the contemporary unions. Outside the Chicago AFL, a stronghold which would prove transient, they were largely limited to useful contacts and temporary alliances. As 1923 dawned, the

¹²¹ McIlroy and Campbell “Leadership of American Communism, 1924–1927.”

¹²² Draper, *American Communism*, 199.

¹²³ Draper, *Roots*, 198–199.

TUEL seemed to be on the cusp of success but it would falter in the face of Gompers' guns and the Farmer-Labor Party and the La Follette fiascos. The League of 1923 was led by a handful of activists with experience of organizing drives and pacts with AFL progressives and lacked depth and reach in terms of embedded rank-and-file cadres.¹²⁴

In this sphere, as in others, things would change, and we should be wary of over-emphasising the foundation years as determining the future of the WP cadre. Draper's claim that: "For almost a decade, the main struggle in the American Communist movement was primarily between those who formed it in 1919 and those who came to the fore in 1921 ... the 1919 group of Ruthenberg, Lovestone and Gitlow provided the hard core of one great faction, the 1921 group of Foster, Browder and Cannon, that of another,"¹²⁵ requires amplification and attention to development and disjuncture. Amter, Engdahl, Minor and Trachtenberg joined the WP in 1921. Yet they supported the Ruthenberg-Lovestone group, not the Foster faction, through the decade. Cannon joined the CLP in 1919, was on the CC by 1920 and distanced himself from Foster by mid-decade in response to events unforeseeable in 1919 or 1921.¹²⁶ That said, revisiting the early years vindicates Draper's central argument. The creation and renewal of the Communist elite which developed from 1919 was not simply a national phenomenon, the product of untrammelled competition between aspiring party leaders in Chicago and New York. The process was supervised by the Comintern, increasingly decisively. *Ab initio* American leaders acknowledged its suzerainty and welcomed exchange of representatives between the Comintern centre and its American affiliate, which developed relations between the leaderships: see **Tables 8 and 9**.¹²⁷ Some

¹²⁴ The account in Zumoff, *Communist International*, 98–111, suggests limited progress had been made by 1924.

¹²⁵ Draper, *Roots*, 322.

¹²⁶ Draper, *Roots*, 340–41; Zumoff, *Communist International*, 57–61; Palmer, *James P. Cannon, passim*; McIlroy and Campbell, "Leadership of American Communism."

¹²⁷ Comintern representatives in the United States in the 1920s included Samuel Agursky, Henryk Walecki, Sen Katayama, Joseph Pogany/John Pepper, Boris Reinstein, Sergei Gusev, Yrjo Sirola, Arthur Ewert, Allan Wallenius, Harry Pollitt, Philip Dengel and Boris Mikhailov. See Draper, *Roots*, 363–64; Draper, *American Communism*, 170; Klehr, Haynes and Anderson, *Soviet World*, 357–58; *The Communist Party of the United*

questioned the wisdom of particular Comintern decisions. By 1923, in the backwash of Moscow’s determination to liquidate “the Geese,” the mould was setting. Cadres quibbled and occasionally protested directives; but they accepted the Comintern was the final appeal court. The WP elite were beginning to understand how the Comintern thought and what it wanted and to condition themselves to think and want the same.¹²⁸ The approval or disapproval of the International had already made or derailed party careers, as the cases of Fraina, Hourwich, Reed, Ashkenuzi, Ballam, Dirba and others illustrated. By 1923, the Comintern was primary in shaping Communist politics, the contours and composition of the American Communist elite, and the prospects of its members.

Table 8. American Representatives to the Communist International in Moscow during the Foundation Period.

1919–1920	John Reed (Communist Labor Party, later United Communist Party)
1919–1921	Louis Fraina (Communist Party of America)
1919–1921	Nicholas I. Hourwich (Communist Party of America)
1920–1921	Max Bedacht (United Communist Party)
1921	Charles E. Scott (United Communist Party)
1921	Robert Minor (Workers Party)
1922	Ludwig Katterfeld (Workers Party)
1923	Israel Amter (Workers Party)

Source: Adapted from Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 360.

States of America: What It Is: How It Works: A Handbook for Americans, 1955, 3, at: <https://archive.org/details/communistpartyof1955unit/page/2>

¹²⁸ McIlroy and Campbell, “Bolshevism, Stalinism and the Comintern.”

Table 9. Workers' Party Representatives Holding Positions in the Communist International's Highest Bodies during the Foundation Period.

James Cannon	Member of the presidium of the Executive Committee, Communist International (ECCI), 1922
Nicholas Hourwich	Member of the ECCI, 1920
Ludwig Katterfeld	Member of the presidium of the ECCI, 1922
John Reed	Member of the ECCI, 1920
Charles Ruthenberg	Member of the ECCI, 1922
Alexander Trachtenberg	Member of the ECCI, 1923
Oscar Tyverovsky	Member of the ECCI, 1921.

Source: Adapted from Harvey Klehr, John Earl Haynes and Kyrill M. Anderson, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 363–64.

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Appendix

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