

Premature Anti-Communists?

**American Anarchism, the Russian Revolution, and Left-Wing Libertarian
Anti-Communism, 1917–1939**

Kenyon Zimmer

2009

Contents

Red Dawn	4
The Bolshevik Myth	8
Uncivil War	13
Disunited Fronts	19
Conclusion	23

“The greatest problem facing the Anarchists since the War,” the struggling American anarchist newspaper *Freedom* declared in 1934, “is summed up in the word ‘Russia.’ All revolutionists, all enemies of bourgeois society, have a natural sympathy with the Russian workers, who ‘stormed heaven’ and, for the first time in history, set about the building of socialism. But all friends of freedom feel an equally natural repugnance for many aspects of the Russian Revolution.”¹ Caught between these two impulses, American anarchism entered into an irresolvable crisis after 1917. It retained the majority of its adherents through the interwar period, but they became increasingly marginalized and ineffectual. This paradox of persistence and marginalization resulted not from a blind refusal to adapt to new circumstances but from an informed and compelling analysis of Communist politics that guided anarchists’ every move. The transnational dynamics of anarchists’ encounter with the Russian Revolution, the discourse they developed as a result, and their subsequent actions reveal a hidden tradition of left-wing libertarian anti-Communism and offer a new perspective on the evolution of the American Left.

John Earl Hynes notes that among historians anti-Communism is usually “treated as a political obscenity, something without redeeming social value.” Ellen Schrecker’s authoritative work on the topic, *Many Are the Crimes*, portrays all opponents of Communism, on both the Left and Right, as part of a vast “anticommunist network” serving McCarthyism. By contrast Haynes, Richard Gid Powers and others have shown that anti-Communism was not a unified movement and its history “is not the same as the story of anticommunist extremism.” Their work has attempted to rehabilitate certain strains of American anti-Communism, but it is difficult to escape the fact that many of the Social Democratic and liberal anti-Communists these authors praise did, as Schrecker charges, knowingly function “as a kind of intelligence service” for the less morally scrupulous mainstream anti-Communist movement and lent their support to some of America’s most excessive domestic and foreign Cold War policies. There were, of course, exceptions, and Schrecker certainly overstates her case. Anarchists, who have been completely overlooked by historians on both sides of this debate, provide one of the most intriguing counterexamples.²

Their absence from the literature on Communism and anti-Communism is understandable, however, in light of the incongruous position anarchists occupied. The anarchist anti-Communist critique developed out of a complex transnational process almost totally autonomous from the Social Democratic, liberal and conservative anti-Communist movements, as well as from the Trotskyist “Left Opposition” that emerged after 1928. While their “premature” anti-Communism alienated them from most radicals and liberals in the 1920s and the Popular Front movement of the 1930s, their intransigent radicalism and libertarianism excluded them from the ranks of mainstream anti-Communism. This, in turn, has led to their erasure from Cold War and post-Cold War scholarship within which the poles of “Left” and “Right” are defined in terms of support for either Soviet Communism or American democracy — both of which the anarchists rejected as inherently corrupt and oppressive. But by ignoring their analysis, opponents of the Soviet Union

¹ “AGIS,” “Anarchism in Bolshevism,” *Freedom* (New York), March 1934.

² John Earl Haynes, “Reconsidering Two Questions: On Arnesen’s ‘No “Graver Danger”: Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question,”” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3, no. 4 (2006): 53 – 57; John Earl Haynes, *Red Scare or Red Menace? American Communism and Anticommunism in the Cold War Era* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Richard Gid Powers, *Not without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 427 (quote); Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 75 – 76. For another exception, see Eric Arnesen, “No ‘Graver Danger’: Black Anticommunism, the Communist Party, and the Race Question,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3, no. 4 (2006): 13 – 52.

opened the way for the destructive anti-Communism of the McCarthy era, while Communists and their sympathizers blinded themselves to fundamental problems of the Soviet system.

Red Dawn

At the time of the Russian Revolution, there were tens of thousands of anarchist activists and many times more sympathizers in the United States. From 1900 to 1917, the circulation of the American anarchist press, which included publications in more than a dozen languages and served as the makeshift institutional base of the movement, averaged more than sixty thousand.³ The most successful newspaper was the Yiddish *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, which peaked at a circulation of nearly thirty thousand in 1914. Fifty-one Italian-language titles also appeared between 1887 and 1923, indicating anarchism's place as the dominant ideology of the Italian American Left — in 1914 there were probably more Italian anarchists in New York and New Jersey than in all of Italy.⁴

Though popularly known for a few individual acts of violent “propaganda by the deed,” anarchists were also among the leading American proponents of syndicalism, which viewed militant unions utilizing direct action and the general strike as both defenders of workers' interests and instruments of revolutionary change. Anarchists played a leading role, albeit one subordinate to the more numerous Socialists, within the Jewish labor movement, and the explicitly anarcho-syndicalist Union of Russian Workers of the United States and Canada (UORW), founded in 1908, counted seven thousand members in 1914 (and, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, fifteen thousand members by the end of 1919). Native- and foreign-born anarchists — including many Italians and UORW members — constituted an influential faction within the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which peaked at around one hundred thousand members in 1917.⁵ Former IWW member William Z. Foster, who considered syndicalism to be “anarchism made practical,” also found anarchists to be the strongest supporters of his small Syndicalist League of North America and its successor, the International Trade Union Educational League, founded in 1913 and 1915, respectively.⁶

³ Calculated from Kenyon Zimmer, “Anarchist Periodical Circulation Figures, 1880 – 1940,” kate.sharpleylibrary.pbwiki.com/Anarchist-newspaper-circulation (accessed November 25, 2008).

⁴ Abba Gordin, *Sh. Yanovsky: zayn lebn, kemfn un shafn, 1864 – 1939* (Los Angeles: Sh. Yanovsky ondenk-komitet, 1957), 314; Dirk Hoerder, *The Immigrant Labor Press in North America, 1840s – 1970s: An Annotated Bibliography*, 3 vols. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 3–8. Compare the numbers given in Nunzio Pernicone, “Italian Immigrant Radicalism in New York,” in *The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement*, ed. Philip V. Canistraro (New York: New York Historical Society/John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 1999), 77–90; and Carl Levy, *Gramsci and the Anarchists* (New York: Berg, 1999), 9.

⁵ *Revolutionary Radicalism: Its History, Purpose and Tactics with an Exposition and Discussion of the Steps Being Taken and Required to Curb It, Being the Report of the Joint Legislative Committee Investigating Seditious Activities, Filed April 24, 1920, in the Senate of the State of New York*, 4 vols. (Albany, NY: J. B. Lyon, 1920) (hereafter cited as *Revolutionary Radicalism*), 1:861, 2:1448; Louis Levine, “The Development of Syndicalism in America,” *Political Science Quarterly* 28 (1913): 451–79; Salvatore Salerno, *Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989); Salerno, “No God, No Master: Italian Anarchists and the Industrial Workers of the World,” in *The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism: Politics, Labor, and Culture*, ed. Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 171–87; Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 349–50.

⁶ William Z. Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin* (New York: International Publishers, 1937), 63; Edward P. Johanningmeier, “William Z. Foster and the Syndicalist League of North America,” *Labor History* 30, no. 3 (1989): 329–53;

Additionally, anarchists were in the forefront of causes as diverse as birth control, civil liberties, avant-garde art, progressive education, movements of the unemployed, and antimilitarism. Though Peter Kropotkin and several prominent French anarchists declared their support for military action against Germany, nearly all of their comrades in America took a strong position opposing the First World War, drafting an “International Manifesto on the War” and agitating from coast to coast. Russian-born anarchists Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman helped organize the Anti-conscription League when America entered the conflict, for which they were arrested in July 1917.⁷

By that time, however, all eyes had turned to Russia, where a popular uprising had toppled the tsarist regime. When the new Russian provisional government declared a general amnesty for all political exiles, regional committees were established by representatives from the Russian Federation of the Socialist Party, the UORW, and other radical groups to coordinate repatriations, with anarchists in control of both the New York and Pittsburgh committees.⁸ Funds provided by the provisional government and the Anarchist Red Cross, an organization founded by Russian exiles to aid anarchists imprisoned under the tsar, paid for the return of at least four hundred Russian revolutionaries between March and June 1917, including the entire editorial staff of the UORW’s paper *Golos Truda*, with their printing press in tow.⁹ Returned Russian American anarchists would have a profound impact on both the revolution and, later, American anarchists’ critiques of it.

UORW organizers founded the Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda in Petrograd in July and reestablished *Golos Truda*, which called for a renewed revolution that would “be anti-statist in its methods of struggle, Syndicalist in its economic content and federalist in its political tasks.” *Golos Truda*’s circulation quickly reached twenty-five thousand and, according to Victor Serge, “at various moments ... rivaled Lenin’s *Pravda* in influence.” Its program found strong support among several unions and within the factory committee movement that sought some degree of workers’ control over production. In the Donets Basin, returnees organized a reported twenty-five to thirty thousand miners under the program of the IWW, and in July 1917 the IWW’s General Executive Board (GEB) approved a request that the Cyrillic type from the union’s defunct Russian-language newspaper be sent to repatriates in Vladivostok “to be used in starting a

James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), chapter 3.

⁷ See Linda Gordon, *Women’s Body, Women’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman, 1976); David M. Rabban, *Free Speech in Its Forgotten Years, 1870–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Allan Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1976), 236–43; “International Manifesto on the War,” *Mother Earth* (New York), May 1915; H. C. Peterson and Gilbert C. Fite, *Opponents of War, 1917–1918* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 25–26.

⁸ *Revolutionary Radicalism*, 1:628–29; report of John R. Dillon, May 25, 1917, Record Group 165, 10110–38, Military Intelligence Division, U.S. Army, National Archives and Records Administration, reprinted in *U.S. Military Intelligence Reports: Surveillance of Radicals in the United States, 1917–1941*, ed. Randolph Boehm (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), microform reel 1:190–206.

⁹ Boris Yelensky, *In the Struggle for Equality: The Story of the Anarchist Red Cross* (Chicago: Alexander Berkman Aid Fund, 1958), 36–40; Thomas J. Tunney, *Throttled! The Detection of the German and Anarchist Bomb Plotters* (Boston: Small, Maynard, and Company, 1920), 267–69.

Russian I.W.W. paper there.”¹⁰ The Russian anarchist movement, largely under the guidance of returned anarchists from America, mushroomed from a mere two hundred members of fewer than a dozen organizations at the beginning of 1917 to an estimated ten thousand anarchists active in 130 towns and cities the following year.¹¹

However, the same conditions that contributed to anarchism’s phenomenal growth — the failure of the provisional government to stabilize the economy or pull out of the war — fostered far greater support for the Bolshevik Party. For decades, anarchists had argued that any Socialist revolution relying on the capture of state power was bound to end in tyranny. Yet in 1917 they proved to be among the Bolsheviks’ closest allies, swept up in the enthusiasm of the moment and delighted by the libertarian turn in the declarations of Lenin, who called for “workers’ control” and “the ‘smashing’ of the present-day state machine.”¹² Emma Goldman reported that the Russian anarchists returning from America “left this country with the determination to help the Bolsheviks,” and former UORW activists Vladimir (“Bill”) Shatoff and Khaim (“Efim”) Yarchuk, along with two other anarchists, were members of the Military-Revolutionary Committee that engineered the October Revolution under Trotsky.¹³ In a bizarre turn of events, anarchists hoping to hasten the destruction of the state eagerly helped to establish a Marxist dictatorship.

Goldman, out on bail, toured the United States defending the new Bolshevik regime as the “voice [of] the inarticulate Russian people,” and Alexander Berkman hailed the October Revolution as “the Messiah come,” praising the Bolsheviks as “the expression of the most fundamental longing of the human soul that demands fullest individual liberty.”¹⁴ Non-Russians were eager to aid in the struggle as well; on March 2, 1918, the anarchist educational Francisco Ferrer Association sent a cable to Trotsky announcing: “Ferrer Association is with you to the death. Are forming Red Guards to help you defend the Revolution.” That same month an Italian-language anarchist paper called on readers to join the “American Red Guard” because “the cause of the *Bolshevik* [*sic*] is the cause of all workers.” And many anarchists, including future Communist

¹⁰ “Declaration of the Petrograd Union of Anarcho-syndicalist Propaganda,” *Golos Truda* (Petrograd), August 11, 1917, in *The Anarchists in the Russian Revolution*, ed. Paul Avrich (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 71; Victor Serge, *Year One of the Russian Revolution*, trans. and ed. Peter Sedgwick (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1972), 213; Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 125, 146–47, 167 n. 60; John W. Copp, “The Role of the Anarchists in the Russian Revolution and Civil War, 1917–1921: A Case Study in Conspiratorial Party Behavior during Revolution” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1992), 64–65, 70–76; Carmen Sirianni, *Workers Control and Socialist Democracy: The Soviet Experience* (London: Verso, 1982), 50–52; Boris Yelensky, *In sotsialn shturem: zikhroyes fun der rusisher revolutsie* (Buenos Aires: Yidisher ratsionalistisher gezelshaft, 1967), 14–54; “Synopsis of Minutes of Meeting of General Executive Board, held June 29th–July 6th, 1917,” box 7, folder 3, Industrial Workers of the World Collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University (hereafter cited as IWW Collection).

¹¹ S. A. Smith, *Red Petrograd: Revolution in the Factories, 1917–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 143; Copp, “The Role of the Anarchists,” 110–11, 172; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 173–74, n. 7.

¹² Diane Koenker, *Moscow Workers and the 1917 Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 219–20; V. I. Lenin, “Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution,” in *Anarchism and Anarchosyndicalism*, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, and Vladimir I. Lenin (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), 266–67; V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1918; repr., Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1976), 64.

¹³ Emma Goldman, “An Unpublished Letter,” *Freedom* (New York), October–November 1919; Copp, “The Role of the Anarchists,” 181–82.

¹⁴ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931; repr., Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith/Gibbs M. Smith, 1982), 645; Goldman, “The Great Hope,” *Mother Earth Bulletin* (New York), January 1918; A. B., “Russia and Elsewhere,” *Mother Earth*, October 1917; Alexander Berkman, “The Surgeon’s Duty,” *Mother Earth Bulletin*, January 1918. See also Emma Goldman, *The Truth about the Bolsheviks* [*sic*] (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, n.d. [1918]).

writer Mike Gold, did join hundreds of other aspiring Red Guard volunteers but were foiled by a State Department ban on American travel to Russia.¹⁵

Fraye Arbeter Shtime editor Saul Yanovsky, however, condemned the Bolsheviks upon their seizure of power, labeling Lenin a “Mephistopheles” who would not live up to his libertarian rhetoric. But Yanovsky, who had signed the “International Manifesto on the War” in 1915, also came out in favor of the war effort against Germany. With the tsar no longer represented among the Allies, he argued, a victory for the Western democracies was preferable to one for imperialist Germany, and Yanovsky even praised President Wilson’s Fourteen Points, seriously discrediting him in the eyes of fellow anarchists. By 1919, the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*’s circulation had dropped to twelve thousand and Yanovsky was forced to resign his post.¹⁶

When Yanovsky’s replacement, Jacob Merison, also refused to run articles lauding the Bolsheviks, the editorship passed temporarily to the Communist Moyshe Kats.¹⁷ Defense of the Russian Revolution also became the burning cause for the militant wing of the Yiddish-speaking movement that rejected the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* as too moderate and published the illegal papers *Frayhayt* and *Der Shturm* in 1917–18. After Allied troops landed in Russia in the summer of 1918, five members of this group were arrested in New York under the Sedition Act for distributing leaflets urging munitions workers to strike in protest. Their case resulted in the landmark Supreme Court case *Jacob Abrams et al. v. United States* and the eventual deportation of the defendants to the Soviet Union in 1921.¹⁸

Between the defendants’ arrest and deportation, however, anarchist views of Bolshevism shifted dramatically. In Russia, anarchists swiftly regretted aiding the Bolsheviks, who quickly began transforming the soviets, trade unions, and factory committees into appendages of their own centralized power and replaced workers’ control with “one-man management” and militaristic “iron discipline.”¹⁹ In April 1918, the Cheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution and Sabotage) raided increasingly restive anarchist groups in Moscow and Petrograd, resulting in more than fifty deaths and five hundred arrests. In the aftermath, several anarchist papers, including *Golos Truda*, were shut down. Numerous anarchists fled to the Volga or Ukraine, where Bolshevik authority had yet to solidify, and many placed their hopes in the peasant army led by Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno, which briefly established an autonomous region of several hundred square miles where “free soviets” were formed. The Makhno-

¹⁵ *Revolutionary Radicalism*, 1:846–47; “Salviamo la rivoluzione russa!” *Nuovi Tempi* (Paterson, NJ), March 1918; Avrich, *Modern School Movement*, 251; Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York: Viking Press, 1957), 108–9. Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ Gordin, *Sh. Yanovsky*, 322–31; Joseph Cohen, *Di yidish-anarkhistishe bavegung in Amerike: historisher iberblik un perzenlekhe iberlebungen* (Philadelphia: Radical Library, 1945), 326, 340; *Revolutionary Radicalism*, 2:2004.

¹⁷ Cohen, *Di yidish-anarkhistishe bavegung*, 342–43, 371. On Kats, see *Moysheh Kats bukh: zamlung fun oytobiografishe skitsn, derinerungen, eseyen vegn literatur, geshikhte, portretn un polemic*, ed. P. Novik (New York: Moysheh Kats Bukh-Komitet, 1963). He should not be confused with the anarchist Moyshe Kats, who edited the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* in 1891–92.

¹⁸ Richard Polenberg, *Fighting Faiths: The Abrams Case, the Supreme Court, and Free Speech* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).

¹⁹ Jay B. Sorenson, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism, 1917–1928* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969); Maurice Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers’ Control, 1917–1921: The State and Counter-Revolution* (Detroit: Black Rose Books, 1975); Gennady Shkliarevskhy, *Labor in the Russian Revolution: Factory Committees and Trade Unions, 1917–1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 169–77; Sirianni, *Workers Control*.

vists' Cultural and Educational Section, which articulated the movement's ideology, was soon filled with anarchists returned from America.²⁰

Only fragmentary accounts of these events reached the United States. Mainstream American newspaper stories on Russia were frequently unreliable, at times contradictory, and hostile to the Bolsheviks and anarchists alike, who were often conflated.²¹ Direct contact with the Russian anarchist movement was cut off in 1918, and American anarchists' own press suffered severely during this period as a result of the postwar antiradical Red Scare, during which nearly half of all anarchist publications were suppressed or forced to cease — five successive Russian-language anarchist papers closed between 1917 and 1920, no Spanish-language paper was printed from 1919 to 1921, and between August 1918 and April 1919 (and again from August 1922 to November 1924) no significant English-language paper appeared in the entire country. Amid this confusion, repression, and lack of information, wishful thinking contributed much to initial anarchist impressions of Bolshevism.

The Bolshevik Myth

By the beginning of 1919, however, one anarchist writer noted that “a considerable number of Anarchists do not agree with the Bolsheviks in Russia.” An Italian-language paper urged its readers to “aid the Bolsheviks in all that truly serves the emancipation of the proletariat” but followed this with a warning that the Bolsheviks made use of “a government, of an authority that, however different in form from capitalist governments and authority, will be a substantial obstacle to all additional progress.”²² Russian-born anarchists, who had access to a few copies of *Golos Truda* that had made their way to the United States, were firmer in their rejection of Bolshevism. During a conference of Russians held in New York on January 6, 1919, to establish a “Soviet of Workers' Deputies of the United States and Canada,” controversy erupted when anarchist delegates refused to endorse the Bolshevik regime. Three Socialist delegates walked out in disgust, and others labeled the dissenters “Anarcho-Mensheviks” and “counter revolutionists,” prompting a reprimand from the newly established Communist International (Comintern), which, ironically, demanded cooperation with the anarchists.²³

Anarchist fears found confirmation in two series of articles that appeared in American newspapers in February 1919 and July 1920 by Robert Minor, an anarchist illustrator and journalist who arrived in Russia on the eve of the April 1918 raids. His sketch of the Russian Revolution laid the foundation for future anarchist interpretations: “The workmen had taken the factories, and the peasants the land” during its first phase, and “Anarchistic syndicalism” had been “practically controlling the industries of Russia.” After the Bolsheviks took power, they legalized what had already occurred, then turned on the anarchists, who had become “the strongest opponents

²⁰ Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 184–85, 205–6, 215; Alexander Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth (Diary 1920–1922)* (1925; repr., London: Pluto Press, 1989), chapter 24; Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1925), 109–110; Michael Palij, *The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), 260; Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement (1918–1921)*, trans. Lorraine Perlman and Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black and Red, 1974), 212, 231.

²¹ See Christopher Lasch, *The American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 118–24.

²² “Our Comrades on Trial,” *Freedom*, January 15, 1919; “Il Bolscevichismo,” *Il Bollettino de l'Era Nuova* (Paterson, NJ), March 1, 1919; “Noi e i Bolscevichi,” *Il Bollettino de l'Era Nuova*, April 1, 1919.

²³ J. Abrams, “The Second Russian Convention,” *Freedom*, February 15, 1919; *Revolutionary Radicalism*, 1:652–53.

Lenin now has.”²⁴ Minor’s reports caused a stir within radical circles and were attacked in the Socialist press. But the *Anarchist Soviet Bulletin*, an illegal paper published in New York, took up Minor’s defense in its first issue, and American anarchist editor Harry Kelly did the same, arguing that it was “vitally important that revolutionists, of all people, know the truth so as to avoid the mistakes, if there are any, made by the Russians.” Yet *Il Martello*, edited by Italian anarcho-syndicalist Carlo Tresca, attacked Minor as an “intellectual” writing for the “reactionary” press and continued to laud the Bolshevik “dictatorship of the proletariat” until 1921.²⁵

On January 19, 1920, a new influx of anarchists entered Russia, deported from America on-board the U.S.S. *Buford*. Among them were Emma Goldman, Alexander Berkman, and 184 members of the UORW. Mistaking the Russian movement’s weak position as a result of inactivity and sectarianism rather than repression, Goldman and Berkman remained supportive of the Bolsheviks for more than a year after their arrival. In the meantime, the Red Army betrayed and routed Makhno’s troops in November 1920, marking the end of major anarchist activity in Russia. The final symbolic blow, which turned Goldman and Berkman firmly against the regime, came in March 1921 when Trotsky commanded the bloody suppression of the Kronstadt “free soviet” that called for the restoration of civil liberties and democratic soviets in place of one-party rule.²⁶

In the aftermath of the Kronstadt affair, the Bolsheviks banned internal factions in the name of party unity, ordered renewed raids on anarchist groups, deported leading anarchists (including Goldman and Berkman), and refused to admit further anarchist deportees from the United States. In 1923, anarchists were included in the first group of prisoners sent to the island of Solovetsky, the initial outpost of the “Gulag Archipelago,” and by 1924 anarchist sources could count at least 300 Russian anarchists in prisons or work camps, 181 exiled abroad, and scores who had been executed or died in prison. According to one well-informed source, approximately 90 percent of those anarchists who had returned from the United States eventually met their deaths in Russian prisons, work camps, or at the hands of the Cheka and its successors.²⁷

Disturbing reports of these events continued to accumulate in the United States. “As time went on,” Harry Kelly recalled, “word came from some of our comrades overseas that the new Soviet nation was not the workers’ paradise that it had been pictured in the early elated reports from Petrograd and Moscow. Letters from the disillusioned were read aloud at some of our meetings.” After 1920, the trickle of critical anarchist writings became an international deluge, with important pieces reaching American readers by such influential figures as Luigi Galleani (who had been deported from the United States to Italy in 1919), Rudolf Rocker, and Peter Kropotkin

²⁴ Quoted in Fred S. Graham [Marcus Graham], *Anarchism and the World Revolution: An Answer to Robert Minor*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: n.p., 1921), 13, 15; Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 204. Minor’s articles were published in the New York *Evening World* and *Butte Daily Bulletin*.

²⁵ Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 201–204; “The Answer — Is Guilty!” *Anarchist Soviet Bulletin* (New York), April 1919; Harry Kelly, “Notes,” *Freedom*, July 1919; Il Tamburino, “In difesa del governo bolshevico,” *Il Martello* (New York), supplement, February 16, 1919.

²⁶ See Paul Avrich, *Kronstadt, 1921* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

²⁷ Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 230–31; “An Open Letter to the Russian Premier Lenin,” *Free Society* (New York), December 1921; Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 20–21; “Transfer of All Politicals to Solovietski” and “The Latest News from Russia,” *Behind the Bars* (New York), January 1924; George Leggett, *The Cheka: Lenin’s Political Police* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 310–11; Yelensky, *In the Struggle for Equality*, 36.

(who died in Russia in February 1921).²⁸ From 1922–24, moreover, the exiled Berkman and Goldman wrote several influential accounts of their experiences and critiques of Bolshevism, and Berkman compiled a valuable collection of first-hand accounts from Russian political prisoners for the book *Letters from Russian Prisons* (1925), published by a committee of American radicals and liberals headed by American Civil Liberties Union founder Roger Baldwin.²⁹ Together these writings, written in diverse corners of the globe and translated into a variety of languages, formed a collective analysis of the Russian Revolution and Communist politics that came to dominate anarchist discourse.

Despite the collapse of anarchists' hopes in Russia, the revolution nevertheless renewed their faith in the capacity of ordinary people to collectively restructure society from below. The spontaneous insurrection of February 1917 and the plethora of self-organization that followed, from soviets to partisan armies, all seemed to conform to anarchist theory. "The Russian masses," Berkman later wrote with only slight exaggeration, "were not too 'backward' to abolish the Tsar, to defeat the Provisional Government, to destroy capitalism and the wage system, to turn the land over to the peasantry and the industries to the workers." This interpretation, historian Edward Acton notes, has much in common with recent social histories of the revolution, especially in its "willingness to take seriously the aspirations of the masses, to credit them with an independence, sense of direction and rationality of their own."³⁰

According to the anarchists, however, "disastrous results were inevitable" from the moment the Bolsheviks seized power. It was not a question of "the character of the Bolsheviks," Goldman insisted, but one of the "principles and methods of Bolshevism." The dictatorship of any minority party or group — especially one faced with civil war and foreign intervention — would necessarily resort to unilateral decrees and terror, thereby becoming a "dictatorship over the proletariat."³¹ This critique was based on an often overlooked feature of anarchist theory: its unique theory of class. As far back as 1873, Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin had predicted that Socialist revolutionaries who seized power would immediately begin "concentrating in their own hands all commercial, industrial, agricultural, and even scientific production, and will divide the people into two armies, one industrial and one agrarian, under the direct command of state engineers, who will form *a new privileged scientific and political class*." Political power exercised through monopolies of knowledge and the means of coercion was viewed as analogous to control of the

²⁸ Harry Kelly, "Roll Back the Years: Odyssey of a Libertarian," unpublished manuscript (n.d.), boxes 26–27, 27:2, John Nicholas Beffel Collection, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University (hereafter cited as Tamiment Library); Luigi Galleani, "Lenin," *Cronaca Sovversiva* (Turin), June 12–July 10, 1920, cited in Ugo Fedeli, *Luigi Galleani: quarant'anni di lotte rivoluzionarie (1891–1931)* (Censa: L'Antistato, 1956), 166; R. Rocker, "Raten-sistem oder diktatur?" *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* (New York), May 15 through May 29, 1920; "Peter Kropotkin's Last Message," *Free Society*, March 1921.

²⁹ Alexander Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy (a Review and an Outlook)* (Berlin: Sindikalist, 1922), Berkman, *The Kronstadt Rebellion* (Berlin: Sindikalist, 1922), and [Berkman, ed.], *The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party* (Berlin: Sindikalist, 1922), all reprinted in Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy*, comp. William G. Nowlin Jr. (Sanday: Cienfuegos Press, 1976); Goldman, *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution* (London: Freedom Press, 1922); Goldman, *My Disillusionment*; Berkman, *The Bolshevik Myth*; International Committee for Political Prisoners, *Letters from Russian Prisons* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925).

³⁰ Alexander Berkman, *Now and After: The ABC of Communist Anarchism* (New York: Jewish Anarchist Federation, 1929), 168; Edward Acton, "The Libertarians Vindicated? The Libertarian View of the Revolution in Light of Recent Western Research," in *Revolution in Russia: Reassessments of 1917*, ed. Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel, and Baruch Knei-Paz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 388–405 (quote on 393).

³¹ Berkman, *Now and After*, 168; Goldman, *My Disillusionment*, 250–51; Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy*, 20.

means of production. Abba Gordin, a former “Soviet anarchist” who fled to the United States in 1924, made the comparison explicit: “A ruler is an owner. He owns a certain Public force, a public energy. He uses and, very often, almost always, abuses it.” Hence anarchists perceived two different, but not mutually exclusive, forms of class division, one economic and the other political. Italian anarchist writer Luigi Fabbri maintained that the state is a “creator of privilege, thereby bringing about new class divisions... In short, class divisions will persist and classes will never be finally abolished as long as the state remains.” A “workers’ state” was therefore a contradiction in terms and, accordingly, the “fundamental characteristic of Bolshevik psychology was distrust of the masses, of the proletariat.”³²

Anarchists were also the first group to label Soviet Communism a form of “state capitalism.” This term did not literally mean that the Soviet economy was capitalist in the traditional sense — as it lacked markets and competition — but rather that under state ownership and its functionaries the relations among worker, employer, and the means of production remained exploitative and “inherent social antagonisms” — that is, class conflict — persisted. The reforms reinstating limited private enterprise under the New Economic Policy of 1921 were, therefore, seen as simply a synthesis of traditional and state capitalism that “made the proletarian ‘dictator’ a common, every-day wage slave, like his brother in countries unblessed with Socialist dictatorship.”³³

Anarchists such as Goldman argued that, by operating under the false assumption that state power could abolish class divisions rather than reproduce them, “the very means [the Bolsheviks] have employed have destroyed the realisation [*sic*] of their end.” Rather than a model to be emulated, the Russian Revolution “demonstrated beyond doubt that the State idea, State Socialism, in all its manifestations (economic, political, social, educational) is entirely and hopelessly bankrupt.” Mollie Steimer, one of the *Abrams* defendants deported to the Soviet Union, reported back that instead of a free Socialist society, “Russia of today is a great prison where every individual who is known not to be in full agreement with the Communists is spied upon ... as an enemy of the government.” And, as another anarchist writer reflecting on “Fifteen Years of Bolshevik Rule” later observed: “A prison is a poor place to build a new world in.”³⁴

In an infuriating paradox, the success of the Bolsheviks provided powerful evidence supporting anarchist doctrines. In 1922, the first issue of the Italian-language paper *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* flatly stated this contradiction: “Our hopes of a world-wide revolution fell, reconfirming us, with a practical demonstration, in our theoretical affirmations.” But Russia, the lens through which radicals of all stripes now viewed the world, failed to provide anarchists with a clear idea of how to realize their own goals and instead highlighted the movement’s ongoing crisis of praxis. More importantly, anarchists’ efforts were hampered by an ongoing struggle against Commu-

³² Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, trans. and ed. Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 181 (emphasis added); Abba Gordin, “Authority,” *Clarion* (New York), February–March 1934; Luigi Fabbri, *Anarchia e comunismo “scientifico”* (Milan: Tempi Nuovi, 1922), repr. and trans. in Nikolai Bakharin, Luigi Fabbri, and Rudolf Rocker, *The Poverty of Statism* (Orkney: Cienfuegos Press, 1981), 13–49 (quote on 20); *The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party*, 41.

³³ Michael S. Fox, “Ante Ciliga, Trotskii, and State Capitalism: Theory, Tactics, and Reevaluation during the Purge Era, 1935–1939,” *Slavic Review* 50, no. 1 (1991): 135–36; Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 191–93; *The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party*, 54; Berkman, *The Russian Tragedy*, 27 (quote). For later theories of state capitalism and a Soviet “new class,” see Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917*, trans. Jurriaan Bendien (Boston: Brill, 2007).

³⁴ Goldman, *The Crushing of the Russian Revolution*, 7; Goldman, *My Disillusionment*, 251–52; “Statement by Mollie Steimer,” in *Letters from Russian Prisons*, 99; “Fifteen Years of Bolshevik Rule,” *Freedom*, January 23, 1933.

nism. Answering the call of their persecuted Russian comrades to make the fight against Soviet totalitarianism “one of the main tasks of the International Anarchist Movement,” anarchists plunged into conflicts that often worked against their own interests.³⁵

If prior to 1917 the borders between anarchism, syndicalism, and left-wing Socialism had been fluid, the Russian Revolution transformed these ideological boundaries into sites of territorial warfare. The Communist Party was rarely successful in winning over anarchists and syndicalists, most obviously due to the latter’s close ties to the embattled Russian anarchists and the potent influence of Goldman and Berkman in particular. National, ethnic, and linguistic divisions mattered little; Spanish-born anarchist and IWW member Juan Andio recalled: “We were all sympathetic to the Russian Revolution at first ... But when Emma Goldman’s pamphlet came, telling of the crushing of the revolution, that was the end of it.” Veteran Jewish anarchist Dr. Michael A. Cohn similarly admitted in 1922 that he “was a hog-headed Bolsh[evik] for the first 2, 3 years following the Soviet Revolution,” but events “made my position untenable” and the writings of Goldman, Berkman, and other Russian anarchists “served to cap the climax in this respect.”³⁶

During the first years of the revolution, a number of anarchists had, like Cohn, considered themselves Communists and many joined one of the two American Communist parties founded in 1918, but most left after a short time.³⁷ Those who remained with the Communists, in the opinion of Harry Kelly, “were not really Anarchists at all, though they thought they were — but were *economic revolutionists*, and when the test of libertarianism came, they were to be found in the seats of the authoritarians.” The most surprising of these was Robert Minor, who in 1920 outraged former comrades by announcing his acceptance of Leninism.³⁸ In addition, most of the Chicago anarchist cadre belonging to William Z. Foster’s Trade Union Educational League followed Foster and the League into the Communist Party, though many never fully abandoned their anarchism and eventually dropped out.³⁹

A more sustained effort was made by both the Comintern and American Communists to bring the IWW round to the Communist position. In 1918, the union had published a glowing account of the Soviet regime by member Harrison George, and it was asked to affiliate with the Comintern on the grounds that the Bolsheviks “also want to abolish the State ... to make way for an industrial administrative body which will be something like the General Executive Board of the I. W. W.” A contested and ultimately voided referendum on the question rejected this

³⁵ Ilio, “Speranze, delusioni e fede,” *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* (New York), April 15, 1922; “A Letter from the Anarchists of Russia to the Comrades Abroad,” *Free Society*, January–February 1922 (emphasis in original).

³⁶ Juan Anido, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 396; M. A. C. [Michael A. Cohn] to Sasha [Alexander Berkman], May 18, [1922], folder 14, Alexander Berkman Papers (hereafter cited as Berkman Papers), International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam (hereafter cited as IISH).

³⁷ Paul Buhle, “Freie Arbeter Shtimme (1890–1976),” in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 246; Rudolf J. Vecoli, “The Making and Un-making of the Italian American Working Class,” in Cannistraro and Meyer, *Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism*, 56.

³⁸ Kelly, “Roll Back the Years,” 27:6; Antliff, *Anarchist Modernism*, 212–13; Graham, *Anarchism and the World Revolution*.

³⁹ Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 292; Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 112–13; Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 71–72, 195; Mary Carr, “Jay Fox: Anarchist of Home,” *Columbia* 4 (1990): 3–10. Moreover, according to James R. Barrett, “There is some reason to believe that [Foster’s wife, Esther Abramowitz] remained an anarchist until the end of her life in the 1960s.” Hutchins Hapgood, *The Spirit of Labor*, ed. James R. Barrett (repr., Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004 [1907]), 428.

request, but the union's sympathetic GEB nevertheless removed the anarcho-syndicalist editor of its *One Big Union Monthly* for criticizing the Bolsheviks, suspended Philadelphia's Marine Transport Workers Local 8 for loading munitions that Communist sources alleged were to be used against the Red Army, and accepted an invitation to the founding congress of the Communist Red International of Labor Unions (RILU) in Moscow in 1919.⁴⁰

Though the Comintern induced IWW cofounder William ("Big Bill") Haywood and Bulgarian-born editor George Andreychine to jump bail from the mass IWW trial on appeal at the time and flee to the Soviet Union, the IWW's official delegate to the RILU conference issued a scathing report of the proceedings. A new GEB declared that membership in the RILU was "absolutely impossible," as that body sharply criticized the "dual unionism" of organizations such as the IWW and demanded that revolutionaries "bore from within" mainstream labor organizations, endorse the dictatorship of the proletariat, and become appendages of their respective national Communist parties. The IWW then fired openly Communist editors from its papers, expelled Communist activist George Hardy, and published works by anarchists and dissident Bolsheviks critical of the new regime.⁴¹ Though many individual IWW members did become Communists, they represented only a small fraction of the union — perhaps two thousand in all, according to an estimate based on Communist sources. In short, the ideological journey made by individuals such as Minor and Foster was not representative of their generation of anarchists and syndicalists, despite many historians' claims to the contrary.⁴²

Uncivil War

American anarchism, though weakened, also survived the Red Scare. Between 1917 and 1920, approximately five hundred anarchists or members of anarchist organizations were arrested on deportation warrants, at least three hundred fifty of who were actually expelled from the country, but anarchist activity quickly rebounded. Sources within the movement observed "a general

⁴⁰ Harrison George, *The Red Dawn: The Bolsheviks and the I.W.W.* (Chicago: I.W.W. Publishing Bureau, n.d. [1918]); Gregory Zinoviev, "The Third International Appeals to the I. W. W.," *Solidarity* (Chicago), August 14, 1920; John S. Gambs, *The Decline of the I.W.W.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 82–83; "Removal of Editor of the One Big Union Monthly," *One Big Union Monthly* (Chicago), January 1921; E. F. Doree and Walter T. Nef, *The Philadelphia Controversy: Being a Complete and Detailed Statement of All That Has Occurred* (n.p. [Philadelphia]: Philadelphia Branch, M. T. W., n.d. [1921]); Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 60–64; Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), chapter 7. Local 8 was reinstated in October 1920 but was suspended in December for charging dues in excess of the union's constitutional limits.

⁴¹ Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern: Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale, 1920–1937* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 229–34, 411–12; George Williams, *The First Congress of the Red Trade Union International at Moscow, 1921*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, n.d. [1922]); *The I. W. W. Reply to the Red Trade Union International (Moscow)* (Chicago: General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World, 1922), quote on 23; Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 76, 87–88; George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years: Memories of the Fight for Freedom on Five Continents* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1956), 145–47; Augustine Souchy, *The Workers and Peasants of Russia: How They Live* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, n.d. [ca. 1922]); Alexandre Kolantay, *The Workers Opposition in Russia* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, n.d. [ca. 1921]).

⁴² Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 82. Cf. Barrett, *William Z. Foster*, 197; Larry Peterson, "Revolutionary Socialism and Industrial Unrest in the Era of the Winnipeg General Strike: The Origins of Communist Labour Unionism in Europe and North America," *Labour/Le Travail* 13 (1984): 115–31; Bryan D. Palmer, *James P. Cannon and the Origins of the American Revolutionary Left, 1890–1928* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 16–17.

revival amongst the Comrades” beginning in 1925 and could count at least seventy-five active anarchist organizations in 1933, and “some one hundred groups throughout the country [were] actually functioning” by 1939.⁴³ Available circulation figures show that the anarchist press retained at least half of its prewar readership through the 1920s and 1930s, equivalent to approximately 10 percent of the circulation of the Communist Party’s press during the same period (and more than twice that share if the IWW’s press is included).⁴⁴

The movement that reemerged in the twenties was different from that of a decade earlier, however. The Union of Russian Workers – renamed the Union of Russian Toilers in 1922 – had lost its leadership to return migration and deportation, and its members drifted toward Communism, anti-Communist Russian nationalism, mysticism, or sectarian squabbling, leaving the Russian-speaking movement just a few hundred strong by the end of the thirties.⁴⁵ In 1921, a Jewish Anarchist Federation with twenty-five chapters was established to support the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, which in 1923 became a strictly anarchist paper once again and maintained a circulation of between seven and ten thousand through the early thirties. But the federation counted just thirteen branches with four hundred members in 1930, and the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime* dropped to a circulation of five thousand in 1935. After 1917, one Jewish anarchist complained, the movement “was only a shadow of what it had been before.”⁴⁶

By contrast, although Italian American anarchism had been hard-hit by the Red Scare, it remained a strong and dynamic force through the thirties. Tresca’s *Il Martello* had a circulation of eight thousand in 1929 and its antisindicalist rival, *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, sustained a circulation of around five thousand but claimed to represent twelve to fifteen thousand militants. In addition, these years saw the apex of a smaller Spanish American movement, which counted “about 2,500 active Spanish anarchists in the United States, as well as about 2,000 sympathizers.”⁴⁷ The interwar decades also witnessed the growth of “international groups” composed of English-speaking immigrants and native-born Americans, and a corresponding revival of the English-language anarchist press.

⁴³ Kate Holladay Claghorn, *The Immigrant’s Day in Court* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), 453–60; Jane Perry Clark, *Deportation of Aliens from the United States to Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 220–21; Anna L. Sosnovsky to Mollie [Steimer], January 12, 1925, folder 29, Senya Fléchine Papers, IISH; *Freedom*, March 18, 1933; Conference Committee for Anarchist Propaganda in English to J. J. Cohen, May 1, 1939, in “Anarchism – Cohen, Joseph J.,” subject vertical file, Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Harlan Hatcher Graduate Library, University of Michigan, Anne Arbor (hereafter cited as Labadie Collection).

⁴⁴ For the IWW press, see Kenyon Zimmer, “IWW Periodical Circulation Figures, 1905–1940,” katesharpleylibrary.pbwiki.com/Anarchist-newspaper-circulation (accessed November 25, 2008). For Communist figures, see Solon De Leon, ed., *American Labor Press Directory* (New York: Rand School of Social Science, 1925), 20–22; Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5, 166.

⁴⁵ Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 237–50; Victor Lynn and Wanda Swieda, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 368, 371; Vladimir F. Wertsman, “Russians,” in Hoerder, *Immigrant Labor Press*, 2:112.

⁴⁶ Herman Frank, “Anarchism and the Jews,” in *Struggle for Tomorrow: Modern Political Ideologies of the Jewish People*, ed. Basil J. Vlavianos and Feliks Gross (New York: Arts, 1954), 282; N. W. Ayer and Son’s *American Newspaper Annual Directory* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer & Son, 1923–25); Ahrne Thorne, interviewed by Paul Buhle, December 15, 1982, box 2, tape 265A, Oral History of the American Left, Tamiment Library; B. Axler to [Alexander] Berkman, August 21, 1930, folder 8, Berkman Papers; Michael A. Cohn to [Max] Nettlau, February 8, 1935, folder 307, Max Nettlau Papers, IISH; Morris Greenshner, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 380.

⁴⁷ Nunzio Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca: Portrait of a Rebel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 105; Paul Berman, “The Torch and the Axe: The Unknown Aftermath of the Sacco-Vanzetti Affair,” *Village Voice*, May 17, 1988; Robert D’Attilio, “L’Adunata dei Refrattari,” in Buhle, Buhle, and Georgakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 4; Marcelino García, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 392 (quote).

Furthermore, as Fred Thompson long ago pointed out and recent scholarship confirms, the IWW likewise rebounded from government repression. Rapid expansion brought IWW membership from a low of twenty-three thousand in 1921 to fifty-eight thousand by 1923, when it led a successful strike of agricultural workers in Washington.⁴⁸ But tensions between anarchist and Communist members, and more broadly between syndicalist decentralists and those who supported a more centralized union structure, soon came to a head.

Both the RILU and the Communist Party continued to court the IWW through the 1920s, and a Moscow-appointed committee of Communist members chided the union for being “swayed by an intriguing anarchist elem[e]nt which has traduced the Marxists in the organization and maneuvered it into a discreditable position of hostility toward Soviet Russia.” This was a reference to those who advocated affiliation with the anarcho-syndicalist International Working Men’s Association, which was founded in Berlin in the winter of 1922–23 and also sought to bring the IWW under its wing. The IWW refused to join either International, however, because of a fear of exacerbating its internal divisions, reluctance to explicitly link itself to anarchism, and its own ambitions of becoming an international labor body.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, conflict within the organization increased, with anarcho-syndicalists battling Communist influence both in the union’s press and with violent “breaker gangs.” The situation came to a head in 1924 when decentralists drew up an “emergency program” for reorganizing the union with fully autonomous industrial unions and without a GEB, which they accused of being dominated by a “political machine” under the influence of the Communist Party.⁵⁰ Though the GEB was almost certainly not controlled by Communists, party publications did openly support the “revolutionary centralists.” Moreover, Vern Smith, editor of the IWW papers *Industrial Solidarity* and *Industrial Pioneer*, was in fact a secret Communist Party operative working to steer the organization toward the RILU and the Communists and was expelled only in 1926 after his role was inadvertently revealed in a French Communist journal by party leader Earl Browder. According to historian Peter Cole, “clearly a number of important Wobblies...joined the Communists’ ranks by 1920 and wanted to bring the entire IWW with them; failing that, disruption of the IWW by Communists is plausible.”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Fred Thompson, “They Didn’t Suppress the Wobblies,” *Radical America* 1, no. 2 (1967): 1–5; Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 165; Nigel Anthony Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World in Oklahoma, 1905–1930* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1998); Greg Hall, *Harvest Wobblies: The Industrial Workers of the World and Agricultural Laborers in the American West, 1905–1930* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001); Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*.

⁴⁹ Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 87; Palmer, *James P. Cannon*, 169, 207; Harrison George, Mike Novak, and H. R. Richards to General Secretary-Treasurer, General Executive Board, and the Membership of the Industrial Workers of the World, n.d. [ca. 1923], box 25, folder 32, IWW Collection; Wayne Thorpe, “The IWW and the Search for an International Policy, 1905–1935,” *Anarcho-syndicalist Review* 42/43 (2006): 13–18. A 1934 referendum to affiliate with the IWMA passed but was later reversed.

⁵⁰ Patrick Renshaw, *The Wobblies: The Story of the IWW and Syndicalism in the United States*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999), 205–11; *The I. W. W. as Reorganized under the Emergency Program* (Chicago: Industrial Workers of the World, n.d. [1924]); *Communists Back Doyle*, leaflet (n.d. [1924]), box 158, IWW Collection; *Don’t Be Stampeded! The I.W.W. and Injunctions*, leaflet (n.d. [1924]), box 159, IWW Collection.

⁵¹ Renshaw, *The Wobblies*, 204–5; Thorpe, “The IWW,” 16; “Minutes of the Regular Session of the General Executive Board of the Industrial Workers of the World,” August 9–18, 1926; Thos. Donlon to Members of the I.W.W., September 21, 1926; and “Statement of the General Executive Board of the I.W.W.,” September 21, 1926, all in box 7, folder 12, IWW Collection; Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront*, 136.

The result of the 1924 controversy was an open split amid fistfights and legal squabbles. The decentralist emergency program faction, composed primarily of West Coast lumber, construction, and railroad workers, seceded and became known as the IWW (EP) but severely damaged its credibility by obtaining an injunction against the GEB for control of the union's headquarters. Though not explicitly anarchosyndicalist, the IWW (EP) included a number of anarchists, carried articles by anarchists in its papers, distributed anarchist materials, and at one point explored the possibility of joining the International Working Men's Association. The size of this organization is unknown but its newspaper, *New Unionist*, reported a circulation of forty-five hundred in 1925 and two thousand in 1927, though a general referendum from 1929 elicited only ninety-nine votes. Regardless, the IWW (EP) never realized its aim of becoming a viable labor union and, after several failed attempts to reunite with the original IWW, folded in the 1930s.⁵² Most rank-and-file members, meanwhile, "dropped out the middle" during the split, leaving the original IWW organization with twelve to seventeen thousand members in 1925 and only three to eight thousand in 1930 as technological and demographic changes within the agricultural and lumber industries further undermined the radical culture of migratory male workers that had previously sustained the IWW in those fields.⁵³ Only in Cleveland's metal shops did the IWW experience a revival in the thirties, thanks in part to anarchist organizers.⁵⁴ Ultimately, neither the Communists nor the anarchists had carried the IWW, which was itself decimated in the contest.

During this same period, another struggle took place within the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), American anarchism's only other major union foothold. In the early twenties, anarchists still occupied key positions in the ILGWU, including the editorship of its paper *Justice*, held by Saul Yanovsky after his departure from the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*, and its presidency, held from 1923 to 1928 by Morris Sigman, who before the war had been an IWW organizer and assistant secretary of a short-lived anarchist federation founded by Alexander Berkman.⁵⁵ But balancing their roles as anarchists, anti-Communists, and union officials proved impossible.

Again, events in Russia were the cause. When a Communist faction had first emerged in the ILGWU in 1919, it united with anarchists, syndicalists, and others in shop delegate leagues that, modeling themselves after both Russian soviets and the British shop delegate movement, called for greater union democracy and shop-floor autonomy. This alliance ended in 1922 when the leagues joined Foster's Trade Union Educational League, the only American affiliate of the

⁵² Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 123, n. 60; "Cle Elum Members Vote to Discuss I.M.W.A. [sic] Affiliation," *New Unionist* (Los Angeles), October 20, 1928; De Leon, *American Labor Press*, 11; "Notice!" *New Unionist*, May 7, 1927; William Randall, "General Referendum Vote," *New Unionist*, May 18, 1929. For a semifictional account of the 1924 split and IWW (EP), see Eugene Nelson, *Break Their Haughty Power: Joe Murphy and the Heyday of the Wobblies* (San Francisco: ism press, 1993).

⁵³ Fred W. Thompson and Jon Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World: Its First 100 Years* (Cincinnati, OH: Industrial Workers of the World, 2006), 143 (quote); Thompson, "They Didn't Suppress the Wobblies," 3; Gambs, *Decline of the I.W.W.*, 165–66; Hall, *Harvest Wobblies*, 164–67, 201, 212–13, 222–29; Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 13, 163; Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1967), 186.

⁵⁴ Roy T. Wortman, *From Syndicalism to Trade Unionism: The IWW in Ohio, 1905–1950* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985); Thompson and Bekken, *The Industrial Workers of the World*, 160–64.

⁵⁵ Louis Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers: A History of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1924), 124–25; A. B. [Alexander Berkman] to Tillie Sigman, August 25, 1931, folder 58, Berkman Papers.

RILU.⁵⁶ That same year, several Communist delegates were denied seats at the ILGWU's annual convention, and when Sigman was elected he continued this policy, repeatedly suspending Communist members and dissolving or reorganizing Communist-dominated locals for "conduct detrimental to the organization." At the union's 1924 convention anarchist union organizer Rose Pesotta — whose lover and fellow anarchist Theodore Kushnarev had been deported on the *Buford* and subsequently imprisoned by the Bolsheviks — introduced a successful motion demanding the release of all political prisoners in Russia. Thereafter, in the revealing words of anarchist member Isadore Wisotsky: "The Russian Revolution was fought out on the streets of New York and in meeting Halls."⁵⁷

But the ILGWU's "civil war" placed the anarchists in a contradictory position. The activities of the Communists were undeniably part of an effort to capture control of the union, yet their campaign against the union's entrenched bureaucracy and moderate Social Democratic officials mirrored the anarchists' own demands. In opposing the union's Communist-led "left wing," anarchists such as Sigman, Yanovsky, and Pesotta allied themselves with the same leadership they criticized and against a majority of the membership who backed the Communists and whose interests the anarchists claimed to have at heart. Jewish anarchist ranks split, with a minority condemning both the Communists and the anarchist-Socialist alliance "for seeking nothing but control," while anarchists within the union's Italian minority supported the Communists' demands for fuller rank-and-file representation.⁵⁸

Most anarchists within the union, however, felt that saving it from Communist control was most important, and Sigman believed that he was beholden to the decisions of this group. Under pressure from both the anti-Communist anarchists and the powerful Socialist officials on whom he depended, Sigman resorted to startlingly authoritarian tactics. Even when Sigman acted against the wishes of the more fervent anti-Communists by brokering a temporary peace with the Communists in 1925, his efforts were undermined by Socialists and his own refusal to agree to endorse the formation of a labor party. When Communists led a drawn-out and failed strike of New York cloak makers in 1926, the breach was reopened, and Sigman once again suspended Communist members.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Levine, *The Women's Garment Workers*, 354–59; David Dubinsky and A. H. Raskin, *David Dubinsky: A Life with Labor* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), 84–85; Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political, and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement*, rev. ed., 2 vols. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1969), 2:130–32.

⁵⁷ Robert D. Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue: David Dubinsky and the American Labor Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 29; Elaine Leeder, *The Gentle General: Rose Pesotta, Anarchist and Labor Organizer* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 26–30; John H. M. Laslett, *Labor and the Left: A Study of Socialist and Radical Influences in the American Labor Movement, 1881–1924* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), 128; Isadore Wisotsky, "Such a Life," unpublished manuscript (n.d. [ca. 1968]), Labadie Collection, 237.

⁵⁸ Anna L. Sosnovsky, "Garment Worker Tells about Wreck of Old Militant Union," *New Unionist*, July 30, 1927 (quote); Jennifer Guglielmo, "Donne Ribelli: Recovering the History of Italian Women's Radicalism in the United States," in Cannistraro and Meyer, *Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism*, 124. See also Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 177. Alice Kessler-Harris argues that the ILGWU's "civil war" can be viewed a power struggle between its male leadership and female membership, though Daniel E. Bender argues it became "a struggle over which male individuals would hold traditional officer positions." "Problems of Coalition Building: Women and Trade Unions in the 1920s," in Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 52–70; Daniel E. Bender, *Sweated Work, Weak Bodies: Anti-sweatshop Campaigns and Languages of Labor* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 174. However, the presence of female anarchists such as Pesotta, Anna Sosnovsky, and Rose Mirsky at the head of the anti-Communist faction suggests that political ideology played at least as important a role as gender.

⁵⁹ Irving Sterling, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 457; Parmet, *The Master of Seventh Avenue*, 39; Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, 2:140–41, 147–48.

In 1928, with the union's treasury and membership decimated, Sigman resigned. At the same time the Communists pulled out to found a dual union, leaving the ILGWU's leadership in the hands of the increasingly moderate Socialists. As a critical anarchist journal later noted, "Because [the anarchists] did not take an independent position and swung their influence to the corrupt officialdom, they unwittingly became a support for the machine politicians." Though Sigman had also fought the Socialist leadership for a more democratic union, his sustained anti-Communist efforts have led many historians to mischaracterize him and Yanovsky as "conservative" or "right-wing" socialists.⁶⁰ Anarchists continued to hold important positions within the union — Pesotta became a vice president in 1933 — but played the role of a "loyal opposition" and became enmeshed in the union bureaucracy. As the ILGWU became less radical, its appeal to anarchists waned, and when officials tried to recruit the young members of New York's anarchist Vanguard Group as organizers in 1933, they were rebuffed on the grounds that it was insufficiently revolutionary.⁶¹

Driven by an anti-Communist imperative stemming from the Russian Revolution, by the end of the twenties anarchist unionists had exited the revived IWW to found an ideologically pure but ill-fated breakaway organization, cast their lot with the moderate garment union leaders they despised, or found themselves a vocal but ineffective minority railing against both bureaucracy and Communist-led insurgency. They still played a role in the "new unionism" of the interwar years, but as individual militants rather than an organized force. Anarchists spearheaded the briefly successful International Federation of Workers in the Hotel, Restaurant, Club, and Catering Industries in New York, organized East Coast shipyard workers, and led rank-and-file oppositional movements within the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the United Mine Workers, helping to found the insurgent Progressive Miners of America in 1932.⁶² Numerous writers have also called attention to the presence of anarchist and syndicalist "two-card men" who maintained memberships in both the IWW and mainstream unions, though only in the case of maritime workers has their influence been explored in any detail. But it was Communist organizers, as well as members of the infinitesimal Trotskyist movement, who led the most important labor struggles of the period. Anarchism had become, in Paul Buhle's words, "an appendage to the mainstream trade

⁶⁰ S. Weiner [Sam Dolgoff], "For an Anarchist Policy in the Trade Unions," *Vanguard* (New York), April 1935 (quote); David Gurowsky, "Factional Disputes within the ILGWU, 1919–1928" (PhD diss., State University of New York, 1978); Stanley Nadel, "Reds versus Pinks: A Civil War in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union," *New York History* 66, no. 1 (1985): 49–72; Philip S. Foner, *The T.U.E.L. to the End of the Gompers Era*, vol. 9 of *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1991), 274–75; John Holmes, "American Jewish Communism and Garment Unionism in the 1920s," *American Communist History* 6, no. 2 (2007): 171–95.

⁶¹ Rose Pesotta, *Bread upon the Waters*, ed. John Nicholas Boffel (repr., New York: ILR Press, 1987 [1944]); Leeder, *The Gentle General*; Paul Buhle, "Anarchism and American Labor," *International Labor and Working Class History* 23 (1983): 21–34 (quote on 3); S. Morrison, "The I.L.G.W.U. Calls upon Youth," *Vanguard*, February 1933; Sidney Solomon, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 451.

⁶² *Revolutionary Radicalism*, 1:916–30; Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*, chapter 5; David Palmer, "'An Anarchist with a Program': East Coast Shipyard Workers, the Labor Left, and the Origins of Cold War Unionism," in *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture*, ed. Robert W. Cherny, William Issel, and Kieran Walsh Taylor (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 85–117; Epstein, *Jewish Labor*, 2:166–67; Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 105, 182; Gianna S. Panofsky, "A View of Two Major Centers of Italian Anarchism in the United States: Spring Valley and Chicago, Illinois," in *Italian Ethnicities: Their Languages, Literature and Lives*, ed. Dominic Candeloro, Fred L. Gardaphé, and Paolo A. Giordano (Staten Island, NY: American Italian Historical Association, 1990), 286, 295, n. 27; David Thoreau Wieck, *Woman from Spillertown: A Memoir of Agnes Burns Wieck* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 139, 157, 191.

union movement, a moral and educational force based upon the power of a few personalities and the resonance of fading traditions.”⁶³

Disunited Fronts

By contrast, Italian anarchists were “the most premature of ‘premature’ anti-Fascists” in the United States, where Mussolini enjoyed his greatest degree of support among Italian emigrants anywhere in the world. From 1921 onward, the Italian American movement made the struggle against Fascism its driving cause, battling Mussolini’s supporters however they could — with invectives, humor, fists, bricks, bats, stilettos, pistols, or explosives, as the situation demanded.⁶⁴ But from its first issue, *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* came out against United Front tactics and maintained that Communism and Fascism were virtually identical, a claim dramatized by ongoing international campaigns for the release of Francesco Ghezzi and Alfonso Petrini, two anarchists who had fled Fascist Italy to the Soviet Union only to be imprisoned for their anti-Communism. For these intransigents, it was ideologically incomprehensible for libertarians to aid the agents of Soviet totalitarianism in the name of combating their Fascist counterparts. Though it eschewed popular coalitions, this group was nevertheless feared by Italian authorities “because of its uncompromising militancy and belief in direct action,” demonstrated in an assassination plot against Mussolini for which Italian American anarchist Michele Schirru was arrested and executed in Rome in 1931.⁶⁵

Italian anarcho-syndicalists, however, initially viewed the Communists as valuable allies in the anti-Fascist struggle. Carlo Tresca, in particular, maintained good relations with Communists (his name appeared on Friends of the Soviet Union literature at least as late as 1929). Those associated with Tresca’s *Il Martello* were a key part of the Anti-Fascist Alliance of North America, a United Front organization created in 1925. A year later, however, the civil war taking place within the ILGWU spilled over into this organization, and the Italian sections of the ILGWU and Amalgamated Clothing Workers, which constituted the bulk of its membership, accused the Communists of political maneuvering and withdrew. By 1932, Tresca and the *Il Martello* group also found the Communists’ “zig-zag politics” intolerable and renounced the United Front, but continued to work with Socialists and unionists. The tiny Italian Communist Federation, which never exceeded one thousand members in these decades, was important only insofar as its drive

⁶³ Sellars, *Oil, Wheat, and Wobblies*, 190–91; Vecoli, “Making and Un-making,” 57; Franklin Rosemont, *Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Working-Class Counterculture* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2002), 368–70; Stephen Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailor’s Union of the Pacific, 1885–1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1986); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Buhle, “Anarchism and American Labor,” 27.

⁶⁴ Dorothy Gallagher, *All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), quote on 4; Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*; John P. Diggins, *Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972); Philip Cannistraro, *Blackshirts in Little Italy: Italian Americans and Fascism, 1921–1929* (West Lafayette, IN: Bordighera, 1999); Fiorello B. Ventresco, “Crisis and Unity: The Italian Radicals in America in the 1920s,” *Ethnic Forum* 15 (1995): 12–34; Fiorello Ventresco, “The Struggle of the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement in America (Spanish Civil War to World War II),” *Ethnic Forum* 6 (1986): 17–48.

⁶⁵ “Épermeso?” *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, April 15, 1922; “Ghezzi, Francesco” and “Petrini, Alfonso,” in *Dizionario biografico degli anarchici italiani*, ed. Maurizio Antonioli, Giampietro Berti, Santi Fedele, and Pasquale Iuso, 2 vols. (Pisa: Biblioteca Frano Serantini, 2003), 1:693–95, 2:335–36; Berman, “The Torch and the Axe”; Paul Avrich, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The Anarchist Background* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 213 (quote); Giuseppe Fiori, *L’Anarchico Schirru: condannato a morte per l’intenzione di uccidere Mussolini* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1983).

to control anti-Fascist groups led to the breakup of the Anti-Fascist Alliance and the nonpartisan anti-Fascist paper *La Stampa Libera*, while anarchists remained in the thick of the struggle and *La Stampa Libera*'s successor, *Controcorrente*, had a decidedly anarchist bent.⁶⁶ For once, anarchists' anti-Communism proved a boon rather than a crippling burden.

Anarchists' aversion to front groups was a direct response to their experiences in Russia where, Goldman reminded her American comrades, the anarchists' failure, "far from being due to lack of cooperation, was due to their faith in Lenin and his clique and their share in helping the Bolsheviki to ascend to power." Any aid given to Communist efforts was seen, not unreasonably, as working against anarchists' short-term interests and long-term goals by strengthening the position of the Communist Party and, by extension, the Soviet Union.⁶⁷ When the Comintern officially introduced the Popular Front as an international anti-Fascist policy in 1935, therefore, American anarchists were conspicuous in it only by their absence. Among the few exceptions were famed Haymarket widow and anarchist agitator Lucy Parsons, who considered anarchism to be "a dead issue in American life" by 1934 and was publicly active in many Communist-affiliated organizations in the thirties. Additionally, anarchist poet Kenneth Rexroth was the central figure of San Francisco's John Reed Club, another front group. For most anarchists, however, participation in the Popular Front was simply unthinkable, as it became for Rexroth after the Spanish Civil War.⁶⁸

Anarchists' disdain for the Communist Party and its subordination to Moscow, however, blinded them to the fact that American Communism was often a truly grassroots movement, and that the Popular Front constituted an "instance of radical insurgency" far beyond the scope or control of the Communist Party. Often, Michael Denning argues, "the 'fellow travelers' were the Popular Front" and had a dramatic impact upon American politics and culture in the thirties and forties.⁶⁹ Some anarchists, such as IWW (EP) member Frederick Blossom, did acknowledge that "the Communist rank and file have splendid spirit and *real* devotion," but they despised the "vultures" and "slick fakers" of the party leadership. Their distrust of Communist motives was not entirely unfounded; William Z. Foster for one openly admitted that the Popular Front was intended, in part, to effect "the liquidation of openly capitalist, reformist Socialist, Syndicalist,

⁶⁶ Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, 176–81, 199–200, chapter 15; *Per la Chiarezza: A Proposito di Polemica Fra Compagni?* (Chicago), February 1, 1930; Ego Sum [Carlo Tresca], "Il fronte unico," *Il Martello*, September 14, 1934 (quote); Vecoli, "Making and Un-making," 59, 62; Ventresco, "Struggle of the Italian Anti-Fascist Movement," 28–29.

⁶⁷ Emma Goldman to Joe Goldman, July 31, 1934, folder 1, Fraye Arbayter Shtime Archive, IISH.

⁶⁸ Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 251–57 (quote on 256); Gale Ahrens, "Lucy Parsons: Mystery Revolutionist, More Dangerous than a Thousand Rioters," in *Lucy Parsons, Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity: Writings and Speeches, 1878–1937*, ed. Gale Ahrens (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004), 19–20; Linda Hamalian, *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991). Ashbaugh's claim (261) that Parsons joined the Communist Party in 1939 is disputed in Ahrens, "Lucy Parsons."

⁶⁹ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), 4–5. Other accounts emphasizing the grassroots aspects of American Communism include Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Michael E. Brown, Randy Martin, Frank Rosengarten, and George Snedeker, eds., *New Studies in the Politics and Culture of U.S. Communism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1993); and Randi Storch, *Red Chicago: American Communism at Its Grassroots, 1928–35* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Critiques of this perspective include Theodore Draper, "Revisiting American Communism: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books* 32, no. 13 (August 15, 1985); and John Earl Haynes, "The Cold War Debate Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 1 (2000): 76–115.

Anarchist and Trotskyist illusions among the workers.”⁷⁰ And anarchist fears that the Popular Front would significantly aid the Communist Party proved correct, as it swelled from only eight thousand members in 1930 to more than eighty thousand in 1938.⁷¹

Anarchism, meanwhile, had become virtually invisible to outsiders, and by 1935 many complained of “the stagnation in our movement.” But it was temporarily revitalized by the outbreak of civil war in Spain in July of the following year. Home to the million-strong anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (CNT), Spain was the final country with a truly mass-based anarchist movement, and CNT members headed the defense of Barcelona against the Fascist-backed coup attempt. With the collapse of governmental authority in Catalonia and Aragon and the flight of many employers, the CNT led efforts to collectivize the majority of industry and agriculture in these regions under workers’ control, enabling the economy to continue functioning and developing a munitions industry virtually from scratch. Fate seemed to have given the anarchists a second chance, and one with far more promising prospects than in Russia. *L’Adunata dei Refrattari* declared that “Spain today confirms the observations of our predecessors and confirms these in an area that in past experiences was never even approached: the social-economic area, offering suggestive examples of practical anarchist realizations, which will certainly edify the world when they are widely known.” Clara Freedman of the Vanguard Group recalled: “The inspiration of the revolution was tremendous. Here was anarchism in practice on a large scale, a true people’s revolution. And anarchism *worked* in the factories and farms.” A revived American movement directed its energies toward aiding the CNT in not just beating back Fascism, but sustaining and expanding a social revolution.⁷²

An unprecedented collaborative effort produced the United Libertarian Organizations (ULO), composed of nearly every major American anarchist and syndicalist organization, to raise awareness and support for the CNT’s struggle. The ULO’s semimonthly paper *Spanish Revolution* soon reached a circulation of seven thousand, and member groups collected tens of thousands of dollars for the CNT, protested the Western embargo on Spain, and supplied small amounts of much-needed arms to be smuggled there.⁷³ In addition, more than a dozen IWW members and perhaps a hundred anarchists, mostly Spanish and Italian in origin, traveled to Spain to fight, while others went as nurses, correspondents for the anarchist press, or to work for the CNT.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Frederick A. Blossom to Alexander Berkman, December 6, 1926, folder 10, Berkman Papers; Foster, *From Bryan to Stalin*, 334.

⁷¹ Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism*, 9, 366.

⁷² Hippolyte Havel, “Proposed Lecture Tour,” *Man!* (Oakland, CA), January 1935; “Iniziativa spontanea,” *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, December 18, 1937; Clara Freedman Solomon, *A Memoir: Some Anarchist Activities in New York in the Thirties and Forties* (n.p. [Los Angeles]: Clara Freedman Solomon Memorial Gathering, 2001), 8 (emphasis in original). Useful overviews of Spanish anarchism in this period include Robert J. Alexander, *The Anarchists in the Spanish Civil War*, 2 vols. (London: Janus, 1999); José Peirats, *The CNT in the Spanish Revolution*, ed. Chris Ealham, trans. Paul Sharkey and Chris Ealham, 3 vols. (Hastings: Meltzer Press/Christie Books, 2001–2006); and Julián Casanova, *Anarchism, the Republic, and Civil War in Spain, 1931–1939*, ed. Paul Preston, trans. Andrew Dowling and Graham Pollok (London: Routledge, 2005).

⁷³ Sam Dolgoff, *Fragments: A Memoir* (Cambridge: Refract Publications, 1986), 19; Gallagher, *All the Right Enemies*, 159.

⁷⁴ See Matt White, “Wobblies in the Spanish Civil War,” *Anarcho-syndicalist Review* 42/43 (2006): 39–47; *Un trentennio di attività anarchica (1914–1945)* (Cesena: L’Antistato, 1953), 171–72, 191; *La Spagna nel nostro cuore, 1936–1939: Tre anni di storia non dimenticare* (Roma: AICVAS, 1996); Fraser Ottanelli, “Anti-Fascism and the Shaping of National and Ethnic Identity: Italian American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 27, no. 1 (2007): 9–31; Valerio Isca, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 148; David Koven, “On Hanging

The Spanish situation caused many anarchists to waver in their wholesale rejection of the Popular Front, as the CNT struck an awkward bargain by accepting several ministerial posts in new Popular Front governments in Barcelona and Madrid, hoping to maintain an anti-Fascist front capable of defeating Franco and to protect the revolutionary gains of the Spanish workers. Most anarchists abroad were reluctant to question these actions given the exigencies of the situation. In September 1936, however, the Soviet Union began to send desperately needed military aid to Spain, and the size and influence of Spain's tiny Communist Party increased dramatically. Rudolf Rocker, who had relocated to the United States in 1933, warned that the Communists sought to terminate the anarchists' social revolution in the hope that Western nations would enter the fight and weaken the threat that Fascism posed to the Soviet Union.⁷⁵ An increasing number of foreign anarchists began criticizing the CNT's policies as it became clear that they were enmeshed in "a one-sided 'unity', in which the C.N.T ... made all the concessions, and from which the political parties reaped the benefits." Some warned that collaboration with antianarchist parties was suicidal, as it had been in Russia, but others, such as Emma Goldman, saw no alternative.⁷⁶

After arriving in Spain in September 1936, however, Goldman did warn American comrades that the "villainous gang" of Communists in Spain would attempt to "sabotage" the revolution. These fears were realized in May of the following year when armed conflict broke out in Barcelona between the Communist-controlled Catalan police and members of the CNT and other dissident radical groups. Hundreds of anarchists were killed and arrested during the ensuing "May Days," which were falsely characterized by Communists and the Spanish government as a plot by "Trotskyites" and "uncontrollable" members of the CNT to seize power. The wave of governmental repression that followed, including the breakup of many collectivized enterprises, destroyed anarchist hopes of sustaining the revolution.⁷⁷

Italian American anarchist journalist Enrico Arrigoni, arrested in Barcelona during the May Days, lamented from a Spanish jail: "As in Russia, the Communist counterrevolution is marching." San Francisco's anarchist paper *Man!* declared: "Our Anarchist comrades in Spain have so quickly forgotten what happened to the anarchist peasantry of Ukrainia as well as to the entire Anarchist movement in Russia," adding: "The bloody massacre of Kronstadt has been repeated in Barcelona." *L'Adunata dei Refrattari* agreed that "the analogy between the ferocious repression of Kronstadt

In," unpublished manuscript (1986), folder 131, 8, David Koven Papers, IISH; Enrico Arrigoni, *Freedom: My Dream* (New York: Libertarian Book Club, n.d. [ca. 1986]); Abe Bluestein, "Biography of Abraham Bluestein," unpublished manuscript (n.d.), box 2, Abe Bluestein Papers, Labadie Collection.

⁷⁵ Rudolf Rocker, *The Tragedy of Spain* (New York: Freie Arbeiter Stimme, 1937), 35. On the CNT's and Soviet Union's policies see, respectively, Robert W. Kern, *Red Years, Black Years: A Political History of Spanish Anarchism, 1911–1937* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Affairs, 1978); Stanley G. Payne, *The Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Union, and Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

⁷⁶ Wayne Thorpe, "Syndicalist Internationalism before World War II," in *Revolutionary Syndicalism: An International Perspective*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe (Brookfield VT: Scholar Press, 1990), 255–56; Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution (1936–1939)* (London: Freedom Press, 1953), 37 (quote); Emma Goldman, *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, ed. David Porter (repr., Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006 [1983]).

⁷⁷ "Emma Goldman on the United Front," *Spanish Revolution* (New York), January 8, 1937; Emma Goldman, "Enemy Within," *Man!* December 1936–January 1937. On the May Days, see Augustin Souchy, *The Tragic Week in May* (Barcelona: Oficina de Información Exterior de la CNT y FAI, 1937), and Helen Graham, "'Against the State': A Genealogy of the Barcelona May Days (1937)," *European History Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (1999): 485–542.

in 1921 and the bestial repression of Barcelona in 1937 is incontestable.” Seen through the lens of the Russian Revolution, history appeared to be repeating itself.⁷⁸

Barcelona’s street fighting also found an echo in New York, where individuals selling anarchist newspapers at Popular Front rallies for Spain were assaulted. Communist attacks on ULO street meetings turned so violent the organization formed a “defense body” against “the fascist tactics of Communist Party hoodlums,” making a special appeal for Carlo Tresca to dispatch “some of the boys over there,” where the skills they had honed fighting Fascists were turned on Communist aggressors. Elsewhere anarchist events were guarded against Communists by street-tough IWW members armed with sticks and pipes concealed in rolled-up newspapers or handkerchiefs.⁷⁹ An assembly of Italian anarchist groups in Pennsylvania subsequently charged that the “ultimate disgrace is contained in the iniquitous conduct of the Popular Front,” and *L’Adunata* ran a cartoon depicting a pile of corpses over the caption: “What the Communists mean by the united front of revolutionary workers.” Such condemnations, however, were the final acts of defiance of a dying movement. Spain’s fall to Franco in April 1939 was, in the words of George Woodcock, “the last, greatest defeat of the historical anarchist movement.”⁸⁰ Demoralized, most of its members simply ceased participating in anarchist organizations. The number of American anarchist newspapers plunged from thirteen in 1939 to seven in 1940, the fewest since 1882.

Conclusion

Just four months after Franco’s victory, the Popular Front was shattered by the Hitler-Stalin nonaggression pact, an event some former Communists and fellow travelers called their own “Kronstadt.” But anarchist anti-Communism, as part of a transnational response to the events of the first years of the Russian Revolution, had virtually no impact on this new generation of anti-Stalinists, which was instead drawn to the Trotskyist opposition, Cold War liberalism, or embarked on the long journey to conservatism.⁸¹ The closest link anarchism had to this new cadre was through Carlo Tresca, whose belated anti-Communist activity — prompted by the May Days in Barcelona — included signing his name to the Dewey Commission’s exposé of the Moscow Trials and the manifesto of the anti-Communist American Committee for Cultural Freedom, as well as implicating party members in the disappearance of dissident Communist Juliet Stuart Poyntz

⁷⁸ Enrico Arrigoni, “The Party of Falsehood and Gallows,” reprinted in Arrigoni, *Freedom*, 327; Marcus Graham, “Counter-revolution at Work” and “Conspiracy against Spain,” *Man!* June 1937; “Kronstadt e Barcellona,” *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, April 30, 1938.

⁷⁹ “‘Challenge’ Worker Beaten,” *Challenge* (New York), June 4, 1938; “Communist ‘Democracy,’ ” *Challenge*, June 18, 1938; Jack White [Schlesinger] to Comrades, in “Anarchism — United Libertarian Organizations,” subject vertical file, Labadie Collection; Starrett [W. S. Van Valkenburgh] to Carlo [Tresca], August 14, 1937, and Walter Starrett [W. S. Van Valkenburgh] to Carlo [Tresca], August 24, 1937, box 2, Warren Van Valkenburgh Papers, Labadie Collection; Abe Bluestein, interviewed by Paul Avrich, in *Anarchist Voices*, 438; Dolgoff, *Fragments*, 19, 55–56.

⁸⁰ “I libertari degli Stati Uniti serano le loro file,” *Il Martello*, January 29, 1939; “Il fronte unico dei comunisti,” *L’Adunata dei Refrattari*, June 26, 1937; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (New York: Meridian Books, 1962), 474.

⁸¹ Louis Fischer, in *The God that Failed*, ed. Richard Crossman (repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2001 [1949]), 204, 221–23. For other examples, see Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1987); John P. Diggins, *Up from Communism: Conservative Odysseys in American Intellectual History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977). The only prominent exception was *Politics* editor Dwight Macdonald, who moved toward anarchism in the 1940s. Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

before a New York grand jury (sparking intense controversy among anarchists). But anarchists did not support the persecution of Communist Party members, and none served as informants for anti-Communist congressional committees — though at least one anarchist, the Italian watch-maker Giordano Bruch, was deported in 1953 after appearing before such a committee.⁸²

Alice Wexler observes that, in claiming the transition from Leninism to Stalinism was inevitable, anarchists such as Goldman “anticipated the basic thesis of the anti-Communist Cold War consensus view of Russia.” However, she offers no evidence that their “obsessive” anti-Communist writings actually contributed to the formation of this consensus. Though anarchist data on political persecution bolstered liberal and right-wing anti-Communists’ list of Soviet atrocities, they were neither foundational nor essential to these. Mainstream anti-Communists viewed Soviet Communism as a totalitarian form of government that threatened American forms of freedom and democracy. Anarchists reviled the grossly repressive nature of the Soviet regime, but argued that governments *per se* — including that of the United States, which had, after all, attempted to eradicate anarchism during the Red Scare — are incapable of being truly democratic or securing freedom for their subjects. Hence, the anarchist analysis of Soviet rule precluded its incorporation into mainstream anti-Communism, as it undermined the premises on which the latter was built. Longtime anti-Communist Sidney Hook, with rather tortured logic, went so far as to blame anarchists for causing one-time Marxists such as himself to ignore “the grave problems of how to limit or tame state power,” because the anarchist analysis was “so extreme and simple-minded.”⁸³

⁸² Pernicone, *Carlo Tresca*, chapter 20; Powers, *Not without Honor*, 457, n. 59; Antonioli, Berti, Fedele, and Iuso eds., *Dizionario biografico*, 1:260. According to Paul Avrich, however, after much conflict at the Mohegan Colony in New York State, some anarchists provided information about Communists there to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Modern School Movement*, 310.

⁸³ Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 2–3, 170 (quote), 240; Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 31.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



Kenyon Zimmer
Premature Anti-Communists?

American Anarchism, the Russian Revolution, and Left-Wing Libertarian Anti-Communism,
1917–1939
2009

Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas, Volume 6, Issue 2 (2009) pp. 45–72
The author thanks the late Paul Avrich, William Chase, Donna Gabaccia, Scott Giltner, Wendy Goldman, Janelle Greenberg, Franca Iacovetta, Richard Oestreicher, Marcus Rediker, Johnathan Scott, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments, and Barry Pateman of the Emma Goldman Papers at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Kate Sharpley Library for his invaluable and generous assistance.

theanarchistlibrary.org