To the Work We Must Do: The Washington State Communist Party 1945-Beyond

Nicholas K. Flessas

Dr. Laurie Mercier
April 23, 2019
Abstract

This study was conducted for two years, and drew resources from Canwell Committee documents, newspapers, letters, and other historians. A major conclusion of this work is that the Washington State Communist Party adapted to the changing culture of the State of Washington, and more broadly the United States with the end of the Second World War. Historically, the Washington State Communist Party had cultivated links with the academic community. By the time of the Canwell Committee, those academic links which had helped the party became severed by expulsion of sympathetic professors and public distrust. Following the Canwell Committee, the Washington State Communist Party was forced to start anew. The Canwell Committee had forced the Washington State Communist Party to move into an open party to move from the political fringe into the political mainstream. This meant that the Washington State Communist Party sought further participation at the University of Washington, ran for political offices, and became increasingly active in fighting for civil rights. While the Washington State Communist Party was unable to move to the politically mainstream as they had hoped for, these actions allowed debate of Marxist theory to carry forward into the 1980s and present times.
Communism in the United States has a long history. The Communist Party USA was active in cities in the East such as New York City, Chicago in the Midwest, and San Francisco in the West. The American Communist Party has been captured well in the works of historians by individuals such as Ellen Schrecker and William Rosswurm. Another element of documenting the American Communist Party (CPUSA) comes from members themselves, such as William Foster and Earl Browder. When it comes to how the American Communist Party interacted with specific states of the union, such as Washington in this case, versus just Chicago and New York, research can become more difficult. Gone are the big city examples of New York and gone are the events that influenced the Communist Party at a national level. To examine the history of the Communist Party in Washington State, one must look to a variety of different primary sources ranging from news articles to Canwell Hearing documents. What was it about Washington State’s Communist Party that according to a federal map of places Soviet officials could travel to, Washington State was blocked off entirely? The Washington State Communist Party was uniquely flexible in that it developed with external influences, such as the new political world following the Second World War, worked with the academic community, and achieved levels of success greater than most Communist Parties working at state levels.

The secondary sources that focus on the history of Communism in the United States frequently view communism as a national trend. The subject of Washington State Communism is
yet to be featured at greater lengths in any substantial secondary sources. This can make gleaning the arguments that historians such as the controversial Harvey Klehr or James Ryan make regarding communism in specifically Washington State more difficult. As a result, the historiography of communism in Washington State is mixed in terms of detail.

What Klehr argued throughout his works is that internal developments influenced the development of Communist change. In two of his works, *Storming Heaven Itself* and *The Soviet World of American Communism*, Klehr revisits his point of "de-Stalinization" being the catalyst for change in the American Communist Party.\(^1\) While Klehr can bring plenty of evidence of members even reconsidering their position within the Communist Party after the death of Stalin, this approach leaves out many details of not only external factors changing the Communist Party, but also other internal factors.

James Ryan in *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* also argued that the CPUSA fell due to its internal struggles. This fall was illustrated, in contrast to Klehr's long decline as being a relatively quick one. Ryan concluded that Browder, the main figure of his book, was unable to separate the CPUSA from the "foreign monster" that was the Soviet Union.\(^2\) Ryan also mentioned that Earl Browder appeared to have no central goal for CPUSA, which would have resulted in a confused leadership.\(^3\)

Perhaps the most useable aspect of Ryan's text in this project is his discussion of the Industrial Workers of the World's (IWW) relationship to CPUSA. Ryan describes a relationship of admiration, or near-admiration of early Communists in their view of the IWW.\(^4\) Ryan also


\(^3\) Ryan, 274.

\(^4\) Ryan, 16.
makes the note of where the IWW was active, and as can be expected, the lumber industry is his first mention. This is what brings his argument back to communism in Washington State. As the IWW had a heavy presence in the early twentieth century, the idea that it had influenced development of the CPUSA as well as its early policies reveal how it operated up to the depression.

Despite the skew towards a history of the national party, the study of communism in Washington State is not at all bleak. Since 2002, from the University of Washington, scholars such as James Gregory have led the *Communism in Washington State: History and Memory* Project which collects, analyzes, and expands our view of the Communist Party in Washington State. However, as large and impressive as Dr. Gregory’s project is, there are some gaps in it that still need to be filled. Notably, the *History and Memory* project can document nearly every aspect of how the Communist Party in Washington changed over time, from its initial split from the Socialist Party in 1919 to its suppression at the end of World War II.

Another historian, John Earl Haynes, in his text *In Denial: Historians, Communism, and Espionage* did take note of the work of the University of Washington. However, Haynes held concerns that the University of Washington took an apologetic stance towards the WACP. Haynes charged that the University of Washington “glorifies the achievements of the American Communists [...]” A charge such as this is heavy to suggest. An important note about Haynes’ assertion is that his text is dated to 2003, about a year after the initial essays on the *History and Memory* project which were published in 2002. While many of the essays appear to be unchanged since 2002, it is highly likely that more content has been added since then.

---

5 Ryan, 9.
While the efforts by historians and the University of Washington have been fruitful, one essential question remains. Why did the Washington State Communist Party reflect American developments rather than Soviet foreign policy? The question of “why” is what this essay answers. And that “why” has to do with the WACP being influenced by external factors such as the rise of new political thought, and cultural impacts such as a booming Civil Rights movement rather than internal developments that authors such as Klehr or Ryan appear to suggest.

To understand the conclusions of this study, this will first begin with basic background information about the creation of CPUSA and the early twentieth-century environment that the WACP operated in. To begin with the post-1945 era, the next biggest development of the WACP, the Canwell Committee and its implications will be examined and analyzed. Finally, how the WACP changed following the crash caused by the Canwell Committee, and how it exists to this day will be brought into light. All of these events do connect to each other; however, some have more significant implications than others. Finally, how the WACP acted in its earlier years had major influences in how the WACP would act in the future. These influences were not always to the benefit of the WACP.

There were two main Communist Parties operating in the United States in the infancy of CPUSA. The main differences between these two Communist Parties were their origins of being made up of “American” born Communists or those from immigrant communities.\(^7\) Regarding the Pacific Northwest, the biggest percentage of immigrant Communists would have stemmed from the Finnish community.\(^8\) The frustration of having different Communist parties with different


members led to rebukes from the Soviet Union, and later forced the parties to unite into CPUSA.  

Continuing in the Pacific Northwest, the dominant radical force was the IWW until the 1920s. This meant that the WACP was initially shaped along IWW-lines. This had mixed results; the IWW was essentially dismantled by the Palmer Raids during the first Red Scare by 1924. The development of the WACP along IWW-lines can be interpreted as the case for two reasons: to attract former IWW members and to take the mantle of being the radical force in the Pacific Northwest. However, aside from members such as Henry “Heine” Huff the members of the IWW were not interested in the WACP, or the Communist Party at all. An important distinction between the WACP and the IWW is that while the IWW had existed as a radical force, it was a radical labour force. This meant that anyone, regardless of political affiliation, could be a viable member for the IWW. The WACP, by contrast, existed as a radical political force on the left and was not always interested in people who appeared to be too naïve.

Polishuk discussed that the WACP (as represented by CPUSA) and the IWW had two different ways of creating change. The IWW struck for change, argued against “using the ballot,” or in other words, voting. Perhaps the most brazen example of this is the Seattle General Strike in 1919, in which the IWW, along with other unions participated in a general strike. To the IWW, voting was a symbol of working with the federal government. This meant that an individual was working against the cause of labour by extension. In contrast to this, the

---

10 Polishuk, 38.
12 Polishuk, 42.
Communist Party relied significantly more on voting, and earlier on, public demonstrations. What the Communist Party appeared to have understood was that overt demonstration could not purely result in a regime change. Government change would need to come from not only the public, but also officials elected to the government from the Communist Party as well.

In the end, the WACP would face hard repression as the Federal Government, and conservative groups would target both Communist groups and the IWW. Members of the IWW in 1919 were targeted in the Centralia Massacre by the American Legion. The Federal Government, meanwhile, launched the Palmer Raids in the same year which finally left the IWW devastated. What the Palmer Raids made clear was that the time of strength in overt demonstrations was over, and the federal focus that disappeared during the First World War had returned.

The WACP was able to breathe during the 1930s thanks to support from the academic community. In a sensationalist title dated to May 18, 1931, the Seattle Times noted that in the University of Washington, “Campus Placards Promise Communist Agitator Talk.” The article itself contains nothing beyond hysteria over a Communist speaker. What is important about this article is that it references a trend that continues into the present Americans continue to worry whether the universities are corrupting students? Even in the beginning of the depression, eyes were on the activities of academia.

With the end of the Second World War, the United States and Soviet Union re-evaluated their relationship. With these re-evaluations, so too did political theory come to be re-evaluated.

15 Daeha Ko, “Rough Beginnings.”
17 “Campus Placards Promise Communist Agitator Talk,” Seattle Times, May 18, 1931.
The result was a return to a fear of Communist thought, akin to what had occurred in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Many in the United States know this as the era of McCarthyism and the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). In Washington State, these developments were localized as the Canwell Committee. While HUAC targets ranged from high profile individuals, such as the Hollywood Ten, to citizens living out their lives, the Canwell Committee was especially interested in the academic community of Washington State. A highly targeted group included those involved in the University of Washington. Melvin Rader in his text *False Witness* recorded Senator Bienz in 1947 as saying there were roughly 150 Communists or Communist sympathizers involved with the University of Washington. 18

Academics in the form of students and professors have a long history of involvement in the WACP. Notably, many professors from the University of Washington found themselves tied in with the WACP. During the Canwell hearings, Ralph Gundlach, Hugh de Lacy, Herbert Philips, and Melvin Rader (as Mr. Rader) were blacklisted and removed from the University of Washington. 19 The reasoning for this charge was convincing a student to join the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War. In Spain, that student died fighting fascists. Another way to interpret this is as corruption of the youth.

The supporters of the Canwell Committee were extremely concerned about possible Communist infiltration into education. In one testimony from Louis Budenz, Canwell had asked about Communist infiltration in the form of “Rugg textbooks.” 20 The character, “Rugg,” that Canwell references is Harold Rugg. Rugg was a progressive educational reformer who sought to

---

reform the educational approach to social sciences. In creating materials for this new social science curriculum, Rugg was able to become very successful. However, Rugg was also criticized by conservative groups such as the American Legion for writing “un-American” ideas in his textbooks. Those ideas were largely re-interpretations of early American history, such as questioning the morality of European conquest over the Native Americans.

Re-evaluation of American history was evidently sensitive. Some of the attacks against Rugg’s work charged Rugg as undermining the United States and belittling its history. There are a few reasons for why this might be a fear at all. One offered by Nash’s article was that it was too risky to give children unbiased viewpoints. Another reason might be that this would lead Americans to no longer support the country, knowing more of its history. Finally, this might motivate Americans to leave the country. This was the case of Thane Summers, the student who died fighting in Spain.

The death of Thane Summers was exemplary for why Communist, or more broad left-leaning elements in academia needed to be pursued. The idea of an American youth being persuaded by elements on the left to give their life for a left cause arguably would have mobilized many Americans. This was especially true during the red scare, and in times such as the red scare, people may be against not only the Communist Party but also the left-wing itself. The implications of this negative press were disastrous for the WACP. Publicly rejected and forced into hiding, the WACP needed to recover. However, even attempting to recover would come with its own challenges.

23 Nash, 40.
24 Nash, 41.
25 Nash, 41.
The academic community that carried WACP through the 1930s had continued to support WACP into the 1940s. In a report dated to 1949, investigators had found that Raymond Allen, President of the University of Washington requested a Soviet scholar in 1946 to lecture for one academic year. The subject of the scholar's lectures intended to be on Russian literature, which could be cause for concern to the investigators. While Russian literature would likely focus on late nineteenth century Russian literature, was it possible that this literature would entail more recent publications within the Soviet Union? Would those later literary works reference communism, and in what way? Evidently, the exploration of Russian literature and Communist ideas by universities was among the concerns that both the state and federal government had in the Cold War.

The public concern of Russian or Communist literature in education was likely thanks to the fear of having further repeats of the fate of Thane Summers. However, it was not only Washington State and the federal governments that were interested in checking the influence of Communism in education, but the labour unions as well. Just like the IWW, many labour unions, such as American Federation of Labor (AFL), were not entirely interested in radical politics. The late 1940s were the apex of the labour unions, with members spanning both sides of the political spectrum. The Seattle Labour School, later known as the Pacific Northwest Labour school, serves as a great example of labour union involvement in education.

---


27 H. L. Moody.

Initially founded as the Seattle Labour School by Bert MacLeech, an alleged well-known Communist in California.\textsuperscript{29} The Seattle Labour school was publicly intended to be staffed by union officials. The course agenda would focus on union rhetoric and labour topics and issues.\textsuperscript{30} Initially, the Seattle Labour School was well-received by labour unions, such as the Building Service Employees' Union local no. 6, who sponsored the school.\textsuperscript{31} The school was successful enough that in 1946 it expanded and became the Pacific Northwest Labour School.\textsuperscript{32} By this development, one might believe that labour had finally found a way to expand its roots.

However, things were not always rosy for the school. While the school ostensibly focused on the education of labour, unions became concerned. Early in 1946, four members of the advisory board of the school had dropped from the board, arguing they were not consulted in school curriculum.\textsuperscript{33} Tom Clark, at the time attorney-general of the United States had listed the school as being affiliated with the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{34} With the earlier Taft-Hartley Act, organizations could be heavily penalized for any associations with the Communist Party. As a result, the International Association of Machinists local no. 79 dropped support for the Seattle Labour School while protesting Clark's label.\textsuperscript{35} This was not helped when it been revealed that the WACP had been sending financial grants to the school, making the activities of the school

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Report of Joint Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, Washington State Congress, House, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., February 26, 1947, 26, (Budenz testimony).
\item Lucie Burnett, “The Pacific Northwest Labor School: Educating Seattle’s Labor Left,” 2009, 
Communism in Washington State History and Memory Project, accessed April 21, 2019
http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cppproject/labor_college.shtml
\item Ed Guthman, “Unionists May Never Know Full Amount of Funds Given to Reds,” 
Seattle Times, October 22, 1947.
\item “Labor School Board to Meet,” Seattle Times, February 14, 1946.
\item “Machinists Drop Labor School,” Seattle Times, December 9, 1947.
\item “Machinists Drop Labor School,” Seattle Times, December 9, 1947.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
appear more suspicious. The final undoing of the school was the discovery of Communist instructors in the school, and the subsequent abandonment by the unions.

The Pacific Northwest Labour school was a victim of its inability to take on a complete labour union identity. By having academic associations such as the University of Washington, the Pacific Northwest Labour School opened itself up to intense observation, on the part of any left-leaning or Communist elements appearing. The ultimate admission of this came from having Communist instructors and sponsors which circled back to the fear of Communist ideas in education. The confirmation of these fears led to the Pacific Northwest Labour School shuttering shortly after these findings by the end of the 1940s, in 1949.

Other organizations suffered the same fate, notably the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF) and Washington Pension Union (WPU). The WACP enjoyed broad power in Washington State in the last decade thanks to its control of the WCF and WPU, however both were virtually destroyed by the Canwell Committee. Howard Costigan, leader of the WCF was caught by the Canwell Committee. In Costigan’s testimony, he admitted to the Committee that WACP acquired control of the WCF, and that he had been a member of WACP. In defining his membership of the WACP to the Committee, Costigan noted he was not a card-carrying member. The revelation of Costigan not being a card-carrying member of the Communist Party may open comparisons to be drawn to another well-known “fellow-traveler” Communist, Harry Bridges.

---

The WCF was by no means a union in the same way Bridges’ ILWU operated. In his own words, the WCF was “an organization of liberals, of labor, and of generally progressive groups that were supporting the Roosevelt administration.”\textsuperscript{41} The WCF was a left-leaning coalition, not an inherently revolutionary group. The WCF supported Roosevelt’s bottom line, which the WACP was once against.\textsuperscript{42} Unlike the ILWU, the WCF was not a purely labour entity. The ILWU possessed the ability to go on strikes, such as in the 1934 strike. The WCF was a political entity that embraced some labour roots, but not to the extent of the ILWU or even IWW.

Unionized organizations were more shielded from the Canwell Committee, but not entirely. The political ambiguity of unions, organizations that could powerfully mobilize large amounts of workers in key industries and focus on labour versus politics or academics, served them well. However, openly political unions were more suspect. The ILWU was unique in that despite being more openly on the left, it was able to survive the critical examinations by the Canwell Committee. The cost of survival meant the ILWU was limited to the West Coast of the United States.\textsuperscript{43}

Ultimately, it was the WCF’s political affiliation that left it open to Communist dominance and led to its eventual fall. Costigan had explained that a trait the Communists possessed, and that he enjoyed, was their work ethic and organization.\textsuperscript{44} This proved effective in earlier times for the WCF, as they were able to dominate the state politics of Washington and mobilize one of the biggest voting blocs in the state. The WCF’s status as a political machine left

\textsuperscript{44} Report of Joint Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities, Washington State Congress, House, 30\textsuperscript{th} Cong., February 26, 1947, 360, (Costigan testimony).
it inherently as a target to other political machinations, such as the Canwell Committee. As a result, the WCF shared the fate of the Pacific Northwest Labour School.

During Canwell Committee, the WACP had gone underground for roughly five years. There are a few factors for why the WACP might go underground. Intense media scrutiny, as in the case of the Pacific Northwest Labour School, would make any new action subject to public criticism. The Canwell Committee itself also presented a large barricade to party recruitment and organized leadership. As the consequences were dire for being caught with the Communist Party, individuals would not have wanted to take the risk.

The Canwell Committee came to an end as charges were made against U.W Professor Melvin Rader. The charges that the Canwell Committee had accused Melvin Rader of, such as being at Briehl’s Farm School in 1939 were proven false. The result was a cycle of events that would lead to Canwell being forced to testify to the House of Representatives. What this represented was Canwell’s fall from grace, and the Canwell Committee’s eventual dissolution. Thanks to this, the WACP would re-emerge as a new entity under the leadership of Burt Nelson.

Burt Nelson led the WACP to a program of relative openness in comparison to earlier iterations of the WACP. Beginning with a bang, Nelson and the Seattle Times announced inter-party elections in 1951. Landis in his own work, *A Partial Revival: The 1960s* even noted that the WACP was organizing picnics. This strategy appeared to take on the slant of political de-alienization. This likely reflects the idea that if the WACP could shake off a politically fringe label, then their politics could move from the fringe and into the mainstream.

---

45 Rader, 154.
46 Rader, 165.
This is an incredibly important development in the WACP, and the purpose of this is twofold. First, the domination of progressive political ideas from movements such as the New Left of the 1960s favoured strong defenses of political rights. As the cold-war culture of the McCarthy-an era faded, historians observe an increase in activity on the part of the youth and college students in defending political rights. One famous example of this is the Port Huron Statement of 1962, created by college students and advocating for a new United States, grounded in the freedom of political debates.

Developments in the 1960s would not always benefit the WACP. A counter-example to the idea of free political debates in university exists in the form of Gus Hall. In 1962 Gus Hall was, at this point, a leading figure for the Communist Party of Washington State slated to speak at the University of Washington. However, Gus Hall was banned from campus for being a Communist speaker. The explanation from the University of Washington was that the Communist Party was identified as a party of subversive elements. This offers an example of where the Communist Party might find its limits. The Canwell-era secrecy period had passed, and the United States appeared ripe for a cultural revolution, though the Washington State Communist Party still encountered repressive elements even in the academic environment.

While the WACP was not always able to openly access the university, there were other streams of academic and popular thought that were emerging into the public consciousness. The 1960s was a time public of re-evaluation of the role of sex, gender, and race, social and political norms. As Richard King says in his essay American Political Culture Since 1945, the 1960s was

---

a time for the search of a "new proletariat."52 King’s examples of the new proletariat range from women, to African Americans, to youth, to academics, and once again, the workers.53 For the Communist Party in Washington, many of these were not new. What was new to the WACP was the new focus of these groups versus a focus on the unionized workforce from older times.

This was localized in WACP by members taking actions to preserve American political rights. In one example, in the 1970s, Burt Nelson’s name, along with other WACP members such as Jeanne Mangaoang appear on a petition to save the Black Panther Party.54 This was the newest iteration in an old struggle. CPUSA had engaged often with race and took part in many legal battles defending the rights of African-Americans even during the depression period. The most famous example of this is their defense in the Scottsboro Boys case in 1931.55

RECAPITULATION OF EXPULSIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Love-stonism</th>
<th>Trotskyism</th>
<th>Halonemism</th>
<th>White Chauv.</th>
<th>Ukr. Hall opp.</th>
<th>Spies</th>
<th>Right Wing</th>
<th>Other Causes</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D.1—Boston</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.2—New York</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.3—Philadelphia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.3—Anthractce</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.4—Buffalo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.5—Pittsburgh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.6—Cleveland</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.7—Detroit</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.8—Chicago</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.9—Minneapolis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.10—Kansas City</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.12—Seattle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.13—San Francisco</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.D.13 Los Angeles</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.15—New Haven</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.17—Atlanta</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>173</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, The WACP had a very interesting dynamic with race, in that they were perhaps one the branches that struggled the most with race. The Pacific Northwest had not historically been the

53 King, 146.
most supportive of racially diverse elements. As far back as 1929, eleven members of the Communist Party from Seattle had been expelled from the party. At eleven expulsions, this was the highest number of members charged for white chauvinism. Perhaps the WACP was a victim of a near-racial homogeneity. Even Julia Ruuttila, a radical woman from the Portland, Oregon area had remarked that compared to southerners, northerners had often struggled with race in that they were not as used to the presence of African Americans.

The WACP continued to move forward with academic and political openness, albeit at another cost. While other Communist groups had always existed in the United States and Washington State, they were re-emerging as separate entities. The Socialist Worker’s Party emerged originally as a Trotskyist party. The SWP Seattle Branch later evolved into the Freedom Socialist Party, which drifted towards Socialist feminist thought. A Seattle Times Article, dated to October 11, 1970 distinguished the FSP (then known as the SWP) and the WACP as being two different organizations to lecture at YMCA on radical politics. Notably, the Seattle Times noted the representative each party sent. From the WACP, Milford Sutherland was to represent the ideas of communism. The FWP however, was represented by a “graduate student of U.W” known as Russel Block. What is poetic about this is that Milford Sutherland has a long history of being in the WACP, a member of the “old left.” Block, by contrast, appeared to represent the ideas of the New Left.

By the 1980s, the environment WACP operate in changed even more dramatically. A newspaper titled the Red Dragon had made its way into the Washington Penal system. The Red

---

56 Klehr, the Soviet World, 328.
57 Polishuk, 118.
58 Klehr, Storming Heaven Itself, 153.
59 Klehr, Storming Heaven Itself, 153.
60 “Y to Offer Course on Radical Politics,” Seattle Times, October 11, 1970.
Dragon was decidedly Marxist in the same vein that the Socialist Worker’s Party once was. More specifically, the Red Dragon was also Leninist, making it closer to the WACP. Despite this, the Red Dragon was against the WACP. In an article titled “WaCAP and the Struggle Against Liberalism” the Red Dragon had derided CPUSA and WACP for taking a peaceful transition towards creating change in the US. In other words, because WACP had followed the cultural and political changes in the 1960s and 1970s, it was no longer radically Communist enough.

The Red Dragon and FWP represent the biggest change that occurred to the greater Marxist movement in the United States. No longer was the idea of Communism bound to one party, CPUSA and the WACP. The idea of Communism became re-interpreted and re-evaluated just as any other idea political idea had been during the late twentieth century. What the political openness that the WACP had banked on led to was rejuvenated ideological factionalism. Unlike earlier times where a Soviet Union forced a party unification, no Soviet leaders repeated the same action. Essentially, while the WACP had managed to change with the times, the times had continued to change with the WACP.

In the end, the New Left appeared to have rejected the Communist Party. When the WACP had tried to change to the ideals of the New Left, the New Left was less than receptive. The WACP brought the New Left was a history of subversion, of association with the Soviet Union, and of old, martial tendencies. In a dynamic time of mass change, perhaps the appearance of being too organized and being too influenced by the dogma of the Soviet Union in

---

62 Mead, 4.
the past had taken its toll. The McCarthyan time had long passed but being associated with a political group such as the Communist Party would have still been dubious.

Today, any individual can trace the amount of development that occurred within the WACP. With the rise of the internet, however, state Communist Parties have grown more intertwined and connected, resulting in changes that less reflect one state and more that reflect the party as a whole. In a powerpoint titled “Strategy: A Marxist Approach” created by Marc Brodine issued on their own website, members of the Communist Party reflected on what a “Marxist Approach” looks like. One of the most notable concepts they recall is how to approach the center. Brodine references a call to make the American political center the target of Communist political attack. Following this, Brodine mentioned that the Communist Party had once done this. His example was the German Communist Party, and the result, he recounted, was the election of Adolf Hitler. This is a powerful example of hindsight in the Communist Party, albeit not specific to the Washington State Communist Party. It also again reflects the Communist flexibility that had got the party this far. By adapting to the crowd and identifying new problems, the Communist Party brought itself into the twenty-first century with newfound hindsight focused on not repeating the mistakes that had caused their mid-century downfall. Rather, the Communist Party appears keen to re-examine what might have led to successes.

Perhaps the easiest way to interpret all of this is to use Ellen Schrecker’s work, chapter nineteen of the A Companion to Post-1945 America, McCarthyism and the Red Scare. Schrecker explores various interpretations of McCarthyism in this chapter, but also opens to question how much impact McCarthyism had on the United States. Notably, Schrecker mentions that

---

Communist secrecy and other earlier activities were responsible for the harsh repression it would face. 66 Was the change the WACP made, moving towards an open party, a response to McCarthyism?

Bibliography

PRIMARY

“Campus Placards Promise Communist Agitator Talk,” Seattle Times, May 18, 1931.


“Y to Offer Course on Radical Politics,” Seattle Times, October 11, 1970.


SECONDARY

http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/anderson.shtml

http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/labor_college.shtml

http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/cpproject/curwick.shtml


