“WHO GETS THE BIRD?” OR, HOW THE COMMUNISTS WON POWER AND TRUST IN AMERICA’S UNIONS: THE RELATIVE AUTONOMY OF INTRACLASS POLITICAL STRUGGLES*

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Do intraclass struggles shape the political terrain on which ensuing struggles, within and between classes, are fought and resolved? Out attempt to answer this question focuses on the rivalry among the factions and parties involved in organizing American industrial workers from the late 1930s on. We assess how the political practices of the Communists and their rivals determined which political camp won power in the new CIO unions. A logit model shows that two ensembles of political practices “loaded the historical dice” in favor of the Communists. The chances that Communists would win union leadership were far higher: first, if the union had seceded from the AFL and joined the CIO from below, in an insurgent workers’ movement, rather than from above, in a revolt of its top officers; and second, if the union had been organized independently, rather than by a CIO “organizing committee.” Two other political practices indirectly favored the Communists: earlier Red union organizing in the industry (although its effects were contradictory); and forming the union as an amalgamated rather than as a unitary organization.

Men and women make their own history, although not just as they please nor under circumstances they choose, but under “circumstances directly found, given and transmitted

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Daniel B. Cornfield and Larry J. Griffin, as anonymous reviewers, provided valuable critiques of earlier drafts of this work. Griffin’s exceptionally thorough critique compelled us to elaborate our argument further and sharpen the empirical analysis—although we could have done without the months of added work required to respond adequately! Richard Berk, Phillip Bonacich, and Kazuo Yamaguchi generously advised us about probit and logit modeling, and Berk especially carefully guided us through their pitfalls. Robert K. Merton’s generously close reading and commentary on the penultimate draft made us clarify some muddy formulations. Walter L. Galenson, Howard Kimeldorf, Harvey Levenstein, Robert Zieger, and, emphatically, Theodore Draper gave us helpful guidance about the “simple historical facts” on which our analysis rests. Research support was provided by Zeitlin’s John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship, by the Academic Senate, and by the Institute of Industrial Relations at UCLA. We are also grateful to Daniel J. B. Mitchell, IIR director, and Archie Kleingartner, associate director, for their helpful counsel.

from the past” (Marx [1852] 1963, p. 15). But these circumstances, Marx forgot to add, have also been shaped both by the attempts of previous generations to make history and by the effects of their own earlier political struggles. We shall try to show that this is a through a multivariate analysis of the independent effects of political struggles in a specific, theoretically relevant, historical case, namely, the organization of American industrial workers from the late 1930s on.

Thus, our analysis addresses the theoretical problem of the “relative autonomy of politics.” This refers, in our formulation, not merely to the possible autonomy (or originative potential) of the “state,” but rather, comprehensively, to the possible independent effects of political phenomena in the shaping and transformation of basic social relations. Of course, this is within the objective limits imposed and the objective alternatives made possible by the existing circumstances. Our originating question, in particular, is whether political struggles have relatively independent effects on class and intraclass relations. This covers such substantive questions as the effects of political struggles on the development of capitalism, on the emergence of the democratic or authoritarian state, on the labor process, and on class formation (see, e.g., Moore 1968; Aminzade 1981; Zeitlin 1984;
THE INTRACLASS STRUGGLE WITHIN THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Every class struggle is simultaneously an intraclass struggle. For no class, as Max Weber remarks (1968, p. 930), is infallible about its interests. What are the real interests, immediate or historical, of a class? What is the class struggle really about? Indeed, is it a class struggle? These questions are always at issue among the contending factions and parties of a class as they struggle to define its interests and what has to be done to protect and advance them. The process of “self-organization” of a class, then, involves concrete political struggles within it—and within its organizations—over what its class interests are and who should organize and lead it. Classes do not simply organize themselves. They become organized in a particular way and by particular leaders, factions, or parties, with particular theories, social objectives, and political/organizational strategies.

Political struggles, therefore, are never mere effects of structures. Nor are their consequences pregiven by the functions of structures.1 Rather, the critical issue is, given certain circumstances, or objective conditions, how do men and women make their own history? The existing historical situation and social relations (economic, political, and cultural) constitute a “realm of possibilities” or a “structure of choices” that is given to men and women, individually or collectively, at a particular historical moment (Przeworski 1977, p. 377). These relations impose limits on the political options and, consequently, on the political struggles that are possible. But they also simultaneously make possible these options and the struggles resulting from choosing one or another of them.

Thus, political struggles, and the political relations they create, are no less real than other so-called material conditions or structures. Whatever limits the underlying social relations impose, political struggles have their own “relatively autonomous” consequences for the circumstances under which subsequent political struggles are waged. These consequences, in principle, can be revealed empirically. So, to the extent that intraclass struggles result in new political relations among the factions and parties of a class, they also determine who organizes and leads it. In turn, both the form of organization and type of leadership—its specific capacities and political consciousness (or ideological commitments)—affect the way that class engages in the struggle against other, dominant or subordinate, classes.2 These propositions form the guiding thread of our study. Thus, our central theoretical question is: how and to what extent do concrete intraclass political struggles independently shape the political terrain on which, as time goes by, subsequent struggles, within and between classes, are now fought and resolved?

ANALYTICAL OBJECTIVES

This is an empirical analysis of the relatively independent political effects of concrete political struggles within the emergent organized segment of the industrial working class in the United States at a decisive historical moment (i.e., the Great Depression cum New Deal). We hope to reveal how and to what extent the political strategy and practices of class organization of the rival factions and

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1 As in the “structur alist” theory of Nicos Poulantzas (1973, esp. pp. 85–98), where a political “practice” is the mere expression of its “specific place and function . . . which are its objective” (1973, p. 42). So, the consequences of a “practice” are pregiven and known a priori, even though the theory rhetorically affirms the “relative autonomy of the political.” So, “history . . . becomes a history that proceeds,” as Przeworski (1977, p. 368) correctly remarks, “from relations to effects without any human agency.”

2 We do not assume that intraclass struggles in a subordinate class and efforts to organize it are equivalent to, or have the same sorts of determinants and effects as, those within a dominant class. For, unlike workers, capitalists do not have to be organized to act as a class. Capitalists as individuals, outside of any “peak association,” employers’ organization, or combination (cartel) have the power that capital-ownership gives them over individual workers and the “right,” in exchange for wages, to dispose of their labor time. But workers can organize themselves as a class only if they are already organized by capitalists, that is, as employees of capitalist enterprises (cf. Offe and Wiesenthal 1980, pp. 70–72).
parties of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) determined who won the leadership of its emergent unions. Our analysis focuses on the Communists—who at that time constituted “the most important minor party in the union world” (Mills 1948, p. 23)—and their political rivals.

If unionization is an indispensable organizational means for workers to achieve their common interests, those interests are not simply given. Nor, when recognized, do they automatically translate into class organization. On the contrary, their “translation” into class organization inescapably involves combat between the conscious agents of capital and of labor (Griffin et al. 1986, p. 148). So, the “interests” that workers recognize and act upon are affected both by struggles between them and capital and, we wish to emphasize, struggles among them, over the definition and organization of their common class interests (cf. Przeworski 1977; Stark 1980, pp. 97–98).

For these reasons, the political effects of the political practices involved in organizing CIO unions constitute a critical, theoretically relevant historical case. Put otherwise, historical materials on CIO organizing are what Robert K. Merton terms “strategic research materials (SRM),” for they clearly “exhibit the structure and workings of the phenomena to be understood” (1987, p. 11): namely, the independent effects of intraclass struggles, in this instance, among contending working-class political factions and parties. Vying for political power in the emerging organized industrial segment of the working class, they had sharply different conceptions of working-class interests and the political strategies to protect and advance them.

The assorted run-of-the-mill unionists, socialists, Catholic activists, radicals, and Communists involved in organizing the CIO unions were engaged in a simultaneous fight on two fronts. The main front was their common struggle against capital to organize and reorganize workers into industrial unions. The second front was the struggle among these political rivals to win political leadership of the new industrial unions—and thus to actively define the interests and shape the cohesion and self-consciousness of this organized segment of the working class.

Asking our empirical question, that is, whether the political practices of the CIO’s contending political camps determined which of them won the leadership of its unions, and asking it in this way, allows us to identify a critical “pocket of theoretical neglect” and of “specifiable and specified ignorance” in political sociology (Merton 1987, p. 11). This type of question cannot be posed within the prevailing paradigm in political sociology. Its central question is: What are the “social bases” of the aggregated individual political attitudes and political behavior of various categories of workers? (See, e.g., Form 1985, chaps. 8–10; Goldthorpe, Lockwood, Bechhofer, and Platt 1968, 1969; Hamilton 1967; Leggett 1968; Lipset 1960, chap. 7; Zeitlin 1967.)

Its unexamined premise, however, is that the social bases themselves somehow also account for the existing balance of political forces. How the contending parties and factions were able to establish themselves and thus viably compete to influence workers politically and win their votes in the labor movement and in the wider society is simply ignored. This, then, is the rationale of our study: We both pose a central theoretical question that has rarely even been asked in political sociology and try to answer a crucial empirical question derived from it.

We focus on the political impact of political struggles, not on their sources; so we do not examine the ideological, programmatic, or strategic issues over which the rival political camps fought. Among these issues, of course, was the Communists’ defense of “Stalinism” and the Soviet dictatorship. For, whatever the courage and admirable personal qualities of individual Communist labor organizers and leaders, even the most saintly of them was linked politically to that dictatorship (Zieger 1984, p. 300). But “most labor leaders actively or passively [fought] Communists,” as even an anti-Communist

3 Of course, a few sociologists who have conducted studies in this tradition (e.g., Lipset et al. 1956, p. 443; Zeitlin 1967, p. 6) have also emphasized that “politics” matters in determining workers’ consciousness and organization. But this observation is not integrated into their own empirical analyses.

4 Griffin et al. (1986) is perhaps the only such previous study. Although it is not explicitly formulated in terms of the relative autonomy of politics, its aim clearly is to assess the independent effects of political practices on the organized (or political) relations between classes (cf. also Rubin, Griffin, and Wallace 1983).
radical such as C. Wright Mills (1948, pp. 190–91) observed, not out of principled opposition to “Stalinism,” but simply “to kill off troublesome factions within their unions” or to solve a problem in “public relations.”

During the “Red decade” of the 1930s and beyond, through the early postwar years, the Communists and their allies led a “powerful and pervasive radical movement in American life” (Starobin 1972, p. x). In particular, they established a broad base in the insurgent industrial unions organized by the CIO. At the height of their strength among U.S. industrial workers, they and their allies led nearly half of the CIO unions and officially represented at least two million workers, or over 30 percent of the CIO’s members.5

SOURCES AND METHODS

The 38 CIO unions included here comprise almost all of the known durable CIO “international” unions. Of the 40 internation-

5 Obviously, these figures depend on how the “Communist camp” gets defined. Of the 40 CIO unions Kampelman lists as of 1946, he classifies 18 (or 45 percent) in the “Communist camp” (1957, pp. 45–47). (Here he follows Avery 1946.) RIA (1946, pp. 17–18) lists 36 CIO unions, 17 of which it classifies as “left-wing unions” (which coincide with 17 of Kampelman’s Communist-led unions), and another 5 of which it classifies as “probably left-wing unions” (of which one is classified as Communist-led by Kampelman). Barrington Moore, Jr.’s assessment in 1945 was that “the Communists and their sympathizers are quite evenly matched within the CIO” (1945, p. 37). Mills (1948, pp. 195, 308) relies on the estimates of Avery (1946) and the RIA (1946). According to Seidman (1950), Communists led unions representing a third of the CIO membership in 1946. This is what we calculate from the CIO’s union-by-union 1944 membership figures (Huberman 1946, pp. 161–80); each camp had roughly a third of the CIO’s total membership. Kampelman estimates that 25 percent of the CIO’s members were in Communist-led unions in 1946, down to 15 percent by 1948; but he also says elsewhere “that Communist-led unions in 1949 claimed a membership of more than two million” (1957, pp. 157, 249), which would amount to about a third of the CIO’s members. These estimates of the membership of Communist-led unions do not take into account the members of Communist-led locals in other CIO unions or of unions in which Communists were very influential, although not strong enough to “dominate” them.

6 Leo Troy (1965, pp. A20–A23) lists 11 short-lived CIO unions, founded sometime during the era (1937–1950) when Communist-led unions were still a potent CIO force. None of the 11, however, is on Max Kampelman’s list (or ours); only 4 of them lasted more than three years.

7 A chart is available from the authors citing specific sources and pages and briefly summarizing the information on which our classifications on the political variables are based. Aside from the sources already cited, these include: Brown 1947; CIO Proceedings 1938; Galenson 1940; Filippelli 1970; Fink 1977; Lens 1949; Pinsky 1947; Schatz 1977; Stolberg 1938; Twentieth Century Fund 1945; Weinstein 1975.
“dominated” involves something of a distortion of political reality.

The classification of the unions into “political camps” used here is taken from Max Kampelman (1957, pp. 45–47). His classification was based mainly on other (anti-Communist) sources (e.g., Avery 1946; RIA 1946, pp. 17–18). For instance, RIA explains its (somewhat more cautious) labeling of unions as “left-wing” (rather than as “Communist-dominated”) as follows: “‘Left-wing’ [unions] have espoused causes or taken positions similar to the Communist Party positions as revealed by the Daily Worker. Whether this is coincidence or is the result of Communists within the union can best be determined by one who deals with them over a period of time. Nor is there any attempt to distinguish here between those unions whose action is caused by the fact that the officers are Communist [sic] and those unions whose policy is set by the fact of their having either a majority Communist membership or a small but active group of Communist members” (1946, p. 16).

Kampelman also classifies unions politically on the basis of the political issues raised, causes advocated, and positions taken by union leaders. In particular, most of his evidence that a union is in the Communist political camp is drawn from the CIO’s so-called formal cases against the unions accused of being “Communist-dominated” (1957, pp. 121–40, 167–224). He rarely presents any evidence of party membership. The second political camp consists of the unions led by “uncertain and shifting coalitions”: Communists were at times highly influential in the coalition holding union office or in the coalition forming the main opposition to the current leadership. The unions classified in the “anti-Communist” political camp were regularly led by officials who considered the Communists an illegitimate political force.

This classification of the CIO’s internal political divisions is partly a product, therefore, of what historian Robert Zieger (1986, pp. 131–32) calls the CIO’s “own dispariting version of the red scare that dominated American politics in the early 1950s.” The CIO put 11 of its affiliated international unions on “trial,” based on elaborate pseudo-legal “cases,” mainly because of the dissenting foreign policy positions taken by their officers. That leaders of the expelled unions had often “parroted the pro-Soviet line” was the main “evidence” used against them. Moreover, “the political struggle within the unions [often] led to suspicion of anyone with a dissenting reputation. . . . Many [anti-Communist radicals who] supported at least the original efforts to discredit the pro-Soviet elements, found themselves . . . frozen out of union politics, and often hounded out of the labor movement because of their alleged subversiveness’.”

Yet, if both analytical tendentiousness and political repression were involved in creating Kampelman’s classification of the unions into political camps, we found that (except for minor differences) it accords with our own study of the historical materials.

IS THERE A PATTERN?

How did the Communists and their allies win the leadership and secure a political base in CIO unions? The broad historical answer, and the starting point of our empirical analysis, is that the Communists won “positions of power and trust in the CIO by the standard method of gaining power in U.S. labor unions: by being the organizers” (Mills 1948, p. 196). “The main . . . source of CP [Communist Party] strength in the CIO,” Irving Howe and Lewis Coser (1957, p. 375) emphasize, “was the participation of thousands of its members in the organizing drives of the late thirties. If there was dirty work to do, they were ready. If leaflets had to be handed out on cold winter mornings before an Akron rubber plant or a New York subway station, the party could always find a few volunteers. If someone had to stick his neck out within the plants, a Communist was available. . . . Never were the Communists more than a minority among the CIO organizers. . . . Plenty of other people, ranging from run-of-the-mill unionists to left-wing Socialists, worked hard and took chances. But the Communists were the best-organized political group within the CIO. . . . The devotion, heroism, and selflessness of many Communist unionists during these years can hardly be overestimated” (cf. also Moore 1945, p. 37).

Although historians of American labor recognize that organizing battles among CIO rivals mattered in shaping the CIO’s internal political lineups, they deny that any pattern existed in who won and who lost from union to union. In his recent CIO history, for
instance, Harvey A. Levenstein argues that, “as for patterns in the response to Communist overtures among American workers, the most striking feature is a lack of apparent pattern.” Where the “CP was strong” in a union, he suggests, it was “mainly because a few leaders . . . happened to be in the right place at the right time, creating a following for themselves and their factions through their determined leadership under fire. . . . There is more accident than pattern in CP strength in the . . . CIO unions” (1981, pp. 71, 55). Nathan Glazer (1961, p. 120) makes a similar observation, and concludes: “In the light of the various histories of many unions, large generalizations appear to be crude and clumsy, scarcely helpful in explaining any single outcome. . . . In the end it would seem to be the organizational factors that predominate: the skill and training and luck of Communists and their opponents.”

Although these observations are correct, they are also incomplete. For if historical accidents (like being “in the right place at the right time”) or contingent “organizational factors” count in the making of history, the question remains, “Why?” If accidents or contingencies matter, what makes one rather than another contingency matter? Are apparent historical contingencies (at least partly) socially determined? We shall try to show that this issue—the social determination of historical contingency—is closely involved with the issue of the relatively independent effects of political struggle. Our analysis will reveal an indelible pattern of relationships among earlier political practices, emergent political relations, and subsequent political alignments in the international unions of the CIO.

We abstract here from the sorts of “objective conditions” or structural factors that are usually the focus of sociological explanations of workers’ political attitudes and behavior. No doubt they affect workers’ struggles and the types of unions and parties which emerge and gain workers’ adherence. But they do not determine how these struggles are waged nor who wins and who loses. In this analysis, we assume that such objective conditions remain constant; and we explore how the political relations resulting from political struggles (whether wittingly or not) become integral components of the emergent objective conditions for subsequent struggles.

The CIO was itself the proximate historical product of intraclass political struggles, which took place in two phases. The first phase, from the early 1920s on, was the fight of Communists and other radicals for industrial unionism both from within and outside the AFL, which refused to organize except along craft or trade lines. The second was the radical response to the labor insurgency of the early 1930s, when top AFL officials and many AFL unions split over the issue of whether and how to organize the unorganized in the mass production industries.

With the birth of the CIO, rival factions and parties now vied with each other for power in the fledgling organization and its constituent unions. These political struggles and the resultant political relations can be seen as constituting and being constituted by four bundles of historical events: (1) whether there had been earlier Red organizing in an industry; (2) whether the union seceded from the AFL from above, in a revolt of its top officers, or from below, in a workers’ insurgency; (3) whether the union was originally organized independently or under the aegis of a CIO “organizing committee”; and (4) whether the union was formed as an amalgamated or as a unitary organization. We emphasize that these historical bundles represent crucial types of political practices and sets of internal relationships among containing political forces. So, these bundles are

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8 Important insights concerning the general political processes involved are contained in the narratives of specific struggles by Levenstein and other labor historians cited in our list of references. We have reformulated some of these particularizing and unsystematic observations as explicit hypotheses.

9 We did try to assess the independent effects on the unions’ political alignments of some of the “objective economic conditions” of the industries they organized and of some demographic characteristics of the workers in these industries. We discuss this in Appendix 1.

10 Our focus on these “historical bundles” is not arbitrary. They are sets of events, as should become clear from the following discussion, representing crucial formative intraclass struggles over class organization. But of course they do not exhaust the universe of prior intraclass struggles which could also have shaped the CIO’s internal balance of political forces. Among these, for instance, are the IWW’s organizing efforts in the decade or so before World War I and the
meant to be "relational concepts," and our attempts to measure them, "relational variables."

Our empirical analysis is presented in four steps: (1) Explication of the hypotheses and assessment of the evidence, in a set of four bivariate contingency tables, concerning the expected direct effects of each of these political variables. (2) Estimates, through a "logit" analysis, of their independent direct effects. (3) Explication of a theoretical model illustrative of both their direct and indirect effects. (4) Assessment of the evidence, in a set of five bivariate contingency tables, concerning the indirect effects posited in this theoretical model. 11

RED UNIONISM

If being in the "right place at the right time" with the "skill and training" is what matters in making history, it was neither mere luck nor an accident that thousands of skilled and trained Communists were in the right place (in the thick of organizing struggles), at the right time (during the workers' insurgency of the 1930s), when others were not. On the contrary, "Red unionism" and the cause of industrial unionism (organizing all workers in an industry, across trade or craft lines) had been almost synonymous for many years before the CIO took up the call. After the decline of the "Wobblies" (Industrial Workers of the World [IWW]), the Communists were the main carriers of the ideas of militant action and industrial unionism. So in the early days of the CIO's split with the AFL, the Communists were skeptical or even hostile toward CIO efforts. "In a way, the Communists looked upon the CIO as a rival that was capitalizing on some of its issues, particularly that of industrial unionism" (Saposs 1959, p. 123).

From 1920 on, when the Trade Union Educational League (TUUL) called for organization of the unorganized and for industrial unionism, the Communists had been trying to organize some of the same industries and plants that the CIO later targeted for organizing (Foster 1947, pp. 198ff.; Keenan 1980b, p. 137). "The AFL made so little effort to organize the unorganized." Theodore Draper (1972, p. 374) emphasizes, "that there was plenty of room for a 'dual union,' even if the AFL wasn't destroyed in the process." These Red organizing drives took place in two phases. Until the Autumn of 1929, the TUUL tried to "bore from within" to create "revolutionary oppositions" within the major AFL unions. Then, until late 1935, its successor, the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), tried to organize independent industrial unions and wage a struggle of "class against class." 12 So, on the eve of the CIO's birth, several thousand Communists already had fought for years trying to organize independent unions and had won a reputation in several industries as militant partisans of industrial unionism and workers' rights.

As a result, they won some supporters (historians differ on the numbers) among the workers in these industries. They also prepared many others for the coming wave of industrial unionism. In auto, for instance, the Communists had started agitating for an industrial union in 1925 and soon were printing shop papers and distributing them to a dozen of Detroit's major auto plants (Keenan 1980a, p. 37). "These little four-page sheets, sold for a penny or given away by Communist distributors at plant gates ... provided the only news of conditions and grievances inside the plants available to workers" (Cochran 1977, p. 63).

Red unions led some heroic, fiercely fought and bloodily suppressed strikes. But many, if not most, of these unions "went to pieces afterward" (Klehr 1984, p. 133). For "all unions were fought bitterly in those days.

11 In Appendix 2, we discuss our use of significance tests and logit modeling.

12 Other than Draper's 1972 article, as he notes (p. 371), "not a single book, dissertation, or article, scholarly or otherwise, has ever been devoted to [the TUUL or] ... to any of its constituent unions." Nor, to our knowledge, has such a work been published since then. On the TUEL and TUUL, see Cochran 1977; Draper 1957, 1960, 1972; Foster 1937; Klehr 1984; Starobin 1972.
But the most brutal terror was reserved for the Communist unions.” With no “revolutionary wave” to ride, “the TUUL had to depend on the straining, sweating, and plodding of its own organizers. They were too few, and they tried to do too much” (Draper 1972, p. 392).

As TUUL’s Jack Johnstone lamented in early 1930, “the objective conditions were never better for building militant revolutionary unions, but objective conditions do not create organizations” (quoted from Labor Unity, in Klehr 1984, p. 41, italics added). By 1932, even the few more or less durable Red unions became “for all intents and purposes, moribund.” Seeing that the upsurge of labor was bypassing their “dual” unions, the TUUL officially disbanded in mid-1935, and its unions “faded away” (Klehr 1984, pp. 47, 133).

In some struggles (such as in Harlan County, Kentucky), Draper suggests, the revolutionary intransigence and plain incompetence of the Communists had been so disastrous for the workers involved that once the Communists were driven out, they could never return; in the end, “for all their fortitude and determination, they had nothing concrete to show for their efforts” (1972, pp. 392, 389). But in other struggles in auto, transport, electric, lumber, and shipping, for instance, Communists apparently succeeded, argue Howe and Coser (1957, p. 373), in putting together and holding on to “a kind of skeleton apparatus. In this way the Communists were able to begin functioning in the CIO with an embryonic structure of organizers who knew each other from ‘the old days’ and, though assigned to different industries, could help one another with regard to both party interests and their own status.” If nothing else, the TUEL and TUUL experiences served “as a training ground for the Communist unionist in organization techniques and in administering unions” (Taft 1964, p. 16). Also, “aside from these organizational advantages,” as Glazer (1961, p. 111) emphasizes, “the Communists were in fact founding fathers, with all the moral authority that gives a leader.”

On balance, even if nearly all of their “revolutionary unions” were stillborn, and some struggles the Communists led were politically disastrous for them, these hard years of Red organizing also probably created in some industries a cadre of experienced Communist organizers and effective, even charismatic, leaders with a legitimate claim to many workers’ support. If this is so, then the Communists should also have had a better chance of winning the leadership of the CIO unions established in the industries where party members had tried to organize Red unions in earlier years (i.e., before the CIO’s founding), than in unions established in industries where no such earlier Red organizing had occurred.

Our findings are more or less consistent with this hypothesis. First, over half of the CIO unions in the industries penetrated by earlier Red union organizing were later led by Communists, as compared to 4 out of 10 of the unions in the industries where Red unionists had not actively organized in earlier years. Second, the contrast is sharper when we examine the effect of earlier Red organizing on the subsequent success of the anti-Communists: the percentage of “anti-Communist” unions in industries the Reds had not tried to organize in the pre-CIO era was nearly twice as large as in those they had tried to organize (Table 1, Part a).13

AFL SECESSION: “FROM ABOVE” OR “FROM BELOW”

In the fall of 1936, the AFL “suspended” 10 unions affiliated with the CIO (then still the “Committee on Industrial Organization”) on charges of “dual unionism” (the same charge the AFL used to throw out the adherents of the TUEL 11 years earlier) and of “fomenting insurrection.” The 10 unions immediately started making their per capita payments to the now independent CIO (Bernstein 1970, pp. 422–23). These founding unions of the

13 As we shall see, Red unionism also had significant indirect effects on the chances the Communists would win union power in later years. We can think of no convincing line of argument that the other insurgent political practices which are examined in the following analysis (insurrection from below, independent organizing, and amalgamation) themselves somehow “reflected” the specific “objective economic conditions” or the social characteristics of the workers in an industry. But in the case of Red union organizing, it is plausible to argue that an industry’s structure did have a bearing on the very existence of that insurgent organizing practice and on the success or failure of the Communists in penetrating that industry. We briefly discuss this issue in Appendix 3.
CIO, and a few others that soon followed them, came into the new industrial union movement as the result of what we term “a revolt from above.” Their top officers broke away from the AFL and joined the CIO with their staff and organizational hierarchy — and much of their union jurisdiction — intact. As a result, they “had a continuity of leadership,” Jack Barbash suggests, “that [was] proof, by and large, against Communist domination” (1956, p. 342).

In contrast, most other CIO unions grew out of local and district battles between craft and industrial unionists over the control of their AFL precursors. Such workers’ “insurrections from below” split many AFL unions. The workers in these AFL locals and districts then came into the CIO to form the core of new international unions. This happened, for instance, in the AFL’s Upholsterers International Union in 1937, where a number of locals defected from the AFL and combined with some other independent craft unions and a few CIO locals to form the CIO United Furniture Workers (Peterson 1944, p. 135). Other struggles “from below” took place in the newly chartered AFL “federal labor unions,” that is, the newly organized locals given a temporary AFL charter to “store workers” until they could be “parcelled out” to AFL craft affiliates (Bernstein 1970, p. 355). Some seceded from the AFL to become the locals of a new CIO union, rather than be parcelled out and subordinated to craft control. Of the 18 CIO unions in our study that seceded from the AFL as the result of an insurgent workers’ movement, 4 originated in battles in federal unions, the other 14 in rebellions in various locals and districts of existing AFL unions.

Often the leaders of the local rebellions against the craft leadership were radicals of various stripes, including Communists and their allies. Unlike the situation in the former AFL unions that came into the CIO from above, these left leaders had the opportunity to gain secure political bases in the new CIO unions they built in struggles from below. This was the pattern among longshoremen, for example, with the Australian seaman Harry Bridges. An outstanding leader in the epic 1934 West Coast maritime strike, and in the San Francisco general strike, Bridges rose, with Communist support, from ordinary dockworker to president of the San Francisco local and then, in 1936, to president of the entire Pacific Coast district of the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA). The next year, he led 17,000 West Coast dockworkers out of the ILA into the CIO, to form the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) (Levinson 1956, pp. 262–63).

For these reasons, we suggest that far more of the unions that had been born from below than from above would be Communist-led. We find, indeed, that the numbers of Communist-led unions in each category differ sharply. Nearly three-fourths of the CIO unions whose secession from the AFL had come through workers’ insurgence were later led by Communists and their allies; but fewer than one-sixth of the AFL internationals whose top officers had broken away to join the CIO were later Communist-led. Seven other CIO unions were independent non-AFL unions before the CIO was established (e.g., the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians) or were organized in an industry that had no prior AFL union (e.g., the Farm Equipment Workers [FEI]). Because they also joined the CIO with their organizational hierarchies intact, we included them in the “from above” category, which raises the proportion of Communist-led

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: CIO International Unions in the 1940s Led by Communists, Shifting Coalitions, and Anti-Communists, by Types of Political Practice (in percent)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Com-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earlier Red organizinga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of secessionb</td>
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<td>Worker’s insurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top officers’ revolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing strategyc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIO committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 0.339; s.e. = .397; p < .20.

b Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 1.521; s.e. = .525; p < .01.

c Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 1.010; s.e. = .456; p < .05.

d Log odds ratio (uniform association) = 0.665; s.e. = .468; p < .08.
unions in that category to one-fourth. The
effect of the type of secession on the chances
that anti-Communists would win union lead-
ership is especially sharp. Nearly half of the
unions that joined the CIO from above were
in the anti-Communist camp compared to
only one-twentieth of those that joined from
below (Table 1, Part b).

INDEPENDENT ORGANIZING
Forged in the earlier Red union organizing
drives, thousands of experienced Communist
organizers dedicated to industrial unionism
formed a ready but recalcitrant, perhaps even
politically dangerous, reservoir of organizers
who could be tapped by the CIO’s founders.
CIO President John L. Lewis and other CIO
leaders “had no choice but to accept the
support of the Communists,” as Saul Alinsky
gives Lewis’s thinking on the matter. “Even
after the debacle of 1933 and 1934, when the
American Federation of Labor smashed the
spirit of unionism, it was the left-wingers who
zealously worked day and night picking up
the pieces of that spirit and putting them
together” (quoted in Cochran 1977, p. 97).
“John L. Lewis was forced to employ many
young Communists as organizers for the
C.I.O. when it first started,” Seymour Martin
Lipset (1960, p. 386) also emphasizes,
“because they were the only people with the
necessary skills who were willing to take the
risks involved for low pay.”

The CIO’s founders, notably Lewis, tried
both to use Communist organizers and to
hobble them so that they could not take power
in the new CIO unions. Responding to
warnings that hiring Communists meant
trouble for the CIO, Lewis asked sardonically,
“Who gets the bird, the hunter or the
dog?” (Cochran 1977, p. 97). But to prevent
the “dog” from straying, Lewis and other
CIO officials exerted tight control over the
“organizing committees” they put in charge of
organizing the unorganized in an industry

What happened to Communist organizers
in the Steel Workers Organizing Committee
(SWOC) exemplifies the process of control:
“With Philip Murray [later head of the CIO]
and his superbly competent, experienced, and
anti-Communist lieutenants in charge of the
steel organizing campaign, ... when
Communists were spotted, or became too
dangerous a threat, they were discharged”
(Saposs 1959, p. 122). SWOC organizers
were all hired, paid, and fired by the head
office. When they organized a local, the
SWOC moved them to another area, allowing
SWOC officials to take control (Taft 1964, p.
57). “Thus, a Communist who had helped to
organize twenty-five SWOC locals lamented,”
says Levenstein (1981, p. 51), “that despite a
few successes, Communists ‘weren’t too
successful’ in wooing the leaders of the locals
they helped to organize.” Communists played
an important role in the four-year battle to
organize “Little Steel,” the violently anti-
union steel companies that held out long after
the US Steel Co. capitulated. “But when the
struggle was over, they were quietly fired by
SWOC head Philip Murray.”

In auto, in contrast, a host of contending
radical, Communist, Socialist, Coughlinite
Catholic, and other factions competed to or-
ganize the unorganized and to win power in
the new CIO union. The UAW financed much
of its own organizing drives by collecting dues
from the workers. Although the CIO also con-
tributed money and organizers to the Ford
drive, top CIO officials had little direct influ-
ence on the conduct of the campaigns against
the big auto companies. As a result, “even at
the height of CIO influence in the internal aff-
airs of the UAW,” the CIO was unable to
impose “outside leadership” (Galenson 1960,
p. 133). Also, the major auto companies bit-
terly resisted unionization. GM, for instance,
agreed to bargain with the CIO union only
after a tenacious and often violent struggle with
the workers. In these battles, and in some of
the decisive sit-down strikes—for example, in
Flint, “the first great victory” for the UAW
“and one of the epic confrontations in Amer-
ican labor history” (Zieger 1986, pp. 46–
47)—Communists gained a reputation as su-
perb organizers and combative and courageous
leaders. Consequently, they were able to cre-
ate strong rank-and-file groups in the auto in-
dustry (Galenson 1960, p. 150).

We suggest that the chances that Commu-
nists could build their own base and later win
the union’s leadership would be higher where
they were involved in independent organizing
than where they organized as employees of a
CIO organizing committee. Aside from the mor-
al authority they commanded as militant
organizers in the fight against the companies,
the Communists could, where there was no
CIO organizing committee to stand in their
way, “bring in reinforcements on the lower
levels who could provide a solid layer of support for its people on top” (Howe and Coser 1957, p. 377).

For these reasons, we expect that far more of the unions that had been built by independent organizers than by CIO organizing committees would be led by Communists and their allies. We find that, indeed, the Communists won leadership in one-sixth of the unions organized by CIO organizing committees compared to two-thirds of the independently organized unions. Also, the percentage of unions organized by CIO organizing committees that later were led by “anti-Communists” was over twice the percentage among independently organized unions (see Table 1, part c.).

### AMALGAMATION

Whatever their origins, the formation of unions as organizations tends to follow roughly either a “unitary” or a “federated” (or “amalgamated”) path. Unitary organizations (i.e., centralized and typically hierarchical) tend, as they grow, to incorporate new members and locals into the union’s existing structure, “with the new subordinate officials and groups deriving their authority from the summits of the organization.” In contrast, an amalgamated organization grows through the merger or combination of a number of existing independent locals or groups of leaders (Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1956, p. 442).

In the early days of the CIO, some unions amalgamated because their “jurisdictions,” whatever a union’s CIO charter, were still mixed and shifting. Sometimes several unions were organizing in different branches of the same “industry.” Sometimes a single union branched out and organized locals in several closely related “industries.” (Analysis would show, we suggest, that what came to be considered an “industry” in capital-labor relations was itself at least in part a political artifact of these organizing struggles.) It was thus always a political question as to how and to what extent CIO officials could impose their demands on these new unions: that is, whether they allowed (or compelled) a union to retain and amalgamate such mixed industrial locals into its permanent structure, or allowed (or compelled) several unions in different parts of an industry to amalgamate into a single union. It was, of course, also a political question, as well as a specific matter of organizing strategy, for the unions and locals involved.

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14 A CIO organizing committee sometimes fell into the hands of men who were not hostile to the Communists, or it was short-lived (or both). In either case, in consequence, Communists were able to form their own nuclei of support in the new union. For instance, this appears to have happened with the Shoe Workers Organizing Committee. Its CIO-appointed head, Powers Hapgood, was willing to work with Communists (Levenstein 1981, p. 108), and the organizing committee lasted barely a year before establishing the fledgling union itself.

15 Amalgamation refers to the merger in the 1930s of several independent units to form one CIO union. So, unions are not classified as amalgamated if they were formed out of the merger of AFL federal locals alone; in general, these federal locals had little if any prior independent organizational existence. If a union already had been an established AFL union before its merger with another union or unions, it is classified as amalgamated only if this merger led to a substantial reorganization of the union’s administrative or political structure after it joined the CIO. Only three unions had any record of mergers after joining the CIO: (a) Mine, Mill, which added a Die Casting Division in 1942, five years after it bolted the AFL to become a charter member of the CIO; (b) the Fur and Leather Workers; and (c) the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. Because the Mine, Mill merger occurred long after its political structure had been established, it does not qualify, in our terms, as an amalgamated union. (Classifying it as amalgamated would strengthen our findings.) As to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), it became a unitary highly centralized union long before 1936, when it absorbed the Journeymen Tailors Union (and its some 6,000 members), and later on, the CIO Laundry Workers (and its nine locals). No significant reorganization of the ACW’s administration occurred after these mergers (Galenston 1960, p. 285; also see Bernstein 1970, pp.73ff). So it does not qualify as an amalgamated union. In contrast, the merger of the International Fur Workers Union in March 1939 with the National Leather Workers Association resulted in its restructuring. The new union was constituted of two relatively independent divisions, fur and leather; each elected its own officers and managed its own finances. Their combined executive boards constituted the executive body of the new amalgamated International Fur and Leather Workers Union (Foner 1950, p. 556; Brown 1947, p. 135). So, it is classified as an amalgamated union.

16 For example, the CIO ordered the United
By bringing their leaders, members, and finances into one organization, a strategy of amalgamation among independent unions strengthened the new, larger, that is, amalgamated, union. Of course, amalgamation also meant a redistribution of power within the new union. Some officials of the previously separate unions were now reduced, at best, to secondary officers of the new international or even to officers of a local, while others emerged as top officers of the international.

But whatever the outcome for individuals, the amalgamation of once-independent unions tended to preserve autonomous centers of power in the new union, and thus fostered political competition if not factionalism. In turn, this tended to enhance the chances for union democracy. Two of the “big three” CIO unions, for instance, in the auto and electrical manufacturing industries, came into existence through amalgamation. The UAW “was formed out of an amalgamation of a number of existing automobile unions, and a number of its other local units were organized independently of national control. . . . Most of the factional leaders in the UAW were leaders in the early organizational period of the union, and the different factions have largely been coalitions of the groups headed by these different leaders jointly resisting efforts to subordinate them to the national administration” (Lipset et al. 1956, p. 443).

For the same reasons, where radical or Communist-led locals or unions were incorporated into the new union through amalgamation, their leaders also had a chance to compete for its international leadership. “A strong local dominated by the party,” Philip Selznick (1952, p. 213) points out, “may become the [Communist] fraction’s base of operations, its officers assuming a guiding role in relation to other party-led groups in the union.”

In the UAW, one of the most influential of the organized factions was led by Communists. They were among the leaders of several important locals, including “the world’s biggest local,” Local 600 at Ford’s River Rouge plant. They also had political bonds to powerful non-Communist allies forged during the sit-down strikes. Although they were highly influential, the Communists made no effort to take over the union’s leadership (Glazer 1961, p. 112; Keeran 1980a). Not only the Communists, of course, but other factions (including the one led by the Reuther brothers and the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists [ACTU]) were successful in winning local centers of power, and using them as bases for further operations, in an effort to forge alliances and build their own machines within the union (cf. Selznick 1952, p. 213).

In contrast, in the relatively diversified electrical industry, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers Union (UE), whose name reflects its amalgamated origins, was organized and led mainly by Communists and their allies. Among the latter were many older radical and socialist workers. Reds had organized one of the major unions (the TUUL’s Steel and Metal Workers Union), and the TUUL had some members and significant influence among several other independent and local unions (e.g., in GE’s Schenectady plant) that amalgamated in 1936 to form the new union. Communists consequently succeeded in winning the new union’s international leadership. “Because it was essentially a coalition of independently-organized unions,” as Levenstein (1981, p. 62) explains, “the UE had a relatively democratic constitution with many features
ensuring local autonomy and decentralization of power. The districts into which UE was organized were exceptionally powerful, paying the salaries of their own elected officers. With much of the support for the Communists resting at the local level, . . . the task of overthrowing [their] leadership would have to involve arduous battles for local after local, for district after district."

The amalgamation of several unions, we suggest, would tend to improve their leaders' chances to retain local political bases within the new union, from which they could try to extend their influence and contend for leadership. So, the Communists should have had a better chance of winning union leadership in amalgamated than in unitary unions. We find, in support of this reasoning, that whereas two-thirds of the amalgamated unions ended up in the Communist camp, just over a third of the unitary unions did, with the rest split evenly between the shifting and anti-Communist camps (Table 1, part d).

LOGIT ESTIMATES OF DIRECT EFFECTS

What were the independent direct effects of each political practice, taking the effects of the others into account? We constructed both a logit and a probit model to measure the independent effects. The substantive results of both models are identical: only secession from below and independent organizing had substantial (and statistically significant) independent direct effects in determining which CIO unions would be in the Communist political camp. We present only the results of the logit model (Table 2). Logit modeling provides not only coefficients interpretable as precise measures of effect, but also (unlike probit) coefficients that can be restated in "everyday language" as the comparative odds of alternative political outcomes (Swafford 1980, p. 672).

Controlling for the effects of the other three political practices, we find that the odds that unions would later be led by Communists were 8.5 times greater if they had been independently organized than if they had been organized by a CIO organizing committee. Similarly, the odds that unions would later be led by Communists were about 7 times greater if they had seceded from the AFL from below rather than from above. On the other hand, the odds that unions would be led by Communists were only 1.2 times greater for an industry with earlier Red organizing than for an industry without it. The odds were also 1.2 times greater for amalgamated than for unitary unions.

A THEORETICAL MODEL OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS

So, neither earlier Red organizing nor amalgamation had sizeable direct effects on the odds that the Communists would win union power. What do these findings imply? Were these two insurgent political practices of little import in shaping the CIO's internal political lineups?

Most important, were the long, hard years of Red union organizing wasted, scarcely leaving any working-class legacy of industrial unionism for the CIO organizers who later followed in their footsteps? In the end, did the Red unionists, as Draper suggests, have almost nothing concrete to show for their efforts? The short answer is a sort of complicated "no." Our "theoretical model" suggests (see Figure 1) and our findings tend to confirm that these "premature" struggles to build industrial unions had complex and sometimes contradictory indirect political effects in shaping the two decisive political practices—secession from below and independent organizing—that allowed the Communists to win the leadership of the new CIO unions.

We offer three related hypotheses about the indirect effects of earlier Red organizing. First, it probably had contradictory effects on independent organizing. On the one hand, the presence of some experienced Red organizers in an industry should have improved the

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Insurgent Practice</th>
<th>Logit Coefficients</th>
<th>Odds Multipliers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earlier Red organizing</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers' insurgency</td>
<td>1.95*</td>
<td>7.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent organizing</td>
<td>2.14*</td>
<td>8.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amalgamation</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.77*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood ratio chi-square</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the .05 level.
chances for the independent organizing of a CIO union there. On the other hand, the chances for independent organizing in that industry were probably reduced because of the past battles there between Red unionists and the then-AFL officials who later founded the CIO. (During the Reds’ so-called “Third Period” of “revolutionary upsurge,” when the TUUL defined the AFL as “fascist,” they could call even a militant AFL leader like Sidney Hillman, a “fascist gangster leader” [Draper 1960, pp. 302–06; TUUL 1930, p. 17; Klehr 1984, pp. 39, 17].) Remembering those battles and knowing the Reds had been active in an industry, top CIO officers (e.g., John L. Lewis, Philip Murray, Sidney Hillman) may well have tried to put a CIO organizing committee in charge of that industry’s campaign in order to prevent Communists from winning power in the new unions being built there. Consequently, much of the impetus that earlier Red organizing might have given to subsequent CIO independent organizing was probably nullified. Our findings support this hypothesis. CIO organizing committees were established more frequently in industries where there had been earlier Red organizing than in those where there had been none (Table 3, part a).

Second, we suggest that amalgamation was more likely in industries that had been penetrated by earlier Red unionism than in those that had not been. Some former Red unions or their remnants which retained sufficient independence and cohesion (e.g., James Matles’s Metal Workers) were able to amalgamate with other such remnants, AFL federal locals or independent unions as a strategy to build new CIO unions. This, we suggest, enhanced the capacity of these unions to go it alone (i.e., without CIO tutelage) in unionizing their industry. In turn, establishing a union through independent organizing would increase the Communists’ chances to win its leadership. Our findings strikingly support this reasoning. Over half of the unions in industries penetrated by earlier Red organizing were formed through amalgamation. But over nine-tenths of the unions in the industries untouched by earlier Red organizing were formed as unitary organizations (Table 3, part b). In turn, amalgamated unions were far more likely than unitary ones to have been organized independently. Indeed, over twice as many of the unitary unions were established by CIO organizing committees (Table 4, part b).

Third, and perhaps most important, by creating local Red bases within many AFL unions, earlier Red organizing made possible subsequent local union insurrections and secessions from the AFL. The Communists had won adherents and forged a significant base within the AFL itself in the earlier TUEL phase. Although the main Red organizing efforts after establishing the TUUL in 1929

Table 3. The Effects of Earlier Red Organizing on Other Types of Political Practice in CIO International Unions in the 1940s (in percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Earlier Red Organizing</th>
<th>Ind. Org.</th>
<th>CIO Com.</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Union Formation</th>
<th>Workers’ Insurgency</th>
<th>Officers’ Revolt</th>
<th>Source of Secession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ a \) Log odds ratio = - .693; s.e. = .727; p < .20.
\[ b \) Log odds ratio = 2.890; s.e. = 1.120; p < .05.
\[ c \) Log odds ratio = 3.900; s.e. = .696; p < .01.
were aimed at building independent "revolutionary unions," many Reds continued to organize oppositions and to try to win leadership in existing AFL unions.

In 1934, a year before the dissolution of the TUEL and the decision to return to the AFL, a confidential Communist Party memorandum reported that Communists were in the leadership of 135 AFL locals, with 50,000 members, and of "several" entire union districts. The Communists also led organized opposition groups in another 500 locals (Klehr 1984, p. 225). The next year, with the TUUL's dissolution, these Communist bases in hundreds of AFL locals were reinforced, and new ones were established when its union remnants rejoined the AFL, as units if possible, or as individuals if necessary.

Thus, we suggest that these hundreds of Communist-led locals and opposition groups were probably among the main centers involved in what AFL officials condemned as fomenting insurrection against them and leading the workers out of the AFL into the burgeoning CIO unions. Again, our findings strongly support this hypothesis. In the industries that had been a focus of earlier Red union drives, six-tenths of the CIO unions were born in rebellions from below, while in the industries that had not been penetrated, seven-tenths were led into the CIO from above (Table 3, part c).

A union's secession from the AFL in a workers' insurgency, as we have seen, increased the chances that the Communists would win the leadership of these unions. But, as our theoretical model suggests, this also indirectly favored their winning union leadership: the unions that seceded from below were also far more likely than those that seceded from above to amalgamate and then go on to organize independently (see Table 4); in turn, this increased the chances that the Communists rather than other factions would win union power. This means that if earlier Red unionism had contradictory effects on independent organizing, it also had a positive effect on the Communists' chances of winning power, both through secession from below and amalgamation.

CONCLUSION

Our analysis has focused on the intraclass struggle for intraclass leadership. It has therefore neglected the question of how the main struggle against capital affected the intraclass struggle (and vice versa). American capitalists waged a "long and implacable fight . . . against the recognition of labor's democratic rights" (U.S. Congress 1937–38, Part 3, p. 5)—with a ferocity unparalleled elsewhere in the West. They deployed their own private armies and had the assistance of local and state police, the national guard, and, occasionally, the U.S. Army itself, to repress their workers' strikes and efforts to unionize (Taft and Ross 1969; Goldstein 1978). But if many employers fought unionism with every weapon at their command (Taft and Ross 1969, p. 289), some were reader to compromise with the new unions.

Assessing the effects of the employers' responses to unionism would be necessary to "round out" our analysis. How did the varying levels and kinds of employer resistance or accommodation to unionization affect the political practices of the contending CIO political camps? How, in turn, did this affect the odds that Communists, rather than their CIO rivals, would win the workers' trust and take power in the new unions? To provide a systematic empirical answer to these questions will require primary historical research on, at least, the stance taken toward unionization by each of the major corporations in all of the industries organized by CIO unions during the wave of unionization in the late 1930s. In steel, for example, U.S. Steel ("Big Steel") suddenly and surprisingly capitulated to the Steel Workers Organizing Committee in 1937, while the so-called
“Little Steel” companies engaged in a bitter four-year battle before grudgingly recognizing the union. On the basis of such industry-by-industry research, it would be possible to assess the relatively independent effects of both class and intraclass struggles in determining the political alignments within the CIO.

In any event, our analysis reveals that concrete intraclass struggles can create, willingly or not, new objective political relations which tend in turn to shape the organized working class’ internal political alignments.

If our analysis has shown the relative autonomy of political struggles in making history, it emphatically does not imply a “voluntaristic theory” of politics or of social change. The original *historical opening* for the left in the working class was provided by an extraordinary crisis of American capitalism, the consequent political upheavals at all levels of government—local, state, and federal, legislative, executive, and judicial—and the unprecedented, primarily spontaneous, “labor upsurge” of the 1930s (Brody 1980, pp. 103, 130–44). “Such times are rare and certainly not of anyone’s deliberate making” (Piven and Cloward 1977, p. 173). And it was in these rare times that “the few Communists who had been working in factories and mines and shops found themselves, . . . carried like corks riding a flood to top positions in a host of unions” (Glazer 1961, pp. 100–101).

But the Communists and other radicals of the 1930s involved in the leadership and organization of the working class were not mere “corks riding a flood.” They were active, self-conscious men and women, and they were not merely “riding” but struggling to give shape to the sudden social eruption in which they were leading participants. This social eruption, this “flood,” did not determine what happened, except in the sense that it constituted, as we emphasized at the outset, a realm of immanent historical alternatives. Which alternative was suppressed or realized was determined by the active intervention and struggles of real actors (collective and individual). Indeed, this realm of alternatives (as we have seen) was itself the partial creation, within (unknown) objective limits, of what these and other men and women already had done in the past, as leading participants in earlier workers’ struggles.

The balance of political forces in the organized industrial segment of the working class was the result, partly revealed here, of the political practices of the factions and parties contesting for the workers’ leadership. These concrete political struggles and their consequences (both intended and unintended) “loaded the historical dice” (to borrow Weber’s metaphor), and thus determined the odds that, at that historical moment, the Communists or their rivals would win power and trust in America’s industrial unions.17

EPILOGUE

On hearing the phrase in this article’s title, “how the Communists won power and trust in America’s unions,” a colleague quickly suggested adding “—and abused both.” What was the impact of the Communists on organized labor during their historically brief sojourn at the helm of so many CIO unions? Did they abuse the positions of power and trust they held in American unions? These questions, to say the least, still arouse passions 40 years after the expulsion of the Communist-led unions from the CIO.18

On the eve of the expulsions of the Communist-led unions from the CIO, the “primary charges” made by liberal and left-wing opponents against the Communists in organized labor were summed up as follows: “First, the turns of these U.S. Stalinists from leftward to rightward, and back again, have been determined not by their judgment of the changing needs of the working people, or by pressures from these people, but by the changing needs of the ruling group in Russia. Second, the ways for maintaining power which are habitual with the U.S. Stalinists include personal defama-

17 We have not tried to assess how “unintended, unanticipated, or unrecognized consequences of action,” in Merton’s well-known phrase, bear on our substantive analysis. We have avoided this question intentionally, because we cannot address it empirically, while signaling our awareness of it by an occasional parenthetical phrase such as “witting or not.”

18 Witness, for instance, the debate between Theodore Draper (1985a,b,c,d) and several “new historians” of American Communism whom he charges with “political partisanship” and “historical bias.” See also the articles and commentary in Zeitlin and Kimeldorf 1984.
tion and intrigue, carried, if need be, to the point of wrecking a man or a labor union. . . . Third, Communist rule within the U.S. unions they control is dictatorial; although they talk the language of democracy they do not believe or practice democratic principles. . . . Fourth, the existence of Communist factions, and their lack of independence, is a strong deterrent to. . . any genuine leftward tendencies of labor in America” (Mills 1948, pp. 199–200).

Implicit in these charges are critical political and historical/sociological questions. What did the Communists do with their power in CIO unions, once they won it? What was the comparative impact of Communist leadership? These questions represent still another theoretical question about the relative autonomy of politics: What are the political effects of political leadership? How, in this instance, does the political consciousness (or ideology) of a union’s leadership and the practices it inspires affect the achievements of specific unions and the entire labor movement? Two “primary charges” against the Communists can be answered empirically. Was Communist “rule” of CIO unions “dictatorial”? Were the “needs” of their union members subordinated to the “needs” of the Soviet regime? Concretely, how different were the formal constitutions and actual internal political life of the unions in the Communist and other political camps? And how different were the contracts and the actual working conditions they won?

Answering these questions—which is the aim of our continuing research—will, in turn, enhance our understanding of the historical meaning of the CIO’s expulsion of the Communist-led unions (and the subsequent dissolution of all but a few of them). What were the effects of this expulsion on the vitality of organized labor and on its subsequent political power and social achievements in American life? Put differently, what did this mean for the making—or unmaking—of the American working class in our times?

APPENDIX 1.

On Measuring “Objective Conditions”

Since union-specific data do not exist for the “objective economic conditions” and demographic characteristics of industries in the 1930s or 1940s, we had to use U.S. Census industry-level (four-digit SIC) data. But many unions lack such data. Moreover, we doubt that measures based on industry-level data are reliable and valid measures of union attributes. First, the jurisdictions and memberships of CIO unions often cut across the boundaries of several SICs. Many of the unions had to be categorized, on the basis of our best estimates, into several different SICs. We assigned very rough estimates of industry weights in the absence of union-specific data. We examined the relationships with and without these weights and found no substantively important differences. Second, unless an industry is quite homogeneous on a given variable, it may not be correct to infer from an industry characteristic to the union. For example, a union in an industry with a high proportion of women may have few women members. Similarly, the industry may contain a high proportion of small shops, but the union may have organized only the largest ones, etc. Third, we have many missing cases for the economic and demographic variables; the number of unions for which we have adequate industry-level data on these variables ranges from 20 to 29.

Withal, we examined the bivariate relationships between each of the following industry-level economic and demographic variables and the union’s political camp: (1a) the industry’s “sensitivity to depression” (relation of employment level to gross consumer income, 1936 dollars) \(N = 26\); (1b) the industry’s level of unemployment (men only) \(N = 29\); (1c) the size-distribution of the industry’s establishments (% large establishments; % of workers in large establishments) \(N = 20\); (1d) the industry’s level of concentration (four-firm) (manufacturing only) \(N = 22\); (2a) the industry’s skill composition (% skilled craftsmen; men only) \(N = 28\); (2b) the industry’s sexual composition (% women) \(N = 31\); (2c) the industry’s racial composition (% “nonwhite”; men only) \(N = 28\); (2d) the industry’s age composition (% under 25; men only) \(N = 28\).

We found no theoretically relevant bivariate relationship between any independent variable and the union’s political camp, with one exception. Unions in industries with a high proportion (25 percent or more) of skilled craftsmen were less likely than low ones (under 10 percent) to be in the Communist political camp; but the relationship is curvilinear. Unions in industries with “medium” proportions (10–24.9 percent) skilled craftsmen were by far the least likely to be led by Communists. That Communist-led unions were less likely to be in high-skilled than low-skilled industries—given the AFL’s preeminence among craftsmen—is what we would expect. But it could be misleading because, for instance, a CIO union in an industry with a high proportion of skilled craftsmen might, nonetheless, have few skilled members. These craftsmen could be members of one or more long-standing AFL unions. (This was true of Mine, Mill and the AFL unions in nonferrous mining.)
But the question remains: Did the strategy of class organization and the consequent political practices of the organizers have different political consequences, depending on variations in the economic conditions in an industry and/or in its internal social composition? That is, was there interaction (or specification) among the variables, such that the “economic” or “social” conditions in an industry determined the measurable effects of the political practices? At this point, we have no confidence in the results of our efforts in this regard because these variables are at best crude and at worst misleading indicators of the actual conditions in the industry encountered by union organizers. Further, not only are there many missing cases, but the number of cases with adequate data varies considerably from one variable to another. Moreover, the sparsity of cases varies at different values of these variables. Such unavoidable flaws in the data make an analysis of interaction effects worthless.

Yet, for variables with enough cases, we did examine several theoretically relevant logit models which also include economic and demographic variables. We found that, controlling for these variables, the direct effects of the political variables did not meaningfully differ from the original logit model. The % skilled craftsmen has a small negative effect on the odds of Communist union leadership; but it does not remain significant in a reduced model, that is, one omitting control variables lacking significant effects. Unexpectedly, the % nonwhite has a small significant negative effect. These logit tables are available from the authors.

APPENDIX 2
On the Appropriateness of Significance Tests and of Logit Modeling

Significance Tests. Although we report significance levels in our tables, we are not convinced that tests of statistical significance are appropriate for this empirical analysis. In particular, in Tables 1.a, 1.d, 3.a, and 4.b, we have allowed ourselves to think seriously about theoretically salient bivariate relationships which fall below the conventional acceptable .05 confidence level.

We question whether it is appropriate to use significance tests here to reject a given finding. First, the small number of cases (38) in the population of CIO unions means that even strong relationships could be rejected at the .05 confidence level. Second, causal relationships are not uncovered by tests of significance. A large enough sample can yield small effects that are statistically significant but substantively unimportant (Safford 1980, p. 687). Rather, causal connections are revealed by demonstrating, in successive approximations to the underlying realities, the existence of a coherent set of theoretically relevant empirical relationships. After providing estimates of the direct effects of the political variables, we also present a “theoretical model” to illustrate the presumed causal connections. Third, this study is an exploratory and not a confirmatory study. Indeed, it is “designed to find out what was not even guessed at before” (see Lipset et al. [1956, p. 483]). In trying to explore a new, theoretically relevant subarea of inquiry, it makes sense to try to think through the implications of all theoretically salient, empirical relationships.

Logit Modeling. Using a logit model may not be fully appropriate here because our data do not meet all the assumptions for such modeling. In particular, a much larger number of cases than ours (38) is necessary for the approximations to be adequate. Our $N$ of 38 is far from “asymptotic.”

But the logit formulation provides a convenient technique for describing relationships among binary events; and the variables in our analysis are both theoretically and empirically binary. Further, the logit analysis is not meant to “confirm” formal hypotheses, but to enhance the credibility of our substantive theory. In addition, the results of the logit analysis are consistent with the results of a conventional examination of contingency tables. On balance, then, we have decided to present the results of the logit analysis of independent effects. We have not applied a full pathlike model because its applicability to our data is especially problematic. To apply structural equations and path analysis to discrete data, we would have to make several untenable assumptions. For instance, the models developed by Winship and Mare (1983) assume a recursive structure, but, again, it is not possible to test this assumption. In addition, in their “Model Four” (i.e., the model for binary variables without an underlying continuum), which is the closest to our own situation, it is assumed that no measurement error exists. But this would be a silly assumption in a sociohistorical analysis, especially one based on secondary sources. Overall, the use of logit modeling to describe independent effects stretches our data, but plausibly so. But a full pathlike model would force us to make assumptions that we are not willing to make.

APPENDIX 3
On Red Unionism

Did an industry’s structure have an important bearing on the success of early Red union organizing? The Communists were inveterate seekers after the right “objective conditions” in which to carry out their activities. So, the TUEL and its successor TUUL targeted certain industries because they considered organizing them critical in the struggle to organize all industrial workers (e.g., such core mass production industries as
steel, auto, chemicals). In short, it could be argued that earlier Red union organizing had an impact precisely where “objective conditions” favored it. If so, the apparent indirect effects of earlier Red unionism on the chances of subsequent Communist union leadership could be spurious. They might reflect instead the “objective conditions” of the industries at the time the Red unionists originally penetrated them.

Yet Communists often tried to organize industries that were neither “strategic” nor characterized by objective conditions that might favor industrial unionism. As Levenstein (1981, p. 71) emphasizes, “Often their egalitarian impulse led [the Communists] to expend inordinate energy on organizing those least powerful and least strategically placed: tragic cases such as the migrant workers, ‘losers’ such as southern textile workers, the infinitely replaceable Macy’s salesclerks, or hospital workers.” Howe and Coser (1957, pp. 257, 272), assessing the Red unionists’ activities during the revolutionary “Third Period,” make the same point. In their view, the Communists bowed to Comintern decisions that ignored the real situation in the United States. “TUUL leaders and members often displayed a heroism and self-sacrifice which no amount of political disagreement should deter anyone from admiring.” But time after time, in one industry after another, from coal mining to textiles, say Howe and Coser, the Reds led workers into disastrous strikes and senseless efforts, where the objective conditions were heavily, and obviously, against them.

For these reasons, we doubt that “objective conditions” in the extraordinarily diverse industries penetrated by the TUEL and TUUL could account for the enduring impact of their years of Red union organizing. Indeed, Communists went on to win the leadership of unions in a broad range of entirely different industries, and to lose and win in others whose objective conditions appear to have been quite similar (also see Glazer 1961, p. 120).

Most important, “objective conditions,” as TUUL leader Jack Johnstone said, do not organize workers. The Red unionists’ decision to try to organize an industry, for any reason (“strategic,” “revolutionary,” or “egalitarian impulse”), is itself a political act which has its own independent political consequences, whatever the existing “objective conditions.” To assess the effects of industry structure on earlier Red unionism will require primary historical research on the TUEL and TUUL’s varying organizing successes and failures and on the nature of the industries in which they occurred.

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